Exploring internal quality assurance management practices: Experiences of some quality assurance actors at the University of Ghana

Emmanuel Dodzi Anyidoho

Directorate of Quality Assurance, University of Health and Allied Sciences, PMB 31, Ho, Ghana.

Abstract

This article used a constructivist-interpretivist approach to explore the perspectives of quality assurance actors on internal quality assurance management practices at the University of Ghana (UG). Semi-structured interviews and document reviews were used to gather data from UG. The themes that emerged from the data indicated that UG has a comprehensive quality assurance policy, and policy implementation structure and uses a systems model of quality assurance management system made up of input, process, output, and outcome sub-systems. The results show that there is a lack of well–resourced quality assurance sub-committees at the policy implementation levels, inadequate quality assurance stakeholders' involvement, and neglect of quality assurance measures for the educational outcome sub-system. The findings imply that for UG to improve its internal quality assurance management, there is a need to establish well-resourced quality assurance sub-committees at the policy implementation levels. In addition, quality assurance actors should involve all stakeholders stipulated in the quality assurance policy documents. The Academic Quality Assurance Unit should implement the educational outcome quality assurance measures by conducting tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, alumni surveys, and community perception surveys as stipulated in the UG's quality assurance policy document.

Keywords: Internal Quality Assurance, Role of Quality Assurance Actors, Quality Improvement

Introduction

Education is a major tool for national development. The quality of education there is critical for the full benefit of education to be achieved. It is therefore important for all educational systems to have a form of quality assurance (QA) for positive outcomes.

Quality assurance researchers contend that the quality of teaching and learning has become a major strategic issue in tertiary education systems across the globe over the past decades (Harvey & Williams 2010; Enders & Westerheijden 2014). Quality of university education is not new but it has become an ever-growing concern since the 1980s and 1990s when high global demand for quality university education started. Some challenges faced by public universities since then have been public demand for accountability at times of high students to lecturer ratio and reduction in government funding that has led to the deterioration of educational facilities, especially in developing countries including Ghana (International Institute for Education Planning [IIEP], 2010; Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Ewell, 2010 & Taylor, 2010). Most significantly, under the new public management paradigm, continuous quality improvement, comparison of quality of educational outcomes, rankings, and a

higher degree of university autonomy and accountability have become a fundamental part of higher education administrators' day-to-day work (Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013).

In Ghana, public universities started experiencing a worsening relationship with the military government that took over power in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This resulted in a cut-down in financial support to the universities coupled with physical infrastructure challenges, resulting in deterioration in public universities (Asabere-Ameyaw, 2016). To improve on quality of core functions of teaching, learning, research, and community service, the University of Ghana (UG) established the Academic Quality Assurance Unit (AQAU) in 2005 to coordinate quality assurance activities within the University. AQAU in UG has been in existence for about sixteen years and there is a need to conduct a study on how quality assurance actors perceive the effectiveness of their own approaches to internal quality assurance practices.

Problem Statement

In Ghana, some recent researches carried out by Ghanaian scholars dealt with QA measures, implementation challenges, operation of external QA agencies, and the barriers and cooperation between the National Accreditation Board and tertiary institutions. For example, Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015) conducted a study on analysis of the quality assurance policies in a Ghanaian University and found that the implementation challenges of quality assurance include: staffing and offices; quality culture; physical and financial resources; commitment and support for quality assurance; and absence of a current strategic plan. Badu-Nyarko (2013)'s study looked at the quality assurance measures adopted by the University of Ghana in its distance education programme at the undergraduate level and found that effective distance education rests on several factors and stakeholders such as committed academic and administrative staff, well-resourced learning environments, well written self-contained study materials, efficient monitoring system and an effective delivery system. Amoako and Asamoah-Gyimah's (2020) study on quality assurance was on indicators of students' satisfaction with quality education services in selected universities in Ghana and found that that instructional environment, technological environment, and psychological environment were predictors of students' satisfaction in the context of how students see academic institution to be quality centered. Adu-Agyem and Osei-Poku, (2012) also carried out a study on quality education in Ghana and the way forward. The major findings of their study were inadequate standardized human and material resources, poor management and supervision, lack of funding and poor conditions of service for employees of the educational system culminating in low productivity.

Boateng (2014) focused his study on barriers to internal quality assurance in Ghanaian private tertiary institutions in which quality management decisions emerged as a major barrier to the implementation of internal quality assurance, especially the failure to link the identification of quality objectives to the institutional strategic plan. He also revealed that student involvement, lack of effective coordination, weaker emphasis on strategic planning and quality management as well as a dominant culture not open to change and improvement were barriers that adversely affected the implementation of internal quality assurance. Tsevi's (2014) study also focused on private higher education quality assurance in Ghana. This study looked at the factors influencing the establishment of Ghana's National Accreditation as a result of the growing population's demand for higher education, an increase in private providers, and concerns about quality. This study concentrated on the accreditation board's quality assurance procedures and attendant problems.

It has been observed that none of the above researchers focused their studies on public university's strategic quality assurance policy and its actual implementation practices from the experiences of internal quality assurance actors. Obviously, there are inadequate studies on strategic IQA policy and implementation practices in Ghanaian public universities and this is a research gap this study intended to fill. A lack of knowledge on how IQA policies are implemented at the academic departments would make it difficult to ascertain whether the establishment of QA policies, systems, structures, and standards without enabling factors actually leads to quality improvement and accountability. Based on this gap. This research was proposed to address the following objectives:

The specific objectives of this article are:
  (i)   To explore internal quality assurance management practices of UG's internal quality assurance actors.
  (ii)   (ii) To use the emerging themes from the data to propose a contextual internal quality assurance model.

Literature Review
Concept of quality
Although the concept of quality in higher education is widely discussed by its stakeholders, many stakeholders in the educational sector such as students, staff (teaching and non-teaching staff) administrators, sponsors, employers, accreditation bodies, government, view and interpret quality differently based on their needs and perception (Singh & single, 2018). For example, students may focus on the facilities provided and the perceived usefulness of their education for future employment; teachers, on the other hand, may pay attention to the teaching-learning process; university management may give importance to the institution's achievements; parents may consider the achievements of their children; and finally employers may consider the competence of the institution's graduates. Given that, each stakeholder has a different approach to defining quality; it is not possible, therefore, to talk about quality as a single clear-cut concept. Any definition of quality must be understood in terms of the context in which it is used. Harvey (2019), and Badran, Baydoun and Hillman (2019) lists five different approaches to quality in the field of higher education and says it can be viewed:

 - In terms of the exceptional (highest standards);
 - In terms of conformity to standards;
 - As fitness for purpose;
 - As effectiveness in achieving institutional goals; and
 - As meeting customers' stated or implied needs.

Quality assurance
There is a universal agreement among QA researchers about difficulty in adopting a common definition for QA in tertiary education, however, general definitions of QA can be found in the literature (Martin & Stella, 2007). For instance, while Harvey and Green (1993) refers to QA as "those mechanisms and procedures designed to reassure the various stakeholders in higher education that institutions accord a high priority to implementing policies designed to maintain and enhance institutional effectiveness" (p. 178). According to Tsevi (2014) and Boateng (2014), QA is concerned with a planned, systematic, and sustained review of the procedures and processes of an establishment or institution to ascertain whether or not the established or laid down standards of teaching, assessment, research, innovation, scholarship, and infrastructure are been met or otherwise.

Internal quality assurance (IQA) management: The systems model
Systems model as educational quality management approach allows for assessment of educational inputs, processes and outputs aspects of the educational institution and interrelate the effects of one aspect in order to put the available resources into best use towards the purpose for which the institution was established. (Gupta & Gupta 2013). Gupta and Gupta (2013) noted that university is a complex system which receives influences from both external and internal environmental sub-systems. Therefore, systems theory is best for university quality management as the theory emphasises all-inclusive approach towards attainment of educational quality goals and gives opportunity to obtain feedback through the output sub-system, which are used to re-energise the entire system through the input sub-system.

Educational inputs sub-system
The environment provides it with personnel, financing, theory, and knowledge. The national and local governments enact laws that regulate the university. In addition, other groups may make demands on the university. Students, for example, want relevant curriculum that will prepare them for employment. Faculty might want higher salary, better working conditions, and fringe benefits. Similarly, the community expects the university to provide quality education. In this situation where each group has its demands, it is the job of the

university administrators to integrate these diverse goals into a viable plan of action. The educational input sub-system component of the model comprises all educational resources and leadership needed to be used in the educational processes of university's core activities of programme and course planning and reviews, teaching and research activities and assessment practices (Von Bertalanffy, 1973 & Weihrich, 2008). The input sub-system leads to the process sub-system. The quality of the input determines the quality of the process.

Educational process sub-system

The process or throughput sub-system includes the internal operation of the university and its system of operational management. The university administrators have to utilize their technical competence in communication, decision-making, curriculum development, motivation, developing organizational culture and their leadership styles in transforming the inputs into outputs. The educational processes part refers to activities such as programme and course development and reviews, teaching and learning, research activities and assessment practices engaged in by quality actors and stakeholders of the educational system to achieve institutional goals (Von Bertalanffy, 1973 & Weihrich, 2008). The process sub-system leads to the output sub-system. In addition, the quality of the process sub-system determines the quality of the output sub-system which is the graduates and research outputs.

Educational output sub-system

Outputs sub-system include student achievement, growth, dropout, attitude toward faculty, faculty performance, employee job satisfaction, employee-management relations and university-community relations, among others. This aspect of the system deals with systematic collection of relevant information on the extent to which the educational process sub-system met the expected educational goals and which aspects of the process requires improvement. The educational output sub-system generates feedback that could be used as new input to close quality feedback loop with the stakeholders in the process sub-system (Von Bertalanffy, 1973 & Weihrich, 2008).

Educational outcome: Graduate employability focus of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)

Educational outcome feedback information are usually obtained from outcome of the educational systems such as students, graduates and users of graduates' services in the job market (Von Bertalanffy, 1973 & Weihrich, 2008). For instance, Martin (2018) maintained that IQA and graduate employability deals with graduates' skills set and how they are useful in the job market, community and to graduate themselves. This means IQA and graduate employability can be seen from educational outcome perspective. In support of Martin (2018)'s argument, Westerheijden, Epping, Faber, Leisyte and Weert (2013) and Dunn, Phillips, Penny, Barrett-Adams and Rose (2016); indicated that one side of the employability focus of IQA is the quality assuring of all educational processes, students are subjected to in order to acquire a desirable skills and knowledge that is useful to the graduates in all circumstances. The other side deals with graduates having employment opportunities and using acquired knowledge and skills to provide services required by the employers in the job market (Dunn, Phillips, Penny, Barrett-Adams & Rose, 2016).

The external environment: closing the quality feedback loop

Finally, the external environment or the supra-system reacts to these outputs and provides feedback to the university system. The feedback loop goes back to both the process and the inputs. If the feedback is positive, then the university's stability can be maintained. If negative, it can be used to correct deficiencies in administrator's operational plan of action, which in turn will have an effect on the university's output. As universities are regarded as a system that receive input from the environmental sub-system, it is important to put measures in place to check whether university programmes are producing acceptable outcomes suitable for use in the environment and this is normally achieved by using data generated through the feedback system to improve on the educational activities that can bring out the acceptable outcome (Musai, 2017).

Factors that support internal quality assurance management

Quality assurance researchers indicated that both internal and external factors drive implementation of IQA policy in public universities. The external factors include national QA policy, national quality assurance agenda and

national laws guiding university administration (Eggins, 2014). With regard to internal factors, level of decentralization, autonomy, financial incentives, quality educational resources such as human, material resources and infrastructural facility, active engagement of all key stakeholders and effective IQA information system. Others include comprehensive IQA policy to ensure rigor of the IQA system, effective IQA decisions and well-resourced management support structures. In addition, decentralized organisational structure, quality culture, committed leadership, effective feedback management communication system that closes the feedback loop with stakeholders (Sampaio & Rosa, 2012; Eggins, 2014; Ganseuer, & Pistor, 2017). The role of educational leadership in promoting IQA efforts includes QA vision statement and promoting it through employee motivation, developing strategic IQA policy in line with external QA agencies' requirements', putting in place strategic resources and empowerment of decentralised unit leaders (van Ameijde, Nelson, Billsberry &van Meurs 2009). Encouraging full ownership of IQA systems and practices among IQA actors and stakeholders make them to be committed to all aspects of the IQA processes leading to QA culture. The benefits of developing QA culture are that the commitments of stakeholders and QA actors helps to meet deadlines and exceed targets throughout all the IQA implementation stair cases and it gives power and urgency to IQA actors at the decentralised levels (Sursock, 2011).

From the review of related literature, it could be established that internal quality assurance actors play critical role in internal quality assurance policy implementation in higher education institutions. However, there are some contextual barriers that affect effectiveness and efficiency of their operations. One way of identifying IQA implementation barriers is through research on QA actors' experiences. Therefore, there is the need to examine perceptions of quality actors on internal quality assurance management practices.

Methodology

The research intendeds to explore perceptions of quality actors on internal quality assurance management practices. The study was based on social constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. From the social constructivist-interpretivist assumptions of this study, a qualitative approach was deemed suitable. Hence, the research approach adopted was qualitative. The design was case study because the research explored current social experiences in a real-life setting (Yin, 2018, Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The population for the study consisted of public universities in Ghana, but the University of Ghana was purposely selected as a case A purposive sampling was used in selecting 12 quality assurance actors as interview participants from the University of Ghana. Purposive sampling was used in selecting interview participants made up of 2 senior members from the Academic Quality Assurance Unit (AQAU) and 10 Heads of Departments selected from the Colleges of Health Sciences, Basic and Applied Sciences, Humanities and Education. The reason for selecting the Heads of Departments and AQAU senior members for this study was because the core functions of teaching, learning and resaerch are carried out at the academic departments whereas quality assurance policy formulation and coordination are carried out by the AQAU. Furthermore, apart from their willingness to participate in the study, by virtue of their positions, the researcher was sure of obtaining valuable IQA information on UG from their offices. The researcher believes that since the selected UG's QA actors were directly involved in IQA policy formulation and implementation, they could provide rich information for the study.

The main document reviewed was the UG' quality assurance policy. The case study design was selected for this study because the researcher was interested in exploring an ongoing lived experience of key IQA actors, therefore, there was the need to interact with the quality assurance actors at their places of work in order to get a deeper meaning of how they practise internal quality assurance (Yin, 2009). In addition, the study was designed to explore an ongoing condition of IQA at UG as an exemplary case, believed to be a rich case institution with a well-established QA unit.

Qualitative research approach was used in data collection and analysis. To ensure reliability of the interview protocol, the instrument was piloted and issues of ambiguity was addressed before the main interviews. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews triangulated with document analysis were the main data collection methods. Content and thematic techniques were used in data analysis and interpretation of findings. The emerging themes

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from the data were used to construct a contextual quality assurance management model (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Akşan & Baki, 2017). The researcher in this study ensured that the findings were credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable by applying varies techniques of enhancing rigor and trustworthiness of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yin, 2016). To ensure trustworthiness of the research process and to attain the rigor required in ensuring credibility of this study, the researcher followed the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability criteria suggested by qualitative researchers such as (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Krefting, 1991 & Baxter & Jack, 2008) as follows:

Credibility: In order to ensure credibility of the data used for this study, member checking was undertaken whereby transcribed scripts were sent to all the interview participants which were confirmed as the true recording of the interviews. Furthermore, the researcher also explained his experiences and how it could affect the objectivity of the data and outlined strategies to manage any form of researcher's biases in a form of researcher reflexivity at the beginning of this study (Shenton, 2014). The researcher also strictly adhered to the approved ethics procedures submitted to UG's Ethics Committee for Humanities (Ethics approval number: ECH 164/17-18). Finally, as part of ensuring thick description of the case, respondents' views and quotes from the documents reviewed were capture in the results of the study.

Transferability: In ensuring transferability of the research findings, the researcher provided enough contextual and background information about the case site, the University of Ghana was provided to enable readers for comparison with other institutions' environments to make such a transfer (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Maxwell, 2012; Erlandson & Edwards, 1993).

Dependability: To ensure consistency with which results of this study could be repeated and result in similar findings, the researcher documented all aspects of the research by offering a thick and thorough description of the methodology used to carry out the research. This was to enable readers to follow the methodology use to replicate this study in institutions with similar contexts as UG's (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability: To serve as a measure of the objectivity used in evaluating the results of this study, the study utilized multiple data sources: interviews and document reviews data sources were triangulated so that one data source could validate the other. In this study, interview results could be easily examined by other research through UG's IQA policy documents. All incidences that occurred in the course of the study were recorded in a reflexive journal. Also, the processes involved in the data collection, analysis and presentation were clearly explained by the researcher (Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Objective 1: To explore internal quality assurance management practices of UG's internal quality assurance actors.

In terms of internal quality assurance management practices at the University of Ghana, four themes emerged from the data analysis. The themes revealed that the current internal quality assurance management system of University of Ghana is being modeled around systems model. The quality assurance management system consisted of four sub-systems made up of external environment, input, process and output sub-systems as discussed below:

Theme one: socio-political and economic contextual factors that influence UG's quality assurance environmental sub-system

External environmental sub-system of UG's IQA consisted of actors and stakeholders such as the Ministries of Education and Finance, alumni, employers, professional associations, faculty and students who present their various demands and whose influence on UG's educational activities in one way or the other drive quality assurance activities or act as barriers. The study found that for example, the embargo on recruitment of lecturers and non-teaching staff placed by the Ministry of Finance since 2011 made it impossible for UG to recruit enough lecturers to match ever-increasing students' enrolment and this has implication for quality teaching. Another

influence from the environment was high demands for UG academic programmes as a result, UG continuous to struggle with high students to lecturer ratio with limited facilities and at the same time, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) is demanding quality improvement and accountability from the universities. Another influence from the environment was government's control over the University's budgetary allocation. This study argues that social, political and economic factors from the external environment was one of the contextual factors influencing effective operation of IQA system at UG as a public university.

During the interview with one of the senior members at the Academic Quality Assurance Unit, the influence of the external quality assurance agency was captured as follows:

> *… I must say that whatever we do here, it is to meet NAB's re/accreditation requirements. They also regulate our activities through academic audits, credential verification for our faculty. Before we recruit staff, we need financial clearance from the Ministry of Finance… (Interviewee AQAU 1).*

The finding confirmed Miliani (2013)'s argument that both internal QA system and the external QA system work together to achieve the same purpose but external QA system influences the internal QA system to ensure accountability and quality educational outputs. For quality improvement, some participants recommend recruitment of more lecturers and qualified quality assurance staff to address the current shortfall in staff strength at UG.

Theme two: Ensuring quality of the educational input sub-system at UG
The educational inputs dimension of UG's IQA system involves faculty and administrative staff, facilities such as lecture halls, library, laboratories, teaching and learning materials, students, fund and leadership. The quality and adequacy of these inputs determine the quality of the educational output. For example, UG's effort to ensure quality faculty was the implementation of a policy that requires a PhD as teaching qualification, job interviews and teaching demonstration and using cut-off grade point and admission interviews for specific progarmmes as part of quality assurance of the admission processes for new students into the university. In addition, various quality assurance committees have been established to ensure quality control.

A portion of UG's Quality Assurance Policy Manual stated:

> *Teaching staff appointed with just a second degree in exceptional circumstances, should register and obtain a PhD or terminal qualification within six years of date of employment. Failure to meet this stipulation would result in sanctions as given in the Conditions of Service…(AQAP, p.9).*

The Academic Quality Assurance Unit (AQAU) also carries out facility audit at the beginning of every semester before commencement of lectures and moderation of course syllabus at the beginning of each semester. From the analysis, the result shows that UG's IQA policy adequately covers quality assurance of its educational inputs, process and outputs. Quality assurance structures and systems were developed to ensure quality of staff and students' recruitment into the University. The results shows evidence of UG's leadership commitment towards quality assuring its educational outcomes through its IQA policies, establishment of AQAU and establishment of quality assurance leadership decision making structures within the colleges, school, faculties and departments. Though UG has a comprehensive academic quality assurance policy, support and decision-making structures and systems to ensure effective practice at unit levels were weak. In order to improve of IQA practices, participants recommended that UG should consider setting up well-resourced quality assurance offices within the decentralized structures at college, school, faculty and departmental levels to help coordinate IQA activities.

Theme three: Quality assurance measures within the educational process sub-system
The finding from the interviews and documentary sources shows that UG's current educational process sub-system centered on programme and course development and evaluation, teaching, assessment and research activities. An assessment of UG's IQA policy revealed that the policy was very comprehensive in terms of procedures of quality assuring all the educational process sub-system activities. It made provision for quality actors to obtain quality feedback and communicate it to the inputs sub-system. Quality assurance feedback management mechanism as indicated specifically in section 11.1 of UG's Academic Quality Assurance Policy document page 13 outlined methods for evaluating teaching at the departmental level by students.

On quality management practices, the interview data revealed that currently, the AQAU conducts university-wide end of semester evaluation using online survey to obtain feedback from the students. In addition, some heads of departments (HOD) also adopted open door policy aiming at encouraging students to report their concerns to the office of HODs. This serves as additional feedback mechanism in addition to online survey. This finding was aptly captured in an interview with one of the HODs:

 …*"The only tool that we have is the online survey using online questionnaire by students…, I think that is the only assessment tool we use currently"*… (Interviewee, HOD 4).

The interview data shows that out of the five course/lecturer evaluation tools stipulated by UG's IQA policy, in practice, quality actors heavily relied on only online survey, which generates only quantitative report. During the interview with the participants from the AQAU, it emerged that students' participation in the online survey has reduced significantly since the evaluation was changed from paper questionnaire to online electronic questionnaire and this has been one of the major challenges of students' level of participation in IQA processes. In addition, some heads of departments indicated that they sometimes use informal feedback but it has not been documented to generate any report.

In practice, it emerged that all studied departments were in full compliance with the IQA policy that requires a PhD as teaching qualification at UG. Furthermore, in terms of staff development, the AQAU has been providing quality assurance orientation for new heads of departments and organizing training workshops for lecturers. However, some heads of departments complained about ineffectiveness of the quality workshops, as most lecturers do not attend.

…*"When AQAU send notice to the Department for training workshops, most Faculty do not go because it is not compulsory and only few people attend* "… (Interviewee, HOD 5).

Theme four: Ensuring quality of educational within the output sub-system at UG
The finding from the data revealed the UG's educational outputs include the university's' products - graduates as educated citizens, research publications and community service. The data gathered from the AQAP demonstrated that UG considers quality of curriculum delivery as top most priority through comprehensive AQPA policy guarding effective teaching and learning with the aim of producing quality graduates. The main quality monitoring tools being used was to enhance quality teaching were students' evaluation and peer review at the departmental level. UG has emphasized quality teaching as embedded in its mission statement. The mission of UG states:

"The mission of the University is to develop world-class human resources and capabilities to meet national development needs and global challenges through quality teaching, learning, research, and knowledge dissemination". (AQAP p.2)

A portion of UG's Academic Quality Assurance Policy further stated that:

...″The departments are expected to review each existing course at least once every other year. Students' feedback are expected to be considered during the review and that of professional and accreditation bodies″ (AQAP p.12).

The Academic Quality Assurance Unit plays a significant role in assuring quality curriculum delivery through the development of standards to guide curriculum activities. These standards include course syllabus template, which serves as a guide especially to the newly recruited teaching staff to easily get adjusted into the system. The template contains information on: course code and title, lecture period (s) and venue, prerequisites, course instructor, introduction/subject or, course overview, course objective/goals, learning outcomes, course delivery, plagiarism policy, assessment, grading scale and reading list or required text and 'Rules & Tools for Effective Teaching' developed for UG in 2010 by the International Quality Assurance Expert Committee to enhance quality curriculum delivery.

A key interviewee further indicated that:

> *In order to foster and strengthen adherence to the University statutes, regulations and byelaws, and maintain high standards of integrity in the execution of the University's mission, the University has developed a code of conduct, which is considered crucial for quality assuring teaching and learning... (Interviewee AQAU 2).*

It also emerged from the data that within the departments where curriculum delivery take place, the head of departments serve as chief quality assurance officers by providing academic leadership. It also emerged that experienced lecturers and the heads of departments take newly appointed lecturers through an induction programme in course syllabus preparation, which has a downloadable template on the University's Quality Assurance Unit's Web Site. They also ensure newly recruited faculty undergoes mentoring process in teaching and assessment for at least a semester before he or she is assigned a course to teach.

Theme five: Ensuring quality within the educational outcome sub-system at UG through surveys
It has emerged from the data that quality managers at UG focused quality management effort on quality assuring educational input, process and output sub-systems. Measures of quality of educational outcome through tracer studies, alumni survey, employer satisfaction survey, community perception surveys are yet to be implemented at the University and this article finds this as a gap in practice.

The review of IQA policy of UG showed that graduate exit survey and graduate tracer studies are supposed to be carried out by departments and AQAU in order to systematically collect data on the educational outcome and use it for quality enhancement of the university's activities within the educational processes sub-system. Feedback from stakeholders such as alumni, employers and professional bodies was considered in UG's IQA strategic policy as means of obtaining educational outcome feedback. Section 6.4 of UG's IQA policy document charged the Academic Quality Assurance Unit to be obtaining feedback on the output of its educational activities as stated as follows:

...″AQAU is required to generate data in a form of annual exit studies of graduating students as well as tracer studies″ (AQAP p. 8).

However, the result showed that the current practice of gathering information on educational output includes the use of graduate exit survey, students internships/attachment and research publication.

The use of tracer study is one of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission's accountability requirements from all tertiary institutions but the results showed that the use of tracer study was completely absent at UG. Tracer

study is highly considered not only for enhancing programme employability but also identifying skills required in the job market. It is also a means of encouraging multi-stakeholder participation in quality assuring educational inputs.

Theme six: Involvement of stakeholders in the quality management processes at UG

One important theme that emerged from the data concerns different perceptions interviewees expressed about stakeholder's involvement in the quality management processes at UG. Some interviewees indicated that they have been involved and others indicated otherwise. For example, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), as an external stakeholder is involved through accreditation, re-accreditation, evaluation of credentials and academic audit. Internally students are involved through student evaluation of teaching. However, some interviewees specifically complained that when it comes to development of quality assurance standards, they are usually not consulted. From the finding, if AQAU develops standards without consulting stakeholders, it then suggests the existence of top-down bureaucratic rather than organic quality management practice, which can negatively affect development of quality culture and ownership among the actors and stakeholders within the university. One HOD suggested in an interview that:

...*"All of us can be involved for example through workshops and through the committee structures, and failure to do that was what seemed to have put off the majority of lecturer"* (Interviewee HOD 6).

Another interviewee lamented that:
> *..Those of us within the units do not have sufficient power to carry out innovative QA practices but rather have been reduced to submitting documents and evidence of things we do at our departments to the AQAU at the expense of our teaching and research activities* (Interviewee HOD 2).

Lesson learned from the analysis was that top-down policy formulation and implementation did not seem to be working well in UG as the lecturers cherish their academic freedom. This finding also revealed gap in policy and practice as UG's IQA policy implementation principle 5.3 stipulates stakeholders' involvement and ownership. A section of the policy states that:

> *Staff and students have an obligation and responsibility to be fully involved in the quality assurance and enhancement of their own work as well as that of the University. Additionally, UG shall involve all staff in quality assurance and shall provide support and training for their professional and personal development especially junior staff whose efficiency and added value to UG would be improved by further training (AQAP p.6).*

It is clear from the analysis that development of UG's quality tools and standards were driven more by AQAU and influence from GTEC rather than academic staff at the departments, although UG's AQAP recommended broader internal stakeholders engagement. This was a major gap in UG's policy and practice. In another department, one of the interviewed heads of departments expressed the following views regarding lack of departmental quality actor's participation in the development of emerging quality standards:

> *AQAU has just introduced exam moderation checklist without consulting us to check whether the checklist fit into how we assess our students and this was introduced in the deadline weak of exam moderation so we had to use it like that ...(Interviewee HOD 7).*

The findings showed even though the Academic Quality Assurance Policy provides for both internal and external stakeholders' involvement, the policy is yet to be fully implemented.

Theme seven: Quality assurance management support structures and feedback management

Data from AQA policy manual and the interviews show existence of centralised and decentralized decision-making IQA structures at the university level and within the academic structures in a form of committees and boards at the college, school, faculty and departmental levels. The University Council oversees quality of UG's academic activities. While the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research, Innovation and Development, and the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Academic and Students Affairs act as chief QA officers answerable to the council, provosts, deans and heads of departments were the chief QA officers within the decentralised structures respectively and the AQAU coordinates activities of the boards and the committees. The study shows that these committees and boards within the decentralised structures were composed of only academics. The study observed that even though there was evidence of existence of decentralised IQA structure, there was lacked of equal representation of required stakeholders on the boards and in the committees especially at the departmental level as stipulated in UG's AQAP pages 7-11.

Analysis of the current IQA decision-making structure of UG revealed absence of quality assurance officers at the college, school, faculty and departmental levels to coordinate the activities of the various QA committees and boards within the decentralised structures. The absence of well-resourced QA offices within the decentralised structures have not only increased the workload of the academic staff but also it has made it difficult to close feedback loop with the lecturers and students as academic staff were compelled to perform both academic and management functions. One interesting rival opinion given by a participant during the interview, decentralization of the AQAU to the college levels while other participants were satisfied with the current structure. This was what the interviewee said:

...if we have quality assurance officers at the College level they can provide administrative support to us but here we are doing both academic and administrative work and that is why were some late in submitting reports... (Interviewee HOD 5).

It has been found from the analysis that though UG has a well-established quality assurance decision-making structures, the structure lacked dedicated quality assurance offices with trained quality assurance staff to coordinate and monitor the activities of the academic staff, the various boards and committees at the college, school, faculty and departmental levels.

Theme eight: Mechanisms of assuring quality at UG

The findings showed that in assuring quality of core functions of the University quality assurance actors are guided by a mechanism that involved four steps.

Step 1: self-review

The results emerging from analysis of documents and interviews shows that UG has an established self-review mechanism implemented by AQAU at the university-wide level assisted by the various QA committees at the college, school, faculty and departmental levels in a form of monitoring and evaluation each semester and academic audit through data collection using survey instrument. Special self – review included course/lecturer evaluation by students every semester and annual teaching inspection by the Departmental Teaching Assessment Committee ((DTAC) which was confirmed by the interviewees as the current practices.

Step 2: self-analysis

The data from UG's AQAP and interviews show that UG's current practice of self-analysis involves analysis of data generated by AQAU through online survey. Reports generated were normally sent to the academic leadership for remedial action to be taken with the faculty found lacking in certain areas of his or her duties. UG's AQAP provided adequate procedures for management of evaluation report but from the interview with the HOD, evaluation reports usually end at the dean's office making it impossible for departments to hold consultative

discussion with faculties and students to close the quality feedback loop. All the sampled interviewees at the departments revealed that the end of semester course/lecturer evaluation feedback generated by AQAU for the past three years has not been sent to the lecturers and heads of departments since online evaluation started.

Six out of the eight heads of departments confirmed that they have never received the end of semester course/lecturer evaluation feedback from the AQAU since the evaluation was changed from manual to online. This finding revealed that the University has not been closing feedback loop with the lecturers and the students after evaluation.

During the interviews with the heads of departments, it also emerged that no department has formed the joint student-staff consultative committees stipulated in UG's AQAP which this study found to be a gap in policy implementation. The heads of departments claimed they were not aware of the policy that required the formation of the joint student-staff consultative committees. During the interview, a head of department confirmed this by saying:

> *I think that the evaluations that I have seen so far, there is no aspect that should be discuss with students, there is nothing to talk to the student about … However, as lecturers, we seek students' opinions and views of the way things are going. We talk to students on regular basis; we encourage them to tell us what they think. There are many instances where students have complained about issues and we have addressed them in timely fashion. We respond to students' e-mails through the Sakai system. …(Interviewee, HOD 1).*

Some of the heads of departments also said that they have never seen the UG's quality assurance policy document before. It can therefore be inferred from the interview data that some of the QA actors did not have complete knowledge of UG's IQA policy, hence the need to make the policy document available to both teaching and non-teaching staff.

Step 3: *Self-feedback*
The analysis of UG's quality policy manual indicated that lectures are required to receive evaluation feedback from the AQAU through the academic leadership to enable them do self-modification thereby closing the quality feedback. This has been UG's established channels of communicating evaluation feedback across the academic hierarchy to ensure that the quality feedback loop was closed. During the interviews, the HODs complained about lack of university-wide course/lecture evaluation feedback from the AQAU. This finding suggests that evaluation feedback communication channel was not effective thereby creating gap in policy text and practice. There is a need for AQAU to create a university-wide means of communicating evaluation feedback so that quality feedback loops with all the concerned quality assurance stakeholders are closed.

Step 4: *Self-rectification*
This element involves how evaluation feedbacks are to be implemented. UG's IQA policy clearly indicates how follow-up on recommendations from the feedback meeting at the departmental levels are to be conducted. The policy states that:

> *The head of department is required to discuss the two reports at a departmental meeting after which comments and suggestions on possible remedial actions to be taken are sent to the Dean and faculties are also expected to propose general modification plans and measures with reference to the requests of experts at the feedback meeting.   (AQAP, 2011 p. 13).*

Interviews conducted with the heads of departments showed that students have not been involved in the quality feedback discussion meetings at the departments and also since evaluation feedbacks from the university – wide evaluation have not been forthcoming to the departments, only feedback generated by departmental quality assurance committees and those from individual lecturers were usually discussed. This finding suggest that AQAU

need to bridge feedback communication gap between offices of the pro-vice chancellors and the departments and also try to enforce the formation of departmental joint staff-students consultative committee as stated in the UG's IQA policy. The figure 1 (See Appendix) presents the four main elements of UG's IQA mechanism. The major gap in practice with regard to UG's QA mechanism was non-existence of decentralised IQA office at the college, school, faculty and departmental levels to help facilitate IQA activities.

Objective 2: To use the emerging themes from the data to propose a contextual internal quality assurance model. Based on the themes explored, the research proposes a contextual internal quality assurance model to guide effective implementation of quality assurance systems and practices in the university as seen in Figure 1 under the appendix.

Conclusion

The Academic Quality Assurance Policy of UG was very comprehensive and made provision for quality assuring all the core functions of the university. There was provisions to assure quality of educational input, process, output and outcome but the current practice is yet to implement strategies to measure quality of UG's educational outcomes through tracer studies, alumni survey, employer satisfaction survey, to mention a few. This article finds this as a gap in practice that quality actors need to improve on.

The Academic Quality Assurance Unit (AQAU) should organise the following studies/surveys, in order to obtain feedback from all major stakeholders: tracer studies /alumni survey, students' satisfaction survey, employer satisfaction survey staff satisfaction survey, staff exit surveys and external community perception survey. Such studies/surveys should be organised on regular basis and the results should be used as inputs into the University strategic plan(s) and improvement in quality assurance service delivery in the University.

It is recommended that AQAU should consider giving course/lecturer evaluation reports to all lecturers not only at the time of promotion and enforce implementation of joint student-staff departmental quality assurance consultative committee meetings as stipulated the UG's AQAP.

Implications for Practice

In view of this research, this paper recommends for other Quality Assurance Directorates/Offices and Units to constantly review their policies, systems and processes based on changing trends in QA around the world. This implies that for quality actors to improve on current quality assurance management practice, the various Academic Quality Assurance Offices should consider setting up well-resourced quality assurance offices within the decentralized structures at college, school, faculty and departmental levels. This will help coordinate IQA activities of the academic staff at the policy implementation levels.

Again, there is the need to reactivate the Inter-University Quality Assurance Committee which brought together all QA officers in public universities to meet and share ideas and best practices.
Lastly, there should more capacity training opportunities for QA officers to update their knowledge in current trends in QA especially from the international perspective.

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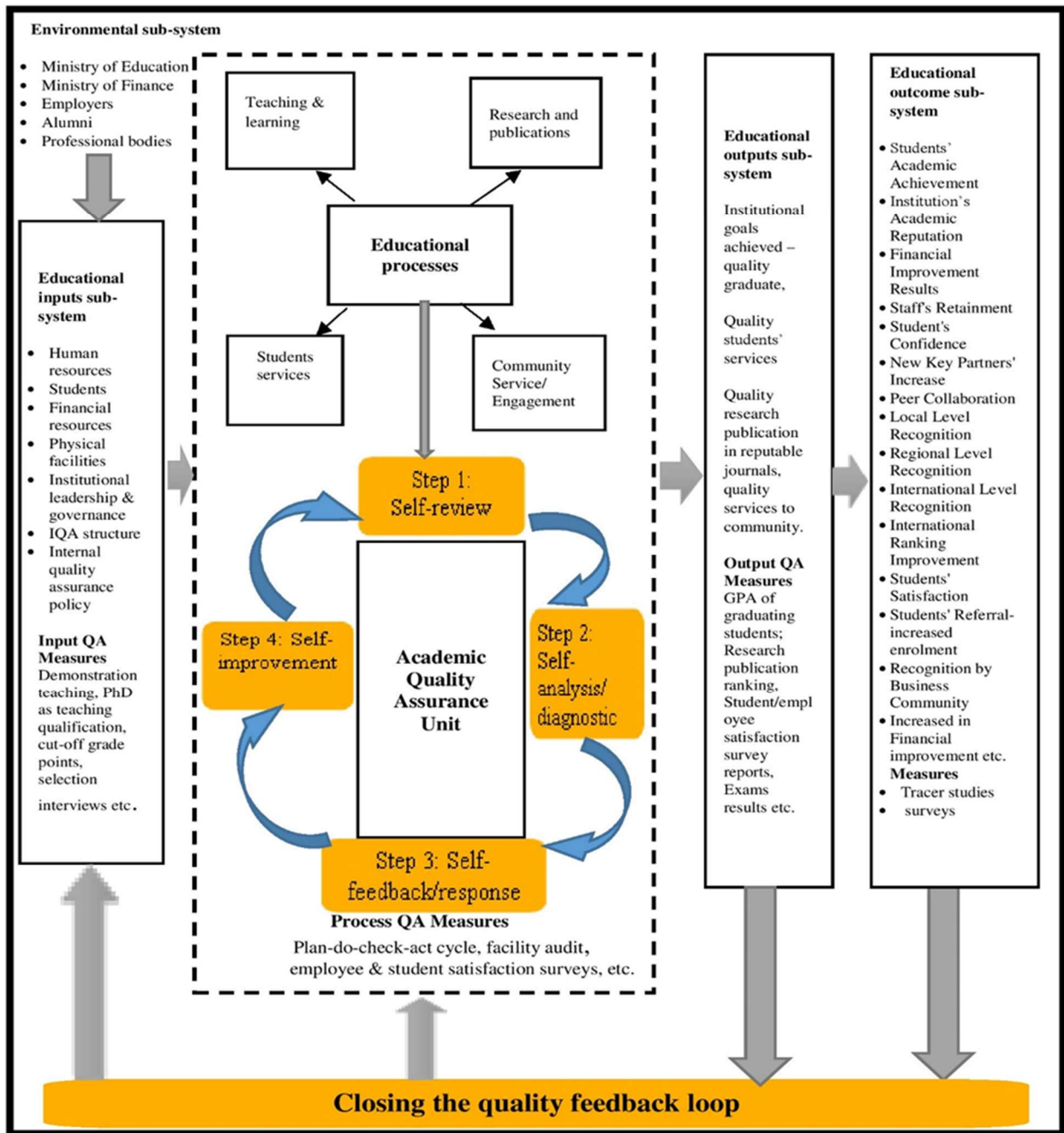
APPENDIX

Figure 1: An internal quality assurance management model developed from the data