

Chapter 7

Quality Assurance Systems of Higher Education in Africa: Trends, Constraints, and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The quality of higher education is currently the main challenge of public policies for higher education and research in many countries and regions of the world. Since their independence, African countries have made several efforts to ensure the quantitative aspects of higher education. But the big challenge concerns the qualitative aspects allowing to generate significant impacts of this sector for economic and social development. This chapter aims to analyze the current trends of quality assurance of higher education in the African region. Also, it plans to discuss constraints that affect development, implementation, and promotion of quality assurance systems in this region. Finally, it plans to give future perspectives to develop effective quality assurance systems of higher education which take into account African specificities.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of higher education is currently the main challenge of public policies for higher education and research, and this after so many efforts made to ensure the quantitative aspects. Among other meanings, the quality is a characteristic of excellence and high level of performance of higher education outputs and outcomes which are linked to human capital, scientific production and community services. It plays a strategic role both for economic and sustainable development of any country and for its competitiveness and long-term prosperity.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8085-1.ch007

At the heart of the debate around the world, the quality of higher education raises many questions as to its definition which is a challenging endeavor (Elassy, 2015; Martin and Stella, 2007; Schindler et al., 2015; Wittek and Kvernbekk, 2011). This is due to the existence of a variety of stakeholders in higher education, namely students, teachers, researchers, administrators, alumni, parents, regulatory bodies, decision-makers, socio-economic actors, national and international partners. Each one of these stakeholders may have different perceptions about quality and have different and varied roles and requirements. Moreover, the manner to measure and evaluate the quality is still a posed and challenging problem (Kaaouachi, 2019). Among possible answers to these questions, the concept of quality assurance (QA) has been emerged after the successful adoption of quality approaches and tools in the industrial sector (Sallis, 1993). The QA is an activity that refers to policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced (Martin and Stella, 2007). This activity deserves continued consideration and interest, particularly in a context marked by major changes and transformations that affect the higher education sector.

The African continent, a large geographical area, rich in natural resources and endowed by a young human capital with a median age of 19.7 years in 2020. This is a significant age gap when compared to 42.6 in Europe, 38.6 in Northern America, 33.4 in Oceania, 32 in Asia and 31 in Latin America and the Caribbean (Rocca and Schultes 2020). The continent is today giving considerable efforts and unprecedented importance to higher education, which is considered as a main key driver to the general development of the continent. The higher education systems of the African countries have undergone several reforms and transformations during the last two decades despite very limited resources and skills (Hopper, 2007). Several factors have influenced development and implementation of quality assurance systems of higher education in Africa: the diversification of higher education; the massification of students; the expansion of the private sector; the funding constraints; the pressing demands for accountability in a context characterized by a new paradigm of public management; the emergence of the knowledge economy; the seeking of fulfilling social and economic needs; the efforts towards continental harmonisation of higher education (Mohamedbhai, 2008; Shabani et al., 2014).

This chapter aims to analyze the current trends of quality assurance of higher education in the African region. Also, it plans to discuss constraints that affect development, implementation and promotion of quality assurance systems in this region. Finally, it envisages to give future perspectives to develop effective quality assurance systems of higher education.

To address all these research objectives, the chapter seeks to address the following sets of questions: What are the challenges facing higher education systems in Africa? Why is quality assurance important for higher education systems in Africa? What is the state and trend of quality assurance of higher education systems in Africa? What are the constraints affecting the quality assurance of higher education in Africa? What are the perspectives of quality assurance in higher education in Africa?

This research is based on a desk and web study of published information on quality assurance in higher education. The exercise concerns the examination of documents on quality assurance of higher education in Africa. In addition, the repository of information analysis takes into consideration the feedback experiences from some international projects in which the first author has participated.

This paper comprises many sections. Following this first section dedicated to the introduction, is the second section which gives a research methodology. The third section presents an overview of the main challenges affecting higher education systems in Africa. The fourth section describes the importance of quality assurance of higher education in Africa. The fifth section studies the situation of higher education quality assurance in Africa. The sixth section discusses some constraints affecting quality assurance of

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