

Neglecting Quality Assurance Practices in Colleges of Education in Ghana is too Expensive to Attempt: Analysis of Sociological Variables

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to find out the state of the structures of quality assurance practices in Colleges of Education in Ghana. It specifically explored the sociological variables and the challenges associated with ensuring quality assurance practices in the management of the Colleges of Education. The design for the research was non experimental descriptive survey and data were gathered through the use of questionnaires. There were 3 sets of questionnaires one for each group namely principals, tutors and students of five colleges of education. Each of the questionnaires were validated and their reliability tested with a Cronbach's co efficient alpha of 0.829 for the students and 0.914 for the tutors. The results were an indication of good reliability estimate. In all, 5 principals, 180 tutors and 1,153 students were given the questionnaires. Findings from the study suggested that students admitted to the Colleges enter with poor grades. The libraries are also not well-equipped for students and tutors to support quality teaching and learning. The study also found out that the professional experience of tutors in the Colleges was excellent. Based on the findings, it is recommended that, firstly, admissions should be based on the Ghana Tertiary Education (GTEC) requirements for tertiary institutions. Secondly, principals should be encouraged to attend institutional management courses to improve upon their management styles. Thirdly, adequate financial resources should be allocated to the Library so that current books, journals and reference books can be purchased to improve teaching and learning. Fourthly, quality assurance units should be established in the Colleges to ensure quality.

Keywords: Colleges of Education, Quality Assurance, Tertiary Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of tertiary education cannot be over emphasized. Tertiary institutions provide a nation with the varied human capital essential for building and growing the economy of a nation. They are marked by certain salient characteristics, among which are internal evaluation and accreditation through external reviews. These are paramount in ensuring quality in the continuing operations of the institutions. Internal evaluation and accreditation through external reviews constitute the major elements of quality assurance.

In tertiary institutions, quality assurance deals with explicit commitment and practices to the development of an institutional culture which, recognizes the importance of quality and the continuous enhancement of quality of services. In other words, quality assurance enables tertiary institutions to guarantee that its quality and standards are being maintained and enhanced. It is through quality assurance that institutions ensure and confirm that conditions are in place for students to achieve the standards set by it or by another awarding body (Quality Assurance Agency, 2004).

Quality assurance is fundamental in the pursuit of quality in tertiary institutions and it is an important global trend. It has become essential in the world these days because of the acknowledgment that expertise capital that builds and sustains a country's national economy depends on the training offered by tertiary institutions. According to (Aly & Akpovi, 2001), tertiary institutions also have realized that their long-term survival depends on how good their services are and that it is the quality of their services that will set one institution apart from the others.

The importance of quality assurance in tertiary education undoubtedly has implications for the Colleges of Education. The upgrade of the teacher training colleges to the tertiary level by an Act of Parliament (Act 847) places them under the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) and are therefore bound by the quality assurance requirements prescribed for all tertiary institutions that operate

under the GTEC. The elevation of the Colleges of Education to tertiary institution status requires a more efficient management with emphasis on ensuring quality assuming the centre stage. While the upgrade provides some privileges to the colleges such as institutional autonomy, it also makes the colleges more accountable to Government and the public in terms of performance. Thus, the survival of a College of Education will be contingent on the quality of its operations and also ensuring that minimum acceptable standards are in place in the institution.

The assurance of quality in an institution is a complex concept that has been defined in different ways according to purpose and context. (Stensaker, Brandt & Solum, 2008) noted that over the past two decades, the issue of quality assurance has been one of the major concerns in the area of higher education resulting in the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms for the assessment of teaching and learning. According to the (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, 2008) quality assurance “refers to the procedures, processes or systems used by a higher education institution to safeguard and improve the quality of its education and other activities”. Other writers such as (Vroeijenstin, 1995) also emphasised the dual notions of maintenance and enhancement. (Vroeijenstin, 1995) further notes that quality assurance requires formalised structures and continuous attention. (Lomas, 2002) also contributes to the view that attention to the maintenance and improvement of standards is important because of the need for higher education to have relevance for students, employers and financiers. (Hall, 2006) in talking about the management of quality, distinguishes between accountability and enhancement whereas accountability focuses on ‘proving’ the existence of quality, enhancement focuses on improving the quality of processes and products or outcomes.

In Ghana, successive governments have put in place quality assurance measures to ensure that tertiary institutions maintain mandatory standards in their operations. At the national level, a quality assurance agency, the National Accreditation Board (NAB) has been established and tasked with the responsibility for quality assurance in tertiary education within Ghana. Institutions to be accredited by NAB are those that have demonstrated their commitment to the maintenance of acceptable standards (Association of African Universities, 2008). In 2007 all the Colleges of Education obtained preliminary accreditation from the NAB. Interim accreditation is granted three years’ and the institutions need to ensure they observe internal evaluation practices in order to be ready for re-accreditation.

The Colleges of Education are in the transitional phase of assuming full tertiary institution status and becoming fully fledged tertiary institutions. There is certainly a difference between the passage of the College of Education Act, 2012 (Act 847) and putting in place of structures for the colleges to be functionally tertiary. There is no denying the fact that the transition of Colleges of Education to the tertiary sector can be described as frustrating, uncertain and disconnect between what we know about tertiary status and reality on the ground.

Quality of work in the Colleges of Education depends to a very great extent on the quality and the relevance of the curriculum of teacher education. Currently, some of the problems affecting quality in the Colleges of Education include the low grades of students admitted to the Colleges, poor teaching methods adopted by tutors, lack of commitment on the part of tutors, poor supervisory roles exhibited by heads of departments and other tutors in leadership positions, and inability of tutors to meet deadlines in terms of setting examination questions. Others include absenteeism on the part of tutors and students, misuse of time especially instructional hours, and irregularity and lack of punctuality by tutors.

Indeed, the upgrading of teacher training colleges to the level of Colleges of Education requires many changes in areas such as the management of the institutions as tertiary institutions, curriculum design, and the upgrading of all resources, be it human, physical and material facilities. Colleges of Education need changes in recruitment, placement, and promotion practices. In order to contend with these challenges and changes, mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure resource availability and quality education.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For a tertiary institution to attract students, it should be able to render quality education services to its students. The Colleges of Education are faced with a lot of challenges but they have to be able to render quality educational services so as to achieve academic success. Quality assurance committees have been set up by the various Colleges of Education. Some of the measures they have put in place have received opposition. There is more to be done to realise quality academic delivery. Generally, quality assurance committees are mandated to put in mechanisms to improve quality delivery so that the products of the colleges will meet national, international and the job market.

As tertiary institutions, there is the need to put in place structures, that is, programmes, policies, and mechanisms for ensuring that CoE’s are fulfilling their own purposes for existence, as well as the standards that apply to tertiary education. There is the need for us to know the structures that the colleges

have put in place since their elevation to tertiary status to assure quality in their operations. . We need to ascertain how these quality assurance structures, if any, are influencing staff performance in the colleges. These are critical issues that need to be empirically explored; yet there is little evidence available that address the issues. It thus becomes necessary for a study to explore the internal quality assurance practices in the Colleges of Education since neglecting it.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study was intended to provide information about internal quality assurance practices in the Colleges of Education in Ghana. Specifically, the study addressed the following objectives:

1. To identify the state of the internal quality assurance practices in the Colleges of Education in Ghana.
2. To explore challenges associated with internal quality assurance practices in the colleges of education.
3. To examine coping strategies adopted by the colleges towards addressing the challenges.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the state of the structures of internal quality assurance in the Colleges of Education in Ghana?
2. What challenges, if any, are associated with the conduct of internal quality assurance practices in the colleges of education?
3. What coping mechanisms have been put in place by the colleges towards addressing these challenges?

V. METHODOLOGY

The non-experimental descriptive survey was adopted for this study. The choice of the survey method was also informed by the fact that such data can be collected in a relatively short period of time. Survey is a form of planned collection of data for the purpose of description or prediction, as a guide to action or for the purpose of analysing the relationships between certain variables. In this light, the design dealt mainly with the assessment of the state of internal quality assurance within the Colleges of Education. The descriptive survey gathers data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of the existing conditions. The descriptive survey design deals with phenomena and reports the way things are. According to (Macmillan, 1996), descriptive survey designs are used to collect data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the subjects being studied. (Gay, 1987) is of the view that a descriptive survey is useful for investigating a variety of educational issues whereby a questionnaire is used to collect data in order to answer the research questions.

The population for the study consisted of all principals, tutors, and students of the 38 public Colleges of Education in Ghana. The Colleges of Education are grouped into five zones: Northern, Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Eastern - Greater Accra, Volta, and Central-Western zones. The Northern and Volta zones are each made up of seven Colleges of Education and the Eastern-Greater Accra zone is made up of eight Colleges of Education. The Ashanti-Brong-Ahafo zone has 10 Colleges of Education while the Central-Western zone has six Colleges of Education.

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the study sample consisting of 5 principals, 180 tutors, and 1,153 students. First, the Colleges of Education were grouped into clusters based on the programmes offered, and then a simple random sampling was used to select a college from each cluster for the study. The college selected offered at least one of the five programmes.

The second step in the sampling procedure was the adoption of the census technique to select all the principals and tutors of the colleges constituting the sample. The total number of principals selected was five and the total number of tutors was 180. A simple random sampling, using the lottery method, was used to select students in Levels 100 and 200 from each of the five colleges. The number of students in each of the five colleges selected were approximately the same ($N = 600$). Both open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires were used to gather data for the study.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Structures of Internal Quality Assurance Practices

What is the state of the structures of internal quality assurance in the Colleges of Education in Ghana? The research question sought to find out the state of the structures of internal quality assurance in the Colleges of Education in Ghana. Data from the students and tutors were used to answer the research question. Student respondents indicated how they view the state of internal quality assurance by selecting one of four response choices of completely dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, and completely satisfied. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the responses to each quality indicator and the results are presented in Table I

TABLE I: STRUCTURES OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

Quality Indicator	M	SD
Internal assessment of students	2.60	0.63
Time lectures begin for each semester	2.20	0.44
Use of instructional time	2.0	0.28
Stated learning outcomes	3.61	0.56
Tutorial support for students	1.40	0.50
Course handouts	2.60	0.22
Practicals or Field trips	2.40	0.25
Academic qualification of tutors	3.48	0.60
Professional experience of tutors	3.62	0.15
Well –motivated staff	2.61	0.43
Opportunity to appraise staff performance	1.47	0.33
Learner friendly lecture halls	2.45	0.22
Appropriate halls of residence	2.38	0.47
Well-equipped library	1.80	0.30
Waste disposal facilities	2.45	0.49
Dining facilities	2.50	0.41
Hygienic washrooms	2.48	0.43

The findings showed that students identified the state of *tutorial support for students* and *opportunity to appraise staff* as being “woefully inadequate.” However, the students identified the state of *stated learning outcomes* and the state of *professional experience of tutors* as being “excellent.” The findings also showed that the state of 50% of the quality indicator items ($n = 9$) were classified by the students as “more room for improvement.”

B. Classification of Quality Assurance Indicators

Table II shows the state of quality indicator items and the corresponding classification as perceived by respondents. The responses show indicators that were classified as ‘Excellent’, ‘Adequate’, ‘More room for improvement’ and ‘Woefully inadequate’.

TABLE II: STATE OF QUALITY INDICATOR BY STUDENTS

Items	Quality indicator
Stated learning objectives	Excellent
Professional experience of tutors	Excellent
Internal assessment of students	Adequate
Course handouts	Adequate
Academic qualification of tutors	Adequate
Well motivated staff	Adequate
Time lectures begin for each semester	More rooms for improvement
Use of instructional time	More rooms for improvement
Practicals/ field trips	More rooms for improvement
Learner friendly lecture halls. Appropriate halls of Residence	More rooms for improvement
Well equipped library	More rooms for improvement
Waste disposal facilities	More rooms for improvement
Dining facilities	More rooms for improvements
Hygienic wash rooms	More rooms for improvement

Group means and standard deviations based on categorization of quality assurance indicators into the three broad areas (i.e., pedagogy and learning, faculty credentials, facilities) were calculated and the results are shown in Table III.

TABLE III: CATEGORIZATION OF QUALITY INDICATORS AND STUDENT RESPONSES

Classification	M	SD
Pedagogy and Learning	2.40	0.68
Faculty Credentials	2.79	0.99
College Facilities	2.43	0.37

Taking the quality indicators as a group, the students did not identify the state of any of the categories as being “woefully inadequate” or “excellent.” However, the students identified the state of the area of *Instruction and Learning* and that of the area of *College Facilities* as being “more room for improvement.” The state of the area of *Faculty Credentials* was identified by the student as being “adequate.”

Using the data from the tutors, means and standard deviations were calculated for the responses to 12 items from the questionnaire for the tutors to address research question one. The information is presented in Table IV.

The findings showed that the tutors identified the state of *visible plans for college* improvement, staff development, and well-equipped library as being “woefully inadequate.” The tutors however, identified the state of *professional experience of tutors* as being “excellent.”

TABLE IV: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF QUALITY INDICATORS OF TUTOR RESPONDENTS

Quality Indicator	M	SD
Leadership style of administration	2.50	0.46
Visible plans for college improvement	1.45	0.49
Channel of communication	2.60	0.24
Internal assessment of students	2.80	0.46
Course handouts	3.20	0.31
Practicals or Field trips	2.50	0.55
Academic qualification of tutors	3.48	0.80
Professional experience of tutors	3.80	0.23
Staff development	1.40	0.41
Learner friendly lecture halls	2.50	0.52
Well-equipped library	1.40	0.36
Hygienic washrooms	2.20	0.29

According to the tutors, the state of equal number of indicators were as “more room for improvement” and “adequate.” Table V shows the quality indicator items and the corresponding classification by the tutors.

TABLE V: STATE OF QUALITY INDICATOR BY TUTORS

Item	Quality indicator
Stated learning objectives	Excellent
Professional experience of tutors	Excellent
Internal assessment of students	Adequate
Course handouts	Adequate
Academic qualification of tutors	Adequate
Well motivated staff	Adequate
Time lectures begin for each semester	More rooms for improvement
Use of instructional time	More rooms for improvement
Practicals/ field trips	More rooms for improvement
Learner friendly lecture halls. Appropriate halls of Residence	More rooms for improvement
Well equipped library	More rooms for improvement
Waste disposal facilities	More rooms for improvement
Dining facilities	More rooms for improvements
Hygienic wash rooms	More rooms for improvement

Group means and standard deviations based on the categorization of quality assurance indicators into the four broad areas (i.e., governance, instruction and learning, faculty credentials, facilities) were calculated. Table VI depicts the information on the computed means and standard deviations.

Table VI: CATEGORIZATION OF QUALITY INDICATORS AND TUTOR RESPONSES

Classification	M	SD
Governance	2.18	0.53
Instruction and Learning	2.83	0.48
Faculty Credentials	2.89	0.22
College Facilities	2.03	0.55

Taking the quality indicators as a group, the tutors identified the state of *governance and college facilities* as “more room for improvement.” The tutors also identified the state of *instruction and learning* as well as *faculty credentials* as “adequate.”

The state of the quality indicator items, especially in the areas of *instruction and learning* and *college facilities*, as identified by the students and the state of *governance* as identified by the tutors fall short of the standards set by various authors. This situation is problematic in pursuing quality education. According to (Ankomah *et al.*, 2005), the materials that support teaching and learning, their type, quality, and quantity impact significantly on the quality of education. Instruction and learning form the critical success factors in determining educational outcomes and any attempt to compromise their quality is

detrimental to assuring quality in the institution (Dano & Stensaker, 2007). (Askling,1997) explained that the facilities of the institution must meet the minimum acceptable standards for the institution to be considered for accreditation. The importance of the acceptable state of college facilities in assuring quality is underscored by prescriptions and checklists of quality assurance agencies. For example, (QAA, 2004) identifies the facilities that should be available and suggests the state in which the facilities should exist. The (QAA, 2004) posits that college facilities must meet adequacy, that is, minimum acceptable standards, and this is non-negotiable. The college should have well-equipped library facilities and highly quality faculty. Anything short of this amounts to compromising the quality of education delivery in the college. The findings show that the state of the structures of internal quality assurance, for example, facilities, do not meet the standards set by various authors. For example, (Tsinidou *et al.*, 2010) postulate that the tangibles (i.e., facilities) of an institution should be in a near impeccable state to assure quality.

C. Challenges with Internal Quality Assurance Practices

What challenges are associated with the conduct of internal quality assurance practices in the Colleges of Education?

The research question sought to find challenges associated with the conduct of internal quality assurance in the Colleges of Education in Ghana. Data from the principals and tutors were analysed to address the research question. Groups of ideas that coalesce around a theme were put together and modal scores were used to describe how frequently that particular theme occurred.

Three major themes emerged from the responses of the principals.

1. Recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff: About 80% of the principals indicated they face the challenge of recruiting highly qualified staff. The principals mentioned that the difficulty is associated with getting staff with graduate degrees in the subject areas, especially, in the sciences and mathematics. This situation, according to the principals (50%), results in the failure to adopt the appropriate teaching methodology. The principals (60%) indicated that in addition to the difficulty in getting the full complement of the staff are two pressing problems: (a) the high turnover rate of the staff and (b) staff pursuing other programmes (e.g., further studies) and missing lectures.

2. Inadequate teaching and learning materials: The principals (60%) mentioned inadequate teaching and learning materials citing insufficient budgetary allocation as the main cause of the situation. Learning is seriously hampered by the lack of instructional materials. Forty percent(40%) of the principals observed that both tutors and students use the absence of instructional materials as excuse for underperforming.

3.Inadequate facilities: Sixty percent(60%) of the principals alluded to the inadequacy of facilities in the colleges. Specifically, the principals identified inadequate residential facilities for students leading to congestion in the halls of residence.

The tutors indicated the degree of severity they assign to the challenges in the college. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the responses of the tutors to each item. Table VII depicts the information on the computed means and standard deviations.

TABLE VII: CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY TUTORS

Challenge	M	SD
Effective evaluation of tutors	2.34	0.58
Quality of grades of students admitted	3.65	0.42
Quality of continuous assessment	3.12	0.22
Nature of communication practices in the college	2.81	0.44
Calibre of quality assurance committee members	2.66	0.81
Learner friendly lecture halls	2.60	0.50
Well-equipped library	3.61	0.84
Leadership style of college administration	3.85	.033
Academic professional development process	2.71	0.38
Use of instructional time	3.48	0.22
Adoption of innovative technology	2.35	0.62

The tutors considered as “*very serious*” challenge the quality of grades of students admitted, well equipped library, and leadership style of college administration. The tutors considered as “moderately serious” challenge the *effective evaluation of* tutors and adoption of innovative technology. The tutors, however, considered the rest of the challenges as “serious” and none as “not serious.”

The computation of the mean of means ($M = 3.01$) for all the challenges revealed that the tutors considered the challenges, as an aggregate, to be “serious.”The challenges identified by the study are consistent with the findings of various authors, such as (Materu, 2007; Manyaga, 2008; Tsinidou, *et al* 2010). The finding that the tutors consider the challenges as serious is congruent with the findings of (Tsinidou *et al.* 2010). They opine that barriers to attaining quality cannot be taken lightly. All efforts in the institution should be marshaled to overcome the barriers.

D. Addressing Challenges of Quality Assurance

What coping mechanisms have been put in place by Colleges of Education towards addressing challenges of Quality Assurance?

The research question sought to find the strategies adopted by the colleges to address challenges associated with the conduct of internal quality assurance in the colleges. Data from the principals were analysed to address the research question. Groups of ideas that coalesce around a theme were put together and modal scores were used to describe how frequently that particular theme occurred. Five broad themes emerged from the responses of the principals.

1. Strengthening quality assurance units: Sixty percent(60%) of the principals suggested strengthening the quality assurance units with the appointment of trained staff and available resources to work. A functional quality assurance unit is to carry out effective in-service training and workshops for staff to understand the key areas that require constant attention for quality. The quality assurance units are also to conduct regular monitoring, supervision, and evaluation of all the activities of the college.

2. Improving facilities: The principals unanimously recommended the development of a systematic plan to improve the college facilities. Eighty percent(80%) of the principals specifically focused on equipping the school library with, for example, latest textbooks and computers with internet accessibility. Forty percent(40%) of the principals suggested the construction of new lecture halls and halls of residence to reduce congestion and overcrowding.

3. Targeted staff recruitment: The principals (60%) suggested the adoption of the targeted staff recruitment model, where tutors are identified and poached to join the college staff. They also suggested collaborative ventures between the heads of departments at the colleges and the heads of departments at the universities in identifying high calibre students pursuing various programmes, who will be the targets for headhunting to fill vacant positions in the colleges.

4. Supervision and evaluation: Sixty percent (60%) of the principals suggested holding heads of departments accountable for performance in the college. The heads of departments should display their schedule for frequent supervision for all to see. Forty percent of the principals suggested rewards and sanctions, where appropriate, to be tied to the outcome of the supervision and evaluation.

5. Financial management: The principals (80%) suggested finding innovative ways of raising funds to make up for the shortfalls in the government's budgetary allocation. The availability of funds would enable the college to provide the requisite resources and also go beyond meeting just the minimum standards. They also recommended having in place checks and balances to ensure financial discipline and controlled expenditure.

The findings about the coping strategies to address the challenges faced by colleges in internal quality assurance are supported by the guidelines put together in the Handbook for Institutional Audit by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in 2002. The guidelines focus among others on the role of the quality assurance unit, provision of resources, frequency of monitoring and supervision, and having the full complement of qualified faculty. The strategies identified in this study also are consistent with the coping strategies suggested by authors, such as, (Lomas, 2002; Watty, 2003; Woodhouse, 1999). For instance, the suggestion by the principals to strengthen quality assurance units in the colleges is in line with the postulates of (Lomas, 2002). When talking about fitness for purpose, (Lomas, 2002) suggests quality assurance unit at various sectors in an organization as the best starting place to begin addressing internal quality assurance. The quality assurance units at every sector of the college will provide opportunities for every member of the college to participate in assuring quality.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following conclusions and recommendations were arrived at:

Structures necessary for internal quality assurance in the Colleges of Education in Ghana are woefully inadequate. This is based on the finding that both students and tutors agreed that the state of governance and college facilities require "more rooms for improvement". The major challenges facing the Colleges of Education in internal quality assurance delivery were recruiting and retaining high quality staff, inadequate teaching and learning materials and poor college facilities for smooth academic work, inability to attract students with quality grades, and the need for college administrators to adopt a more democratic leadership style. Coping mechanisms put in place by some of the principals of the colleges to address the challenges include: establishing and strengthening quality assurance units in the colleges, engaging in targeted recruitment of qualified faculty, providing effective supervision and evaluation and finally pursuing financial management.

It was found that the state of structures of internal quality assurance in the Colleges of Education require more rooms for improvement. To deal with this problem, principals of the Colleges of Education should purposefully put in place quality assurance units in the colleges to specifically focus on quality

delivery. The units when put in place should be well resourced, and strictly monitored to function effectively. It is recommended that a significant percentage of Ghana Education Trust Fund (GET Fund) allocation for staff development and research is used for workshops, conferences and seminars to put the tutors abreast with tertiary operations. Tutors who express the desire to do further studies to enhance their professional development should be encouraged to enable them offer quality lesson delivery in their subject areas. The policy on academic staff recruitment that requires a prospective lecturer to have a research masters degree should be strictly enforced. A comprehensive staff development plan should be developed by the Colleges as part of their strategic plan to replace staff, upgrade staff, and improve competences of staff. Top management should be committed to the plan

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