Arts and Design Studies
ISSN 2224-6061 (Paper) ISSN 2225-059X (Online)
Vol.29, 2015

Evaluation of the Challenges of 21st Century on Quality Assurance of Higher Fashion Education in Ghana

Ninette Afi Pongo[1*] Thomas Obeng Asare[2] Ibrahim Abdul-Fatahi[3]
1.University of Education, Winneba, Kumasi Campus. P. O. Box 1277, Kumasi, Ghana
2.Kumasi Polytechnic, Kumasi, Ghana
3.Takoradi Polytechnic, School of Applied Arts, Department of Textiles
E-mail:afienyonam@yahoo.com*;toasarek@yahoo.com;abdulfatahiibrahim@gmail.com

Abstract
Quality Assurance has become an important component in Higher Education (HE). Even though a significant number of studies have been conducted on it, there are still many unanswered issues about how Quality Assurance (QA) improves the core processes involved in Higher Fashion Education (HFE). This study attempted to evaluate the challenges of QA in Higher Fashion Education in Ghana, using a mixed methods design based on the premise that, QA in HFE is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that involves the perspectives of different actors and requires the collection and analysis of data from different sources. The sample for this study included 100 participants from four higher education institutions in Ghana. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed to gather data. The study shows that, quality of education, particularly student learning is threatened by problems such as poor quality of educational inputs, processes and outputs, unavailability of resources due to increasing student population, the absence of a well-planned curriculum design and review processes. Other policy implications are discussed.
Keywords*:* Ghana, higher fashion education, quality assurance, the design school model

1. Introduction

The World Bank (2013) acknowledges that, knowledge has become a key driver of growth and development. The World Bank further maintains that countries with higher skill levels are better equipped to face new challenges and master technological discoveries for development. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), quality human capital remains a challenge compared with the continent's development needs. This challenge hinders development and undermines the foundation for sustainable development because, skills for the knowledge economy are built at the tertiary education level. Improving tertiary education systems must thus be high on the SSA's development agenda. African tertiary education institutions and policy makers must ensure that their workforce acquires the needed skills to compete, innovate, and respond to the complex social, environmental and economic situations (World Bank, 2013).

Education in SSA in the 21st century faces many unprecedented challenges. The primary reason is that knowledge has become the fundamental feature of the development process for many nations. According to Nigavekar (2006), the youth now requires three new skills – the ability to learn, to change and to analyze – to prepare for the challenges ahead. They also need to develop the appropriate skills to adapt to the various changes that will arise, since the 21st century represents change (Nigavekar, 2006). It is HE that prepare graduates with these new skills and competencies to enter a more complex and interdependent world. Indeed, Smith (2011) observed that there is a correlation between participation in HE and a country's level of development. Smith further argues that HE is crucial to economic the success and long-term development of Africa, a continent that is facing several challenges of social progress, economic growth, and technological advancement. Thus, there is a widespread and legitimate concern about Africa, not only by Africans themselves but the international community as well. Africa is the only continent in the world where according to Picker (2014), while the rest of the world's economy grew at an annual rate of 2 percent between 1960 and 2002, growth performance in Africa has been dismal.

Ghana's tertiary institutions enrol over 300,000 students in undergraduate, graduate, certificate and diploma programs in a full range of academic and professional fields (National Council for Tertiary Education, 2014). Ghana has one hundred and forty (140) accredited institutions, both public and private, offering four-year degrees, diplomas and certificates (National Accreditation Board, 2014). According to NCTE (2014), twenty-six percent of tertiary students are enrolled in private institutions. In Ghana, university admission is highly competitive, especially in fields such as; medicine, engineering, law, business and pharmacy. All HE institutions in Ghana operate a modular, semester system.

Afeti & Adubra, (2012) describe knowledge and skills as the key drivers of most economies. They oil the wheels of industry and commerce. Every day, new ways of doing things, new technologies and new products are made and at the core of this constant change is the dynamic interaction between knowledge, skills and enterprise (Afeti & Adubra, 2012). According to them, a critical mass of knowledge and skills is necessary for the effective participation of any country in the global economy and marketplace. Developing a skilled human

resource for the growth and transformation of African economies is thus a major development issue as noted by Afeti and Adubra (2012).

The past few years have seen incredible and rapid transformation in the industrial landscape in the world over; changing not only the foundations of economies and social life, but also the knowledge, skills and competencies that individuals need in almost every field (Baker et al., 2012). Quality assurance (QA) in HE is a systematic process of assessing and verifying inputs, outputs and outcomes against standardized benchmarks of quality, to support and enhance quality, ensure greater accountability and help the harmonization of standards across academic programmes, institutions and systems (UNESCO, 2008). According to UNESCO (2013), QA can take many forms, ranging from simple self-assessment to more comprehensive inspection, accreditation, review or audit(s) supported by external and independent peer review.

The challenges in the 21st century demands that HFE be significant and responsive to develop mechanisms to produce dynamic and technically competitive human resources to meet the challenges of the global world. Kozar & Hiller Connell (2015) notes that, there are concerns regarding students' professional development as has been echoed by employers. Importantly, QA strategies need to be adopted for affecting quality improvements in HFE and making it relevant and useful not only for sustained growth and development of higher fashion institutions but also in serving society in a progressive manner. Fashion is a playground of contradictions; creative and technical; art and profit; local and global. It throws a diverse set of people together to transform a creative vision into something tangible and profitable (Charbin, 2012). Fashion is a social phenomenon common to many fields of human activity and thinking and has always been a reflection of our society. It can transform an image, help express a person's identity or even make a social statement, in its wider sense; fashion portray the zeitgeist – the spirit of our times (Burke, 2011).

According to Hodges & Karpova (2009), global forces have shaped the fashion industry into a complex and far-reaching phenomenon. Fashion students in HE institutions do not only create cutting edge apparel, but are also, creative innovators and problem solvers who are constantly aware of current and future styles and trends (Burke, 2011). For Ghana to be able to compete in the international apparel industry, there is the need for continual evaluation of the challenges facing HFE in Ghana. Fashion business includes all the industries and services connected with fashion-design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, retailing, advertising and communications, publishing and consulting hence the need for excellence in HFE (Stone, 2013). The Ghanaian economy is going through a period of significant change, driven by a number of factors, including new and emerging technology; international trade and finance; competitive advantage; innovation and technical progress (WTO, 2013). This period of change has seen increasing focus on the ability and willingness of businesses and industries to adapt to change. Ghanaian higher educational institutions also need the capacity to innovate and respond flexibly to the shifting demands of the industry.

Sustainable development should aim at meeting the needs of the customers through the provision of quality HE (Ebuara, 2012). Since the 1990s, QA has become the key theme for HE institutions the world over (UNESCO, 2013). Academic scholars and fashion practitioners have raised many critical issues about the output of fashion students produced by higher education institutions. Though circumstances vary from country to country, several broad trends are contributing to the increasing interest in establishing mechanisms to ensure quality in HFE. Considering the gaps between actual practices and accepted practices of QA in higher educational institutions in Ghana, this study sought to examine the framework, conditions and models that underlie the QA in higher educational institutions with special focus on fashion, how comparable each are with accepted QA practices, how it may be enhanced, adopted and implemented as well as how it should be monitored and measured.

In the face of the increasing enrolment in HE - In 1970, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) estimated that there were roughly 32.5 million students enrolled in HE worldwide. In the year 2000, this estimation increased to nearly 100 million and in 2010 to 178 million. This translates into 4.3% average annual growth in tertiary enrolment, a very rapid growth when compared to the 1.6% average annual growth in the world population over the same period (UNDP, 2012). The number of HE students is forecast to further expand to reach 263 million by 2025 (British Council and IDP Australia, cited in Davis, 2003 and Daniel, 2009). Even though enrolment in HE is increasing at a fast rate in Africa, Okebukola & Shabani (2012) argued that, increased access has failed to be matched by improvements in quality, thus the need to design QA framework that is coherent and consistent with the goals of HFE in Ghana.

Although there is growing literature on QA in HFE, the field is still in its formative stages of development (Baijnath et al., 2001). QA in HFE is not well researched within the context of developing economies in Sub - Saharan Africa, much of the studies have been dominated by the US and the UK. In the Ghanaian context, research on higher fashion education is under-represented in literature and is largely being overlooked and remains a blind spot. The challenges facing Ghanaian HFE are multifaceted due to the complexities with the geopolitical dynamics and its embeddedness in educational configurations in the country (Ansah and Kissi, 2013). Fashion design is a service oriented industry, where the success of most fashion design

establishments depends on performance excellence and customer delight. Performance excellence means producing excellent graduates by imparting high quality education and shaping them to become complete individuals to face the competitive world in the modern fashion world.

1.1 Research questions

The central question that will be addressed in this research is *"How will quality assurance relative to the higher fashion education be rationalized to meet the challenges of the 21st century".*

The study sought to address three specific questions:

1. What are the challenges of the 21st century on quality assurance in higher fashion education?
2. What factors enable or impede the enactment and practice of accepted quality assurance systems in Ghanaian higher fashion education?
3. What is needed for improvement and how can that be adopted and implemented?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The importance of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Every country and its HE graduates are competing in an environment shaped by their local and national needs as well as international expectations and standards (Materu, 2007). The effects of globalization on international standards are increasing and public demand for has intensified. Educators and policymakers are challenged to set appropriate standards which reflect the needs and expectations of their stakeholders. Additionally, they are expected to put mechanisms in place to enforce those standards and monitor performance (Materu, 2007). Commenting on transformation in modern HE, Johnson et al. (2003) indicated that, the vision for change must come from inside the institution through the department and college levels. The authors further argued that, leadership, technology and academic culture are interconnected dimensions of managing organizational change. They endorsed what Clark (1983) specified that, changing HE from above is very difficult, although there is a lot of bottom-up change. Effecting changes in education is tough; it is hard work to change an educational and learning system that has been relatively untouched and unchallenged for decades. To this end, Blazey et al. (2003) noted that, it is easier to move a graveyard than to change a curriculum.

In the European dimension, QA in the Bologna Declaration (1999) is a vital aspect of any system of easily readable and comparable degrees. Its importance is generally recognized and indeed emphasized by the majority of countries in order for the creation of recognition procedures, facilitated mobility and increased confidence to avoid lowering of standards (see Bologna Declaration 1999). On the one hand, in the Prague communiqué (2001), Ministers recognized the vital role that QA system play in ensuring high quality standards and in facilitating the comparability of qualifications among member states. They encouraged HE institutions to disseminate examples of best practices and to design scenarios for mutual acceptance of evaluation and accreditation/certification mechanisms. The Prague communiqué further acknowledge the significance of QA as a key element in the move towards the creation of credible HE. Likewise, Africa shares common drivers for educational reform with many European countries due to colonialization, yet there are important differences such as demography, levels of academic infrastructure and other socio-cultural factors (Association for the Development of Education in Africa, 2011). Africa can learn from the European experience, but it should not be used to fit the African context, taking into account the uniqueness of indigenous Africa culture which cannot simply adopt the Bologna Process or the Prague communiqué in developing its HE due to cultural and institutional dissimilarities between Europe and Africa (ADEA 2011).

2.2 The importance of Quality Assurance in Higher Fashion Education

Fashion is an economic force, a culture industry and a powerful way to convey identity, politics, status, and personality (Stone, 2013). Stone explains that, an in-depth study of the history of fashion in its symbolic, creative and coercive faces confirms how it has been central in the construction of national identities and the remapping of the world economy. Stone (2013, p. 28) maintained that "fashion is one of the greatest economic forces in present day life; to a great extent, it determines what people buy". QA is therefore an essential element in the growing field of fashion studies.

The need to rethink the traditional organization of the social sciences and the humanities to include the impact of the study of fashion is thus extremely necessary for a successful higher fashion education. Since QA is a component of quality management and is focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled, HE institutions that run vocational programs such as fashion are expected to establish QA procedures, to carry out evaluations, appraise the effectiveness of their QA procedures and review the implementation of the findings of these procedures (Cedefop, 2009). In 2001, the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training set out a policy agenda for QA in Vocational Education and Training (VET) within the process of promotion as a way of enhancing European cooperation in VET (see Cedefop, 2009). As such, a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) was developed; this framework was endorsed in 2004 but gained

recognition in 2006 as there was a need to progress from the CQAF to that of a culture of quality improvement (Cedefop, 2009).

In 2008, the framework was proposed as a recommendation to the European Parliament and of the European Council. The report noted that QA *"should be seen as an instrument for continuous improvement of VET, based on a quality cycle establishing the appropriate interrelation between planning, implementation, evaluation and review of VET*" (Cedefop, 2009 p. 16). In addition, the report further notes that, QA implies a systematic approach to quality. Some qualifications and types of education and training, such as fashion, have weak reputations for quality, especially in Africa and specifically Ghana due to certain institutional constraints (Afeti, 2012). The recognition of quality of fashion education in general and its products is mostly not valued. To articulate the qualifications of fashion education with other qualifications, mechanisms must be put in place to assure quality, relevance, coherence consistency and standards of their qualifications and programs (Afeti, 2012).

2.3 The design school model

The design school proposes a model of strategy formulation that seeks to attain a match or fit between internal capabilities and external possibilities (Mintzberg, et al., 1998). The model places primary emphasis on the appraisals of the external and internal situations, the former uncovering threats and opportunities in the environment, the latter revealing strengths and weaknesses of the organization. The goal is to try to match the internal situation of the organization with the external situation of the environment (Ansoff, 1991).

The underlying assumption of the design school model includes: (1) strategy formation should be a deliberate, tightly controlled process of conscious thought. Strategy is neither intuitive nor natural but must be learned formally, (2) responsibility lies with the head who controls the strategy in a single mind and carries the responsibility to decide on and then teach the strategy to the organization, (3) the model for formulating strategy must be kept simple and informal (allowing for control), (4) each strategy is unique, developed as a creative act, dictated by situation and built on distinctive competencies, (5) strategy must be explicit, (6) the strategy is presented as a fully formulated grand conception, leaving little room for incremental or emergent strategies and (7) thinking precedes action. Implementation can only happen after the unique, full-blown, simple and explicit strategy has been fully formulated (Mintzberg, 1990).

The focus in this strategic toolkit is strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The SWOT with the design school model is a convenient tool for analysis and coming up with a strategy (Sarbah and Otu-Nyarko, 2014). QA in HFE needs to be critically examined through the lens of a strategic analytic tool as it makes it more relevant to meet national and international accepted standards. The realization that HFE in Ghana is critical in contributing to social inclusion, decent employment and poverty reduction should be a strong incentive for evaluating the challenges associated with it to directly link it to growth, development, poverty reduction and job creation.

3. Methodology

This study is exploratory and employs a case study strategy. An exploratory study is a valuable means of finding out 'what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light' (Robson, 2002:59). Whiles a case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 2002). Taking into consideration the purpose of this study, gathering and analysis of data were carried out using mixed methods. The mixed methods strategy seems to be the appropriate methodology for this study given the purpose of the research and the nature of research questions that this study seeks to address. Employing a single approach to the study QA systems and practices at any institutional level may limit the comprehensiveness of the data and accuracy of the findings (Saunders et al., 2009). The design school model is used as our conceptual framework to evaluate the challenges facing HFE in the 21st century in Ghana. The model highlights on the appraisals of both external and internal conditions of an organization, the former uncovering threats and opportunities in the environment, the latter revealing strengths and weaknesses.

As of 2014, there is no statistical information indicating the number of public or private universities offering the fashion design program in Ghana. The criteria for the case selection hence, was based on the fact that, such HE institutions are well known to the authors to offer the fashion design education programs. Based on this criterion, only four HE institutions were considered for the study – one public university, one private university and two polytechnics. In all, twenty (20) academic staff and eighty (80) students were drawn from the four HE institutions. The 20 academic staff members were lecturers in the department of fashion with an average of 6 years teaching experience in fashion design, whereas the 80 students were pursuing higher national diploma (at the Polytechnics) and Bachelor's degrees (at the Universities) in fashion design.

The names of the HE institutions used were left out for confidential reasons. Both semi- structured interviews and questionnaire surveys were used in the data collection. The data collection took place between October 2014 and December 2014. Two sets of questionnaires were designed and administered by the authors,

whereas the semi-structured interview were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 50 minutes to one hour each. All the interviews and the questionnaire surveys were conducted in English.

The questionnaires contained items on QA strategies, practices, challenges and procedures regarding the problem areas of quality assurance such as academic programs, staff, teaching and learning, learning resources, students' assessment and evaluation, curriculum and physical and financial resources. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. The questionnaires were self‐explanatory and respondents could complete it themselves. They were hand delivered to the respondents by the researchers and a proposed date was scheduled by the respondents for collection. Most of the returned questionnaires were received between two to five days after being given out; this approach yielded almost 93% of the response rate. Questions that were not answered by respondents were treated as missing data and were excluded from the analysis. In this paper, the researchers used closed-ended (Category, Ranking, Rating, and Matrix) questions. The response format was based on a 5-point Likert-scale rating pattern with weightings of Strongly Agree (SA) = 5, Agree (A) = 4, Not Sure (NS) = 3, Disagree =2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The questionnaire survey data were analyzed with the help of Statistical package for social science (SPSS), while content analytic technique was used to analyze the qualitative data collected through the semi-structured interviews. Below are the findings of the study.

4. Findings

Table 1 Self-evaluation by students

	Self-Evaluation	Percentage					Mean	S.E
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	Academic preparedness to pursue your study	1.4	2.8	12.5	26.4	50.0	4.30	.113
2.	Attitude towards your current field of study	-	4.2	6.9	30.6	54.2	4.41	.098
3.	Interest towards the courses you are attending	-	4.2	11.1	18.1	65.3	4.46	.102
4.	Motivation for learning	4.2	8.3	13.9	36.1	31.9	3.88	.135
5.	Skills in managing time	8.3	6.9	23.6	37.5	20.8	3.57	.139
6.	Academic competence	2.8	2.8	12.5	44.4	36.1	4.10	.110

1=Very poor, 2=Poor, 3=Not sure, 4=Good, 5=Very good

Students were requested to evaluate themselves based on a set of activities. The responses show about two-thirds (76.4%) of the respondents considered their academic preparedness to pursue their studies to be good and very good, whereas, two-thirds (83.4%) generally see their interest in courses they are pursuing to be good and very good. The motivation for learning was evaluated as good and very good by 36.1% and 31.9% of the respondents respectively. In addition, the attitude of the respondents to time management skills has been good and very good as depicted by 37.5% and 20.8% of the respondents respectively.

The study also focused on the methods employed by the department/faculty to help students become aware of their support to improve quality of their education. Table 2 indicates their responses.

Table 2: Methods employed to solicit for student support to improve quality of education

Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Orientation Programs	54	43
Regular meeting with students	29	23
Publishing rules and policies of the department	28	22
Brochures	15	12
TOTAL	**126**	**100**

Respondents were asked to indicate methods often employed to improve the quality of education in their various institutions. About 43% indicated the use of Orientation Programs to improve quality of education. 23% said they organize meetings with students whiles, 22% of the total responses indicated publishing rules and policies of the department. The least used method in improving quality of education was 'Brochures' with 15 responses constituting 12%.

Table 3: Quality Assurance evaluation in institutions

	Quality Evaluation	Percentage rcent						Mean	S.E.
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
1.	Academic staff commitment to high quality in teachers	4.2	6.9	4.2	12.5	29.2	37.5	4.78	.174
2.	Student involvement in Quality Assurance practices	13.9	5.6	6.9	12.5	18.1	27.8	4.16	.235
3.	Professional competence of teaching staff	2.8	2.8	1.4	8.3	37.5	38.9	5.09	.143
4.	Relevance of the courses offered	1.4	11.1	8.3	13.9	29.2	26.4	4.52	.174
5.	Standard of lectures and presentations	1.4	4.2	5.6	16.7	25.0	34.7	4.87	.156
6.	Variety of assessment methods	6.9	8.3	4.2	20.8	22.2	27.8	4.40	.195
7.	Promptness of feedback	12.5	20.8	12.5	9.7	19.4	12.5	3.46	.216
8.	Library resources	2.8	8.3	2.8	12.5	25.0	36.1	4.79	.180
9.	Laboratories/Equipment	9.7	45.8	8.3	5.6	5.6	9.7	2.77	.196

1=No Opinion, 2=Very dissatisfied, 3=Dissatisfied, 4=Not sure, 5=Satisfied, 6=Very Satisfied

Table 3 presents frequencies and mean scores on students' level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the evaluation of Quality Assurance practices in the various institutions studied. The results indicate more than half (66.7%) of the respondents were satisfied and very satisfied with the academic staff's commitment to quality teaching. In addition, there was nearly a general spread of responses among the respondents regarding student's involvement in Quality Assurance practices in their institutions. That notwithstanding, almost half, 45.9% of the respondents had their responses skewed towards the satisfaction end of the scale. On the issue of professional competence of teaching staff, again, about two-thirds (76.4%) of the respondents indicated they were satisfied and very satisfied respectively, with the level of professional competences exhibited by the teaching staff in their institutions.

However, concerning the relevancy of the courses offered, 29.2% and 26.4% of the respondents was satisfied. Again, the respondents were asked to comment on the standard of lectures and presentations. About 25% of the respondents expressed their satisfaction, whereas, 34.7% were very satisfied with the standard of lectures and presentation. On the variety of assessment methods, 27.8% of the respondents were very satisfied and 22.2% expressed their satisfaction with the variety of assessment methods in their institutions With library resources, 25% and 36.1% of the respondents were satisfied and very satisfied with the level of resources at their disposal respectively. However, the same cannot be said of the state of laboratories/equipment in the institutions as the results revealed nearly half (45.8%) of the respondents were very dissatisfied with the state of laboratories and equipment in their institutions.

Table 4: Level of satisfaction with competencies gained by students during their study

	Competencies	Percentage						Mean	S.E.
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
1.	Subject matter knowledge	1.4	4.2	2.8	16.7	20.8	48.6	5.09	.146
2.	Problems solving skills	8.3	11.1	1.4	29.2	16.7	26.4	4.22	.197
3.	Analytical/critical thinking skill	1.4	5.6	8.3	18.1	29.2	31.9	4.74	.153
4.	Practical skill	2.8	16.7	11.1	19.4	13.9	30.6	4.24	.192
5.	Research ability	4.2	12.5	9.7	19.4	22.2	25.0	4.27	.186
6.	Your overall preparation for a professional career	4.2	4.2	9.7	15.3	23.6	34.7	4.68	.176

1=No Opinion, 2=Very dissatisfied, 3=Dissatisfied, 4=Not Sure, 5=Satisfied, 6=Very Satisfied

It is assumed that, after gaining admission into the institutions, the academic achievement of students depends essentially on the quality and quantity of their lecturers, though there are other contributing factors. In this regard, the role of teaching staff is fundamental to improving student learning through quality teaching. Quality teaching demands academic staff with appropriate qualifications, professional competences, motivation and commitment that is relevant to the level of programs assigned to them. In this regard, respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with competencies gained during their study. The responses as shown in table 4 indicates that, competencies regarding subject matter knowledge was 20% and 48.6% of respondents are satisfied and very satisfied respectively. With regards to problem solving skills acquired, majority of the respondents were "satisfied" and "very satisfied" and 29.2% of the respondents could not decide on whether they were satisfied or not. Again, with regards to analytical/critical thinking skills, the results illustrate that 29.2% of the respondents were satisfied and 31.9% were very satisfied. When it comes to practical skills, majority of the

respondent's responses was skewed towards the satisfaction end of the scale. Similarly, 22.2% of the respondents were satisfied with their research ability likewise 25% who also stated they were very satisfied with their research abilities. On the overall preparedness of the respondents for a professional career, the results as depicted in table 4 suggests that more than half (58.3%) of the respondents are satisfied and very satisfied with their overall preparedness for a professional career.

Table 5: Challenging factors in Quality Assurance

	Challenging factors	Percentage					Mean	S.E
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	Higher education provisions	11.1	9.7	15.3	20.8	27.8	3.52	.179
2.	Rapid globalization, impacts of technology	4.2	12.5	22.2	23.6	26.4	3.62	.149
3.	Poor entry qualification	41.7	6.9	9.7	16.7	8.3	2.32	.194
4.	Poor program/curriculum planning review	30.6	8.3	13.9	13.9	16.7	2.73	.204
5.	Population explosion and overcrowded lecture halls	16.7	5.6	11.1	6.9	43.1	3.65	.210
6.	Poor teaching methods employed by lectures	36.1	8.3	11.1	12.5	12.5	2.47	.205
7.	Poor student teacher relationship	34.7	8.3	18.1	9.7	12.5	2.48	.194
8.	Poor evaluation of student academic performance	30.6	13.9	23.6	5.6	8.3	2.36	.172
9.	Unstable academic calendar due to incessant strikes by staff	9.7	11.1	16.7	11.1	34.7	3.60	.186
10.	University leadership	11.1	6.9	26.4	16.7	19.4	3.33	.173
11.	Low commitment and engagement of students for their learning	20.8	12.5	12.5	16.7	18.1	2.98	.201
12.	Academic preparation of incoming students	18.1	6.9	15.3	13.9	30.6	3.38	.200
13.	Poorly equipped libraries	11.1	19.4	13.9	12.5	26.4	3.28	.189
14.	Laboratories do not have essential apparatus	8.3	12.5	6.9	6.9	47.2	3.88	.194

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Students were asked to point out factors challenging Quality Assurance in their respective institutions. The results from Table 5 demonstrates (48.6%) of the respondents agreeing that quality assurance in their institutions is challenged by the provisions of higher education. In addition, half (50%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that quality assurance in their institutions is challenged by rapid globalization, as well as technological advancement. Furthermore, almost half, (48.6%) of the respondents disagreed that poor entry qualification of students is a challenge to quality assurance in their institutions. Similarly, 30.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed that poor program/curriculum planning is a challenge to quality assurance. However, 50% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the increase in population and overcrowded lecture halls pose a challenge to quality assurance. About 44.4% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed that poor teaching methods employed by lecturers is also a challenge to quality assurance.

That notwithstanding, 44.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed that poor evaluation of student's academic performance challenges quality assurance efforts. On the contrary, 45.8% agreed and strongly agreed that quality assurance in their institutions is challenged by unstable academic calendar due to incessant strike actions undertaken by staff members. There was a general spread of responses regarding the possibility of University leadership posing any challenge to quality assurance activities The results shows that (36.1%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed to that effect. However, it is worthy of note that, 26.4% of the respondents remained neutral on the subject. Also, 33.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed that low commitment and engagement of students for their learning poses a challenge to quality assurance. On the contrary, 44.5% agreed and strongly agreed that academic preparation of incoming students also challenge quality assurance. In terms of infrastructure, 38.9% agreed and strongly agreed that a poorly equipped library in the institutions is a challenge to quality assurance. Also, more than half (54.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed with the notion that, poorly resourced laboratories in their institution is a challenge to quality assurance.

5. Discussions

The literature review seems to largely support the results of the studies, but requires critical consideration in some aspects. The empirical findings did not entirely support the theory of this study, which suggests the possibility of the weight of some variables in the model that was used to be inadequate. From the results it is clear that, the perception that quality education in HE institutions requires investing in important inputs - human,

financial and physical resources is not farfetched. The quantity and quality of staff; adequacy and accessibility of financial and physical resources are considered as important input elements for HE institutions. The analysis is based on the assumption that, ensuring quality of inputs is a necessary condition for quality learning to occur.
It was also discovered that, quality of education, particularly student learning, is susceptible to issues including quality of educational inputs, processes and outputs, unavailability or mismatch of available resources with increasing student population, lack of well-planned and coherent curriculum design and review processes, even student and staff evaluation of teaching and external examiner system, which some of the institutions indicated were QA methods and procedures were not fully operational as they should. It is very difficult to expect the quality of student learning without ensuring the availability of adequate resources. The findings suggest that qualification, competence and motivation of the teaching staff across all the institutions were not very satisfactory. Academic staff across all the institutions were not properly trained, motivated and engaged to face challenges and improve quality of teaching to the level it should be. Although there are differences in the qualification mix of staff, shortage of qualified and experienced staff is a feature across all the institutions studied.

The study employed key concepts from contingency and neo-institutional theories to understand and explain how the internal and external organizational environment of HE institutions influences their actual quality assurance practices. Contingency theory provides an understanding of how organizations operate under varying conditions (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). It holds the assumption that the best practices depend on the contingencies of the situation, implying that there is no one best way for all organizations. It focuses on the task environment of organizations. While neo-institutional perspectives emphasize the importance of the institutional environment of organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Fundamentally, specific institutional and external environmental factors influenced the adoption and practice of QA in most of the institutions studied. The absence of staff and student engagement and commitment; institutional commitment and support for quality; population explosion and overcrowded lecture halls; inadequate and improper use of resources were major challenges faced by most institutions. This is as a result of the lack of a well-organized and functioning internal QA system with appropriate policies, structures, methods and instruments. Some institutions adopted and introduced quality assurance policies and structures to address stakeholder requirements. This suggests that the introduction of policies by some institutions were only meant to serve the purpose of compliance thereby getting legitimacy stakeholders. The findings support the arguments of institutional theory that organizations design their formal structures, based on the prescriptions of the customs of the institutional environment, to get legitimacy that ensures their survival (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1991). The findings in this study also support the theoretical arguments that externally driven quality assurance initiatives may encourage a culture of compliance and HE institutions may exhibit resistance when the initiatives are not aligned with their values, beliefs and traditions (Newton, 2002).

Good practices in quality assurance were drawn from the literature review to serve the purpose of this study. Accordingly, it is argued that accepted quality assurance system leads to improvement of student learning when the institutions own it and when the external quality assurance system plays a supportive role. Most institutions still rely on the traditional internal practices of assuring quality. These internal practices were found to be ineffective in improving the quality of the core educational processes. It was also discovered that, there is no substantial difference among the institutions in terms of the adequacy and effectiveness of their internal QA systems in improving quality of student learning. The universities conducted institutional self‐evaluation. This suggests that the universities are more likely to resist the adoption of externally driven reform agendas and policies than the polytechnics. This is because the universities have greater historical experience, capacity and strength to challenge policies that may not be in line with its deep‐rooted norms, values and beliefs.

The lack of a strong regulatory body that must stimulate and facilitate internal quality development processes; bureaucratic complexity of the review process and government reform policies; rapid globalization, impacts of technology; variation between internal QA practices and accepted practices were all setbacks to ensuring QA practices in the institutions as specified by some staff members interviewed. Analysis of the interview data also shows that, the inadequacy of the available facilities and support services is a major problem across most institutions. Library service is obviously central to ensuring effective teaching and learning in higher education. It is important to make sure libraries are equipped with adequate and relevant collection of books and other reading materials relevant to the program. The same is true concerning the adequacy of laboratories. As two of the student's put it, "the laboratory facilities either do not exist or those that are available are insufficiently inadequate'. Staff respondents also share similar views regarding the inadequacy of facilities and services. There was also the problem of mismatch between the available facilities and the increasing student population in most institutions.

The overall findings in this study suggest that most of the enabling internal and external factors for QA are missing. In such circumstances, it is very difficult to expect successful implementation of QA in these institutions.

5. Conclusion, recommendations and limitations

The study was based on two major assumptions. First, quality assurance of education in general and student learning in particular is the primary responsibility of HE institutions and this is influenced directly by the internal context of each institution. Second, the external factors play an important role in creating the conditions that facilitate internal QA practices. This may include setting and enforcing laws and regulations through regulatory bodies and policy instruments that affect organizational processes - leadership, student admission, staffing and resources. The finding indicates that, the major challenge for the adoption and implementation of internal QA at the institutions is not lack of laws, policies and structures, but lack of professional capacity and commitment.

This suggests that initiating and introducing laws and regulatory bodies are necessary but not sufficient conditions to affect QA, unless there is a supportive environmental context. There is also the issue of performance indicators for assessing the effectiveness of QA procedures in relation to their responsiveness to social demand and the needs of the labour market. It is difficult without these to even assess the impact of QA systems and practices. Externally, the inability of the education system to capacitate and build students' readiness in required ways - the number of non-degree awarding tertiary institutions in Ghana is a cause for concern. Some of these institutions play an essential role in the preparation of students for the recognized degree granting HE institutions. Yet, little is known about their QA practices. Also, the lack of thorough planning and sufficient preparation in implementing government educational reforms such as increased enrolment are major challenges to the practice of QA in Ghanaian higher fashion education.

It may be argued that in view of the rapidly growing demand for HE, rapid expansion is inevitable. But the concern here is how the institutions can address access without compromising quality. As higher education institutions look to the future, there is the need to think more deeply about the prospects and threats presented by evolving market trends and the driving forces behind them. With a different approach higher education can discover what they can do that is new and how best to do it, thus find itself not just navigating tomorrow's global trends, but actually shaping them. Overall, the study has demonstrated that, there are obvious challenges as well as quality gaps between intended and accepted QA practices, and quality of higher fashion education in Ghana, particularly student learning experience is constrained by a multitude of interrelated problems both internally and externally.

This calls for a closer attention of the existing QA systems and practices. Relative to the findings, the following are recommended. First, the National Accreditation Board (NAB) and other mandated bodies should (i) strengthen their legal and regulatory frameworks to facilitate the adoption and implementation of internal quality assurance systems in the institutions, (ii) ensure that the HE sector are led and staffed– with highly qualified professionals, this may enable them to initiate and implement QA policies and procedures, (iii) to increase the credibility and reliability of the QA system, there should be transparency about the consequences of the QA system and institutions' quality status should be publicly available. This study had some limitations. First, due to moderate resources, the sample size was restricted, the study focused on only four (4) HE institutions. The sample size could have been expanded by including all polytechnics and universities, both public and private that offer fashion, as a larger sample size would have ensured a representative distribution of the population. Also, the qualitative data collected may contain some possible response biases. Further, some questionnaires were not completely filled and not all the questionnaires administered were retrieved. Finally, QA procedures, implementation and challenges were applied and tested in the homogeneous context of Ghanaian HE. Studying one country means it is unlikely to address the influence and differences between countries and cultures. This poses a limitation to the generalizability of the findings of this study as they are historical and cultural traditions that are specific to each country setting. However, the institutional characteristics and their relationship with external influences found in the Ghanaian HE institutions have several characteristics that are of a general kind and reflect general principles of QA, thus, these findings might be relevant in other countries with similar cultural and institutional similarities.

References

Afeti, G. (2012). *Technical and Vocational Education and Training for Industrialization*. The African Research and Resource Forum: Occasional Paper; Kenya.

Afeti, G. & Adubra, A. L. (2012). *Lifelong Technical and Vocational Skills development for Sustainable Socioeconomic Growth in Africa*. Burkina Faso: Association for the Development of Education in Africa.

Altbach, P. G. (2011). *Leadership for world-class universities: Challenges for developing countries.* New York: Routledge.

Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L. & Rumbley. L. E. (2009). *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution.* France: A Report Prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education.

Ansah, S. K. & Kissi, E. (2013). Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Ghana: A Tool for Skill

Acquisition and Industrial Development. *Journal of Education and Practice* 4 (16), 172-180.

Ansoff, H. I. (1991). Critique of Henry Mintzberg's The Design School: Reconsidering the Basic Premises of Strategic Management. *Strategic Management Journal, 12(6), 449-461*.

Association for the Development of Education in Africa. (2011). Working Group on Higher Education, creating an African higher education and research Space. Retrieved 26 August 2014 https://sig.ias.edu/news/adea-creating-african-higher-education-and-research-space

Baijnath, N., Maimela, S. & Singh, P. (eds.) (2001). *Quality assurance in open and distance learning*. Pretoria: University of South Africa & Technikon SA.

Bologna Declaration. (1999). The European Higher Education Area. Bologna: Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education.

Blazey, M., Davison, K. S. & Evans, J. (2003). *Insights to Performance Excellence in Education.* An Inside Look at the 2003 Baldrige Award Criteria for Education. Milwaukee, WI: ASQ Quality Press.

Burke, S. (2011). *Fashion Designer: Concept to Collection*. UK: Burke Publishing.

Charbin, A. (2012*). Collaboration in the Fashion Industry*. India: San Blue Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.

Clark, B. (1983). *The Higher Education System. Academic Organization in Cross- National Perspective.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher (2001). Towards The European Higher Education Area. Prague: May 19th, 2001.

Currall, S. C. & Towler, A. J. (2003). *Research Methods in Management and Organizational Research: Toward Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques*. In A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (Eds.), Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Daniel, J.S. (2009). *Highlights of the UNESCO Global Forum on Rankings and Accountability: Uses and Misuses.* Closing presentation, Paris. www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/RANKINGS/StamenkaJohnDaniel.pdf

Davis, T.M. (2003), Atlas of Student Mobility. Institute of International Education, New York.

Diamond, I. (2008). *Education, Globalization and the knowledge economy*. The Economic and Social Research Council. A Commentary by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme; London: by Phillip Brown, Hugh Lauder, and David Ashton.

Ebuara, V. O. (2012). Quality Control Measures and Sustainable Development in Higher Education System in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice* 3(7), 81-95.

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. (2009). *The relationship between quality assurance and VET certification in EU Member States report on vocational training research*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Guthrie, H., Perkins, K. & Mitchell, J. (2005). *A workforce development framework for VET practitioners 2008-2013*. Australia: Western Australian Department of education and Training.

Hamad, M. M. & Hammadi, S. T. (2011). *Quality Assurance Evaluation for Higher Education Institutions Using Statistical Models*. *International Journal of Database Management Systems* Vol.3, No. 3.

Hayward, F. M. (2006). *Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education in Africa.* Burkina Faso: Paper prepared for presentation at the Conference on Higher Education Reform in Francophone Africa: Understanding the Keys of Success June 13-15, 2006.

Hodges, N. & Karpova, E. (2009). Making a major decision: an exploration of why students enrol in fashion programmes. *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education,* 2(2-3) 47-57.

Johnson, M. E., Hanna, D. E. & Olcott, D. (2003). *Bridging the gap: leadership, technology, and organizational change for university deans and chairpersons*. Madison, Wis.: Atwood Pub.

Kozar, J. M. & Kim Y. Hiller Connell, K. Y. (2015). The fashion internship experience: identifying learning outcomes in preparing students for the 'real world'. *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education,* 8(1), 3–11.

Lawrence, P. R. & Lorsch, J. W. (1967). Organization and environment: Managing differentiation and integration. Boston: *Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration.* (cf. Pfeffer, 1992)

Materu, P. & Righetti, P. (2010). Quality Assurance in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Research in Comparative and International Education* Vol. 5.

Materu, P. (2007). *Higher Education Quality Assurance in Sub-Saharan Africa Status, Challenges, Opportunities, and Promising Practices.* Africa Region Human Development Department, Washington, D.C.: World Bank Working paper no. 124.

Meyer, J. & Rowan, B. (1991). In*stitutionalized Organizations: formal structure as myth and ceremony*. In DiMaggio, P.J. & Powell, W.W. (Eds.), The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Meyer, J. W. & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony.

American Journal of Sociology, 83 (2): 340–363.

Newton, J. (2002), Barriers to Effective Quality Management and Leadership: case study of two academic departments. *Higher Education*, 44 (2), 185 - 212.

Nigavekar, A. (2006). Roadmap for Reforms in Governance and Management of Indian Higher Education System. Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) *Journal of Management,* 36(1).

Nkunyah, M., H. H. Bienefeld, S. & Hansert, C. (2009). *Developing internal quality assurance mechanisms - towards an East African quality assurance framework (Trends in Quality Assurance).* A Selection of Papers from the 3rd European Quality Assurance Forum, Belgium: European University Association.

Mintzberg, H. (1990). The design school: Reconsidering the basic premises of strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal,* 11(3), 171-195.

Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B. & Lampel, J. (1998) *Strategy Safari: A guided tour through the wilds of strategic management.* New York: The Free Press.

National Accreditation Board (2014). List of Accredited Institutions. University-Directory.

National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) (2014). Accredited Tertiary Institutions in Ghana.

Okebukola, P. A., & Shabani, J. (2012). Report of the study on the establishment of the Africa regional quality assurance framework. A study commissioned by the ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa) Working Group on Higher Education, Tunis.

Onyesom, M. & Ashibogwu, N. K. (2013). *Towards Quality Assurance in Business Education in Nigeria: Constraints and Control. Asian Journal of Business Management*, 5(3), 306-312.

Picker, L. (2014). *The Economic Decline in Africa*. UK: The National Bureau of Economic Research.

Saunders, M. Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2009*). Research Methods for Business Students* (5th edn). England: Pearson Education Limited.

Sarbah, A. & Otu-Nyarko, D. (2014). An Overview of the Design School of Strategic Management (Strategy Formulation as a Process of Conception*). Open Journal of Business and Management*, 2, 231-249.

Smith, W. (2011). *The Paradigm Shift in Higher Education: A Call for Action*. Speech delivered at Annual Conference of the Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA). UWI Cave Hill Campus, Barbados.

Stone, E. (2013). *The Dynamics of Fashion*. Canada: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.

The Global Information Technology Report. (2013). *Growth and Jobs in a Hyperconnected World.* World Economic Forum Insight Report

Wells, P. J. (2014). *The DNA of a Converging Diversity: Regional Approaches to Quality Assurance in Higher Education Higher Education.* Washington D.C.: Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

UNDP (2012), *World Population Prospects*: The 2010 Revision. http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm.

UNESCO (2013). *Quality assurance in Higher Education*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011), Global Education Digest 2011, UNESCO Publishing. Montreal: http://stats.uis.unesco.org

UNESCO. (2009). World Conference on Higher Education. 2009 Final report. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2008). Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity. Governance Terms. Paris: UNESCO.

World Bank (2013). *Tertiary education in Africa*. Education in Sub Saharan Africa: http://go.worldbank.org/K09Q14BTT0 : Retrieved on September 2, 2014.

World Bank (2011). *World Development Indicators*. UNDP (2010). Human Development Index.

World Bank. (1999). *World development report: knowledge for development*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

World Trade Organisation (2013). *Factors shaping the future of world trade*. World Trade Report. Geneva: WTO Publications.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
http://www.iiste.org

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: http://www.iiste.org/journals/ All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: http://www.iiste.org/book/

Academic conference: http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digtial Library , NewJour, Google Scholar