

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE IN GHANA

*How NAB is Coping with the Balance
Between Improvement and Accountability*

Jones Obeng Boampong Baryeh



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**INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF OSLO**

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DEDICATIONS

This work is dedicated to:

My parents – Mr. E. A. Baryeh and Mrs. Lucy Baryeh who supported me and loved me.

My children – Yaw Baryeh (Junior) and Dinah Baryeh (MP)

Leticia Appiah – Her challenge, love and support of me increases and embellishes my self-worth
on a daily basis.

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Faculty of Education

University of Oslo

Oslo, Norway.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED

1. APB Association of Professional Bodies
2. CHASS Heads of Assisted Secondary Schools
3. COPP Conference of Polytechnic Principals
4. CSIR Council for Scientific and Social Research
5. EUA European University Association
6. GIMPA Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration
7. ISSER Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research
8. JAMB Joint Admission and Matriculation Board
9. KNUST Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
10. MOE Ministry of Education
11. MOEYS Ministry of Education Youth and Sports
12. NAB National Accreditation Board
13. NABPTEX National Board for Professional and Technical Examinations
14. NCTE National Council for Tertiary Education
15. PNDC Provisional National Defense Council
16. PIP Population Impact Programme
17. PSC Public Service Commission
18. SSNIT Social Security and National Insurance Trust
19. UDS University of Development Studies
20. UG University of Ghana
21. UGCC University of Cape Coast
22. UMT University of Mines and Technology
23. URC University Rationalization Committee
24. UST University of Science and Technology

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The issue of higher education quality and the need for effective quality assurance systems beyond those of institutions themselves is becoming increasingly important in national strategies of higher education. There are more people involved in investigating, researching, auditing, applying, analyzing, controlling, assessing and writing about quality than ever before. (Roffe, 1996). This is driven by a multitude of interrelated factors (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994) such as: the change in the relationship between higher education institutions and the state; the rise of the knowledge economy and the importance attached to higher education as the engine of economic growth; the increased participation of private higher education providers as a result of the increased demand for higher education coupled with the growing cost of higher education.

These factors place more importance on extrinsic qualities of higher education than on the intrinsic qualities of higher education. The extrinsic qualities, as defined by Vught (1997) refer to the capacities of higher education to respond to the changing needs of the societies. On the other hand, the intrinsic qualities of higher education “refer to the basic values and ideals which form the very heart of higher education: the unfettered search for truth and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge” (Vught, 1997: 81). According to Vught and Westernheijden (1994) the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms by governments and other societal actors was mainly influenced by the extrinsic qualities of higher education. However, higher education institutions also have the task to take care of their intrinsic qualities. According to Vught and Westerheijden (1994) a national system of quality assurance of higher education needs to combine both the intrinsic and the extrinsic dimensions of quality. In other words, a national quality assurance agency needs to combine both the internal needs of higher education institutions and the external needs of the society in quality assurance. According to the authors, a national quality assurance system that focuses on only the intrinsic dimension of quality risks of societal isolation. On the other hand, a quality assessment system that is limited to only providing accountability risks of not being taken seriously by academics. Equal emphasis (Wilger, 1997) must be placed upon

communicating the results of this assessment to interested parties, both to satisfy demands of accountability and to enable institutions to use the results to affect changes and improvements.

The question of balancing internal institutional needs (improvement) and external societal needs (accountability) by national systems of quality assurance of higher education has received much attention lately both at the national and international levels. Much of the scholarly literature on quality assurance indicates that quality assurance agencies in many countries give more prominence to the accountability dimension to the detriment of the institutional improvement.

This problem has made it necessary for many scholars (for example, Smeby and Stensaker 1999; Vught and Westerheiden 1994) to analyze how national systems of higher education quality assurance are managing the balance between the improvement and the accountability dimensions of higher education quality assurance.

Immediately after independence, most states in Africa adopted a state-organized system of education. The case in Ghana is not different. A formal education structure modeled on the British system was set up during the colonial period. Since independence, however, the higher education system has gone through a number of reforms in an attempt to make it more modern, effective and able to serve the socio-economic needs of the country.

In spite of the fact that there have been many reforms in the Ghanaian higher education to make it more responsive to the society, the system is still confronted with a number of serious problems and challenges. Notable among them are: the increasing demand for tertiary education coupled with the rate of population growth, the poor financial conditions and budgetary constraints and the external quality assurance system.

The increasing demand for tertiary education coupled with the rate of higher education population growth in Ghana without any expansion and improvement of existing physical facilities such as lecture halls, residential facilities and laboratory facilities for science education has created a state of malaise hindering the enhancement of efficient and effective higher education system. Although there has been an increase in the number of private universities in order to shoulder the excess demand, these universities charge very high fees and for that matter have become attractive to only the rich in the society. According to a World Bank report on

Africa (WorldBank, 2000:27) “expansion in both public and private university has been unbridled, unplanned and often chaotic resulting in deterioration of average quality.

In his presentation at the 58th Annual New Year School, Awuah (2007) pointed out that “the drive to increase enrolment in Ghanaian higher education institutions has occurred at the expense of quality”.

In terms of financing, higher education in Ghana is funded largely from government resources. Over the past decade, education's share of the government discretionary budget has not exceeded 40%. On the average, the higher education sub-sector share has been about 12% of the total recurrent education budget. Effah (2003) Education share of the government approved discretionary budget for the year 2000 was \$ 204,824,621 (32%). Of this amount \$23,870,359 (15%) was allocated to higher education sector. The approved previous budget for universities in 1998 met 50% their estimated requirement. The corresponding figure for the year 2000 is 56%. In spite of these increases, the 2000 budget still leaves serious institutional budgetary gaps.

The poor financial conditions and budgetary constraints have remarkable effects on institutions in the teaching and learning environment, development of various projects and staff development and productivity. There have been minor efforts to expand the physical structures to cope with the increasing number of enrolment aspired by both institutions and state. Projects have been left abandoned because of budget shortfalls.

Due to the above problem, it is very common in Ghanaian universities to find students sitting in pairs on a single desk. In some cases, the lack of tables and chairs has forced students to stand in windows to take lecture notes. In addition, the universities have shortage of recommended literatures on various programmes and that has necessitated some of the lectures to dictate notes to students. The practice encourages memorization and during exams, in most cases written exams, reproduction of what the lecture has dictated. In such a situation, the question asked is whether national quality assurance agency is fulfilling its mandate in line with the intentions behind its establishment in 1993? Which, among others, is to ensure the quality of higher education in Ghana?

The National Accreditation Board (NAB) is a public service institution under the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports (MOEYS), responsible among other things for the accreditation of both public and private tertiary institutions with regards to the contents and standard of their programmes and also to determine, in consultation with the appropriate institutions or body, the programme and requirements for the proper operation of their institutions and the maintenance of acceptable levels of academic or professional standards. It is also responsible for the determination of equivalents of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications awarded in Ghana and elsewhere.

National Accreditation Board (NAB) was established by the government of Ghana in 1993 with the enactment of the NAB LAW 1993 (PNDCL 317), to contribute to the furtherance of better management of tertiary education as a quality Assurance Agency.

The passage of the National Accreditation Board Act, 2007, Act 744 of the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana retained the above mentioned mandate but also assigned NAB additional responsibility to:

Publish as it considers appropriate the list of accredited public and private institutions and programmes at the beginning of each calendar year. Advise the President on the grant of a charter to private tertiary education. Perform any other functions determined by the Minister.

The agency is governed by a board composed of a chairman; representative from the University of Ghana (UG), representative of University of Cape Coast (UCC), representative of the University for Development Studies (UDS), representative of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), representative of University of Mines and Technology (UMT), representative of Conference of Polytechnic Principals (COPP), representative of Heads of Assisted Secondary Schools (CHASS), representatives of Association of Professional Bodies (APB), representative of Public Service Commissions (PSC), representative of National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEX), representative of Ministry of

Education (MOE), representative of Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) and the Government nominees.

NAB has two main committees with respect to its activities: the Accreditation Committee which comprises the institutional visits and the monitoring, and the Assessment Criteria sub-committees, as well as the Finance and Administrative Committee made up of the Appointment/Promotion and Disciplinary, and the Budget sub-committees.

The agency has its office in the capital, Accra, and is financed on government subvention for personal emoluments, administration costs and service cost. This is also augmented with Internally Generated Funds from fees charge from accreditation exercises and evaluation of certificates.

Literature on higher education quality assurance indicates that improvement and accountability are believed to be the two main purposes of national quality assurance agencies. However, at the moment most national quality assurance agencies seem to focus on the accountability aspect rather than the improvement (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). The issue of balancing accountability and improvement in higher education quality assurance has become a major concern in recent times and many scholars have contributed to the debate (Wilger 1997; Vroeijentijn 1995; Vught and Westerheijden 1994). According to Vught and Westerheijden (1994) a national quality assurance agency needs to combine both internal needs of higher education institutions (improvement) and external needs of society (accountability) in quality assurance, as mentioned before. Cambell and Rozsnyai (2002) also argue that if external quality assurance (e.g. requirements for the approval and design of programmes) is very rigid, then higher education institutions may not have the flexibility to respond rapidly or in an innovative manner to new demands.

1.2 Research Questions

Like many national quality assurance agencies in the world, National Accreditation Board (NAB) as a quality assurance agency in Ghana, is also faced with the challenge of balancing accountability and improvement.

This study therefore seeks to find out *How NAB is coping with the balance between Improvement and Accountability in Quality Assurance of Ghanaian Higher Education.*

In order to answer this broad question the following specific research questions were raised.

- What is quality of higher education from Ghanaian perspective?
- What are the mechanisms employed by NAB to assess higher education quality in Ghana?
- What are the challenges NAB faces in trying to balance improvement and accountability of higher education quality assurance in Ghana?

1.3 Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to examine the practice of higher education quality assessment in Ghana. The study examines external quality assessment procedure and the extent to which NAB is trying to balance the needs of improvement and accountability.

1.4 Significance of the study

Although there are a lot of materials and studies made on quality of higher education in other parts of the world, it seems that little research has been conducted on higher education quality assurance on West African Countries, specifically Ghana. Therefore, this study is expected to provide insight into understanding the practice of higher education quality assurance in Ghanaian higher education. It is also envisaged that the study will give impetus to interested parties in Ghanaian higher education to engage in useful discussion around this subject.

Finally, yet importantly, it is expected that the study shall serve as a basis for future research into the practice of higher education quality assurance in Ghana and also developing an improved system of higher education quality assurance practice.

1.5 Limitations of the study

A major limitation of my study was my inability to go to my home country to do a face to face interview with my correspondents due to financial and time constrain. It is argued that face to face interviews is good for measuring attitudes, allows probing and follow-up questions, provides an in-depth information(Rubin and Rubin,2005). However, I had to resort to document analysis as my main source of data. Although few telephone interviews were done, it was used as a complement to the available documents used.

1.6 Delimitation

To make the research manageable, the scope of the research was restricted to the practice of higher education quality assurance by an external agency. Thus focusing on NAB as the only higher education quality assurance agency in Ghana. Since its inception in 1993, NAB has been focusing on higher education evaluation and accreditation of both public and private institutions.

1.7 Terminologies

Accreditation: Is a process of according recognition to a tertiary educational institution for meeting satisfactory standards in performance, integrity and quality (NAB, 2007).

Tertiary Institution: A tertiary institution is post-secondary institution of higher or further learning, or professional studies. It is expected to provide advanced academic and/or professional instruction and conduct research (especially in the universities) in sciences, social sciences, humanities and career focused programmes (NAB, 2007).

Chartered Institute/Institution: A “Chartered” institute/institution implies one that has been granted certain rights and privileges by the President or the legislature to operate as such.

1.8 Organization of the Study

My study comprises six chapters:

- Chapter one is made up of the introduction and/background of the study, the research question, significance of the study, study limitation, objectives of the study.
- Chapter two talks about the history of higher education in Ghana and also gives a brief account of Ghana.
- Chapter three is the literature review on higher education quality assurance. Major concepts such as quality, standards and indicators, external versus internal quality assurance and the general model of quality assurance are presented.
- Chapter four consists of the research strategy and data collection tools used in the study.
- Chapter five gives a presentation and interpretation of research findings.
- Chapter six is my final chapter. Here, conclusion is presented.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a brief history of higher education in Ghana and its development process to its present stage. The discussions are centered on several issues including the birth of higher education, structure of the Ghana education system, relationship between government and the higher education institutions, financing, staff, research and the reform in tertiary education that saw the birth of the National Accreditation Board.

2.2 Ghana in Brief

Ghana is geographically located at the Western part of Africa with a total land size of about 238,583 square kilometers. About the size of Illinois and Indiana combined. In 2003, Ghana's population stood at 21.1 million with an annual growth rate of about 2.7% per annum. Formally colonized by the British, Ghana gained its independence from its colonial masters on the 6th of March 1957. The country is subdivided into ten regions with Greater Accra region as the capital. The political system in the country is a multiparty democracy.

Ghana's average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita over the past decade was approximately US \$ 300 (IMF, 2003). The proportion of the population living under poverty fell steadily from 51% in 1992 to 35 % in 2000. Though human development indicators have improved over the years, a recent survey shows a rise in child and infant motility rates. Again, Ghana still has significant disparities in the poverty distribution, especially in its Northern region (IMF debt relief report, 2003). Ghana is well endowed with natural resources such as cocoa, timber, diamond, gold and black gold.

2.3 Historical Overview of Higher Education

The development of higher education in Ghana can be traced back to the year 1948. By an ordinance dated 11 August 1948, the University College of the Gold Coast (now University of Ghana) was created by the British colonial government in 'special relationship' with the University of London, to offer limited programmes of study. In 1961, the university college

attained sovereign university status with the powers to award its own degree. Between 1972 and 1973, the number of students that enrolled at the University of Ghana was estimated at 2530 in addition to the 450 academic staff. To overcome the problem of rapid population growth coupled with increasing demand for higher education it was expedient for the nation to open the doors for new universities. In view of the above, the Kumasi college of technology was upgraded to a university status and was renamed KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY by an Act of parliament on August 22, 1961 (Daniel, 1996). The Kumasi College of Arts Science and technology was opened officially on the 27th January, 1952 with 200 teacher training students transferred from Chicot College to form the nucleus of the college. In October, 1952, the School of Engineering and The Department of Commerce were established and the first students were admitted. Between 1952 - 1955, the School of Engineering prepared students for professional qualification only. The school offered courses leading to the University of London Bachelor of Engineering in External Degree Exams in 1955 (U.S.T. Calender, 1986-1992).

In a similar development, an international commission in line with the county's development objectives recommended for the establishment of a third university. The University College of Cape Coast was established in December 1962 and was upgraded to a full university status in October 1971 by an Act of Parliament, the University of Cape Coast Act 1971, and subsequently the University of Cape Coast Law 1992 (PNDC LAW 278) (University of Cape Coast Calender, 1995-2005). This University was established with the purpose to provide graduate teachers for the growing number of secondary schools and teacher training colleges.

In 1992, the University of Education, Winneba was established with an affiliation to the University of Cape Coast. The University was established to train teachers for the nation's secondary schools. The University has got three campuses located in two of the country's ten regions. In May, 1992, the University of Development Studies was established by Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) Law 279 (Agbodeka, 1998). The new university is a novel institution not attached to any other university. It is free to explore integrated programmes directed at development in critical areas of agriculture and health delivery. The University has

four campuses spread over four regions of the country namely, Brong Ahafo, Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions.

As a former British colony, Ghana's higher education system has been influenced to a large extent by the British model. Higher education, until recently, has been elitist and trained skilled personal that can run modern bureaucracy.

Currently, the country has 38 public post-secondary teacher training colleges, 10 polytechnics and 6 universities, the universities are: The University of Ghana, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Cape Coast University, University of Education, Winneba, the University of Development Studies, Tamale, and the Western University College, Tarkwa. In addition to this, the National Accreditation Board has accredited 10 private universities and university institutions that offer various programmes. The Board has also accredited nine tutorial professional colleges, which prepare students for taking examinations of accredited professional bodies within and outside Ghana, and two distance education centers that represent accredited universities outside Ghana (Keteku, 2000).

2.3.1 Private Universities

The expansion of private higher education institutions is apparent in most parts of the world. Although the expansion of the sector can be attributed to a number of reasons (Altbach, 2005) argues that the main reasons are related to massification and financing. An increased demand for access to higher education and the change of thinking about the financing of higher education, which is related to the change in concept from the traditional idea that higher education is a public good that has to be provided by society to private good, has been the major derivatives for the growth of private higher education. In line with the general rational plus the national political and ideological changes, the country has seen a tremendous growth in private higher education institutions since the year 2000.

Currently there are twelve accredited private higher education institutions dotted across the length and breadth of the country (NAB, 2009).

2.3.2 The Structure of the education System

The current education system consists of 2-6-3-3-4. That is 2 years of pre-primary and 6 years of primary which is free, compulsory and universal. There are further 3 years of junior secondary and another 3 years of senior secondary, followed by 4 years of university education. In terms of language, the local language depending on the area of the school is the language of instruction for the primary school level and English at secondary level up to the tertiary level.

2.3.3 Relationship between State and Higher Education Institutions

The minister of Education has ministerial oversight of all levels of education (public and private) including higher education institutions. The National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), with representatives from the universities, provides for formal consultation on education. It also acts as a liaison for the government and the universities.

The National Accreditation Board (NAB) and the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), both recommended by the Universities Rationalization Committee (URC), represent additional formal structures for interaction with government and among the institutions (Daniel, 1998). These bodies have an additional responsibility of ensuring that the quality of higher education in the country meets the acceptable national standards.

The 1990 Government White Paper was among other things meant to democratize the university governance structure. Thus the traditional governance structure (state control model) was to be transformed into a participatory approach. However, the government adopted a different approach. It established an integrated and coordinated tertiary education system comprising all post secondary pre-service training institutions under the general supervision, direction and control of the Ministry of Education. Thus the system of governance is still the traditional 'state control model'.

2.3.4 Financing of Higher Education

Income available to the higher education institutions is derived mainly from government subvention and part also from an internally generated funds such as, the sale of application forms, fees from students registration, tuition paid by students, issue of academic transcripts, consultancies, rent from university housing and from floor space leased for private catering and other businesses, the sale of products from university farms, hospital and veterinary fees, bookshop sales, monies generated from printing houses on campus and from vehicle servicing at the estates' organization.

Expenditure includes staff emoluments and allowances, passages for sabbatical and study leave, cost of instruction, cost of examining, including passages and honoraria for external examiners, maintenance of staff houses and university buildings, hire of houses for entitled staff, utility charges from university buildings, insurance and maintenance of university vehicles, hospital services for entitled staff, provision of coffin, transportation and related services for deceased staff.

Income available to the university often fall short of expenditure, some of which particularly arise from the fact that the universities were initially built far away from the city centre; the universities were obliged to provide their own municipal services. At various times services provided on campus have included staff housing, student housing, electricity, water, telephone, bus services, postal services, air travel agency, bakery, catering grocery, laundry, primary school, junior secondary school, chaplainry, estates development, estate maintenance, ground maintenance, security fire services, sanitation, hospital, pharmacy, mortuary. Provisions of these services require staff in large numbers, all of them paid from the subvention received from government, which naturally tips the scale heavily on the expenditure side.

To rectify the imbalance between income and expenditure, the Universities Rationalization Committee urges disengagement from services not quite critical to teaching and research, and retrenchment of the staff concerned. Disengagement from catering and retrenchment of catering

staff has occurred since 1989, while other costs saving measures continue to receive attention. Meanwhile the bulk of monies required for emolument and recurrent expenditure derived from the annual subvention received from government, represent about 95% of the universities' operating cost.

2.3.5 Staff

About 95% of the higher education staff are Ghanaian nationals with academic staff grades ranging from lectureship, associate professorship, to full professorship of which possession of at least an M.Phil degree or other evidence of research competence is required. Assistant lectureship is available for a very limited period only to persons of promise that may not have obtained a research degree yet. Native speakers of foreign languages or experts in practical fields of study in music and other theater arts who do not have requisite formal qualification may also be appointed as tutors.

As mentioned above, teaching is conducted in English through a combination of lectures, seminars, tutorials and practical. Full time academic staff is expected to teach a minimum of 3 courses or 9 hours a week and to devote the rest of their time to research. Any teaching beyond 9 hours a week over a 25-week teaching period of the year is compensated for by extra pay at hourly rate payable to part-time staff with the provision that full time staff may not earn more than half as much again of the annual basic salary. Full time research staff may teach only one course in the year in addition to their research duties. Academic staff may take one year sabbatical leave every seventh year; a 2-year sabbatical leave after 10 years of unbroken teaching or other academic work is also possible.

Vacancies are filled by advertisement placed both locally and abroad through the Ghana web page. Salaries in Ghana are now not competitive to attract foreign nationals, though some who receive support from their home governments or international funding agencies are able to accept a Ghanaian appointment. Foreign nationals now constitute less than 5% of all staff at post.

Scholars visiting Fulbright Fellowship or other reciprocal staff exchange programmes are provided rent –free accommodation on campus.

Staff may opt for the Universities of Ghana Superannuating Scheme to which university and staff contributions stand respectively at 12 % and 5% of salary. University and staff contributions may be paid also to a national pension scheme administered by the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT).

Through a staff-training program, which does not now receive enough funding, the universities in the past provided post-graduate training abroad for all who showed promise in the first degree taken at home. Nearly all the older generation of academic staff (those over 50 years) received part of their training in the universities in the United Kingdom, other Commonwealth countries and the USA. Current efforts are geared towards building a vibrant graduate studies programme to train staff locally; being local; the expenses exclude airfares and other cost related to travel abroad. Therefore, more can be admitted to these programmes, which provide opportunity also for more research into local problems.

2.3.6 Research

The typical appointment contract requires academic staff to advance their subject by research, teaching and extension, in that order. Some members of staff are engaged in research full time as research fellows in the teaching departments or in institutes and centers devoted to full time research. Teaching staff may transfer to a research institute or take sabbatical leave in a research institute.

At the University of Ghana, research institutes include the Institute of Adult Education, the Institute of African Studies, the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), The Nugochi Memorial Institute for Medical Research and the Regional Institute for Population Studies. Other research facilities include the Language Center, the Volta Basin Research Project,

the Centre for Tropical Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics, and the agricultural research stations at Kade (tree crops), Kpong (cereals) and Legon (livestock).

Other fulltime research occurs within the Population Impact Programme (PIP) and the Remote Sensing Application Unit, both at the department of geography and resource development. In addition, the International Centre for Music and Dance at the University of Ghana Collaborates with and complements work done at the Institute of African Studies and of Performing Arts.

At the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, research institutes include the Bureau of Integrated Rural Development, the Institute of Technical Education, the Land Administration Research Centre, and the Centre for Cultural Studies and the Institute of Renewable Natural Resources.

At the University of Cape Coast, the Centre for Development Studies, the Institute for Education Planning and Administration and the Institute of Education are among the university's research concentrations, while at the university College of Education at Winneba, the Institute for Education Development and Extension leads research in programming of distance education.

Established in 1960, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) now includes 17 research institutes, employing full-time scientific officers, some of whom teach part-time in the universities and are generally available to assist as supervisors in the training of postgraduate students registered with the universities, but using some of the council's facilities. The Ghana Atomic Energy, located at Kwabenya near Legon has some of its staff in collaborative research with staff of the University of Ghana.

2.4 Reform in Tertiary Education

The 1987 tertiary education reform serves as the most comprehensive policy initiative ever in the history of Ghana's higher education. Prior to this, Ghanaian tertiary education had gone through crisis among which are: the complete deterioration of conditions; low staff recruitment and retention; moral decline in academic standards; interruptions in academic calendar through student and staff strikes.

In view of the above, the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) appointed the URC to undertake broad review of the post-secondary education (MOE, 2000). In 1987, the committee released its preliminary report about the state of the higher education in the country and detailed in it the changes that needed to take place in the structure, administration and governance of higher education institutions. The main objectives of the URC were to develop strategies to expand access and equity, to improve efficiency and effectiveness at the university level and to improve on the quality and relevance of degree programmes.

Based on these objectives, the URC upon deliberation identified key issues facing the higher education in Ghana. Among the prominent ones are: 1) the restructuring of academic programmes to be relevant to students and the economy 2) the effective managing of higher education so that it will be cost effective 3) improving the existing facilities and efficient utilization of available resources and space 4) finding of new strategies to expand higher education in Ghana (Girdwood, 1999).

Following the above issues, the URC made 166 recommendations to reform the higher education system. These were adopted by the government and became the Government White Paper entitled “Reforms to Tertiary Education System” issued in 1991 (Girdwood, 1999).

The proposals include, among other things, the establishment of a Board of Accreditation to contribute to the “furtherance of better management of tertiary education” as the quality assurance body at the tertiary education level.

The enactment of the Provision National Defense Council Law (PNDCL) 317, 1993, saw the birth of the National Accreditation Board with the following mandate

- Accredite both public and private (tertiary) institutions with regard to the contents and standards of their programs
- Determine, in consultation with the appropriate institution or body, the programme and requirements for the proper operation of that institution and maintenance of acceptable levels of academic and professional standards

- Determine the requirements of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications awarded by institutions in Ghana or elsewhere.

Ghana has earned much international acclaim for its quality education. The birth of the NAB as regulatory agency of the Ministry of Education therefore is to ensure that the country's tertiary education system continues to be responsive to the fast changing world and to make its graduates progressively competitive in the world of work (NAB, 2007).

2.5 The Impact of Globalization on Ghana's Higher Education

According to Held et al. (1991), globalization is a process which embodies transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity interaction and power.

In higher education context, globalization has been defined by (Knight and De Wit, 1995: cited in Beerkens, 2004:16) as an internationalization of higher education, thus the process of integrating international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of higher education institutions. This process has impacted both on management of higher education systems and institution as well as curricula issues. Social pressures and the specific requirements of the labor market have resulted in an extraordinary diversification in universities and in programmes of study.

University education in Ghana has not been exempted from the force and urgency with which educational reforms is politically advocated as a response to the economic imperatives. There has been a lot of restructuring, as indicated above, to tailor programmes to global market needs.

Besides the demand for higher education in Ghana over the last twenty years has been enormous. As having higher education degree increasingly became a necessary condition for entering, not only the professions but also the rapidly expanding service and technology oriented jobs (Maassen and Cloete, 2002).

The impact of global market forces has compelled Ghanaian governments over the years to reduce the per capita public funding to higher education, despite the continuous increase in student enrolments. This situation has therefore resulted in the introduction of other alternatives to shift cost to individuals. In Ghana the introduction of cost sharing in the 1990's was met with a lot of student unrest. Besides, higher education is being asked to be more accountable for how its administration portion of public financial support is spent (Altbach, 1997).

The increase in student enrolment has therefore prompted the introduction of private providers to the higher education sector. However, most of the private institutions are business oriented and their survival depends on private people who invest their money for profit making. The implication of this is attracting more students for money making from tuition fees. Some of the incentives involved in the pursuance of this goal are detrimental and the quality of education provided by some of the institutions is also doubtful. In such a situation the state needs to come in and regulate the activities of higher education institutions in order to ensure that they follow the rules of the game and also provide quality service. One way of doing this is by the introduction of quality assurance mechanism.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has given a brief account of the development of higher education in Ghana and has gone further to give an account of the reforms that also led to the establishment of a quality assurance board (NAB, 2009). It must be noted that Ghana's higher education has seen a tremendous improvement since independence. And Ghana has won an international reputation as one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa with the best higher education system (NAB, 2009). This is due to the priority that was given to higher education as a pivot of economic growth over the years by past and present governments. However, for Ghana to remain competitive in this era of technological advancement and globalization there is the need for a vigorous institutional reforms that need to be undertaken under cooperative agreements between international institutions example World Bank and United Nations.

CHAPTER THREE

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

My study focuses on quality assurance in higher education; therefore, the first part of this chapter aims to provide a short summary of how quality assurance has emerged in higher education, with the discussion moving forward to provide a synopsis of what has been written on quality and quality assurance as well as the concept of standards and indicators in quality assurance. The final part of this chapter presents a general model of quality assurance systems developed by (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994).

3.2 Factors at Play in the Emergence of Higher Education Quality Assurance

According to Rob de Klerk et al. (1998) quality assessment of education is as old as education itself. The informal discussions after class between professors and students, however, are far from a systematic instrument for uniform measurement of quality of all aspects of the educational process: curriculum content, curriculum structure, didactic quality etc. While academic quality assurance in the publicly supported sectors in the UK had been carried out by professional self-regulation until the 1980's, it had been state regulated in the case of continental European countries like France and the Netherlands. However, markets have been influential in regulating academic quality of higher education institution in the US. (Dill, 2003). The issue of quality assessment of higher education has become an agenda for discussion in many countries of the world since 1980s (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). Almost every higher education system today is driven by some form of quality assessment/accreditation. A phenomenon which is partly attributed to what (Naeve, 1988) refers to as the rise of the evaluative state.

This paradigm shift has emerged as a result of a multitude of interrelated factors (Vught and Westerheijden 1994; Brennan and Shah 2000; Materu 2007; Dill 2004). An important factor is the change in the relationship between higher education institutions and the state. In many countries, governments are moving away from the 'State Control Model' that is "characterized by strong confidence in the capabilities of government actors and agencies to acquire comprehensive and true knowledge and to take the best decisions" (Vught, 1989) towards the

‘State Supervising Model’ where “ government becomes one of the actors who watches the rules of the game played by relative autonomous players and change the rules when the game is no longer able to lead to satisfactory results” (Vught, 1989). As a result of delegating more autonomy to higher education institutions, governments and the public, in return, require accountability from higher education institutions.

Another important factor is the rise of the knowledge economy and the importance attached to higher education as the engine of economic growth. According to Held et al (2000) knowledge economy is one where knowledge is emphasized more than labor. The World Bank also describes knowledge economy as one where organizations and people acquire, create, disseminate and use knowledge more effectively for greater economic and social development. Thus knowledge has become the key source of growth for global economy. An organizations value has now come to depend on the intellectual skills, knowledge and intelligence of its human capital which is the source of self sustaining growth for post industrial economies. It can therefore be deduced from the above that knowledge has now become a pivot of post industrial economic development and has attracted worldwide attention. Therefore higher education institutions with knowledge as their building block (Clark, 1983) have come to the fore of the debate and as a result a concern for the quality of service that they provide to their stakeholders.

Thirdly, the increased demand for tertiary education and rising private contribution followed by the explosive rise in student enrolment has raised great concerns about the quality of higher education. According to Materu (2007) since the late 1980’s, the global market for tertiary education has been growing at an average rate of 7 percent per annum and more than 80million tertiary students pursue their studies with the help of 3.5 million additional people who are employed in teaching and related work. The increased participation of private tertiary providers saw some countries beginning to face problems of educational quality as a result of the use of sub-standard curriculum, lack of essential facilities such as laboratories, unqualified academic staff (Materu, 2007). This therefore, triggered the need to have quality assurance systems that will check the activities of these private tertiary providers.

The fourth factor is the need to expand the system in response to the growing social demand with reduced unit cost per student, as a result of reduced governments budget on education, there has been concerns about the 'efficiency and effectiveness' of higher education institutions (Barnet, 1992). He argues that the tension between the expansion of the system on the one hand and budget cuts on the other has created quality gap (Brennan and Shah 2000; Damme 2004) that necessitated the need for quality assessment of higher education.

Last but not least, is associated with the 'extrinsic qualities' of higher education institutions: services institutions provide to the society (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). Higher education institutions inability to satisfy the qualitative and quantitative needs has lead to loss of confidence on the traditional management capacity of institutions. This has therefore resulted in the establishment of quality assurance systems.

3.3 MAJOR CONCEPTS

3.3.1 Quality

The search for a universal definition of quality has been unsuccessful because "the quality construct space is so broad and include so many components that there would be little utility in any model that tried to encompass them all" (Reeves and Bednar, 1994: 441). According to Cameron and Whetten (1983) the challenge is not to formulate one definition or model of quality that attempts to include all possible variables. Rather, the challenge is to develop models and definitions of quality that are comparable and cumulative and includes new components ignored up to now (Cameron and Whetten, 1993, cited in Reeves and Bednar, 1994). In their analysis on defining quality, Reeves and Bednar concludes that a global definition of quality does not exist and that different definitions of quality are appropriate in different circumstances (Reeves and Bednar, 1994). They also come to conclusion that "no one definition is best in every situation because each definition has both strengths and weakness in relation to criteria such as measurement, generalizability, managerial usefulness, and consumer relevance" (Reeves and Bednar, 1994 :427).

Although what constitute quality is debatable, however, a few useful examples of definition of quality are found. Vroeijentstijn (1995) provides a practical guidance how to define and assess quality in higher education. A broad definition of quality, as proposed by him, is that: “Quality is a matter of negotiation between all parties concerned” (Vroeijentstijn, 1995:14). According to Vroeijentstijn (1995) each stakeholder should formulate clearly ones requirements. Then, a higher education institution should reconcile all those different requirements, translate them in the mission and goals of a faculty and of the educational programme and achieve those goals. If a higher education institution succeeds to do so, then it has quality. In summary quality as defined by Vroeijentstijn (1995) is achieving of the goals of faculty and of the educational programme, which are formulated on the requirements set by all stakeholders concerned. More or less similar Cheng & Tam (1997) also argued that from a wider perspective, education quality can be seen as a set of elements that constitute the input, process and output of the education system, and provides services that satisfy both internal and external actors through meeting their explicit and implicit expectations. Cheng and Tam (1992) also differentiate between both internal and external stakeholders in the quality assessment process. The internal actors are current students and front line staff, whereas employers, government bodies, institutional management, prospective students are external ones. These stakeholders might define quality in different ways as well as prefer different quality assessment procedures.

On the other hand, Harvey and Green (1993) described quality as a relative concept: “Quality is relative to the user of the term and the circumstance in which it is involved” (Harvey and Green, 1993:10). Besides, as they say, quality is relative to processes and outcomes, Harvey and Green contend that setting criteria for assessing quality in higher education requires understanding of different conceptions of quality from stakeholder groups (Harvey and Green, 1993:11-27). therefore suggest that, stakeholders views on quality could be categorized into five discrete but interrelated ways of conception of quality: quality as exceptional (e.g. high standards), quality as perfection or consistency (e.g. zero defects), quality as fitness for purpose (fitting customer specification), quality as value for money, and quality as transformation (empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge).

- **Quality as Exceptional.** This view of quality is linked to the idea of excellence and to exceptional high standards of academic achievements. According to Harvey (1999) quality in this approach is achieved if the standards are distinguished. This traditional view of quality is linked with elitism, it does not offer criteria against which to measure quality and does not attempt to define quality. The distinctiveness and inaccessibility of elitist education for most people is of itself 'quality'.
- **Quality as Perfection or consistency.** This notion of quality sees quality as consistent or flawless outcome. This idea means there should be a 'Zero error'. As higher education does not aim at producing standardized, free of defects graduates, this view of quality is not really applicable to higher education (Watty, 2003).
- **Quality as Fitness for Purpose.** Quality as fitness for purpose sees quality as, meeting the requirements or needs of customers on one hand and on the other, placing emphasis on the institutions fulfilling its stated objectives or missions. Defining quality as meeting customers' needs raises the question about who should define quality in higher education. The problem here is that different stakeholders in higher education may have different understanding of what quality is. Another problem with the fitness for purpose definition of quality is that it is difficult to identify the purpose of higher education, According to the PHARE Quality Assurance, this conception of quality needs to be complemented with the conception of the fitness of purpose for higher education so that an evaluation could be discussed and challenge the comprehensive and relevance of purpose in order to ensure improvements.
- **Quality as Value for Money.** This notion of quality sees quality in terms of return on investment. If the same outcome can be achieved at a lower, or a better outcome can be achieved at the same cost, then the 'customer' has a quality product or service. The growing tendency for governments to require accountability from higher education reflects a value- for money approach. Increasingly students require value-for-money for the increasing cost to them of higher education (Harvey, 1999).
- **Quality as Transformation.** This notion sees quality as a process of qualitative change, which in higher education adds value to students through their learning (Harvey, 1999). According to this concept of quality, higher education is not a product or service for a

customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participants. Transformation in education refers to enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge. Students are enhanced in higher education through the provision of an educational experience that enables the development and improvement of their knowledge, abilities and skills (Harvey, 1999). Empowering students means not only engaging them in selecting their own curriculum, monitoring the quality of education they are provided or constructing their own learning contracts but also empowering them as critical, transformative learners (Harvey, 1996). Thus higher education is “first and foremost about the enhancement and empowerment of students as participants in process of learning” and “even more than that, higher education is about participation in a process of learning for transformation” (Harvey, 1996;2).

In his contribution to the quality debate, Gola (2003) defines quality in higher education as “specifying worthwhile learning goals and enabling students to achieve them” “it involves articulating academic standards” to meet

- Society expectations
- Student aspirations
- The demand of the government, business and industry
- The requirement of professional institutions

This definition of Gola (2003) seems to be in line with Harvey’s (1993) conception of quality as ‘fitness for purpose’.

The difference in these conceptions seems a matter of emphasis either on the intrinsic and/or the extrinsic values of higher education institutions. It can therefore be argued that different definitions of quality are likely to be prioritized by different stakeholders according to their interest and at different circumstances, and quality of higher education is not static, rather it is dynamic and expresses itself in a continuous innovation (Bruggen et al, 1998).

However, according to Harvey and Green (1993) the fact that there are many different definitions or understandings of quality does not mean that we should withdraw from the responsibility of maintaining and enhancing quality. To Henkel and Little (1999) ‘higher education has its traditional language of quality reflecting notions of standards, of academic coherence and progression of attainment and understanding’ which is not readily communicable to people outside the discourse of the specialist discipline’.

3.3.2 Quality assurance

Quality assurance refers to the “systematic, structured and continues attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and quality improvement” (Vroeijensten, 1995: xix).

According to Harvey (1999) quality monitoring procedures serve a variety of purpose that can be group into three:

- Accountability
- Improvement
- Information

Accountability in this context includes three broad concerns. First, accountability to external funders (government) that public money is spent appropriately. Secondly, accountability to the higher education sectors that principles and practice are not being treated with contempt. Third is accountability to ‘customers’ in order to ensure that an appropriate experience is provided. Trow (1996) also defines it as the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used, and to what effect.

Improvement on the other hand is to encourage institutions to reflect upon their practices and to develop what they do (Harvey, 1999). A final purpose of monitoring procedure according to Harvey (1999) is to generate information for funders as to aid funding allocation decisions and thus link to accountability, and information for stakeholders to help them make informed choices. According to Schwarz and Westerheijden (2004) information is related to transparency that refers to provision of information to stakeholders so as to help them make rational choices.

World Bank (2003) also gives five different functions of quality assurance systems that can include: assessment related to the initial opening of programmes and institutions (commonly called ‘licensing’ and leading to the status publicly recognized entity; supervision of the current functioning (commonly relating to minimum standards, also including the supervision of administration and finance); accreditation (frequently of advance levels of quality); professional certification of graduates in chosen professional fields and the provision of information on the recognition and accreditation status of both institutions and programmes. Although quality assurance programmes serve different functions, accountability and improvement functions are more emphasized in the literature. However, the point of analysis in a particular context determines whether more emphasis is given to accountability or improvement and/or how the system maintains a balance between the two. According to Swarz and Westerheijden (2004) it would be appropriate to focus on the accountability and compliance aspect of quality assurance in circumstances characterized by a ‘proliferation of unregulated private higher education’ or when ‘addressing the introduction of new types of institution or qualification’; whereas in a system of higher education where effective internal quality assurance scheme is in place, it would be appropriate to focus on the improvement side of quality assurance. It can therefore be concluded from the above that accountability oriented assessment is linked with external quality assessment whereas improvement oriented assessment is associated with institutional quality assessment. According to Massy (1997) “Accountability generally provides the proximate motivation for externally-organized assessment; while improvement provides the motivation for institutionally-initiated assessment. However, accountability goals generally include improvement as an indirect benefit and internal assessment processes can be used as an element of accountability.” (p.7). It is therefore clear from the above statement that one form of assessment has got an effect on the other. It is argued in the literature that rigid application of accountability oriented quality assessment from external agent would rather lead to compliance leaving no room for innovation and improvement. In their contribution to the debate, Harvey & Colling (1995) submit that there is therefore the need to adopt an approach that ensures accountability, enhances quality, is practical, efficient and effective, and offers a degree of autonomy.

3.4 Levels of Quality Assurance

The levels of assessment refer to the kind of institutions and the programmes that are subjected to an external evaluation. These levels according to Brennan and Shah (2000) could be institutional and that may include Private and public higher education institutions, university and non-university higher education sectors, faculty/department, subject or individuals. The levels of assessment are normally determined by a lot of reciprocal actions. However, the ‘size and shape’ of the higher education system is the most crucial factor in determining the levels of quality assurance (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002). Although the practice is different from country to country the dominant practice in this respect are subject/programme level or whole institutional or both (Brennan and Shah, 2000).

They further elaborated the focus of assessment at each level as follows: The programme level assessment usually encompasses structure and organization of the course, teaching and learning objectives, academic staff details, library and other learning resources, information technology, student progress and achievement, staff development and internal quality assurance mechanisms; on the other hand, whole institutional assessment focuses on the institutional systems (mission, governance, management, quality assurance, finance and physical resources), quality of education (aims and objectives, assessment methods, student achievement, employability of graduates, research scholarship, qualification and experience of teaching staff, learning resources, accommodation, student support services), quality of research (number of publications, facilities, external funding, collaboration with industry).

3.5 External versus Internal Quality Assurance

Quality assurance can have an internal and an external dimension. UNESCO (2007) defines external quality assurance as the actions of an external body, which may be a quality assurance agency or anybody other than the institution that assesses its operations or that of its programmes, in order to determine whether it is meeting the agreed or predetermined standards. According to Vlasceanu et al. (2004) external quality assurance is an assessment procedure regarding the

quality and effectiveness of the academic programmes of an institution, its staffing, and its structure that is undertaken by an external expert. Nevertheless, there seems to be differences in the review as regards to the purpose, evaluation methods used and national context (Brennan and Shah, 2000). External review takes place based on an institutional self-assessment report and its purpose can be related to controlling, accountability and improvement (Kalkwijk, 1998). However, according to Amaral (2007) improvement and accountability has proved to be the two apparent contradictory objectives as far as quality assessment is concerned.

Another very important element that is related to the overall purpose of external quality assurance is whether it is of a compulsory or voluntary nature (UNESCO, 2007). To this effect, in countries where it is compulsory, every new programme or newly establish institution that has special interest to the state is subjected to undergo a periodic quality assurance procedures. On the other hand, where it is voluntary, the decision to undergo through periodic evaluation procedure depends on the institution. Their motivation to undertake the evaluation might be obtained from their desire to attain a special status (accreditation) in order to gain an advantage in an environment where there is competition for students, funding or access to specific funding. (UNESCO, 2007).

On the other hand internal quality assurance refers to the policies and mechanisms implemented in an institution or programme to ensure that it is fulfilling its own purpose and meeting the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular (UNESCO, 2007). While external quality assurance is more oriented to accountability, internal quality assurance is improvement-oriented. Internal quality assurance aims at developing the quality of teaching practice, learning conditions, research or management within the framework of self-regulation of higher education institutions (Vroeijensijn and Acherman, 1990). As indicated above, higher education institutions are themselves responsible for internal quality assurance. In this system of quality assurance, the role of the government is not to control the quality of higher education but to check how institutions internally assure the quality of higher education and do the institutions fulfill their promise to guarantee quality (Vroeijensijn and Acherman, 1990).

3.6 Major Indicators of Improvement or Accountability

In analyzing whether a certain national quality assurance is more of accountability oriented or improvement, there are certain key elements that can guide us: According to Bruggen et al., (1998) certain elements such as stress on self assessment, peer evaluation, operational recommendations, and absence of direct link to financial consequences of evaluation results are some of the elements that constitute improvement oriented assessment. On the other hand, accountability oriented quality assessment focuses on meta-evaluation and follow up by government or a governmental agency, assessment conducted by experts and public report.

According to Smeby and Stennsaker (1994) they identified six indicators used to evaluate the balance between improvement and accountability oriented assessment. The first one is related to the presence of an independent agent and the extent of its functions other than administration and coordinating national evaluation. The second indicator concerns who decide what units/disciplines need to be externally evaluated. If there is a collaboration between the higher education institutions and the national quality assurance agency in deciding ‘what’ and ‘when’ to evaluate, then this is the indication of improvement orientation. If the national quality assurance agency has power in deciding ‘what and ‘when’ has to be externally evaluated, then this is an indication of accountability orientation.

The third indicator is the standardization of evaluation methods and procedures. If higher education institutions have internal quality assurance methods and procedures design to meet their internal needs, and the national quality assurance agency does not impose standardized evaluation methods and procedures, then the quality assurance system aims at improvement because it is adjusted to internal use. If national systems of quality assurance are very centralized and standardized, and national quality assurance agencies impose a standardized model of evaluations on higher education institutions, then quality assurance is accountability oriented. The fourth indicator concerns the nomination and appointment of evaluators.

Improvement assessment evaluation attaches the responsibility to institutions or the units to be evaluated. The fifth indicator is whether there are other types of quality assessment systems, like the presence of national database, which, according to the authors, would impact on the improvement side of quality assessment. The six indicators address the issue of how external evaluations are followed up at the institutional and national levels. Follow-ups of evaluations at higher education institutions are very important to the improvement of quality of higher education. Therefore in the improvement oriented system of quality assurance of higher education, emphasis is placed on follow-ups of evaluations. In this system of quality assurance of higher education, the responsibility for following up the results of the evaluation is shared between the higher education institutions and the national quality assurance agency. Moreover, in the improvement-oriented system of quality assurance of higher education, the higher education institutions have well-functioning internal quality assurance mechanisms at higher education institutions for effective follow-ups of evaluation. In the accountability oriented quality assurance system, the quality assurance agency is most responsible for following up the outcomes of external evaluations, and it usually organizes repeated evaluations only if study programmes are not granted full accreditation.

3.7 Standards and Indicators

Based on specific definition of quality, quality assurance agencies build their frameworks for translating it into quality assurance decisions. According to UNESCO (2007) a critical element in quality assurance is the use of evaluative guidelines or frameworks, against which the agency can measure, judge, validate and/or compare. Underlining through all these come the concept of standard which often get lumped together with similar concepts such as indicators, benchmarks, measures and norms (EUA, 2008).

3.7.1 Standards

Standards refer to the level of requirement and conditions that must be met by institutions or programmes to be accredited or certified by a quality assurance or accredited agency. Therefore

depending on the general definition of quality of education, standard could be the minimum threshold level or the highest level or the level of excellence in which institutions/programmes are supposed to conform to (UNESCO, 2006).

As a concept, standards are difficult to grasp as they vary internationally depending on the context of application and use (EUA, 2008). Standards can become quality standards if actors and institutions agree to link it to quality. However, according to (Harvey and Green 1993, cited in EUA, 2008) it is important to consider which quality notions they are build upon or aim at. In spite of the above, all standards do have normative function (Lassnigg and Gruber, 2001 cited in EUA 2008 11) whether they provide consistent scales and measures, regulate action, set limits or facilitate comparisons. There is therefore the need for a consensus among actors and institutions on the construct of standards.

3.7.2 Indicators

Standards can be divided into indicators which turn to be operational (UNESCO, 2004). Indicators describe the futures or the state of the object or the change occurring in it. Often indicators refer to parameters based on statistics (statistical indicator) (UNESCO, 2004). Performance indicators are also used to offer an objective measure as to the extent to which a higher education institution is performing. One important example of performance indicator is an assessment made of students by the use of test and examinations.

3.8 General model of Quality Assurance

After granting more autonomy to higher education institutions in European countries in the 1980's and 1990's, the government of these countries came out with new methods of quality assurance systems in order to check the efficiency and effectiveness of these institutions. Depending on the purpose and specific circumstances, different approaches and methodologies, have been employed to assess the quality of higher education (Herman, 1998). According to

Brennan and Shah (2000) these differences specifically lie on ‘who assesses what, how and how often.

However, at present, most national systems of quality assurance are based on the general model of quality assessment develop by Vught and Westerheijden for the Commission of European Communities in 1991. Drawing from the experiences of different countries these authors came out with a general model which has four elements: 1.managing agent(s); 2. Self-evaluation; 3.external peer review; 4. Publication of reports (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). This model has been promoted by the commission since the mid-1990’s. Tomusk (2000) refers to the spreading of the general model of quality assessment as “the westernization programme”. The elements of this general model develop by Vught and Westerheijden is explained below.

Managing agent (or agents). It means a national body responsible for the coordination and setting procedures and methods for quality assurance of higher education institutions. The agent should be independent from government politics and policies, but have its legal basis and ‘not having the task to impose upon the institutions an approach that the government deems necessary’ (p.365).

Based on his own experience in external quality assessment (Vroeijerstijn, 1994 44-45) identifies specific roles of an agency which includes information and guidance for the self-assessment; composing the review committees; instructing and training of committees; training and counseling of secretaries; organizing the visits and backing the process and publishing the reports. However, according to Brennan and Shah (2000) the operational aspects of the national body vary in terms of the level and focus of the quality assessment.

Self-evaluation, self-study, self assessment. It is based on the procedures and methods set out by the national coordinating body; an institution should undertake regular self-evaluation and report to the coordinating body on a regular basis (Brennan and Shah, 2000). According to (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994; 366) “in order for academics to accept and implement changes, they must trust and ‘own’ the process in which problems are defined and solutions are designed”.

According to the authors that same ideology also applies to quality assessment; ‘only if academics accept quality assessment as their own activity, will the system be successful’. They further argue that it is of very great importance to include outside actors (like employers and alumni) in self-evaluation process. According to Smeby (1996) self-evaluation serves two purposes: It is a method for preparing background information for an external review committee, and it is also a method for developing local quality assurance systems.

External peer-review: This element constitutes the mechanism of peer-review and especially one or more visits by an external expert group. It is important that these external experts should be accepted by institutions as unbiased. This expert group can be composed of various stakeholders such as, employers, organizations and professional bodies (Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). Depending on the nature of the visits, these experts need to have specific background on the content of evaluation. The peer review should give an opportunity to institution, faculty or department to discuss about the self-evaluation report and ‘the plans for the future innovations. According to the authors, the experts can also take the opportunity to interview students, staff and possibly alumni.

Reporting. It sets out the findings of the peer review. The main purpose of the report is to make recommendations to institutions in order to help them improve the quality of their teaching and research (Brennan and Shah, 2000). Vught and westerheijen (1994) asserts that that report should not be used for ranking institutions or programmes. The authors further stated that institutions visited should be given the opportunity to indicate possible disagreements with the peer review team. External evaluation report serves the purpose of providing accountability and improvement. However there appear to be two ways of reporting (Vught and Westserheijen, 1994). The first possible way is to publish complete report and offer it to all stakeholders. The other way of reporting is to offer detailed report to only institutions visited and to guarantee confidentiality. And to the society at large a general summary of the report can be presented. However, according to the authors, either way of the reporting has got its own advantages and disadvantages.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with various definitions of quality of higher education as well as the forms and focus of higher education quality assurance. Thus it should be noted that quality of higher education is relative. In other words different stakeholders have different conceptions for quality. It seems to be positive because it leaves room for stakeholders with different views who are not necessary right or wrong. However, in practical terms decisions on how to define quality have to be taken in order to guide institutions to achieve their aims and objectives and develop appropriate internal quality assurance methods and procedures. The general model of quality assurance proposed by Vught and Westerheijen (1994) has also been touched upon in this chapter. Although there are other major concepts as far as higher education quality assurance is concerned, the above concepts were selected and reviewed as they will be the main concepts to be used for data interpretation in chapter five. The next chapter will be the research methodology and design.

4 CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the practice of higher education quality assurance by an external agency (NAB) in Ghana.

Research is a complex process which requires the researcher to follow certain procedures in collecting, analyzing data so as to validate the findings. Therefore a researcher before embarking on a research needs to develop a research design. Such a design is viewed as “overall planning and preparing the methodological procedure for obtaining the intended knowledge” (Kvale, 1996).

In this chapter the research design and methods used for achieving the objectives of the study will be presented. It addresses the tools and procedures that have been used in this study. I also explain the reasons for adopting some specific methods and perspective to collect and analyze the data.

4.2 Choice of methodology

Literature on research methodology indicates that there are two basic research strategies: quantitative and qualitative research. A simple way of distinguishing between the two is that, quantitative research emphasizes measurement whereas qualitative research emphasizes on words.

However, the differences are deeper than just quantification. For many writers (Bryman,2004:11, Cohen et al., 2001:27) quantitative and qualitative research differ with respect to their epistemological and ontological orientations, which concern the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline, and, in particular, whether the same principles and procedures as used in the natural sciences can/should be applied to the social world. The authors differentiate between two epistemological positions known as positivism and interpretivism.

From the positivist perspective, the research world is external and objective, where the observer is independent of what is observed; the focus is on facts; research is directed to identify causality; the researcher formulates concepts for measurement; the sample used for research are usually

large; this type of research attempts to discover general laws explaining the nature of reality (Coleman et al., 1999). However, from the perspective of interpretivism, the world is regarded as being socially constructed and subjective with the observer being a part of the world observed; the focus is on deducing understanding and meaning; the samples used for research are small and explored in depth and during certain time-period; the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; and the research findings are descriptive, not arrived at by means of statistical procedure (Coleman et al.,1999)

In other words, the quantitative research emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data and that has included the practices and norms of the natural scientific model. That is, it toes to the positivistic ideology.

On the other hand, qualitative research can be explained as research strategy that usually emphasizes on words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. It has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret the social world (Bryman, 2008: 22).

In conducting this study, I have chosen the qualitative research strategy in order to get an in-depth understanding of the practice of external quality assurance in Ghanaian higher education. The method enables you to draw on unquantifiable but rich, that is, comprehensive and in-depth, data that help to deeply understand the phenomena (Anderson, 1998).

4.3 Instruments

Document analysis was employed for data collection for the study. This was complemented by a telephone interview.

4.3. 1 Document Analysis

Document analysis is seen as one of the important approaches of getting information for qualitative study. Documents captured for this study includes NAB'S annual reports, government papers on quality of higher education, World Bank Working Paper Series, Public newspapers, previous work in this field both published and unpublished and the World Wide Web were also made use of.

Policy papers, reports and publications from the National Accreditation Board are most available resources and references tools for the study. In addition Government policy papers on higher education were analyzed by considering the objectives and purpose of the policy. World Bank reports on policy recommendation and higher education in Africa were also used in the study. Previous work on quality of higher education both Africa and other parts of the world were also critically considered and factored in the study.

Having access and understanding of documents on the research topic improves the richness of information for qualitative study. Additionally, “learning to use, study, and understand documents and files is part of the repertoire of skills needed for qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 2002). In the same vein, Guba and Lincoln (1981) identify certain reasons why documents and records need to be integrated into a naturalistic inquiry:(a) Documents and records no matter how old they are, are stable and rich resources that serve as the basis for investigation into a phenomenon;(b) they serve as checks and balances on the truthfulness or falsity of a statement, thereby checking misrepresentation and libel during the research process ; (c) access to documents and records especially in the public record is easier and even sometimes free of charge to researchers; (d) they are available for the sharing of knowledge; (e) provide insight into what people think and what they do.

With regards to the telephone interviews, individuals whose responsibilities in the organization, NAB, were related to my research topic were also interviewed on the phone as a complement to the documents analyzed. The selection of participants for the study were primarily based on the following self designed characteristics or criteria. Participants who were selected for the study met the following criteria:

1. Participants have knowledge of the procedure and methods used by NAB in its higher education quality assurance.
2. Participants have knowledge of the challenges facing the organization in undertaking its quality assessment

3. Participants have served on the agency for not less than two years

4.4 Sample Selection

Sampling is usually applied in empirical research because it is too unwieldy, too expensive, too time consuming or simply unnecessary to study an entire population (Goezt and LeCompte, 1984:66). In the literature one differentiates between two basic types of sampling: probability and non probability sampling. Probability sampling is usually used in quantitative research because it randomly draws representatives from wider population and thus, allows the researcher to make generalization from the findings of the study (Cohen et al, 2001). It has to be mention that a probability sampling has a less risk of bias than non-probability sample (Cohen et al, 2001)

However, non-probability sampling is considered to be the most appropriate sampling strategy for qualitative research, which is usually done on a small scale (Merriam, 1998).The most common type of non-probability sampling is purposive sampling. Unlike probability sampling, the choice of subjects/objects for observation in non- probability sampling is made by the researcher. It may be regarded as a disadvantage as it does not provide a reliable basis for generalization. However, an advantage of a purposive sampling is that by its means the researcher can select information-rich cases from which the most can be learnt about the central issue of the research (Patton, 1999).

Thus for the purpose of this study I employed purposive non-probability technique to generate data that are very relevant for the study.

In view of the above, I have chosen to base my research on NAB published documents and other government papers on higher education as well as both published and unpublished documents related to my topic. As stated above, this was complemented by telephone interviews. The rationale behind this choice can be summarized as follows:

First, the NAB website is the only official site for the agency (NAB) that offers detailed information about the agency as well as the methods that they use in carrying out their operations. Besides, the site also covers various aspects of quality in higher education. Accredited and unaccredited institutions in the country can also be assessed from the site.

Another reason for using the NAB documents was related to feasibility and access. Being the official site for the only higher education quality assurance agency in the country, it is easily accessible. And it offers current information on the quality of education in the country.

Again, the purposive sampling strategy was used for selecting both published and unpublished documents for the study. This was done based on the following criteria:

First the documents were selected on the basis of whether their content is related to the area of higher education quality assurance. Secondly, preference was also given to the empirical cases the researchers have studied.

With regards to the telephone interview, participants were selected based on the criteria given above.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

The terms validity and reliability have been more prominent in quantitative research but they are also applied to qualitative research though addressed differently (Brock-Utne, 1996; Cohen et al, 2000).

Validity refers to whether ‘you are observing, identifying, or “measuring” what you say you are’ (Mason, 1996:24). In LeCompte and Goetz (1982) two types of validity are addressed: internal validity and external validity. By internal validity, they mean whether there is a good match between researchers’ observations and the theoretical ideas they develop. By external validity, they refer to the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings.

The authors also addressed two types of reliability: external reliability and internal reliability. By external reliability, they mean the degree to which a study can be replicated. And by internal reliability they mean whether, when there is more than one observer, members of the research team agree about what they see and hear (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982).

In qualitative research the term trustworthiness has been used by various authors to incorporate reliability and validity (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). According to the authors, trustworthiness is made up of four criteria: Credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity)

In this study, trustworthiness was maintained in the following ways:

- By carefully choosing documents that are relevant to the study
- Carefully designing the interview questions in order get the perspective of the participants.
- Using interview as a complement to documents analyzed.

4.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is one of the major components of any research, quantitative or qualitative. The approach and method adopted affects the results and conclusion of the study. This therefore means that the careful and necessary utilization of the right data analysis techniques can have great impact on the outcome of the research. In this direction, the qualitative techniques of data analysis were used in the study. According to Anderson (1998) qualitative data are analyzed in interpretative ways whereby the researcher makes judgments and interpret meaning within a particular context.

According to Kvale (1996) there are five main approaches to qualitative data analysis. These are: meaning condensation, meaning categorization, structure of meaning through narratives, interpretation of meaning and ad hoc methods for generating meaning.

Meaning categorization means to reduce long statements to simple categories (kvale, 1996). That is, long statements are categorized into reduced form of simple categories like symbols, numbers or scales. Meaning condensation, as defined by Kvale, means “an abridgement of the meaning expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations”. Meaning structure focuses on drawing structure and plots of stories told by the interviewee, or creates ‘a coherent story out of the many happenings reported throughout the interview’ if there are no stories told. Meaning interpretation

means to go “beyond structuring of the manifested meanings of a text to deeper and more or less speculative interpretations of text” This approach requires a certain distance from what is said, which is achieved by methods or theoretical stance, recontextualizing what is said in a specific conceptual context (Kvale, 1996:201). The ad hoc approach to generating meaning means “a variety of commonsense approaches to the text under analysis, as well as sophisticated textual or quantitative methods, can be used for generating meaning” (Kvale, 1996:193). No standard method is used for analyzing the whole of text material.

For the purpose of this study, the ad hoc methods and meaning interpretation methods of data analysis will be used to describe, interpret and draw meanings from the data presented for this study.

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with the research design and the methods for gathering data. It specifically addresses the sample selection procedure as well as the data collection tools and methods. It has also shed light on the methods that were used in order to ensure validity and reliability of the study. Method of analyzing the data was also presented. The next chapter will focus on presentation and analysis of the research findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the main findings of the study obtained through document analysis and interviews. The chapter deals with the presentation and interpretation of the main findings based on the literature reviewed in chapter four.

5.2. MAIN FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

5.2.1 Quality of Higher Education from a Ghanaian Perspective

Integral to any quality assurance programme in higher education is a working definition of quality (Wilger, 1997). Investigation of policies and other documents revealed that the concept ‘quality’ has been used in several state documents but the word has not been clearly defined in any of these documents. For instance the government White Paper that set out to restructure Ghana’s higher education and subsequently established NAB does not state a definition of quality higher education that will guide NAB in its operations. Regarding the quality of education the document only focus on how to improve the quality of education in general by increasing the expenditure on educational factors. For example the White Paper gave one of its aims as the provision of “quality education for increasing number of students through efficiency in the utilization of space, resources and personnel” in this way, it appears efficiency in resources use alone would lead to quality of education. Although there is a connection, little attention was given in the paper as to offering greater clarity, nor to define the academic quality and standard. Besides, the white paper outlines the conditions for the establishment, reorganization and closure of higher education institutions; it states the qualification requirements for study programmes. The final report was clear on the need for ‘forth cycle’ of education, including the development of a ‘knowledge and research industry’ to find solutions to the problems of development and the promotion of centers of excellence in research. However, it was not clear as to how these might be achieved. The white paper states that the National Accreditation Board is responsible for evaluating periodically the quality of study programmes and also has to be resourced very well in order to carry out its activities fully.

Examination of the NAB strategic plan (see document in appendix) reveals that, the vision of NAB is to ensure the maintenance of an acceptable standard/quality of programmes in the tertiary educational institutions. However, the document does not give the definition of higher education quality. The document only lists the action plan of the agency. That is to become, among other things, the badge of quality assurance and the reference point for quality education and scholarship; achieve nationwide coverage; to enhance public awareness; achieve international recognition and acceptance; to establish the standing and competitiveness of every tertiary institution; to provide data to facilitate informed choices and to promote the realization of the country's manpower needs.

However, the NAB document clearly suggests that quality of higher education is conformance to qualitative requirements determined by the board. For example, according to NAB Legislative Instrument (L.I 1700 PP.7) "for grant of accreditation an institution has to comply with the relevant standards prescribed by the board". Besides, (Pg.8 of L.I.1700) also states that these standards should be maintained at all times. The Government White Paper also clearly states that all institutions would be required to:

- Review periodically all programmes and courses with a view to upgrading and the continuing relevance to national needs;
- Introduce new programmes and courses in relation to national development priorities, as required;
- Rationalize existing programmes and courses within the institutions as a whole as required;
- Make provision for practical training by attachment of students to industry

Although the Government White Paper does not give a clear definition of quality of education, it clearly suggests that quality of education is fitness for purpose. The word 'Purpose' in this wise means relevance of education to the development needs of Ghana, employability of graduates, and relevance to expectations of stakeholders. This meaning of purpose seems to be in accordance with the above statements in the Governments White Paper. Besides, the NAB legislative document clearly considers quality of education as conformance to the qualitative

requirements (standards) determined by the board. In this sense, there is quality of education if an institution meets the minimum threshold that has been set by NAB.

According to Harvey and Green (1993) quality as fitness for purpose sees quality as, meeting the requirements or needs of customers on the one hand and on the other, placing emphasis on the institutions fulfilling its stated objectives or missions.

Based on the above, interviewees were asked to describe what is quality of higher education, if there were any used by the agency in its higher education quality assessment. One interviewee responded:

“... We don't have a definition of quality per se but what we do is that we make sure that institution that are to be accredited meet the requirements that has been spelt out in our questionnaire. For example, assumed mission/objectives of the institution, the qualification of the teaching staff and their programmes etc.”

According to this interview, there is no such explicitly definition of quality of higher education that is used by NAB. Rather, there is quality of higher education if institutions conform to the qualitative requirement of the board.

Although a formal incorporation of external quality assurance is a recent phenomenon in Ghana, thus commencing the practice requires prior clear formulation and common understanding of all the necessary concepts, and the elements that constitute it. Defining of higher education quality among other things helps to set a system level or institutional framework that guides action towards monitoring quality of education. According to Harvey (1999) it is imperative to have a clearly stated definition of quality before deciding how to assess and assure quality: Throughout the world, the quality of higher education is being assessed:

This involves operationalising the notion of quality in some way, which in turn requires a clear statement about the concept of quality that is being measured. It appears that far too often, quality assessment and quality assurance processes have started by determining how quality is to be assessed or reviewed rather than by asking what, fundamentally, is it that is to be assessed (Harvey,1999a:1).

Reeves and Bedna, (1994) also argues that a global definition of quality does not exist and that different definitions of quality are appropriate in different times.

5.2.2. How they work

Like many other countries, the process of external quality assurance in Ghana includes the elements of the well-known general model developed by Vught and Westerheijden (1994).

The process of external quality assessment and accreditation takes the following procedure (NAB, 2009).

- A self-assessment in the HEI and prepares a self assessment report.
- A site- visit by expert group appointed by NAB.
- NAB issues an evaluation report which includes recommendations to HEI and suggestions.
- A final report is sent to the Ministry of Education for the final decision relating to accreditation or no accreditation.

External quality assessment and accreditation of all new and operating programmes in Ghana is compulsory. However, the Act establishing the law leaves room for either the Board itself or the higher education institutions to initiate it. This could be in relation to the institution or its programme or both. Where the initiation is emanated from the higher education institution, the institution writes a formal application to the Board. After receiving the application, the Board administers a standard questionnaire (the NAB Questionnaire) to all applicants to respond by way of self appraisal and to provide information on the existing or proposed institution and programme. HEI draw up their self-evaluation reports based on the guidelines provided by NAB.

A self-evaluation report contains information on the university as a whole and on the faculty/department/college and its programmes. Institutional self-evaluation comprises five procedures: establishing a team for the self-evaluation; fixing a timetable for the self evaluation; gathering and analyzing information for the self evaluation; reporting the self evaluation; and making use of the evaluation. An institutional self-evaluation is mainly carried out by members

of the respective academic community. As a recommendation some universities can work with experts from outside the university.

The self-evaluation report presented by the applicant institution is the beginning of the evaluation process carried out by NAB. Depending on its type the agency shall within twenty-one days form an evaluation team specialized in the respective area. These specialists are drawn from among appropriate academic, professional, commercial and industrial fields.

The evaluation team then analyses the self-evaluation report presented by the applicant institution, and, if necessary asks the institution for additional information. The next step is the fact-finding visits by the experts to the institution under evaluation that includes the commission specialist and the external experts. The visiting team is normally made up of members not exceeding eight. In special cases the team can be more.

Their task is to find out whether or not the data and information presented by means of self-evaluation report are consistent with the reality observed in the applicant institution. As briefed by the interviewees, the visiting team examines whether the criteria and the standards stipulated by NAB are fulfilled. In addition the evaluation team can also observe teaching in the classroom, hold discussions with the students and teachers of the institution. First-hand comments are made regarding teaching activity and certain recommendations to the institution under evaluation with a view to improving various aspects and eliminating dysfunctions. Usually, according to NAB, the average amount of time for Ghana's higher education quality assessment takes five days.

The information requested in the self-evaluation reports is based on the following focused areas as identified by NAB:

- Assumed mission and objectives
- Organization and Governance
- Code of Ethics
- Academic and Administrative Leadership
- Academic/ Professional Programmes

- Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff
- Human Resource Management
- Appointments and Promotion of Staff
- Research Output
- Student Matters
- Academic Quality Assurance
- Distance Education.

For programme accreditation/evaluation, the key areas of concern for the experts are, programme philosophy, admission policy, curriculum, staffing, examinations, external moderation, academic regulation, provision for student assessment of course content and teaching and for peer and professional assessment of content of teaching, physical facilities (lecture halls, library, workshops etc (NAB, 2009).

The final stage of the external assessment is the reporting stage. The visiting team draws up a report and presents it to the management of the higher education institution under evaluation. The management of the institution is made to sign the report and to list any objections, in writing, if any. The expert group presents the final report to NAB that in turn presents the report to the council of experts at NAB. The council of experts reviews the degree to which quality criteria and standards have been met and makes the final suggestion to the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports regarding accreditation. The council of experts makes one of the following suggestions regarding accreditation for study programmes: a full accreditation; interim accreditation and not accredited. The full accreditation is given for a period of five years and the interim accreditation may be given for a period between one to three years. The report also presents recommendations for the higher education institutions evaluated. By means of periodic controls, NAB makes sure that these recommendations are observed by the HEI.

The reports of NAB and the expert commission along with the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports approval is then send to the higher education institutions that was evaluated. According to the NAB Act 2007, Act 744, the final report may be published as it considers appropriate.

Where the operations of an institution are adjudged to be far below acceptable standards, the Honorable Minister of Education is advised to use his powers under the Education Amendment Act, 1965 to close down the institution. In some instances institutions which fail accreditation exercise are ‘punished’ with the withdrawal of public funds, student loans or the transfer of students to another institution.

Offences ranging from operating an unaccredited institution or programmes, to the provision of false information are punished by a fine or to a prison term of not more than two years or both (NAB Act, 2007: 23).

5.2.2.1 The Purpose of NAB Assessment

Literature on quality assurance of higher education institutions points out that the focus of national quality assurance can be on improvement (which focus on institutional self-assessment) or accountability. According to Harvey (1999) accountability in this context includes three broad concerns. First, accountability to external funders (government) that public money is spent appropriately, secondly, accountability to the higher education sectors that principles and practice are not being treated with contempt. Third is accountability to customers in order to ensure that an appropriate experience is provided. The data presented above shows that external quality assurance in Ghana has the main purpose of improving the quality of higher education institutions. In this respect the external experts provides recommendations to institutions so as to improve the quality of their education. It is also worth noting that the first step of external quality assessment by NAB is that higher education institutions carries out a self-assessment of a study programme by using the methodology for self-assessment provided by NAB. The main purpose of self-assessment according to the NAB document is to instill the culture of quality assessment in institutions. Again, according to the NAB strategic plan, their main goal is ensuring quality in tertiary institutions.

Although NAB's documents and other publications shows that the main focus of the agency is for institutional quality improvement, my analysis shows that the focus is more on the accountability rather than improvement.

First, according to some scholars, even the view of quality as 'fitness for purpose' is intrinsically linked as a definition of quality with the accountability approach to quality assurance. Peter Williams (2002:1) for example alludes to this interrelationship when he notes:

In the world at large, 'quality assurance' describes all aspects of the ways in which organizations try to make sure that their activities are fully fit for their intended purposes, that they are doing 'what it says on the tin'. The reasons for organizations to want to do this are numerous: it may be to satisfy themselves that they are meeting the needs of their clients, or account to paymasters for financial assistance received. It may be to gain a marketing advantage over their competitors, or simply a wish to be sure that they are doing a fully professional job. All these reasons can apply to higher education.

All of this shows that accountability is an inclusive phrase for various compliance, control and value for money expectations.

Again, NAB's document indicates that NAB views quality as conformance to the minimum threshold of standards set by NAB. For example, according to NAB Regulation (2002: sec. 6 '1a') "An interim authorization is given where after consideration of the evaluation report, the Board is of the opinion that the information in the application is accurate and meets standards set by the Board for the establishment of a tertiary institution of the kind proposed to be set up". Section 11 (1c) of that same document also states "accreditation will be granted to an institution if, among other things, the institution has complied with the relevant standards prescribed by the Board. According to Dill (2007) the main objective of such an accreditation system based on minimum standards is to enforce conformity with standards and accountability. Besides, according to one interviewee, institutions refused to send the self-evaluation report which will guide the agency to undertake its institutional evaluation. This clearly shows that there is little

sign of cooperation between the institutions and the agency since the institutions feels they are being controlled and therefore does not accept the system.

According to Vught and Westerheijen (1994) it is only if academics accept quality assessments as their own activity will the system be successful. In his contribution, Harvey (1999) also argues that:

Where institutional staff sees self-evaluation as part of a judgmental process, especially if it is linked to status ranking or to funding, then there will be a disinclination to be open about weakness and a tendency to overstate strengths. A lack of frankness makes dialogue difficult and the self-evaluative process becomes defensive account rather than an opportunity to explore future development and change.

Regarding the NAB administered self-assessment questionnaire to higher education institutions (see document in appendix 2), it can be observed that the document basically ask for organizational resources such as academic staff qualification, library, lecture theatres, reliable source of funding etc. Thus the requirements focus on institution and not on student nor on learning instruction. According to Dill (2007) it places too much emphasis to inputs or resources rather than to what use was made of them.

According to Vught (1999) national quality assessment system should balance the internal and external needs of the higher education system, both to create an improvement-oriented climate within universities and colleges, and to gain legitimacy from actors outside higher education. He further warns that a tilt to either way could result in a risky imbalancing of the specific functions and practices of higher education institutions. To this end, it will be very appropriate to further analyze how NAB is coping with the balance between accountability and improvement by using the six indicators that was presented in the literature review.

5.2.2.2 NAB in light of the six indicators

The first indicator concerns on whether an independent managing agency exist, and if so, the status and authority of that agency; to what extent the managing agent also has task other than to administrate and co-ordinate national evaluations.

In Ghana the National Accreditation Board is the agency that is responsible for quality assurance of higher education institutions. NAB is a legally established agency at the national level. According to the Act that established the agency, the agency is supposed to be an independent agency however, according to article 70 of the Ghana constitution, the chairperson as well as other members of the Board shall be appointed by the president. Besides, the agency is financed on government subvention for personal emoluments, administrative cost and service cost. Again, the fact that the final recommendation as to the grant of accreditation and charter is vested in the Minister of Education and the president respectively makes one wonder where lies the independence of NAB? Being directly accountable to the Ministry of Education means that it performs its role under the general framework of government policies and regulations. This clearly shows that accreditation exercise as well as evaluation is linked with national steering purposes and it is less likely that the agency would be independent from government politics and policies. This reflects more of the accountability and /or controlling function of external quality assurance than improvement and institutional development.

The second indicator examines who initiates and decides which field or units to be evaluated. According to Smeby and Stensaker (1999) “if the purpose is institutional development, one could imagine that this is a question for the institutions and the discipline to decide” and “If the purpose is control or accountability, this question can be regarded as an external affair”. As indicated above, an initiation for self-assessment or accreditation can be initiated by the institutions or the agency. An interviewee stated,

“...this is normally initiated by the agency. As to the field or units to be evaluated, it is the agency that decides”.

According to this interviewee, although the initiation can come from any of the parties (institution or NAB) it is in most cases done or initiated by NAB.

The third indicator that is used to analyze the balance between improvement and accountability functions of external quality assurance is the standardization of evaluative methods and procedures used. According to the authors, if the purpose is institutional development, the institutions should be allowed to adjust the procedures to fit their own needs. A

control/accountability effort would imply more standardized methods and procedures to give authorities the possibility to make comparisons between evaluations and units. According to the NAB document titled “Road Map” they have formulated a one- size- fit- all mode of accreditation for all study programmes. Thus, all study programmes in Ghana are assessed by using one model. And institutions which want accreditation have no other choice than to toe the NAB line on quality assurance. This evinces a high degree of standardization. The standardized methods and procedures of external assessments in Ghana impose an accountability-oriented quality assurance on higher education institutions and also prevent institutional innovation. According to Stensaker and Kalsen (1993) “evaluation process are difficult to steer in a standard way” Institutions are set up for different missions and objectives so the question therefore is, how do you formulate a one-size-fit all mode of evaluation for institutions/programmes which has been set up for different missions and objectives? Methods and procedures should be adjusted to institutional needs in order to promote the quality culture among institutions.

The other important indicator used to analyze the balance between improvement and accountability functions of higher education quality assurance was related to the question who nominates and appoint the evaluators? According to Smeby and Stensaker (1999) where institutional development is concerned, one could assert that this should be a responsibility vested solely in the unit to be evaluated. According to NAB’S legislative instrument:

The board for the purpose of considering an application for accreditation shall within thirty days of receipt of an application for accreditation appoint an accreditation panel in accordance with section 7 of the National Accreditation Board Law, 1993 (PNDCL 317).

Thus institutions to be evaluated/accredited in the Ghanaian quality assurance system has no part to play as to the nomination of evaluators. Although NAB states in its strategic plan to ensure quality in tertiary institutions and to promote co-operation with institutions, the above stresses a system of control rather than improvement.

The fifth indicator concerns whether other types of quality assessment systems exist, for example a national database for higher education, are implemented.

NAB has at its website the list of accredited/unaccredited institutions. NAB has been mandated by the Act that established it to publish in the public media both accredited/unaccredited institutions yearly but this mandate is hardly adhered to by the agency. In fact, even if the accredited/unaccredited institutions is published at their website, the question asked is, how many people in Ghana has access to the internet to access this information in order to make informed choices? Besides, NAB has stated in its action plan to develop a national database for higher education institutions by 2006, but that has not been materialized till date (2009). It was also stated in their action plan to use information to rank units assessed according to their results but that has not also been done. In Ghana, external assessments are done not only for the purpose of providing recommendations to the higher education institutions about how to improve quality of higher education but also for the purpose of providing recommendations to the Minister regarding accreditation of study programmes. In Ghana, all new programmes and existing programmes have to be accredited every 5 years.

Last but not least indicator goes into how evaluations are followed up by institutions and central authorities. For example, have performance-based funding systems tied to the results of the assessment been developed? (Smeby and Stensaker, 1994). Perellon (2007) also described it as the summative objective of quality assurance policy in higher education that is if objectives stress the importance of linking the results obtained through the procedure to some particular consequences. According to the Perellon (2007) in the field of higher education this has taken the shape of subordinating the amount of funds delivered to the universities to how they are able to perform in the evaluation of their activities. In Ghana, higher education institutions which fails the accreditation exercise are ‘punished’ with the withdrawal of public funds, student loans or the transfer of students to another institution. Offences ranging from operating an unaccredited institution or programme, to the provision of false information are punishable by a fine or to a prison term of not more than two years or both (NAB Act, 2007: 23). For example, at NAB’S 64th meeting, four programmes of KNUST, the nation’s second oldest university, had its accreditation withdrawn pending a review of their curriculum, changes of admission requirement to conform to international standards, rectification of deficiencies identified and immediate cessation of admission of fresh students.

Regarding the follow ups of assessment, if study programmes are given interim accreditation, then within the period of the interim accreditation, NAB organizes repeated external assessments. This is done in order to ensure that institutions are working to improve the quality of their education. Besides, expert groups during external assessment of study programmes have to evaluate how higher education institutions internally assure the quality of studies and how they follow up results of internal assessments and how they followed up the results of the last external assessment.

Regarding internal quality assurance bodies, (Saffu, 2006) Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Kumasi, alongside Cape Coast University have the best established and most effective Quality Assurance Units among all the tertiary institutions in the country. The KNUST Unit is not that old. It was established in October 2002. There are several reasons for its effectiveness. First, it is combined with planning. Its full name is the Quality Assurance and Planning Unit. In fact, the Unit is located in the offices of the Vice-Chancellor. Third, its founding coordinator is an inspirational, hardworking profession whose enthusiasm for the work of his Unit is truly infectious. Finally, perhaps the most important reason, the coordinators approach to quality assurance and improvement, hence the Units as well, is holistic. Even healthy living, regular physical exercise and medical test by staff and students, appear to qualify as aspects of quality assurance and improvement (Saffu, 2006)

Although institutional academic review is emerging in some Ghanaian institutions, it must be noted that, it is done purposefully to prepare for external review (Dill, 2007) refers to it as “compliance culture” but not to inculcate the culture of quality per se as stated in the NAB document. In this wise, what gets measured gets done or fixed in the short term in order to meet assessment targets.

In a rhetorical manner, NAB is trying to strike a balance between ‘accountability’ and ‘improvement’ in higher education quality assurance with the use of the accreditation system, an approach Stensaker (2007) described as the dominating paradigm in the design of quality assurance system. However, the accountability aspect pre-dominates over the improvement function:

- NAB was formed with the intension of carrying out government policies related to higher education.
- The one-size-fit-all mode of accreditation is highly standadized.
- With the exception of KNUST and Cape Coast University the other tertiary institutions do not have well established internal quality assurance unit and as indicated above, even where they exist, institutional academic review is done only when external evaluators are coming around for evaluation.
- Assessment team is also nominated by the agency rather than the institutions
- Methods and procedure of external quality assurance is highly standardized
- NAB takes an active role when it comes to follow ups. Especially when institutions have not been given a full accreditation status.

According to literature on higher education quality assurance, national quality assurance system must combine both external needs and needs of higher education institutions. However, the research findings have indicated that the national quality assurance system in Ghana is not balancing both needs well. According to Harvey and Colling (1995) there is the need to adopt an approach that ensures accountability, enhances quality, is practical, efficient and effective, and offers a degree of autonomy. It is therefore very important for the Ghanaian national quality assurance system to have a better balance of both improvement and accountability.

5.3 Major Challenges faced by NAB.

Although socio-economic restructuring, internationalization and globalization of education market, together with the emergence of the knowledge-based society have influenced higher education quality assurance development, the fact is that national quality assurance institutions operating within specific national frameworks have their own challenges. Ghana is no different from the above scenario. According to Materu (2007) quality assurance systems in Africa are in general at an infant stage compared to their counter developed systems in other parts of the world and thus confront with many challenges. The formal incorporation of an external quality

assurance system in Ghanaian higher education is a recent phenomenon and therefore is also faced with challenges.

In view of the above, an attempt was made to find out from participants some of the challenges faced by the agency (NAB) as a quality assurance agency. An interviewee responded,

“...the inadequate financing from government is one of our biggest problems. This has resulted in our inability to hire and maintained qualified experts to carry out our higher education quality evaluation in an effective and efficient manner”.

Another stated,

“We even intend to include foreign peer reviewers from Europe and the USA but because of the inadequate finance from the government, this idea has never been materialized”.

Closely related to the above is the difficulty in identifying the best qualified and experienced experts to undertake the assessment exercise. It is evident that legitimacy and credibility of the results of an external quality assessment depends on the professional competence, experience and technical expertise of the team to undertake the assessment exercise. According to Materu (2007) effective quality assurance depends largely on the availability of highly qualified faculty members and administrators within institutions and competent professional and technical staff in national quality assurance agencies.

Besides the inability of the few available assessors to do a thorough assessment due to time constrain is also a major problem faced by the agency. This is coupled with the poor remuneration given to assessor which does not attract the effective, competent and qualified personnel to take the job.

Ghana's population is believed to be increasing at a rate of 2.7% per annum and it is feared that if the supply of financial and human resources to NAB remains as it is now the agency may not be able to cope with an overwhelming workload as the higher education population increases and this may have a toe on the credibility of the agency due to falling standards as the workload increases.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the definition of higher education quality adapted by the agency (NAB). The chapter has also shed light on the procedure of external quality assurance adapted by NAB. It must be noted that the procedure of external quality assessment adapted by NAB is not quite different from the ones practice in most countries.

The six indicators presented in the literature review have also been used to analyze how NAB is balancing accountability as well as improvement. The subsequent chapter will present a final conclusion of the study and recommendations will also be given.

6 CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The foregoing chapter has given the findings and interpretation of the data. This chapter gives a summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study. The chapter is organized into three sections. The first section gives a summary of the study. The second section gives the conclusion of the study. The last chapter gives a general recommendation concerning higher education quality assurance in Ghana.

6.2 SUMMARY

The overall objective of this study was to find out how NAB is coping with the balance of accountability and improvement in higher education quality assurance. The study was guided by the following sub questions: How is quality of higher education defined from a Ghanaian perspective? What are the mechanisms employed by NAB to evaluate higher education quality in Ghana? What are the challenges facing the agency (NAB) in assessing the quality of higher education in Ghana.

The study was mainly qualitative and qualitative methods (Documentary analysis and interview) were used to collect the data and the analysis of the same data was done qualitatively.

The history of Ghana's higher education has revealed that the country has made tremendous improvement since independence. And has won an international reputation as one of the countries in the sub-Saharan with the best higher education system (NAB, 2009). This is due to the priority that has been given to higher education as a pivot for economic growth by both past and present governments. However, there is still the need for more institutional reforms to be undertaken under cooperative agreements between international institutions (World Bank and the United Nations) and the government of Ghana. There is also the need for increased private participation in order to solve the problem of excess applicants and also improvement in joint research activities. Besides, government's ambition to increase access to all prospective applicants should correlate with improvement in quality.

The literature review has revealed that quality of higher education is relative. Thus different stakeholders have different conceptions for quality. However, in practical terms decisions on how to define quality have to be taken in order to guide institutions to achieve their aims and objectives and also to help them formulate good internal quality assurance systems that will help them to achieve their goal.

We have also noticed that methodology and practice of quality assurance of higher education in general conform to a general model of quality assessment: an independent meta-level coordinating body; self-evaluations; external peer review and publication of evaluation reports. The most common levels of higher education quality assurance is at the programme and whole institutional level. However, there is a significant difference between quality assessment in terms of purpose of quality assessment and design of quality assurance systems. According to Harvey (1999) there are three purposes of quality assurance of higher education: Accountability, improvement and information. It should be also noticed that higher education quality assurance has two main dimensions. That is external and internal quality assurance systems.

The findings of the study revealed the following. In principle, there is an independent national quality assurance agency responsible for higher education quality assurance in Ghana. The process of external quality assessment and accreditation follows the general model of quality assurance. That is self-assessment by higher education institutions; a site visit by peer- reviewers, assessment report which includes recommendations and accreditation. The findings also revealed that the agency is much concerned with programme and institutional accreditation.

Regarding the method of institutional accreditation, the agency has developed a one-size-fit- all mode of accreditation which is highly standardized. It must also be noted that higher education quality assurance in Ghana is linked with funding, closure of institutions, transfer of students to other institutions and in some extreme instances imprisonment for operating an institution without accreditation.

Regarding challenges faced by the agency in undertaking its institutional quality assessment, it was found that inadequate funding from government and unavailability of experts to carryout institutional quality assessment are among the most challenging issues facing the agency.

6.3 CONCLUSION

Basing on the findings of this study, it is safe to conclude that the National Accreditation Board (NAB) is trying to strike a balance between improvement and accountability. However, accountability predominates the improvement dimension. The one-size-fit-all mode of accreditation is too standard and does not encourage institutional innovation. It must be realized that institutions have different missions and objectives and therefore have different perspectives on needs and uses of the self-evaluation.

In principle NAB is an independent agency. However, basing on this study, it can be concluded that NAB is a semi-autonomous agency. The chairman, as well as other top members of the agency, is nominated by the President. This indicates that the agency has been set up to carry out the government's policies because how do you expect a government appointee not to carry out the policies and objectives of the boss who has appointed him or her? Besides, nobody knows the process used to appoint the chairman and the other top members by the President.

Again it can be concluded that because NAB's accreditation is linked to funding, institutional academic review has become just a window dressing to prepare for external quality assessment but not to improve the quality of higher education.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that NAB should restructure its activities in order to have a better balance between accountability and improvement. In doing this the following can be done.

One, NAB should be practically independent to the extent that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusion and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions. Besides, there should be an open procedure for nominating the chairman and the other top members in order to improve trust.

Second, it is also very important to include students in NAB committees and also involve students in the external expert group. Student participation enhances the possibility of obtaining a broader discussion within the panel, securing wider perspective and hence better quality for the

decision made. Besides, the student representative becomes the voice of students within the panel. Students also have fresh experience of being a student and also have update knowledge of teaching and exam forms, of regulations of curricula etc.

Third, NAB should be resourced adequately both human and finance so that it will be able to undertake its quality assurance process effectively and efficiently. As the population of higher education of the country increases it will be impossible for NAB to undertake its quality assurance process if it is not well resourced.

Last but not least, it is also very important that NAB develops more different sets of accreditation criteria for different kinds of study programmes since institutions and programmes have different objectives and outcomes.

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APPENDIX 1

LIST OF DOCUMENTS USED:

- NAB published Accredited and Unaccredited Institutions
- Legislative Instrument (L.I 1700)
- NAB Strategic Plan
- NAB Questionnaire for Existing Programme Accreditation
- NAB Questionnaire for Institutional Accreditation
- NAB Questionnaire for New Programme Accreditation
- Financial Standing Questionnaire for New Institutions
- Published Government White Paper on the Reforms to the Tertiary Education System

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What are the objectives and purpose of setting up NAB.
2. Are there any definitions of quality of higher education at the national level? How were they defined and who involve in the process of defining them?
3. What is the framework of reference for your evaluation.
4. What methods and procedures does NAB use to ensure and assure the quality of higher education institutions?
5. Do you think higher education institutions undertake genuine and critical self-evaluation of their education?
6. How is the institutional quality assessment report prepared? What is the implication of quality assessment reports to the institutions assessed?
7. What is your general evaluation on the operations of NAB particularly on procedure and methods use in assessing the quality of higher education?
8. In your opinion what are the general challenges, if any, facing the agency in undertaking higher education quality assurance process.