

DECLARATION

“ I declare that *Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education and its Implementation at the University of Durban-Westville* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references”.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE

ABSTRACT

Using the University of Durban-Westville as an illustrative case study, the study examines quality assurance policies and their implementation in the South African higher education system. The scope of the study covers a wide-ranging analysis of discourses underpinning quality assurance and a focused analysis of institutional policies. As one of its central aims, the dissertation investigates the tension between quality assurance as it is conventionally understood and quality assurance conceived as continuous organizational improvement based on the principles of total quality management.

The study has two fairly distinct dimensions: a literature survey focusing on global trends and practices, and an empirical investigation focusing on the University of Durban-Westville. The literature study looks global systems, trends and practices, and provides a suitable point of departure for a contextual analysis of quality management in the South African higher education system. Relying on a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews as research instruments, the study's empirical component investigates the attitudes and perceptions of academic managers at UDW towards national and institutional quality assurance policies and mechanisms.

The study's findings all point to a preference for a decentralised system of quality management with the government playing a peripheral monitoring role rather than a central policing role. This study also demonstrates that the distinction between academic development and quality assurance is a spurious one and should only be made for analytical purposes.

Key words

Higher education

Quality assurance

Efficiency

Quality enhancement

Corporate enterprise ideology

Assessment

Evaluation

Academic development

Total quality management

Dedication and acknowledgements

Dedicated to my mother, Philile Phyllis Ngwenya, and to the memory of my father, Samuel Siphon Mphenduleni Ngwenya.

I wish to thank my supervisor, Prof E M Lemmer for her guidance and support during the course of this study. I also wish to record my gratitude to my wife and children for their unstinting support. I am grateful to all my colleagues at the University of Durban-Westville who willingly participated in this study.

List of Tables

Table 5.1 Perceptions of managers regarding institutional self-evaluation and external quality audits.

Table 5.2 Perceptions of managers regarding the relationship between quality assurance and academic development.

Table 5.3 Familiarity with national policies on quality assurance.

Table 5.4 Familiarity with institutional policies on quality assurance

Table 5.5 Possible quality assurance mechanisms at UDW.

Table 5.6 Possible methods of assuring quality at UDW.

Table 5.7 The management and administration of quality assurance and quality enhancement.

ANNEXURE

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

APPENDIX B

Interview guide

APPENDIX C

Ethical clearance letter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	i
Abstract and key words	ii
Dedication and acknowledgements	iv
List of tables	v
Annexure	vi
Table of contents	vii

CHAPTER 1

CONTENTS	PAGE
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Quality assurance: a global perspective	1
1.3 Quality assurance in South African higher education	2
1.4 Conceptions of quality assurance in higher education systems	4
1.5 Definition of terms	5
1.6 Reconciling global imperatives with national needs	6
1.7 Scope and focus of the study	9
1.8 The research problem	11
1.9 Aims of the study	11
1.10 Theoretical and analytical paradigms	12
1.11 Research design	14

1.12	Limitations	15
1.13	Chapter division	16
1.14	Summary	18
CHAPTER 2		
2.1	Introduction	19
2.1.1.	Analytical and conceptual framework	20
2.2	Quality assurance in higher education: An international perspective	22
2.3	The need for effective management of quality assurance systems in higher education	24
2.4	Institutional self-evaluation and external quality audits	28
2.5	Quality assurance versus quality enhancement	31
2.6	Implications for the South African quality assurance system	34
2.7	Quality assurance in South African higher education: A brief historical overview	36
2.7.1	Relevant policy and legislation	41
2.7.2	The HEQC and related management structures	41
2.8	Conclusion	43

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Introduction	44
3.2 Historical background	45
3.3 An overview of quality assurance policies and mechanisms at UDW	46
3.3.1 Quality as enhanced student performance and progression rates	47
3.3.2 Quality as improved teaching and learning programmes	47
3.3.2.1 Bridging programmes	47
3.3.2.2 Foundation modules	48
3.3.2.3 Mentorship programme	48
3.3.2.4 Upward-bound university-wide academic enrichment programme	48
3.4 Quality as regular course evaluation and review	49
3.5 The formalisation of quality assurance at UDW	49
3.6 The current structure and responsibilities of the QA Office	51
3.7 Theories and models of management	54
3.8 Envisaged future developments	56
3.9 Conclusion	57

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Introduction	58
4.2 Rationale for qualitative approach	59
4.3 Research design	61
4.3.1 Sampling	61
4.3.1.1 Selection of site	61
4.3.1.2 Sampling of questionnaire respondents	61
4.3.1.3 Sampling of interview informants	62
4.4. Data collection	63
4.4.1 The questionnaire	63
4.4.2 The interview	64
4.4.2.1 Gaining access	65
4.5 Data analysis	66
4.5.1 Analysis of questionnaires	67
4.5.2 Analysis of interview transcripts	67
4.5.2.1 Narrative description	67
4.5.2.2 Data reduction	68
4.5.3 Drawing conclusions	69
4.6 Ethical measures	69
4.7 Measures to ensure trustworthiness (Reliability and Validity)	69

4.7.1 Triangulation	70
4.7.2 Clarifying researcher bias	70
4.7.3 Member checks	71
4.8 The researcher an instrument	72
4.9 Summary	74

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Introduction	75
5.2 Questionnaire analysis	75
5.2.1 Institutional self-evaluation versus external quality audits	79
5.2.2 Quality assurance and academic development	77
5.2.3 Reflections on national and institutional policies	82
5.2.4 National policies: Data from open items	89
5.2.5 Institutional policies: Data from open items	92
5.3 Analysis of interview transcripts	94
5.3.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Research)	95
5.3.2 The Quality Assurance Office	97
5.3.3 The Dean	99
5.4 Data reduction and analysis	101
5.4.1 Conceptions of quality	101

5.4.2 National and institutional quality assurance policies.	103
5.4.3 Quality assurance management systems at UDW.	104
5.4.4 Changing the attitudes of staff towards quality assurance.	104
5.5 Drawing conclusions	105
Chapter 6	
6.1 Introduction	108
6.2 Summary of the research	108
6.3 Recommendations	112
6.4 Guidelines for future research	114
6.5 Conclusion	115
References	116