

**IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A POLICY INSTRUMENT IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA**

By

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Declaration

I Netshifhefhe Lufuno Phillip hereby declare that this Mini – Dissertation entitled **“Implementation of Quality Assurance as a policy instrument in the University of Venda”** which I am submitting at the University of Venda for the Masters in Public Management (MPM) is a product of my own conception and effort. It has never been submitted to any institution of learning for academic purposes. Wherever information has been used from other sources, necessary acknowledgement has been made in the form of references and such sources are listed in references.



01 July 2020

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Date

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Abstract

The study investigated the implementation of Quality Assurance as a policy instrument at the University of Venda. Within the study, the researcher critically analyzed the implementation of Quality Assurance policy as a system and the procedures within the University. To universities around the world, quality assurance in higher education institutions has become a matter of great importance. In South Africa, quality assurance roles and practices are closely guided by legislative guidelines, which are primarily structured to report and comply with universities' obligations to DHET, CHE and SAQA, and so, too the national demand for universities to contribute to the study and advancement of higher education policy. This study used a qualitative research approach which included ethnographic method to address the question on the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument using University of Venda as a case in point. The study findings revealed that the illustration of the quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education context is very critical to enable an institution of higher learning to execute its core business in a way that quality uncompromised. Stakeholders should have faith in the institution and that the university should undertake a systematic cycle of external program assessments based on teaching and learning concerns and take the necessary steps to build capacity and provide support in curriculum design and program development processes at the school and departmental level. The study concluded by giving recommendations on what are the strategies that the University can apply in enhancing the "quality of its core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement."

Key words: Quality Assurance, Policy, Policy implementation, Policy Instrument.

Table of contents

| Contents | Page Number |
|--|--------------------|
| Declaration | i |
| Acknowledgement | ii |
| Abstract | iii |
| Table of Contents | IV |
| List of acronyms | v |
| | |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY | |
| 1.1. Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.2. Background | 1 - 4 |
| 1.3. Problem statement..... | 4 |
| 1.4. Aim of the study..... | 4 |
| 1.5. Objectives of the study..... | 5 |
| 1.6. Research questions..... | 5 |
| 1.7. Significance of the study..... | 5-6 |
| 1.8. Delimitation of the study..... | 6 |
| 1.9. Limitations of the study..... | 6 |
| 1.10 Definition of operational concepts..... | 6-8 |
| 1.11 Organization of the study..... | 6-9 |
| 1.12. Conclusion..... | 9-10 |
| CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 11 |
| 2.1. Introduction..... | 11 |
| 2.2. Quality assurance: A holistic approach..... | 11-12 |
| 2.3. Historical overview of quality assurance globally..... | 12-14 |
| 2.4. Quality assurance mechanism and its use as a policy instrument..... | 14 |
| 2.5. Contextualization of a policy instrument..... | 14-16 |
| 2.6. Generic classes of policy instruments..... | 16 |
| 2.6.1 Mandates..... | 16-17 |
| 2.6.2 Inducements..... | 17 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 2.6.3 Capacity-Building..... | 17-18 |
| 2.6.4 System-Changing..... | 18 |
| 2.7. Significance of quality assurance in higher education System..... | 18-20 |
| 2.8. Background of quality assurance in South African higher education context..... | 20-22 |
| 2.9. Approaches or methodologies of quality assurance..... | 22-23 |
| 2.9.1 Reviews..... | 23-24 |
| 2.9.2 Accreditation..... | 24 |
| 2.9.3 Institutional Audit..... | 25 |
| 2.10. Legislative framework of quality assurance in South Africa..... | 25 |
| 2.10.1 South African Constitutional Educational Provision..... | 25-26 |
| 2.10.2 Higher Education Act 101 of 1997..... | 26-27 |
| 2.10.3 Report on the National Commission on Higher Education, A framework for transformation, 1996..... | 27 |
| 2.10.4 Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of Higher Education, 1997..... | 27-28 |
| 2.10.5 South African Qualification Authorities (SAQA) Act no 58 of 1995..... | 28 |
| 2.11. Quality assurance systems at the University of Venda..... | 29-30 |
| 2.12. University of Venda Quality assurance structure and responsibilities..... | 31 |
| 2.13. Conclusion..... | 31-32 |
| CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY..... | 33 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 3.1 Introduction..... | 33 |
| 3.2 Research design..... | 33 |
| 3.2.1 Descriptive research design..... | 34 |
| 3.2.2 Explanatory research design..... | 34 |
| 3.3 Research methodology..... | 34-35 |
| 3.3.1 Qualitative research methodology..... | 35 |
| 3.4 Study area..... | 35-36 |
| 3.5 Population of the study..... | 36 |
| 3.6 Sampling..... | 36 |
| 3.7 Sampling methods..... | 37 |
| 3.8 Sampling size..... | 37 |
| 3.9 Data collection method..... | 37-38 |
| 3.10 Data analysis..... | 38-39 |
| 3.11 Ethical considerations..... | 39 |
| 3.11.1 Informed consent..... | 39 |
| 3.11.2 Anonymity and confidentiality..... | 40 |
| 3.11.3 Voluntary participation..... | 40 |
| 3.11.4 No harm to participant..... | 40 |
| 3.12 Conclusion..... | 41 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION..... | 42 |
| 4.1 Introduction..... | 42 |
| 4.2 Presentation of data collected through ethnographic method..... | 42 |
| 4.2.1 Illustration of quality assurance as a policy in higher education..... | 42-43 |
| 4.2.2 The extent of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda..... | 43-44 |
| 4.2.3 The implications of the state of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda..... | 44-46 |
| 4.2.4 Recommendations or strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda..... | 46-47 |
| 4.2.4.1 Strategies in line with programme planning, design and management..... | 47 |
| 4.2.4.2 Strategies that can enhance effectiveness of quality assurance at the University of Venda in line with access and admission..... | 47-48 |
| 4.2.4.3 Strategies in line with student's development and support..... | 48-50 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 4.2.4.4 Strategies that can enhance effectiveness of quality assurance at the University of Venda in line with assessment of student learning..... | 50-51 |
| 4.3. Presentation of data collected through interviews..... | 51 |
| 4.3.1. Question 1. What is the illustration of the quality assurance as a policy as a policy in higher education context?..... | 51-53 |
| 4.3.2. Question 2. To what extent is the implementation of the quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?..... | 53-55 |
| 4.3.2. Question 3. What are the implications of the state of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?..... | 55-57 |
| 4.3.3. What are the recommendations or strategies to enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda?..... | 57-60 |
| 4.3 Conclusion..... | 60 |
| CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION..... | 61 |
| 5.1 Introduction..... | 61 |
| 5.2 Suggested Good Practice..... | 61 |
| 5.2.1 Suggested good practice regarding Academic Planning and Curriculum Management..... | 61 |
| 5.2.2 Suggested good practice regarding Policies and Procedures for design and approval of programmes..... | 61-62 |
| 5.2.3 Suggested good practice regarding Operationalization of Mission & Goals/ Academic Planning Framework/ Teaching & Learning Plan and Strategy..... | 62 |
| 5.2.4 Suggested good practice regarding consultation / participation of internal and external stakeholders..... | 62 |
| 5.2.5 Suggested good practice regarding feasibility and resources..... | 62-63 |
| 5.2.6 Suggested good practice regarding staffing..... | 63 |
| 5.2.7 Suggested good practice regarding students..... | 63 |
| 5.2.8 Suggested good practice regarding Management Information Systems (MIS)..... | 64 |
| 5.2.9 Suggested good practice regarding mechanisms for improvement..... | 64 |
| 5.2.10 Suggested good practice regarding policy for the Quality Management of Academic Reviews..... | 64-65 |

| | |
|--|--------------|
| 5.2.11 Suggested good practice regarding Guidelines & Support for Academic Review... | 65 |
| 5.2.12 Suggested good practice regarding Review method..... | 65-66 |
| 5.2.13 Suggested good practice regarding the Use of feedback for Curriculum Improvement..... | 66 |
| 5.2.14 Suggested good practice regarding staff Development and Support..... | 66-67 |
| 5.2.15 Suggested good practice regarding Equity and Access..... | 67 |
| 5.2.16 Suggested good practice regarding alignment between Admission policy and strategic and Academic Planning..... | 67 |
| 5.2.17 Suggested good practice regarding policy and Management structure..... | 67-68 |
| 5.2.18 Suggested good practice regarding internal dissemination and consistency of application..... | 68 |
| 5.2.19 Suggested good practice regarding Recruitment & dissemination of admissions information..... | 68 |
| 5.2.20 Suggested good practice regarding Institutional culture & diversity..... | 69 |
| 5.2.21 Suggested good practice regarding Comprehensiveness & accessibility of student support services..... | 69-70 |
| 5.2.22 Suggested good practice regarding Models of Academic Development..... | 70 |
| 5.2.23 Suggested good practice regarding Curriculum Development..... | 70 |
| 5.2.24 Suggested good practice regarding policy and procedures about Assessment..... | 70-71 |
| 5.2.25 Suggested good practice regarding Moderation System..... | 71 |
| 5.2.26 Suggested good practice regarding Institutional Policies, Guidelines or plans on Staff Development..... | 71-72 |
| 5.2.27 Suggested good practice regarding Alignment of Recruitment Strategies, Selection & Promotion Criteria..... | 72 |
| 5.2.28 Suggested good practice regarding Effective Management of the Postgraduate System..... | 72-73 |
| 5.2.29 Suggested good practice regarding Post Graduate Policies and Procedures..... | 73 |
| 5.3 Recommendations of the Study..... | 73-74 |
| 5.3.1 Recommendation on the challenges of Programme Planning, Design and Management in the University of Venda..... | 74 |
| 5.3.2 Recommendation on the role of Programme and Course Review at the University | |

| | |
|--|--------------|
| of Venda..... | 74-75 |
| 5.3.3 Recommendation on the Access and Admission policy of the University of Venda... | 75 |
| 5.3.4 Recommendation on Student Development and Support processes and procedures at the University of Venda..... | 75 |
| 5.3.5 Recommendation on the Assessment of student learning at the University of Venda..... | 75-76 |
| 5.3.6 Recommendation on Staff development at the University of Venda..... | 76 |
| 5.3.7 Recommendation on post graduate research and supervision at the University of Venda..... | 76 |
| 5.4. Recommendations for future Studies..... | 76-77 |
| REFERENCES..... | 78-83 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

According to McDonnell and Elmore (1987: 33), “policies work by bringing the resources of government, being money, rules, and authority into the service of political objectives; and by using those resources to influence the actions of individuals and institutions”. In this regard the South African democratic dispensation that was marshalled in 1994 and found its expression through the Constitution of the Republic of 1996 has brought about policies. Among those policies that find impression throughout is a need for quality higher education. This study therefore, investigates the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument within University of Venda.

In this chapter, the study gives a background on quality assurance as a policy in higher education with a specific focus on University of Venda. The chapter also gives information on problem statement of the study, the aim as well as the objectives of the study. Research questions, significance of the study, delimitation and the limitation of the study including the definitions of the operational concepts are also addressed in the chapter.

1.2. BACKGROUND

The Education White paper 3 of 1997, which is also referred to as a programme for the transformation of higher education identifies quality assurance as a crucial factor for improving higher education, both globally and institutionally. The white paper also provides guidelines to institutions of higher learning like the University of Venda in ensuring that they are at par with other institutions as benchmarked in line with the key national goals. Thus, as per Education White paper 3 (1997:6), “quality assurance policies strive towards enhancing an effective and credible University core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement and ensuring that quality processes guide decisions and actions” to fulfil the

University's vision and purpose. It also helps Universities to develop accurate metrics to ensure that institutional stakeholders and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) are successful in their policies, processes, strategies and resources to ensure and improve the quality of the core business. According to the CHE (2004:8), Universities should promote and support "the renewed national focus on the quality of higher education under the leadership of the HEQC of the CHE". Universities should thus weave consideration of quality into all aspects of its planning and activities. More importantly, they should commit to implementing and applying the quality management system (QMS) to continuously improve all areas of the organization.

University of Venda is one of the 26 public Universities that have been established through the statute on the finalization of amalgamation of institutions of higher learning in South Africa (DHET, 1997: 17). To ensure that academic offerings by the established Universities, the government of the Republic of South Africa has promulgated a piece of legislation that gives effect to higher education in the form of Higher Education Act 101 of 1997. To provide regulation on issues of quality within Universities, a popular definition of the concept of quality in education and training and the implementation of a comprehensive quality management program aimed at improving the quality of education and training in South Africa was developed through the SAQA Act 58 of 1995. According to Mhlanga (2000: 2), "quality assurance is increasingly becoming an important aspect of higher education institutions in both developed and developing countries, as expressed in the development of relevant policies, structures and systems at national and institutional levels". Chandru (1999: 125) concedes that, the idea of quality assurance is evolving as a primary tool for measuring efficiency and transparency in higher education where South Africa is the latest candidate for a global implemented quality assurance programme following a range of policy and legal measures to change higher education after apartheid. Quality assurance systems in higher education is evolving around the quality of programmes and qualifications that are offered by these institutions of higher learning," the quality of the core business of Teaching and Learning, research and community engagement" (Stander, 2016:1). SAQA (2000: 15), stipulates that "quality in higher education and training must provide a beneficial impact on the lives of all South African Higher Education stakeholders". To achieve this effect, standards set in participatory and inclusive frameworks need to be implemented and

validated in ways that promote lifelong learning for all users of this program, and to ensure that such standards are met, preserved, and continually strengthened.

Quality assurance system should be a vital player in higher education nowadays, not only in University of Venda, but also in the other South African higher education institution and in the world to give confidence to the stakeholders CHE (2010:29). In South Africa, quality assurance roles and practices are closely influenced by the Universities legislative reporting requirements for bodies such as the DHET, the HEQC of CHE) and SAQA as well as the national demand for Universities to contribute to the study and advancement of higher education policy. The University of Venda strategic plan (2012 – 2016: 38), stipulates that the White Paper on Higher Education of 1997 identifies quality assurance, as a crucial factor for achieving higher education transition in line with key national policy objectives. The quality assurance processes are information - intensive and involve organizations to ensure the reliability of their credentials, the placement of systems for carrying out their core business, and the ability to manage and analyse data for decision making purposes CHE (2004:19). The question that remains however is whether quality assurance policy implementation is taking place or not and this study purports to assist in determining that.

SAQA (2000: 5), states that, “it is important to note that the main function of quality assurance in higher education is about setting standards”, and at the same time ensuring that the set standards are maintained and continuously evaluated to ensure that the improvement is taking place within the systems. This means that the University of Venda should enforce the compliance with quality assurance policy and ensure that it is implemented. SAQA (2000: 7) supports this statement by maintaining that: “quality is not a thing; quality is an ongoing event”. SAQA (2000: 39) further states that, the framework of quality assurance should include this complex definition of quality as a continuous event to ensure the continuous development and regeneration of standards and qualifications to meet individual learner needs and the needs of society.

The subsequent sections provide an outline on problem statement, aims and specific objectives of the study. Research questions are spelt out followed by an account on the significance of the study, the limitations and delimitations of the study. The chapter concludes by definitions of

operational concepts central to the study.

1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the implementation of quality assurance system as a policy instrument using University of Venda as a case in point. The problem is that even though University has a quality assurance policy in place that describes certain aspects which deal with the improvement of its core business and the extent of evaluation; there are still shortcomings that are shown by symptoms that are surfacing on several occasions. A prototype example is the conceptualization of the Quality Assurance unit and its activities which are not well recognized with the poor level of comprehensiveness within the institution. This was also picked up by the CHE in their institutional audit wherein a recommendation was made that “the University should initiate an institution-wide dialogue about the nature of a comprehensive University and the implications that it has for its academic profile, and the profile of students attracted to the University, in order to clarify misconceptions and ensure that there is sufficient common understanding of the University’s identity” (CHE, 2010: 9) Some of the actors that are supposed to be involved in the implementation of such quality assurance policies are not keen enough to realize its intentions. University’s quality assurance policy seeks to assess whether the services that the University offers to its stakeholders meet the expected requirements and if there is an improvement which needs to take place and how. According to the quality assurance policy (2012: 3), “University of Venda is committed to a strategic preparation and quality culture that seeks to continually improve performance to meet the needs of its students”, workers and society in general and to the degree to which targets are continuously achieved.

1.4. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to investigate the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument in the University of Venda and to make recommendations on strategies that can enhance its effectiveness including good practice of quality assurance as benchmarked with statutory bodies policies and procedures of quality assurance. To realize this aim, few objectives are mentioned in the following paragraph.

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are research objectives that need to be realized in pursuit of the aim as stated:

- To illustrate quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education context
- To establish the implementation of quality assurance in University of Venda.
- To determine the implications of the state of implementation of quality assurance in University of Venda.
- To make recommendations on strategies that can enhance effectiveness of quality assurance and good practice at University of Venda.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To realize the aim and objectives outlined in the previous paragraph, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What is the illustration of quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education context?
- To what extent is the implementation of the quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?
- What are the implications of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?
- What are the recommendations or strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda?

1.7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The analysis is important to researchers as it may promote the development of new theories or ideas at the University of Venda on the implementation of quality assurance policy, frameworks, processes and procedures. This study will also contribute to existing literature about quality assurance in South African higher education context and this will assist both scholars, the public

as well as the University of Venda to check if the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument is taking place. This study is also critical to the management of the University of Venda in that they will be able to make informed decisions when it comes to structuring and capacitating quality assurance system in terms of resources and activities to enable the unit to execute its mandate effectively and efficiently. The study will also highlight new developments emerging within the field of quality assurance thus benefiting quality assurance practitioners and theorists.

1.8. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument and quality assurance processes at the University of Venda in Limpopo province of South Africa. University of Venda is one of the twenty-six (26) Universities in South Africa and one of the two Universities in Limpopo Province. University of Venda was established in 1982 and it falls under category of comprehensive University in that it offers both vocational and non-vocational type of qualifications. The University of Venda is situated in the far north region of Limpopo Province under Thulamela Municipality in the Vhembe District in the Thohoyandou town.

1.9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Regarding the limitation of this study, financial implications hindered the progress of the research on that there were stationeries, calls to be made to the interviewees and other important aspects that required financial resources. Time was a major hindrance in this study in that the researcher's time with the interviewees was difficult and some of the set appointment by the interviewees was not honored. Another important factor which was a hindrance in the progress of this study was the sensitivity of the topic in that some of the participants felt uncomfortable in answering the questions when interviews were conducted.

1.10. DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

Definition of concepts meant to have real world applications must be constructed within the set

of constraints of the phenomena of the study (Meehan, 1985). In this section, concepts that are key to the study are defined and operationalized in the context of the study:

Quality assurance: According to Vukasovic (2002: 8), within the higher education system, “quality assurance can be referred to the planned and systematic review process of an institution or programme to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, teaching, administration and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced”. Stander (2017:15) concedes with Vukasovic (2002: 8), on that “quality assurance ‘aims to ensure that the definitional elements are embedded in the offerings of institutions”. The question remains out of this as to, “how do we assure that what is offered is for instance”, ‘fit for purpose’? In this case, therefore the goal of quality assurance is to ensure the standard of higher education offered to internal and external stakeholders are of quality. Therefore, quality assurance can be defined as “an all-encompassing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of assessment, evaluation, guaranteeing and maintaining the quality of a higher education system, institutions or programmes”. It must also have to do with how the institution of higher education will guarantee its stakeholders trust and assurance in preserving and improving the standards and quality of their educational provision.

Policy: According to Sherri (2005:2), it is not easy for one to provide a simple answer on what policy since everything we do is regulated and that has something to do with policy. Within the higher education context, Wies (1996: 23), argues that a policy is meant “to influence the behavior of a manager or managed objects”. He further states that they are “derived from management goals and define the desired behavior of distributed systems, applications and or networks”. In the case of this study the policy directives of quality assurance are assessed to check their impact of implementation within the University of Venda.

Policy implementation: According to Khan (2016: 1), policy implementation involves, “translating the goals and objectives of a policy into an action”. DeGroff and Cargo (2009: 1), argued that Policy implementation represents a dynamic process of change that turns government decisions into initiatives, processes, rules, or activities aimed at social progress. Wherein the goals and objectives of what the company or University have set for they should be put into practice. An example could be a quality assurance policy operationalization and implementation within an institution of higher learning like the University of Venda.

Policy instrument: According to Howlett (2017: 31), policy instrument can be referred to as governance mechanisms that require the use, or deliberate restriction, of state authority in one way or another. They mostly fall not only within the domain of political science, but also, since they often affect the behavior of individuals in society as they go about their daily tasks, within the realm of economics. Wies (1996:23) views policy instrument as “an active concept which can initiate or change the characteristics of ongoing management activities”. In the context of this study, the implementation of quality assurance as policy instrument is assessed to see its impact on the core business of” teaching and learning, research and community engagement” at the University of Venda.

1.11 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is arranged into five (5) chapters which are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study – In this chapter the researcher dealt with the “introduction and background of the study”. The chapter also covered the aspects around the “problem statement, aim of the study, specific objectives of the study” and critical research questions. In addition, the chapter also discussed the significance of the study, the limitations and delimitation.

Chapter 2: Literature review – This chapter provides insights to the relevant literature on the implementation of quality assurance system as a policy in the University of Venda. It contains relevant literature on aspects of the origin of quality assurance in higher education context, the

quality assurance mechanisms and their use as policy instrument in different contexts globally, in the South African higher education system and in the University of Venda. Literature provided gives insight and highlights the policies that inform quality assurance and different legislative frameworks in line with quality assurance issues within the South African higher education landscape and at University of Venda.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology - The Chapter provides details regarding research design and methodology used to investigate the implementation of quality assurance as a policy globally, in South African context and at the University of Venda when conducting the study. The outline of the “population of the study, sampling method used, sampling size, data collection and pilot study” were also addressed.

Chapter 4: Data presentation, analysis and interpretation - This chapter focuses on “data presentation, analysis and interpretation”. Data was collected through interviews, ethnographic observation and participation. The information is presented in a narrative form.

Chapter 5: Findings, Conclusion and recommendations – In this chapter the study concludes the research and provides a summary of the research, conclusions, and recommendations for further study. The chapter also outlines the findings on the implementation of quality assurance system as a policy at the University of Venda. Recommendations for future studies such as areas with gaps which may need future studies by other researchers are also outlined in this chapter. The study gives the Management of the University ideas and plans on how to address the quality assurance challenges that were identified for the betterment of the University and the Quality assurance system.

1.12. CONCLUSION

In this chapter the study focused on purpose of the study, aims and specific objectives. The research questions are spelt out and the significance of the study is also mentioned in this chapter including the limitations and delimitations of the study. The chapter also includes with definition of the operational concepts t central to the study. In the coming chapter, the study

focuses on the literature review which is about historical overview of quality assurance in international higher education context and its significance. The background of quality assurance in South African higher education and its legislative framework, the discussion also includes the concepts of policy instrumental and quality assurance as a policy

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chandru (1999: 125), argues that “Quality” has long been the touchstone in education all over the world”. It is generally agreed that quality and quality assurance are essential for the maintenance and development of higher education. Chandru (1999: 127), further argues that, “South Africa's transition from apartheid and minority rule to democracy required all existing practices, institutions and values to be viewed anew and re-thought in terms of their fitness of purpose for the new era of which one of the numerous tasks of the new democratically elected Government was the transformation and restructuring of higher education”. This has culminated in several policy and legal proposals to change post – apartheid higher education. There are different policies which inform the operationalization of quality assurance in South African higher education context and institutions of higher learning should conform when developing their own quality policies.

This chapter reviews the literature on quality assurance giving the quality assurance mechanisms and their use as policy instrument in different international approaches, historical overview of quality assurance systems, and processes globally, in the South African context and in the University of Venda.

2.2. QUALITY ASSURANCE: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Ali and Shastri (2010: 17) addressed the origin of the word quality from the Latin word “quails” which means “what kind of”. It indicates different meaning and implies different things to different people and sectors. According to Kahveci, Uygun, Yursever and Ilyas (2012: 1), quality assurance is a “holistic approach covering all processes in a higher education institution, to serve the students and other stakeholders in expected quality standards”. These scholars are of the view that “quality assurance should cover the strategic management, process management and measuring – monitoring for enabling the institution to improve its processes”. The use of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions enables them to adopt a common strategy and action plan to integrate its activities and create cost efficiency and competitive

advantage. Harman (1998: 1), concurs with Kahveci, Uygun, Yursever and Ilyas (2012: 1) to say, quality assurance should also discuss the structured management processes implemented “to ensure the achievement of specified quality” or quality improvements and to allow key stakeholders to have trust in quality management and the results obtained in accordance with those targeted elements. In this case, Harman (1998: 1), “referred elements as reviews and evaluations of programmes, courses, disciplines and organizations while Stakeholders are defined as individuals and groups with a major interest in and achievement of the higher education institution or programme.

Kahveci, Uygun, Yursever and Ilyas (2012: 162), depicts quality assurance as “a process of maintaining standards reliably and consistently through applying criteria of success in a course, programme or institution”. Quality assurance is an indication by higher education community of what a College or University must do to deserve the public trust. All processes, procedures and guidelines or systems that are used by the higher education institution to safeguard and improve the quality of its education and other activities. Harman (1998: 331), emphasizes the importance of quality assurance in higher education system as an item that has adopted a self-regulatory approach to government-higher education ties. This means that quality assurance should be the business of the day in all the activities of higher education.

2.3 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE GLOBALLY

According to Harman (2008: 332), “quality assurance is by no means a new idea in higher education.” For years, most, if not all, higher education systems have had in place various mechanisms of review and assessment. Ali and Kumar Shastri (2010: 9) concur with Harman to say, quality assurance movement in manufacturing companies around the world started with a quality improvement initiative. But it later spread to other service sectors, including banking; insurance, non-profit, health care, government, and educational institutions.

Total Quality Management (TQM) models, based on quality gurus’ teachings, generally involve many concepts or “essential elements such as teamwork, top management leadership, customer emphasis, engagement of staff, continuous improvement method, training”, etc. Awards

like Deming in Japan, Malcolm Baldrige in United States of America; European Quality awards and others are reflection of growing concern in this area. According to the Mishra (2006: 17), by the 1980s, there has been increasing criticism of the decline in the country's higher education standards. One of the major criticisms was that the affiliate program was insufficient. Ensuring the quality of higher education is gaining importance worldwide in policy making because of the interplay between many variables, such as reduced higher education resource allocation and knowledge of higher education growing understanding among stakeholders of the value for money.

Although numerous educational delivery and education providers have expanded access to an d choice of higher education institutions over the past two decades, the risk of low quality educational requirements reaching the higher education system has also increased (Ali & Shastri, 2010: 15), the expansion of the higher education system was combined with growing criticism of the standard of educational provisions. The establishment of quality assurance agencies has become a common phenomenon throughout the world as a response to this issue.

Ali and Shastri (2010: 16), added to this to say “the importance of quality education for the development of excellence, expertise and knowledge leading to overall development in economy cannot be undermined”. This has necessitated a sound strategy for the development of quality assurance systems in higher education in almost all countries of the world. Ali and Shastri (2010: 21) further argued that, quality assurance is ultimately a common factor that will influence higher education institutions strategies in their attempts to satisfy various stakeholders, including students, parents, industry and community.

Harvey (1999: 4) explains that “national governments expect higher education to be more relevant to social and economic needs; widen access; be more cost effective; ensure comparability of provision and procedures, within and between institutions, including international comparisons; and, be responsive to a range of stakeholders”. Harvey (1999: 6) further argues that, “higher education quality then became the main concern of the higher education institution”. The quest for quality assurance has made higher education institutions focus on awareness of quality costs, knowledge of tools and techniques; understanding the

specifications and satisfaction of customers; pursuing continuous improvement; and believing that everyone is responsible for quality.

Anderson (2000:18), referred to Giertz (2000:68), who identified two reasons for different perceptions of what constitutes higher education quality. Firstly, he argues that quality has many facets and is often dependent on values held by community of stakeholders, including “researchers, students, parents, future employers, government agencies and funding agencies”. Secondly, in general, “higher education has undergone significant changes and there are many different forms” and, thus, if quality is ‘fit for purpose, ‘what counts for quality will be different.

2.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISM AND ITS USE AS A POLICY INSTRUMENT

According to Harman (1998: 331), “quality assurance mechanisms for higher education can be used more generally as policy instruments by a range of different political actors particularly ministers and government official who are in the public offices of the governing party of the day”. Within the South African context, the African National Congress (ANC) being the ruling party should therefore make use of the quality assurance mechanism as policy instrument to determine quality of its service to the public. In similar vein, the University of Venda is using a quality assurance mechanism to manage and assure its stakeholders that “its core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement is of high quality”. This has become apparent when the University introduced the quality assurance policy during the year 2012 and mandated it to the department of IPQA to execute the quality assurance mandate of the University.

2.5. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF A POLICY INSTRUMENT

Harman (1998: 331), identifies policy instruments as, “more obvious mechanisms, such as legislation or directives which also include mechanisms whose declared purpose is to achieve policy objectives on a variety of different matters”. This means that even though different Governments often use quality assurance to satisfy key stakeholders such as employers and investments, and quality assurance can also be used as a tool for achieving a range of policy o

bjectives, such as promoting national recognition of skills and skilled labor mobility, Improving the management and planning capacities of universities and Technicon, as well as promoting the use of tools such as performance indicators, urging universities to make specific improvements while gaining more knowledge and therefore tracking what universities can do through government agencies. This is very important to ensure that the universities are not just operating by themselves but through quality assurance policies which are driven by the political policy makers and implemented by those deployed in different education department.

“The government of the day should be able to outline the main critical national or system level approaches which can be adopted by other non-governmental structures to ensure quality assurance, as well as approaches adopted by individual higher education institution both in a public sphere and in a private sphere” (NPHE, 2001: 45). This statement is supported by Harman (1998: 331), who argued that “quality assurance becomes critically important in that community and government concerns about academic standards and the levels of achievement of graduates in a time of major expansion in student numbers associated with decreasing government funding support per student unit is increasing”, this is the case especially in South African system where the majority of the students are poor and depend on the National Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). But according to (Ogude, Nel & Oosthuizen 2005: 17) “it has also been driven by the effects of increased international competitiveness, by recognition of the need for greater mobility of professional labour, by demands for greater accountability by public institutions, by concerns related to the expansion of the private higher education sector, and by pressure from employers and the professions for University courses become more relevant to workplace needs”. Harman (2008: 333), gave a very interesting proposal of implementing quality assurance systems as a policy when he argues that, apart from the terminology of quality assurance, what is supposed to be a way forward is a more comprehensive and far reaching approach to ensuring that organizations and processes have mechanisms in place for analysis and evaluation and replacement and development. This means that quality should not only be a word of mouth or a nice drafted policy which cannot be implemented. Manghani (2011: 1) argues that, “it is important that once a system is in place, it should be implemented for improvement and enhancement”. The quality assurance mechanisms should then put emphasis on scrutinising if the system is working as required and the views of the stakeholders should also

be considered. Harman (2008: 333), concede to say, “the new quality assurance processes must also put much greater emphasis on external review, on obtaining the opinions of employers and students and, in various ways”, on making the assessment findings more widely available to a range of stakeholders.

2.6 GENERIC CLASSES OF POLICY INSTRUMENTS

According to Howlett, Mukherjee and Jie (2015: 1), policy instruments “are and have been the subject of inquiry in many policy related fields, including public administration and ‘governance’ studies, but also various broader disciplines such as political science and economics”. These scholars argue that; policy instruments are governance tools that require the use of state resources in one way or another to help define and achieve policy objectives. Lippi and Capano (2016: 1) are in support of Howlett, Mukherjee and Jie (2015: 1) to say “Policy instruments are a fundamental component of public policies and are often a result of mediation within the policy design process, whenever decision makers reshape existing instruments without introducing any real innovation which then results in imitation, layering and ambiguity in tool choice selection, and raises the theoretical problem of the logic according to which decision makers choose certain specific policy instruments rather than others”. McDonnell and Elmore (1987: 7) define “four common classes of policy resources that can be made more concrete by applying them to current educational issues, such as the deteriorating quality of teachers in the program for example, the declining quality of teachers entering the system” being mandates, inducements, capacity-building and System-changing. Those instruments are each briefly discussed below:

2.6.1 Mandates

According to Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, and Livingstone (2005: 181), “this instrument includes rules governing the actions of individuals and agencies and oblige those individuals or organizations to take or not taking certain actions in the context of the society”. This is evident in the requirements of the government's mandated curriculum and student performance standards and through compulsory standardized testing. By principle, government policy mandates are meant to ensure the quality of education mitigates the need for district policy m

mandates, but in reality, on the other hand, government policy mandates provide a framework in which district policies are defined but do not eradicate district policy,(Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, & Livingstone, 2005: 182). It is important to note that that mandates are important even in higher education institution like the University of Venda so that the University can perform very well as it receives grants and funding from the government.

2.6.2 Inducements

Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, and Livingstone (2005: 182) argue that, “this instrument includes transferring of money to individuals or agencies in return to the production of goods and services”. McDonnell and Elmore (1987: 7) characterize them in terms of “the proverbial financial carrot, the offer of money in exchange for and as a reward for performance”. An example of induction can be when when the electricity consumption of a person is below a certain level; when the government pays for him / her; or when individuals obtain vouchers for the use of public transport for not using their private vehicles. Within the higher education context in the South Africa inducements can also be compared to the benefit that the students get if they perform well and the NSFAS loan is converted into a bursary because they are doing well.

2.6.3 Capacity-building

According to Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, and Livingstone (2005: 180), capacity building has to do with “the transfer of money for the purpose of investment in material, intellectual, or human resources”. Developing capacity differs from inducements in that funding is not a compliance incentive, not it is designed to reduce financial deficiencies that directly impede service delivery. Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, and Livingstone (2005: 180), further argue that, “capacity building aims to invest in the short-term improvement of human and material resources, e.g. leadership development, teacher quality, institutional research potential, curriculum alignment with the expectation that this will yield some long-term gains in educational performance”. Capacity building is very crucial in institutions in that it gives the lower level official a chance to grow and become better, responsible and accountable individuals. According to

McDonnell and Elmore (1987: 21), “the main difference between capacity – building, on the one hand, and mandates and inducements, on the other, is the proximity and tangibility of their effects” as capacity building has remote and vague effects, while mandates and inducements have proximate and measurable effects.

2.6.4 System-Changing

According to Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, and Livingstone (2005: 181), “system changing transfers official authority among individuals and agencies to alter the system by which public goods and services are delivered”. They further state that, “this instrument uses the transfer of authority among individuals or agencies to implement the government’s policies”. For example, fully public organization transfers some of the responsibilities to private sector and in this way by changing the system into one of the forms of Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. McDonnell and Elmore (1987: 21) argue that System-changing, as a policy instrument, “is best exemplified by the situation in which a constant budget is allocated for a given public service (education or health care, for example) and some dramatic change is made in the policy governing the provision of that service allowing private schools to receive public aid or nationalizing the provision of health care”. Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, and Livingstone (2005:181) in support of McDonnell and Elmore (1987: 21) argued that “the system changing policies may be based on the expectation that the transfer authority will increase efficiency whereby policies may alter the distribution of public funds to providers or consumers of public good and services, and in this sense may resemble inducements whereas the fundamental property of system – changing policies is the distribution of authority, not money”. According to this source, improvements in the distribution of money reflect changes in authority distribution under these policies.

2.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

According to Netshifhefhe, Nobongoza and Maphosa (2016: 69), This investigation is a key priority for the “planners and policy makers in the higher education”.

We should not accept the HEQC order for quality; rather, quality should be a technique from the bottom up and everyone should be aware of why we should emphasize the importance of our teaching and learning and the nature of our scholastic projects and higher education institutions. Netshifhefhe, Nobongoza and Maphosa (2016: 69), refer to Ali and Shastri (2010: 6), who argue that, “the significance of higher education for the advancement of perfection, aptitude and information prompting general improvement in economy can't be undermined especially in this time and age”. Higher education takes a real role in driving the nation's financial progress, which needs a change in administration and service delivery. Higher education institutions need to be more innovative in supporting the development and distribution of quality learning institutions.

Abukari and Corner (2010: 201) argue that “even though benefactors assume a pivotal part in guaranteeing quality, the exploration discoveries proposes that the premise for any viable quality ought to move past the conventional statutes to make it reflect neighborhood needs and substances inside a Universal setting guided by powerful quality monitoring and assessment components”. This means that quality assurance in higher education context is very critical in the execution of the higher education core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Abukari and Corner (2010: 201), Furthermore, argues that “this included a growing interest in higher education, technological advancement, the growth of the digital economy and the weight of higher education institutions to respond to the needs and expectations of stakeholders in addition to everything else”.

According to the CHE (2001: 4), Promoting and improving the standard of higher education “requires both a specific vision and a strategic emphasis to promote the achievement of the various social goals of higher education in the current context of South Africa”. Within the South African higher education context, quality assurance cannot be overemphasized because it covers many aspects that must deal with standards setting and ensuring that the higher education is delivering to their mandate. The CHE (2001: 3), gives the following as critical components of the South African quality assurance aspects.

- The imminent size and shape reconfiguration of higher education that is likely to require more explicit mission specification and effective delivery within the context of national needs. It, in

effect, would entail the creation of a more equitably educated and resourced higher education system to provide high-quality education and training across a range of institutional missions.

- A fragmented landscape of quality assurance with several unintegrated global, institutional and regional initiatives.
- The difficulties in meeting the requirements of the NQF for public and private higher education.
- Growing pressures on higher education to provide information resources and services as well as high-level social and economic development skills and skills.
- The required role of higher education in facilitating social justice by increasing opportunities for previously disadvantaged constituencies to participate in higher education.
- Developing a higher education system whose goals are delivered in a competitive and collaborative context by public and private providers.
- Technology's rising role in teaching and learning, expanding opportunities for higher education through distance and open learning, and through arrangements for higher-level workplace learning.
- The rapid internationalization of higher education and the growing mobility across national boundaries of graduates and professionals.

The CHE (2001:3), further identifies quality assurance as a system which “is intended to support the achievement of the purposes and goals for higher education and as one of the principles that should guide the transformation of higher education”, together with equity and redress, democratization, development, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.

2.8 BACKGROUND OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

According to the CHE (2004: 142), In the early 1990s, there tended to be little, or uneven, development of a “systematic and comprehensive focus on quality and quality assurance in South African higher education”. There was no denying that this condition could only be anticipated from a broken higher education system along various fault lines. There was no

institutional quality system strategy in all sectors of higher education. Although awareness of quality assurance as a higher education problem was stirring at three levels (system, sector and institutional), awareness was still erratically connected to practice in many parts of higher education. South Africa has not been exempted as quality assurance has become an increasingly important aspect of higher education institutions in developing countries, as expressed in the development of relevant national and institutional policies, structures and systems.

The White Paper 3, A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997, Adopted quality as a concept and, consistent with its acceptance of the principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, placed primary responsibility with institutions for quality assurance. Nonetheless, as a permanent committee of the CHE, it approved a quality assurance authority to perform the roles of program accreditation, institutional evaluation and promotion of quality. The 1997 Higher Education Act 101 provided for the establishment by the CHE of a permanent sub-committee to fulfill its quality mandate, the HEQC. According to the CHE (2004: 153) “the overview of quality assurance in South African higher education shows that the existence of the HEQC since 2001 has facilitated an accelerated focus on quality across the system”. In an amendment to the Higher Education Act, the HEQC was approved by SAQA as the Quality Assurer of Education and Training (ETQA) for the NQF Higher Education Group, with the duty to comply with SAQA policies and specifications and the right to assign quality assurance functions to other relevant bodies.

The HEQC is a statutory body responsible for the development and implementation of a national quality assurance system in the higher education system in South Africa. This body oversees quality assurance practices in the higher education system in South Africa and ensures that the program meets its goals and aims as outlined in the White Paper of the National Department of Education. Mhlanga (2008:55) is of the view that, “Quality assurance is a post-apartheid unitary higher education system involving the development of a common policy and a common understanding of quality for all universities based on equity, accessibility and relevance values”.

In the institutional level, the CHE (2004: 148), believes universities should guarantee their own

quality standards in terms of teaching and learning, innovation, community engagement, assessment and graduation, in terms of their own legislation. Regular self-evaluation in some universities – sometimes combined with external review at departmental level, although a consistent practice across the higher education sector could not be labeled as such.

The CHE monitors and handles higher education quality assurance through the HEQC, which is the CHE's permanent committee. In 1999, an interim committee was set up and in 2001 it was fully constituted. Collectively, these two bodies are important tools to ensure clear and adequate attention is given to quality assurance in higher education. According to the CHE (2004: 145) Since its inception, the HEQC has developed a wide range of tools and tools to ensure that institutions are audited, programs are accredited and quality assurance promoted appropriately. In response, “higher education institutions are challenged to be transparent about their methods and approaches to quality assurance”, systematically illuminate what they are doing, show what they are doing, what they are saying, and then provide evidence of how well they are doing it.

The HEQC functions within the framework set out in its founding document. CHE (2004: 147), indicates that “it has approached its work with respect for institutional autonomy and with the intention of assisting institutions of higher education (HEI) in developing their capacity to address quality issues while at the same time seeking to impress on institutions their responsibility for quality in a transforming system”. The CHE (2004:148), further stipulates that, “the quality environment in South African higher education has acquired a distinctive character as the HEQC has sought to achieve this balance in terms of philosophical approach, policy development process, policy content and specific promotion initiatives – including the country's first national quality assurance frameworks and systems”. In terms of specific content, the HEQC has established a focus on quality disparities issues including, but not limited to, quality assurance, health and wellness for purposes of development / improvement and transparency, alignment of quality assurance with strategic planning and resource allocation, quality and equity, quality management, teaching and learning efficiency, institutionalization of a quality culture etc.

2.9 APPROACHES OR METHODOLOGIES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Depending on country and context, there are different approaches and methodologies for quality assurance in different higher education institutions. Harman (2008: 333), concurs to this by stating that, “many higher education systems in different countries have experimented with a variety of quality assurance mechanisms”. He further argued that there was substantial mutual borrowing and sharing of knowledge in which most countries tried to adopt solutions to meet their needs and satisfy different political and other constraints.

According to the CHE (2015: 4), The quality assurance strategy of the HEQC is largely shaped by the diverse challenges faced by South African higher education institutions. Of which, as expressed in various national legislative imperatives since 1994, the strategy aims to be sensitive and constructive in advancing the higher education transformation agenda and to ensure improved and sustainable quality. The focus of South African quality assurance is more on auditing public and private higher education institutions, program accreditation, and evaluations / reviews. The HEQC takes on this position by supporting the development, maintenance and improvement of the quality of public and private higher education to allow a wide range of stakeholders to benefit from efficient higher education and training. At the same time, the core goal of the HEQC is to ensure that providers deliver efficiently and effectively high-quality education, training, study and community service, providing socially valuable and enriching knowledge, as well as a specific range of graduate skills and skills necessary for social and economic development.

In terms of operational context, the procedures for quality assurance depend on the executive management's discretion. In some cases, the Vice-Chancellor is responsible for initiating both quality assurance policies and reviews, while in others, responsibility is assigned to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor's office or to the Registrar. Quality assurance resides in the Vice Chancellor's office within the University of Venda. In the context of higher education, there are few forms of methods or methodologies for quality assurance which are mentioned below:

2.9.1 Reviews

Within the South African higher education context, review is one of the critical approaches or methodology which is used to determine the quality of the higher education offerings. According to the CHE (2015:5), “the review process should be consistent with the accreditation scheme for the program reviewing new programs and current programmes”. The CHE stipulates that the fundamental purpose of reviews is to ensure that minimum standards are met in programs, that students are protected from programs that do not meet minimum quality standards, and that public trust in higher education programs is assured. The CHE (2015:9), outlines the overall objectives of the reviews to “ensure and enhance the quality of higher education programs and institutions through the identification and recognition of programs that meet the HEQC standards”. The HEQC encourages and supports organizations to institutionalize a self-managed appraisal culture that builds on and meets threshold expectations and acknowledges these achievements.

2.9.2 Accreditation

According to the CHE (2004: 1), Accreditation is a “form of quality assurance that is practiced in many countries and is usually linked to accountability and program quality improvement purposes”. Together with higher education systems in many parts of the world, through improved student access and mobility, South African higher education faces numerous stakeholder demands for greater sensitivity to societal needs. Also through research and innovation that explores social and economic growth by interacting with concerned local, regional and international communities.

The HEQC's accreditation system approach is strongly influenced by the dynamic challenges facing higher education institutions in an age of significant transformation of South African higher education. The CHE (2004:1), Stipulates that the program accreditation scheme strives to meet the goals of “the transformation of higher education as expressed in the numerous policy and legislative documents published since 1994”. It is therefore a fundamental premise of the HEQC's approach to quality assurance in general and especially program accreditation to ensure that increased and sustainable quality is part of the transition goals of higher education institutions.

2.9.3 Institutional Audit

According to the CHE (2004: 1), the institutional audit methodology of the HEQC is “strongly influenced by the dynamic challenges facing higher education institutions in an age of significant transformation of South Africa's higher education”. The CHE claims that the audit program ought to be sensitive and constructive in promoting the goals of transformation in higher education, as expressed in numerous policy and legislative documents published since 1994. Therefore, ensuring that improved and sustainable quality is part of the transition priorities of higher education institutions is a fundamental premise of the HEQC's approach to quality assurance in general and institutional audits.

Institutional audit is a form of quality assurance that is used in many countries and is usually associated with the purposes of improving and improving quality. South African higher education, along with higher education schemes in many parts of the world, faces numerous stakeholder needs for greater responsiveness to societal needs through improved student access and mobility; studies and innovation focused on social and economic development; and engagement with local, regional and global interest groups. Stakeholders also expect institutions of higher education to be able to provide comprehensive data to the public on how to sustain the quality and standards of their core educational activities and to show continuous improvement in this regard. Institutional assessments are used to resolve all sets of problems.

2.10 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the context of South African higher education, there are various crucial policies and legislative frameworks that form the basis for quality assurance. These include, constitutional provision, the report of the NCHE, also known as the framework for transformation of 1996, the education white paper 3: A programme for the transformation of Higher Education of 1997, the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, and the SAQA Act of 1995 among others.

2.10.1 The South African Constitutional Educational Provision

The constitution of South Africa is South Africa's supreme law. This means that the Constitution must be consistent with all other laws and actions. No one can act in a manner that runs counter to the Constitution—not even the Parliament or the President. The Constitution is described as a document that is 'transforming.' Such revolutionary objectives extend to our system of education. The Constitution ensures that everybody in South Africa has the right to a basic education that requires active action to improve the country's education. This means that our Constitution is seeking to change South Africa for the better, rather than keeping it as it is. The Section 29(1) (a) of the Constitution gives provision of basic education to each citizen of the country. One would argue that since the beginning of the #fees-must-fall protest, the higher education landscape has also changed in South Africa. Students can now learn for free in higher education institution provided they fall below the R 600 000-total household income. This means that the constitutional provision is not only focused in the basic education but also in the higher education and training sphere.

2.10.2 Higher Education Act 101 of 1997

The 1997 Higher Education Act 101 stipulates the management of quality assurance in South African higher education through the HEQC, the CHE's permanent committee. The Higher Education Act stipulates that the HEQC via CHE should comply with the policies and criteria formulated by the SAQA in accordance with the 1995 SAQA Act 58 and provides for the delegation by the HEQC of any quality promotion and quality assurance functions to other relevant bodies with the CHE's competition.

The role of the HEQC in the South African Higher Education system includes accrediting higher education providers to provide programs leading to NQF – approved qualifications by certifying that they have the frameworks, processes and ability to do so. Quality promotion among constituent higher education providers to encourage the creation of quality knowledge and responsiveness in public and private provision. Audit of the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions and coordinate and facilitate higher education quality assurance activities within a partnership model with other quality assurance providers of education and training (ETQA). According to the CHE (2001: 5), HEQC is “committed to a high-quality higher

education system that contributes to South Africa's socio-economic development, social justice, and innovative scholarship”. To this end, the HEQC promotes the growth, maintenance and quality enhancement of public and private higher education provision to enable a variety of stakeholders to benefit from successful higher education and training. The core goal is to ensure that providers provide high-quality education, training, study and community service effectively and efficiently, generating socially valuable and enriching expertise, as well as a specific range of professional skills and skills necessary for social and economic growth. The policies and programmes of the HEQC are guided by the above-mentioned commitment and objectives.

2.10.3 Report on the National Commission on Higher Education, A framework for transformation, 1996

According to the CHE (2001: 2), the NCHE guidelines developed at the time of Mandela's administration highlight quality and the role of “quality assurance in a transformed higher education system”. This National Higher Education Commission made it clear that a systematic, development-oriented system of quality assurance is essential to the formation of a single integrated system of higher education. Furthermore, the Commission argued that quality assurance systems are necessary to resolve quality discrepancies through institutional programs and to see quality assurance as an important element of the new form of higher education governance introduced and as one of the ways in which private higher education can be integrated into the new system. This is where the proposal was introduced to shape the South African quality assurance body and then the CHE's HEQC was created to resolve the quality issue.

2.10.4 Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of Higher Education, 1997

According to the CHE (2001: 2), The White Paper then identified “quality assurance as a critical principle for the restructuring of higher education in South Africa, following the report of the National Commission on Higher Education. The White Paper claimed that upholding the concept of quality means preserving and implementing academic and educational standards, both in

terms of specific criteria and specifications to be achieved, and in terms of principles of excellence to be pursued. Applying the quality concept means measuring services and products against a fixed standard to enhance, renew or progress. The White Paper also suggested that the primary responsibility for quality assurance would lie with institutions of higher education themselves. The white paper, however, argued that it was necessary throughout the framework for the role of a national umbrella authority responsible for quality promotion and assurance. Accordingly, that's when the Higher Education Act 101 provided for the coordination of higher education quality assurance through a HEQC established as a CHE permanent committee. In the framework and procedural guidelines developed by SAQA, the establishment of the HEQC, its registration with SAQA and its modus operandi were determined by the CHE.

2.10.5. South African Qualification Authorities (SAQA) Act no 58 of 1995

The SAQA Act no; 58 of 1995 Provides for the development and implementation of the NQF to define and provide for the SAQA. On the other hand, in its mandate to facilitate the development of the NQF, the HEQC is required to operate within the requirements of SAQA. Of which the NQF's goals are to ensure that an integrated national structure for learning achievements is created; to promote access to and mobility and development in education, training and career paths. Improving the quality of education and training; promoting the redress of past unfair discrimination in opportunities for education, training and employment; and thus, leading to the full personal growth of each learner and the nation as a whole's social and economic development.

According to the CHE (2001: 3), “the duties of SAQA are to supervise the creation of the NQF; to devise and publish policies and guidelines for the registration of bodies responsible for setting requirements or qualifications for education and training”. Accreditation of bodies responsible for tracking and auditing achievements with respect to such requirements or qualifications; monitoring the application of the NQF. Registration or accreditation of bodies and their assignment of functions; registration of national standards and qualifications; measures to ensure compliance with accreditation provisions; and steps to ensure international comparability of standards and registered qualifications.

2.11. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

Quality assurance at the University of Venda is within the Directorate of IPQA, which was started in 2007 and reports to the Vice Chancellor and Principal. At the University of Venda, planning and quality assurance are interrelated and are mutually reinforcing practices that help the institution to plan and track its performance. This is vital if a higher learning institution like this is to use available resources to meet its core teaching and learning, science, and community engagement mandate. This structure of the University of Venda is supported by the White Paper on Higher Education 3, A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997: 23), which recognizes “strategic and institutional planning and quality assurance as key frameworks for achieving the higher education system's transition in line with key national objectives”.

The University of Venda's planning and quality assurance function processes are information-intensive and require institutions to ensure their database reliability, as well as the ability to manage and analyze the data for decision-making purposes. This is particularly important regarding financial sustainability, as the failure to align institutional academic and enrollment plans with the planning parameters determined by the Higher Education and Training Minister would adversely affect the annual state subsidy allocation, thus putting the institution at risk. Quality assurance at the University of Venda needs to address this problem by promoting the implementation of policies and procedures that support university-wide planning and quality management activities. Quality assurance develops policy frameworks and guidelines in this regard, which are based on the conceptualization of their core business by each section. In addition, the Directorate of Quality Assurance conducts training workshops aimed at empowering staff with awareness and understanding of policies related to planning and quality. As far as academic planning is concerned, the university has initiated the development of student enrollment plans and processes to enable it to meet its objectives of size and shape.

Quality assurance works on program portfolio reviews and program qualification mix (PQM) with schools and departments to verify that the university qualification is approved for funding

purposes by the department of higher education and training, accredited by the CHE HEQC and registered by SAQA.

The University of Venda quality assurance monitors all services to ensure that they are consistent with the sub-framework for higher education qualifications (HEQSF). Similarly, quality assurance engages with professional bodies to ensure that their input is reflected in the professional qualifications curriculum, where necessary. According to the University of Venda quality assurance policy (2012: 5), the approach of quality includes but not limited to “the following issues:

- Quality Assurance includes the policies, procedures and mechanisms by which the University of Venda or a unit or role ensures the maintenance of specified quality processes and standards.
- University quality assurance is a shared responsibility because it is centralized as well as decentralized. While the directorate of IPQA will play a promoting, and organizing role, it is essential to remember that quality is the responsibility of all departments.
- Self-assessment is recognized as the main quality assurance method. That functional unit at the university is responsible for defining and implementing successful self-assessment procedures on a regular basis.
- Self-assessment of quality is complemented by peer and external evaluation.
- Quality Assurance is a mixture of compliance, efficiency and development at the University of Venda.
- Quality Assurance at this institution serves to supervise the process, efficiency and discharge of services by employees in both academic and non-academic departments in compliance with clearly defined policies, procedures and regulations in accordance with the university's mission, vision and objectives.
- At the University of Venda, Quality Assurance will track and conduct regular assessments of the performance of university departments and sections.
- Quality enhancement is accomplished by ongoing monitoring and assessment processes of academic, administrative, support service and other programs aimed at promoting university excellence”.

2.12. University of Venda Quality assurance structure and responsibilities

According to the structure of quality assurance indicated below, quality assurance is at the Centre of the core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement in the University of Venda. The roles and responsibilities of quality assurance at the University of Venda are to ensure that the issues such as “compliance with academic programme accreditation requirements, effective quality assurance systems and academic reporting requirements are addressed as per the needs of the statutory bodies such as the DHET, CHE, SAQA and professional bodies”. The quality assurance office provides professional leadership, support and co-ordinate the development of quality assurance policies and procedures, quality assurance framework and quality management system. University of Venda’s quality assurance also assists academics by means of overseeing the academic programme accreditation processes, facilitating the institutional audit as well as reviewing the curriculum.



2.13. CONCLUSION

In this chapter the study presented quality assurance in higher education in a global context, in the South African context and at the University of Venda. Quality assurance addresses issues such as compliance with academic programmes accreditation requirements, effective quality

assurance systems and academic reporting requirements. Quality assurance also assess whether a service or product meets the specified and expected requirements in line with the policies and procedures for South African higher education institution as required by the statutory bodies. Services or product in this context meaning the core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement that the university as an institution of higher learning provides for the students and the community it serves. Most significantly, institutions of higher education should be committed to strategic preparation and quality culture that consistently increase performance to meet the expectations of their students, staff and society in general.

In the next chapter, the study focuses on the details regarding research design and methodology used to investigate the implementation of quality assurance as a policy at the University of Venda. The outline of the population of the study, sampling method used, sampling size, data collection and pilot study are also highlighted.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Research methodology should address the overall method that one is going to use to carry out their research. In this case the study used qualitative research design. The qualitative method of research is primarily explanatory research where one can gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations. This research methodology was chosen for this study on that it trends in thoughts and opinions and dive deeper into the aspect of implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument in the University of Venda. The methods used in collecting data includes the use of interviews, ethnographic approach which includes observation, and engagement in the day to day activities of quality assurance.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

Mahole (2017: 267) referred to Zikmund (2003: 740) who argued that, “research design should deal with a master plan which specifies the methods and procedure for collecting and analyzing the needed information and that it is also a strategic plan for a research project, setting out the broad structure and features of research”. Research configuration accordingly is the arrangement for interfacing the calculated research issues to the attainable observational research. As such, the examination configuration verbalizes what information is required, what strategies will be utilized to gather and investigate this information, and how the entirety of this is going to respond to the exploration questions.

The study has adopted the qualitative method of conducting research through interviews and ethnographic observation where data can be found around in daily lives in meetings, workshops engagement with academics, memorandums and direct observations. The study’s choice of qualitative research method was influenced by its flexibility which allowed the researcher to be more innovative and have close interaction with the respondents by way of observation and personal interview.

Types of research design.

3.2.1. Descriptive research design

According to the University of Southern California Libraries (2016: 4), “descriptive research designs help provide answers to the questions of who, what, when, where, and how associated with a research problem; a descriptive study cannot conclusively ascertain answers to why”. Descriptive analysis is used to obtain information about the state of the phenomenon and to explain "what does happen" in relation to factors or circumstances in a situation.

Descriptive research's main objective is to provide an accurate and reliable description of factors or variables that are important to the research question and are more systematic than exploratory research.

3.2.2. Explanatory research design

According to the University of Southern California Libraries (2016: 5), an explanatory design “is conducted about a research problem when there are few or no earlier studies to refer to or rely upon to predict an outcome”. The main objective of descriptive research is to provide a precise and valid representation of factors or variables that are relevant to the research question and are more structured than exploratory research. The explanatory designs were used for this analysis to develop an understanding of how best to proceed in the study of the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument, and it was found to be successful in gathering information on the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Rajasekar, Philominathan and Chinnathambi (2013: 5) research methodology can be referred to “as a science of studying how research is to be carried out and more essentially the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena”. Rajasekar, Philominathan and Chinnathambi (2013: 6) further state that “in

another view methodology can still be regarded as the study of methods by which knowledge is gained as its aims is to give the work plan of research”. There are different types of research but for this study the researcher used only qualitative research methodology.

3.3.1. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Cochran and Patton (2002: 2), “Qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which in general generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis”. According to Kothari (2004: 3), this type of research “aims at discovering the underlying motives and other desires, using in depth interviews for the purpose”. Other such testing methods include word association tests, sentence completion tests, story completion tests, and many some projection techniques. “Attitude or opinion research, that is, research designed to find out how people feel or what they think about a subject or institution is also qualitative research” according to Kothari (2003: 4). He further argued that qualitative research is particularly important in behavioral sciences where the aim is to uncover the underlying motives of human behavior by examining the various factors that motivate people to behave in a way or make people like or hate a thing.

The motive of choice for the qualitative method by the researcher is that this kind of research also includes the ethnographic research which according to Naidoo (2012: 1), is a kind of “qualitative methodology that lends itself to the study of the beliefs, social interactions, and behaviors of small societies, involving participation and observation over a period, and the interpretation of the data collected”. However, over the time the methodology have found its space in other disciplines like Public Administration (Rhodes, 2014:7). Sangasubana (2011:1), agrees with Naidoo (2012:1), to say, “ethnography may also involve a full immersion of the researcher in the day-to-day lives or culture of those under study” which is the case in this study by the researcher.

3.4. STUDY AREA

In the case of this study, University of Venda was the study area where data was collected and

analyzed. University of Venda is one of the twenty-six (26) Universities in South Africa and one of the two Universities in Limpopo Province. University of Venda falls under the category of comprehensive type of University in that it offers both vocational and non-vocational type of qualifications. University of Venda is situated in the far north region of Limpopo Province under Thulamela Municipality in the Vhembe District approximately 190 kilometers from the capital city of Limpopo Province Polokwane. It was established as a branch of the University of the North in February 1981. According to the Universities higher education data management portal, it had a total of around +- 15500 students as in 2017.

3.5. POPULATION OF THE STUDY

According to Day (2008: 4), population of the study can be referred to as the group of individuals in a study, wherein the participants make up the study population. For this study, the population consisted of the executive, senior and middle managers including the academic and administrative staff members of different sections of the University. Academics and non-academic staff members were selected in this study for qualitative purpose. According to the University Higher Education Data Analyzer (HEDA) system information extracted on 22 November 2018, the University of Venda has 871 employees of which 40% is academic staff members and 60% being the support of the core business which include administration and service staff members.

3.6. SAMPLING

According to Mugo (2002: 1), Sampling “is the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population”. For this study, as indicated above in the population of the study, the sampled group in this study consisted of one in each of the following category, executive management official, senior manager, middle managers, academic and administrative staff members of different sections of the University.

3.7. SAMPLING METHODS

The purposive sampling method which is also non-probability sampling method was also used in this study. This kind of sampling method “is a sampling technique where the odds of any member being selected for a sample cannot be calculated” Taherdoost (2016: 23). The non-probability sampling approach is chosen based on population characteristics and the study target. This method is “also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling” Taherdoost (2016:23)

3.8. SAMPLING SIZE

For this study a total of twenty-four interviewees were targeted and the breakdown is as follows. 1 (one) sample in the executive management position for interviews. 4 (Four) Deans of Schools in the University will be targeted. 2 (two) Directors of departments, 6 (Six) administrative staff members are also targeted for the study, 9 (nine) academics in different levels are targeted and 2 (two) service staff members of the university.

3.9. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

According to Taherdoost (2016:23), data collection method refers to the kind of collection method “that is relevant to the purpose, objectives, questions or hypothesis of the study”. This focuses on gathering information through a range of data sources for a research project. For this study, the researcher used the ethnographic research method. Naidoo (2012: 1), Ethnographic research involves a full immersion of the researcher in the study's everyday life or society. which is the case in the context. This research in line with the characteristics of the ethnographic type of research is personalized since the researcher is both the observer and participant in the activities of quality assurance in the University of Venda. According to Sangasubana (2011: 3), some of the advantages of ethnographic type of research are that: “

- Ethnography can be conducted entirely by one individual.

- It is longitudinal in nature, allowing the researcher to observe and record changes over time.
- It can be carried out almost at any place.
- It provides the researcher with a detailed and rich database for further investigation and writing.
- The researcher can make the research not only interesting but adventurous.
- It requires no expensive or elaborate tools or equipment.
- It may present the researcher with an opportunity to learn and use another language.
- It draws upon your personal skills and strengths to advantage.
- The researcher often has exclusive domain or sole responsibility in the chosen setting or Site
- The researcher's role is recognized.
- It offers the researcher with an opportunity to integrate professional and personal life.
- It allows the researcher to get an insider's view of reality.
- It can provide deep insightful data.
- It can be used to study marginalized groups of people closed to other forms of research.
- It allows the researcher to collect data in a realistic or naturalistic setting in which people act naturally, focusing on both verbal and nonverbal behaviors.”

3.10. DATA ANALYSIS

According to Gbenga (2015: 3), data analysis “is a systematic approach to investigations during which numerical data is collected and the study then transforms what is collected or observed into numerical data”. It often describes a situation or case, referring to the ' what ' and ' how many ' questions about something you may have. The method of data analysis is a complex and innovative process characterized by a close relationship between the researcher and the

participants and the produced data. In this study, a narrative of the findings on interviews and the ethnographic research that was chosen has been provided.

3.11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Akaranga and Makau (2016: 2), “ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the conduct of people and guides the norms or standards of behavior of people and relationships with each other”. It refers to an ethic or way of life, social standards of behavior that differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable actions within the practice culture. These scholars further argue that; “the study of ethics leads to the creation of social norms which focus on the behavior that a person is expected to uphold in a situation”. “These norms of behavior which guide moral choices can allow for a wide range of ethical positions” (Akaranga & Makau, 2016: 2). Research ethics is very relevant because they are the moral norms or guidelines that differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. Ethics assists in assessing the difference when performing a research between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. The researcher followed ethical procedures or requirement to protect participants’ human rights during research. According to Akaranga and Makau (2016: 3), “researchers are professionals hence research ethics as a branch of applied ethics has well established rules and guidelines that define their conduct”. Research ethics is important in our daily lives; research is undertaking and involves researchers to preserve the integrity of their subjects and publish the researched information well.

This study took the following ethical issues into considerations:

3.11.1. Informed consent

According to Scot (2013: 79), “respect for the individual’s right to make decisions about themselves and their life (respect for autonomy) requires that research participants are adequately and properly informed regarding the nature of the research project”. In the case of this study, the respondents were explained the research intent and what it entails. Respondents were only interviewed once they had given their consent.

3.11.2. Anonymity and confidentiality

According to Akaranga and Makau (2016: 6), anonymity refers “to keeping secret by not identifying the ethnic or cultural backgrounds of respondents, refrain from referring to them by their names or divulging any other sensitive information about a participant”. Therefore, during this research, the respondents were promised that their information given in confidence would be respected. But, if any information should be revealed, then consent was sought from the respondent. Confidentiality, on the other hand, refers to a situation in which the researcher knows the identity of a research subject, but takes steps to prevent others from knowing that identity. In this study these issues were taken into considerations. None of the information given to this study by the participant is to be traced back to the same participant as no personal details were collected during the interview process that may disclose the identities of the respondent.

3.11.3. Voluntary participation

According to Akaranga and Makau (2016: 6), voluntarism is “one of the most important component of ethics in conducting research which implies the fact that a person knowingly, voluntarily, intelligently, and in a clear and manifest way, gives his or her consent to participate in the research study”. This is the ethical principle that people should never be involved unless they agree to participate directly or openly. This study made it clear to the respondents that they should voluntarily participate without being intimidated or threatened. The participant who decided to quit or had second thoughts about going through with the study, their decision was also respected.

3.11.4. No harm to participant

Either physical or psychological harm may occur. It is the duty of the researcher to ensure that the participants are protected and that there is no harm whatsoever that occurs to them during the process of the study. There was no potential harm in this study that was envisaged as the participants ' truth was not altered or misinterpreted, and the researcher explained the reality as it is and did not hide any of the study details.

3.12. CONCLUSION

In conclusion of this chapter, the study addressed the research methodologies which were used in investigating the implementation of “quality assurance as a policy instrument in University of Venda”. The reasons of the choice and use of the qualitative research methodology was provided in this chapter including the research design, research methodologies, study area, population of the study, sampling methods and sampling size, data collection instruments, and data analysis methods as well as ethical considerations. In the next chapter, the study focuses on the “data presentation, analysis and interpretation”. Data was collected through interviews, observation and participation by the researcher. The information is presented in a narrative form.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focus on data presentation, analysis and interpretation. Qualitative method was used to collect data through interviews. It is important to note that the researcher also used the ethnographic way of conducting research as someone who is involved in quality assurance and related activities daily.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD

Ethnographic method of collecting data included observation, involvement, engagement with available memorandums, documents analysis, electronic mails, articles and other already available resources. The information is presented in a narrative form.

4.2.1 ILLUSTRATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

According to Peterson P, Baker E and McGaw B (2010:16), “quality assurance in higher education is increasingly used to denote the practices whereby academic standards are supposed to improve”. That is, quality assurance policies in higher education provide assurance that the delivery of an institution of higher education is of high quality and meets expectations as benchmarked with other institutions. This statement is supported by the Central European university quality handbook (2016:6), which stipulates that, “making use of positive experiences from other countries and by avoiding some of the mistakes that have been made elsewhere during similar quality assurance practices makes the system better”. Different systems and policies in different countries illustrate their quality assurance in ways suitable to them. The Central European University quality handbook (2016:7), stipulates that, “quality assurance in higher education is one of the critical and pressing issues for the development of a national higher education system”. This can be seen in the South African context also, in that quality of higher education activities and outcomes have a significant impact on the economy and on the other sectors like, public administration, public health, or democratic citizenship.

According to the Central European handbook (2016:8), “quality assurance of higher education is a priority area for both higher education institutions and the policy makers.” Nevertheless, the institutions of higher education themselves should track and improve the quality of their provision of education. In the same time, they must ensure that their policies and practices speak to their programmes and “core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement”. Peterson P, Baker E and McGaw B (2010:17), argue that, “while Individual universities have always possessed policies and practices designed to assure the quality of education, academic institutions have also always operated within a national policy framework designed by the state to assure academic standards”. This is the case in the South African higher education context in that University’s quality assurance policies should be accompanied by national policy reforms and the higher education issues they raise.

4.2.2 The extent of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda

Through engagement with the officials in the directorate of institutional planning and quality assurance, the University of Venda’s institutional academic planning which is also the quality assurance office working hand in glove with the Management Information System (MIS) ensures that they cater for the qualifications, programmes and courses or modules. The institutional quality management system of the University of Venda incorporates sub-systems that serve as the primary unit of academic review for the programs. For efficiency and cost-effectiveness purposes, however, and given the accreditation period of the HEQC, the University may choose to review all its programs offered in a school or department in a single clustered phase.

One of the most important activities that the University of Venda is doing well in implementing its quality assurance as a policy is to design and review its modules/Courses as a component of programmes and not as isolated units. For instance, a module can serve more than one program and its status (e.g. precondition, core or elective) may vary from program to program. While it is important to check all the courses / modules that include a curriculum in terms of their fitness for that program purpose, which is likely to become burdensome and time consuming for the academic staff in question. A consensus among academics that appears to be growing is that

the University Quality Management Process should ensure that all modules / courses are reviewed periodically but not overly. At the same time, a sensible selection of course review data is acceptable for the review of a program which in the case of the University of Venda is happening though at a snail's pace because of different challenges like human capacity in the quality assurance Unit.

In line with the CHE's HEQSF of 2013, which is a framework that guide the development of programmes in South African higher education institutions, the University of Venda ensures that its programmes and qualification designs conform to the general standards proposals laid down. By adhering to the HEQSF standards and registering its programmes and qualifications in the NQF, the University ensures that, its programmes and qualifications are recognizable and fundable by the DHET.

4.2.3 The implications on the state of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda

Within the University of Venda, quality assurance serves four major purposes which are, improvement, accountability, compliance and control. This is in line with the CHE (2004:5), to say "quality assurance in South African higher education context should be about enhancement of the core business, accountability to the public, control of the activities within the University and compliance with the statutory requirements". Kis (2005: 10), regards accountability in quality assurance "as a summative approach of rendering an account of what one does or the institution does in relation to the goals that have been set or legitimate expectations that others may have of one's products, services or processes, in terms that can be understood by those who have a need or right to understand the account". For this reason, at the University of Venda, accountability is linked to the public information and judgments about the fitness of the university for the purpose it's intended to achieve.

Within the University of Venda, "quality procedures for accountability purposes" are set down by the quality assurance policy (IPQA/01/2011). The aim of the quality procedures at the University of Venda are to strengthen the control with possibility of undertaking corrective action if

necessary. According to Kis (2005:11), “quality assurance for accountability purposes implies the use of summative approach”. This approach predominates at the University of Venda; reports include explicit statements of results and are published on the websites of the university to demonstrate accountability to the university service public. The aim of the publication is to inform the public about the University of Venda's performance. The publication is in the form of financial reports, memorandums of new development and updates of the Universities activities for the public.

Another critical purpose of quality assurance in line with the implementation of quality assurance in the University of Venda is the issue of quality as an improvement. According to Kis (2005: 10), this kind of approach is formative in nature, in that “quality procedures for improvement purposes aim at promoting future performance rather than making judgment on the past performance”. The standards and procedures used within the University of Venda are intended to strengthen the university's requirements, goals, reach and level of quality improvement.

Kis (2005:12), further argues that, “quality assurance for improvement purposes implies a formative approach wherein the focus is not on control but on improving quality”. This is in line with the University of Venda quality assurance policy (IPQA/01/2011: 6), “Where this approach is predominant, the reports are written for academic audience and the emphasis is on recommendations than punitive measures”. This approach is typical at the University of Venda and other South African higher education institutions because of the strong state regulation.

According to Harvey and Newton (2007: 248), “Improvement is one of the purposes or functions of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education”. These authors indicated that the improvement of the core business is the main and the most frequent stated purpose of the quality assurance process. According to these authors, improvement is linked to the definition of quality as transformation. Within Venda University, this approach leads to institutional innovation in that the goal of quality assurance policies and procedures is to help the university gain the necessary input, improve the processes and raise the standards of their results.

The third major part of the implication of quality assurance implementation within the University

of Venda is the issue of compliance. According to the (IPQA self-evaluation report (2010: 16) 2010 HEQC institutional audit, “the responsibilities and activities of quality assurance are strongly informed by the statutory reporting requirements of universities to bodies such as the department of higher education and training, the higher education quality committee as well as the national call for the universities to contribute to higher education policy analysis and development”. Within the sense of South Africa, the government is generally the most important and powerful higher education entity because it provides so much funding and thus also governs the licensing of the institutions it supports.

According to Geda (2014:49), “governments around the world are also looking for higher education to be more responsive, including making higher education more relevant to social and economic needs, widening access to higher education, expanding numbers, usually in the face of decreasing unit costs, ensuring comparability of provision and procedures within and between the institutions”. This author points out that quality is used as a tool to ensure some degree of compliance with these overt political agendas as well as less open agendas, such as attempts to reduce academic autonomy and question the extent to which work is produced by mass higher education – ready graduates.

The last part of the University of Venda focus of quality assurance is regarding the control part of quality assurance. According to Harvey (2007:3) the “external review is used to ensure that the principles and practices of higher education are not being eroded or flouted, thereby undermining the intrinsic quality of university level education and research”. The management dimension of quality assurance within the University of Venda discusses precisely the comparability of standards: that is the norm or level of academic or professional achievement of students in their academic endeavors. In line with the university rules and regulation booklet on examination, “the use of externally set and marked examinations; specification of the content of syllabuses; descriptors of outcomes; external examiners to ensure inter-institutional comparability of awarded qualifications” Harvey (2007:3).

4.2.4 Recommendations or strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda

The following are the strategies that the researcher out of ethnographic means of collecting data thought are important for the enhancement of quality assurance at the University of Venda.

4.2.4.1 Strategies in line with programme planning, design and management

According to the CHE (2002:33), the issue of “programme planning, design and management applies to the school’s academic planning system and the department responsible for managing a programme”. This is the case also in the University of Venda in that the Department and the School within which the programme resides has a bearing on all moments of the quality cycle of the programme. The quality cycle of a programme include, planning, implementing, monitoring and improving. The University of Venda quality assurance policy (IPQA/01/2011:5), stipulates that, all programmes should be evaluated and reviewed within a 5 years’ cycle. Out of the engagement of the researcher with the available recourses, participation in quality assurance and related activities, is safe to say this has not been happening in the University of Venda. The researcher would recommend that the University focuses on ensuring that there is improvement in the programme planning, design and management process.

4.3.4.2 Strategies that can enhance effectiveness of quality assurance at the University of Venda in line with access and admission.

According to the CHE (2004: 84), “an institution’s admission policy is an obvious place to look for the evidence or indicators of the realization of the national translocator goals and values”. However, the challenges for South African higher education Institutions including the University of Venda is not only open access, but also should do with ways that are responsible, financially feasible and academically sustainable. Through its policy on admission which is contained in the University of Venda calendar (2019: 60 - 64), the university is doing well with its limited resources to widen access. However, while the University of Venda has policies and procedures of admission and access, it should consider giving access to the previously disadvantaged community.

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, does not specify a minimum admission requirement for higher education study but it requires that higher education institutions admission policies should have provision for the redress of the past inequalities and discrimination. Although the university is trying to address the past discrimination and inequalities, it has developed a recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy. There is a need to make awareness of such policy to the university stakeholders. The University of Venda RPL policy (Univen RPL/01/2016) seeks to ensure that people who do not meet the entrance requirement in the system through the normal admission requirements of the qualification, but have intensive experience which can be supported by evidence can also be assessed as a way of giving them access to certain qualification. The ethnographic engagement of the researcher with available resources and participation in the quality assurance activities reflected that little is done in terms of implementing the RPL policy.

Within the South African context, Universities are also permitted to set additional admission requirements for specific programs that are beyond the minimum above. To follow suit on the national requirements, the University of Venda should also establish practice for professional degrees which are in demand, particularly for the health and social work professions. Taking into considerations its infrastructural limitations and resources, the university should have clear guides on the requirement by the professional council concerned.

4.3.4.3 Strategies in line with student's development and support

According to the CHE (2004: 116), "the issue of student's development and support is mostly referred specifically to institutional responses to the needs of underprepared students and to enhance the teaching and learning activities". The CHE (2004:117), further stipulates that, "the development of students should cover extra – curricular campus activities which are designed for quality of life and for personal and social development". These may include development of student leadership, sports, gender support groups, political, cultural, religious, and society's students, as well as appropriate forms of communication and off-campus support. The programs that support students in their day-to-day lives on campus as well as those that support them in their academic work, including financial assistance, bursary and loan systems, housing, counselling for students, library services, IT facilities, and health services.

Within the University of Venda, the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL), plays an important role in student's development and support. CHETL plays a coordinating role of supporting students in academic related activities and in non-academic activities that might have impact in their learning. Given the currency of such understanding of the nature of student learning, it is critical that in seeking to create the conditions for learning, the University of Venda should increasingly adopt an integrated and holistic approach through its Centre for Higher education teaching and learning. It is safe to say that all aspects of institutional, curriculum and service organization and delivery support that affect the quality of the experience of the student are relevant to this focus area. However, based on the engagement and interactions with the CHETL activities at the university by the researcher, it is evident that more still need to be done. One of the most critical focus of the CHETL should be to communicate, make awareness of the services offered for the students. Most students seem not to be aware of the services they can get from the center and some drop out because of lack of knowledge of where they can get information and assistance. Through different awareness to the student about the services the Centre offers, it can enable students to be aware and utilize the services and therefore be productive in their studies.

University of Venda should provide an appropriate level of support and growth by finding ways to make best use of scarce resources to grow and maintain their students. Therefore, if the University wants to produce enough students as it envisages and with the relevant skills needed by the modern economy, the number of postgraduate enrolments will need to increase. This means that student development and postgraduate support also require a high level of attention. Thus, addressing the social imperative for greater access and equality, the University should at the same time aim to improve the performance of its program by rising graduation rates as well as the number of post - graduate students.

According to the CHE (2004: 105), "most South African higher educational institutions are challenged to deal with increasingly diverse students' profile". University of Venda, should through its CHETL provide a range of comprehensive students' development and support services which meet its student's needs, enhance their educational experience and learning

environment and cater for a diverse student body. At the same time, universities should track and review their student engagement and support services around regular intervals and ensure that input is considered by academic staff, career development staff and students. Where there are signs that a program or service they provide does not fulfill their goals, these approaches for student growth should be re-evaluated and changed for the better.

At institutional level, school level and program level at University of Venda must ensure that systems are in place to track the performance of students and recognize students at risk of failing their courses in a timely manner.

4.3.4.4 Strategies that can enhance effectiveness of quality assurance at the University of Venda in line with assessment of students learning

According to the CHE (2004: 134), “assessment of student learning is all about the practice of designing formal tasks for students to complete and making inferences from results and estimating the worth of their performances on these tasks”. The student learning assessment should apply to the institutional, program and evaluation practice levels. Assessment policies and systems are usually determined at institutional or school level in higher education institutions, while their implementation and the extent of their effectiveness must be evaluated at program and course level. The appraisal question is closely related and should be dealt with in accordance with the planning, design and management of the programme.

Assessment should provide students with individual input on their learning progress. According to the CHE (2004:135), “assessment must promote the practice of directly assessing students on credible intellectual tasks as opposed to making inferences about student’s abilities through indirect assessment”. In addition, realistic assessment activities help students concentrate on demonstrating their ability to discern relevant information and effectively act in situations that make sense in their future professional contexts.

In line with its assessment policy (IPQA ME/01/2009), “University of Venda should also ensure that its assessment strategies are recognized as an essential and integral part of teaching and learning”. The performance of such an evaluation role should depend on a concerted effort to

professionalize the evaluation practices of academic staff, including encouraging theoretically informed discussion and research. The university should promote demystification of assessment processes to make them more clear, accountable and transparent. For example, this could be done by developing student evaluation guides. The University should also consider the use for formative purposes of structured and supported peer and self-assessment that can lighten the staff marking burden. This can also allow students to gain a better understanding of the context of the evaluation criteria. Developing a good fit between the intent of the evaluation, the essence of the material and abilities being evaluated, and the form of assessment chosen is critical to achieving validity in the evaluation.

Stressing the concept of curriculum consistency by the researcher implies that evaluation approaches and activities should be consistent with the material and skills learned during the course. In other words, care should be taken to ensure that assessment tasks are tested for the learning outcomes as specified for the course. This involves making clear the learning outcomes and levels of awareness, comprehension and skills that one aims to achieve by students and then developing assessment mechanism that will effectively evaluate the achievement of these outcomes by students. More specific assessment criteria can be designed to each assessment task.

4.3. PRESENTATION OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH INTERVIEWS

This section presents data collected through interviews. The data is presented in narrative form.

4.3.1. Question 1. What is the illustration of quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education context?

Respondent A

Regarding the question of, *what is the illustration of quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education?* The respondent noted that, “quality is illustrated in the context of higher education in the form of common themes of accreditation and continuous improvement of the

core business of teaching and learning, research and community engagement of higher education institutions”.

Respondent B

In the same question of, *what is the illustration of quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education context?* Respondent B indicated that, “quality assurance in higher education is illustrated as a response to the national policy by statutory bodies that deal with quality like the CHE in the case of the South African context, who develops standards and procedures to guide higher education institutions in the process of commitment to continuously improve its offerings in line with the developed standards”.

Respondent C

Regarding the question of, *what is the illustration of quality assurance as a policy instrument higher education context?* Respondent C indicated that, “the review should form the basis of the quality assurance policy in higher education institution and that the review committees can therefore use the standards developed as a basis for judgment on the quality of the offerings of the higher education institution and make relevant recommendations and decision of future improvements”.

Respondent D

In line with the same question of, *what is the illustration of quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education context?* Respondent D indicated that “the critical illustration of quality assurance as a policy in higher education institutions is the audit of the higher education systems, processes and procedures on how they offer their services of teaching and learning, research and community engagement”.

Respondent E

Regarding the question that, *what is the illustration of quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education context?* Respondent E indicated that, “for higher education institution to fulfil their function efficiently, there is a need to meet certain standards of quality”. According to the respondent, for these to happen “there should be regulatory frameworks that mandate and ensure among other continuing attention to promoting and attaining quality, assessment and control of quality while providing evidence to the relevant stakeholders about the quality levels attained in the university which is a key factor for any successful higher education”.

Respondent F

With regard to the question, *what is the illustration of the quality assurance as a policy instrument in higher education context?* respondent F is of the view that, “the illustration of quality assurance as a policy in the higher education should include involving students in evaluating and enhancing the quality of their higher education institutions through specific activities such as responding to focus group interviews, questionnaires, participating in quality assurance related working groups, and involving them in quality assurance processes”.

4.3.2. Question 2. To what extent is the implementation of quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?

Respondent A

With regard to the question on, *to what extent is the implementation of quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?*, Respondent A replied that, “University of Venda quality assurance implementation is still in its early stage because the focus of the quality assurance as it stands is only on academic planning part of quality which deals with the approval of programmes by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) for inclusion in the Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM), Accreditation of the programme by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and registration of programmes by the South African qualification authority (SAQA)”.

Respondent B

In line with the question on, *to what extent is the implementation of quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?* Respondent B expressed that, “University of Venda quality assurance system needs to include the review of academic programmes in a cycle of five years to improve the quality and to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the programmes that are offered by the University”.

Respondent C

Regarding the question, *to what extent is the implementation of quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?* Respondent C indicate that as it stands, “There is lack of involvement in the quality assurance and related activities”. The respondent stipulated that, “introducing students to quality assurance processes and allowing them to participate in external evaluation panels provide good experiences for students”. In the role of student representatives, the student can see the situation from the learner’s perspective which others may not be able to consider because the students are the stakeholders in the University of Venda with time and money investments in the system.

Respondent D

In line with the question, *to what extent is the implementation of quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?* Respondent D indicated that, “they view quality assurance at the University of Venda as a way in which management enforces accountability, control, evaluation, measurement and quality improvement”.

Respondent E

Regarding the question, *to what extent is the implementation of quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?* Respondent D indicated that, “they were not aware of the quality assurance policy and they don’t see enough happening regarding the awareness of quality

assurance activities and that they only get the knowledge of the quality assurance processes when they were requested to participate in the interview by the researcher”.

Respondent F

In line with the question: *to what extent is the implementation of quality assurance observed in University of Venda?*, Respondent F replied that, “the role of quality assurance is very visible in the University in that the programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) of the institution is very clean and also have SAQA identity numbers which shows that all the programmes that are offered in the University of Venda are approved, accredited and registered by the relevant statutory bodies that oversee the qualifications offered in the republic of South Africa”.

In conclusion, on the question: *to what extent is the implementation of quality assurance observed in the University of Venda?* The respondents replied differently per their views and knowledge stressing the fact that they see quality assurance being implemented well in the University of Venda while others gave a different view that there should be more awareness on the quality activities.

2.2.1. Question 3. What are the implications of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?

Respondent A

In response to the question: *what are the implications of quality assurance implementation in University of Venda?* Respondent A indicated that, “lack of departmental review as a point of departure for ensuring quality enhancement in the university is causing problem as some of the programmes are at risk because they have never been reviewed since their inception when the University of Venda was formed”.

Respondent B

Regarding the question, *what are the implications of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?* Respondent B indicated that, “the last five years saw the implementation of a comprehensive system of internal quality assurance as a response to the CHE institutional audit of 2010 for the university of Venda and that the principle of quality as a key element in the relationship between the management and the students”. The respondent further gave a view that, “if it wasn’t because of the CHE 2010 audit quality assurance systems of the University of Venda was not going to be what it is now. That it is better compared to what it was before the CHE audit”.

Respondent C

In response of the question: *what are the implications of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?* Respondent C indicated that, “the approach of the CHE 2010 audit was an avowedly developmental one for the University of Venda and that the purpose was to stimulate the development of comprehensive institutional processes and policies to assess the quality of the core business of the university which is the teaching and learning, research and community engagement.” According to the respondent, “the methodology stressed the need for institutional self – evaluation as well as peer review, to develop capacity in the system to improve and demonstrate that the institution is fit for their purpose as defined in their mission and visions”.

Respondent D

With regard to the question: *what are the implications of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?* Respondent D indicated that, “quality assurance of teaching and learning has become a major strategic issue in the university of Venda on that the evaluation of lectures by the students makes the lecture give more in the process of teaching and the assistance of the students at risks by the postgraduate students or tutors makes the quality of the outcome to improve within the University”.

Respondent E

In response to the question: *what are the implications of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?* respondent E indicated that, “quality assurance and quality management at the University of Venda are more of a means to develop a quality culture which promotes the willingness of academic staff to make use of evidence which is produced by quality assurance procedures to innovate their teaching and attitudes towards the scholarship of teaching and learning as a response to changes in the environment and changing targets audiences. The respondent further stipulated that, academics don’t want the issue of bureaucracy and having to deal with many paper works but prefer to teach and do research”.

Respondent F

With regard to the question: *what are the implications of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?* respondent F indicated that, “even though the existence of quality assurance is widely accepted at the university of Venda, some of the lecturers still accuse the quality assurance officials / practitioners of being both bureaucratic burden and an illegitimate interference from executive management or the office of the Vice Chancellor and principal which holds the managerial power to regulate and discipline academics”. That’s, according to the respondent, “some academics resist when it comes to quality assurance processes at the university of Venda”.

In conclusion, to the question: *what are the implications of quality assurance implementation in the University of Venda?* The respondents held different views on how good is the University of Venda quality assurance and what the implications of its implementation are.

2.2.2. What are the recommendations or strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda?

Respondent A

Regarding the question on, *what are the recommendations or strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda?* Respondent A indicated that, “University of Venda should ensure that it initiates an institution wide dialogue on the nature of the

comprehensiveness of the institution and the implications that it has for its academic profile, which include its offerings (whether the University offers careers focused programmes or traditional type of qualifications), and the profile of students it attracts as the university, in order to clarify misconceptions and to ensure that there is sufficient common understanding of the University Identity which is understandable by all stakeholders”. The respondent indicated that, “the issue of the type (whether traditional University, University of Technology or Comprehensive University) of the University has a huge impact in the quality of its teaching and learning research and community engagement as quality goes in line with the type, vision, mission and strategic goals of the institution”. The respondent further suggested as a recommendation that, “it will be good if presentations on the meaning of comprehensiveness, and progress to date regarding University of Venda’s conversion to a comprehensive University as mandated by the Department of Higher Education and Training are made to all staff members and students with a view that they would assist in furthering this concept to various other internal and external stakeholders”.

Respondent B

In response to the question: *what are the recommendations or strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda?* Respondent B recommended that, “University of Venda should address the conceptualization of quality underpinning the work of quality assurance unit including the technical and human resources available to it, to ensure that the responsible staff have sufficient knowledge, capacity and seniority to interact appropriately with senior academics to discharge the quality assurance responsibilities within the University.

Respondent C

Regarding the question: *what are the recommendations or strategies to enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda?* Respondent C indicated that, “a good strategy that the University of Venda can use to enhance its quality assurance system is to ensure that it reviews its approach and use of benchmarking, surveys and performance management system to ensure that the operationalization of these activities directly serves the advancement of the mission and strategic goals”. According to the respondent, “it can be good if the University of Venda can have

a proper monitoring and evaluation of benchmarking exercises by relevant executive managers where reports after each benchmarking exercise can be written and submitted and the staff member is held accountable for implementing the findings or lesson learned in the benchmarking process”.

Respondent D

In response to the question of, *what are the recommendations of strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda?* Respondent D replied that, “the effectiveness of quality assurance in any higher education institution including University of Venda in this case depends greatly on an understanding of quality that goes beyond a technical compliance approach and rather engages with curriculum and teaching and learning practices”. According to the respondent, “University of Venda needs to make efforts to ensure that appropriate structures support the quality agenda of the university so that there is development and dissemination of quality responsibilities in schools and departments and there is an institution wide knowledge of the quality assurance policies and procedures”.

Respondent E

Regarding the question on, *what are the recommendations or strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University of Venda?* The respondent E indicated that, “as a strategy to enhance Quality at the University of Venda, University should initiate a comprehensive process of external programme reviews focusing on teaching and learning issues, and that it takes the necessary steps to develop capacity and provide resources at school and departmental level in curriculum design and programme development processes”.

Respondent F

In response to the question: *what are the recommendations or strategies that can enhance quality assurance at the University Venda?* Respondent F indicated that, “the strategy that University of Venda should use to improve its quality assurance system is through a robust

engagement to institutionalize quality assurance at the University using a system of policies, reviews and committees”. The respondent further indicated that, “the University should approach quality as an integral aspect of all its plans and activities so that quality management supports the attainment of the vision, mission and strategic plan”.

In conclusion to the question, the respondents generally indicated that, for the University of Venda to enhance its quality assurance system, it should ensure that it increases the capacity of the quality assurance office and that the focus of the office should not only be of Academic planning but also to include review of academic departments and support service departments.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter data collected through ethnographic research and interviews were presented through the researcher’s participation in the activities under the study of implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument in the University of Venda. Data collected was presented in a narrative form. The next chapter presents discussions on suggested good practice of quality assurance and recommendations for further research studies.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings, good practice of implementing quality assurance as a policy in line with the national policies and procedures and the recommendations of the study that are brought forward as measures that can be used by the University of Venda to overcome the challenges of implementing quality assurance as a policy instrument. The conclusion will also be addressed in this chapter.

5.2 SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE

This suggested good practice arising from the research aim and objective of the study which is about investigating the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument in the University of Venda to make recommendations on strategies that can enhance its effectiveness. These best practices are the results of the observation, participation and the benchmarking of different quality assurance policies in higher education and their implementation thereof.

5.2.1 Suggested good practice regarding Academic Planning and Curriculum Management

The University of Venda should ensure an effective management structure that identifies the individuals and structures responsible for planning, managing and administering the programs at each university level. Accountability, monitoring and correspondence processes, time frames and lines should be clearly defined. Macro planning and supervision should be centrally managed, with curriculum and course level responsibility for design and implementation. The institution's broad approval procedures should enable innovation and flexibility at program and course levels as far as possible.

5.2.2 Suggested good practice regarding Policies and Procedures for design and approval of programmes

University of Venda should develop clearly defined policies and procedures with realistic time frames for designing and approving its academic offerings in line with its policies, processes and procedures for program design and approval and provide guidelines from which academic staff and program team's work. A well-planned course / module and program-based system that clearly specifies its modules ' credit ratings, level and status. At the same time, the university should ensure that all its programs are accepted by an administrative authority that is independent of the program team based on clear requirements and that there should be clarity across the organization on frameworks and standards.

5.2.3 Suggested good practice regarding Operationalization of Mission & Goals/ Academic Planning Framework/ Teaching & Learning Plan and Strategy

The mission and goals, strategic planning process or teaching and learning strategy of the University of Venda should be operationalized into an instructional plan and program profile. This should be well understood throughout the institution and used as a criterion for the internal approval of new programs.

5.2.4 Suggested good practice regarding consultation / participation of internal and external stakeholders

The University will ensure that internal and external stakeholders are adequately consulted on the design of the program to ensure that students meet the requirements of employability and the needs of the labor market in both the short and long term. Students, professional bodies, potential employers, government departments and local communities involve internal and external stakeholders. Cooperative education programs should ensure formalized work place-based evaluation arrangements with industry partners for experiential learning and mentoring and monitoring of work.

5.2.5 Suggested good practice regarding feasibility and resources

It is necessary for the University of Venda to ensure that planning and budgeting are coordinated in such programs that they are not only allowed to operate unless there is:

- Confirmation-based evidence that adequate financial, physical, human and administrative resources are available to handle them using their planned delivery method,
- An adequate resourceful and sustainable learning environment such as access to adequate library and IT,
- Time tabling, place allocation for delivery and evaluation and the production of learning resources are effectively worked out for all modules in a way that accommodates both the delivery method and the needs of the groups of targeted students.

5.2.6 Suggested good practice regarding staffing

The University of Venda will ensure that it is capable of hiring, selecting and training adequate academic staff and supporting staff with the requisite skills and expertise to teach and support all programs so that students can achieve program results. It is reasonable to have a full-time to part-time staff ratio. Scientific activity / research is a prerequisite for all academic staff, particularly those appointed to teach at and above the degree level. The university should also provide its academic staff with both academic and professional development.

5.2.7 Suggested good practice regarding students

As a good practice, the University of Venda should ensure that it has the capacity to market its programs and provides appropriate access management arrangements for recruiting, selecting and placing enough suitable students in its programs. The university should have, where applicable, specified its targets for diversity or equity and size and shape. These are translated into academic program approval criteria. At the program level, the university should provide for alternative or versatile entry, and the curriculum should be balanced to match the level of preparation of students with incentives for student support and development from undergraduate to postgraduate programs.

5.2.8 Suggested good practice regarding Management Information Systems (MIS)

The University of Venda should be able to demonstrate that it has the resources and ability to use a suitable software system to collect and continuously monitor all the necessary information about its students and programs including their status of registration and accreditation. Relevant aspects of this information should be made available to staff, students and the public on a regular basis. Management information systems will allow monitoring of the performance of students, allowing appropriate educational interventions where deemed necessary in individual cases.

5.2.9 Suggested good practice regarding mechanisms for improvement

As a good practice, Venda University should have an efficient and integrated quality management system that includes processes for tracking and reviewing the effects of policies and plans and their execution at all program delivery levels. The findings and recommendations of the institution's internal assessments and external evaluations and its services should be incorporated into new planning cycles and lead to improvements in the curriculum. An effective support systems should also be in place for curriculum improvement.

5.2.10 Suggested good practice regarding policy for the Quality Management of Academic Reviews

University of Venda should ensure that a quality assurance director, supported by or equivalent to a quality committee, is appointed to be responsible for the development and review of quality management and quality assurance policies and oversee their implementation. Implementation of the quality management program should be implemented into all line managers' job descriptions. One of the most critical aspects is that the policy on quality assurance should be common throughout the organization and owed to those responsible for its execution.

It is essential for the University to guarantee that the curriculum coordinators are responsible for organizing and performing the reviews at program level and to make sure that the reviews of the courses that include the program are undertaken and that the results are aggregated to inform

the program review. The university should also ensure that the quality assurance employees are available to inform and help academic staff in the review process and that accountability for the review of the course is assigned with the help of the quality assurance staff to the course conveners or facilitators. The university should consider that the policy requires program coordinators or department heads to take responsibility to ensure that observations from reviews are documented, reported and reflected at both program and course level, and that strength is built on and shortcomings are resolved.

The University's evaluation policy need to provide guidelines on the duration of the analysis. The frequency will vary with courses being reviewed more frequently than programs for program and course review. The review period should consider the accreditation cycle of the HEQC. At program level, there must be at least one formative review process in a six-year cycle, while on an ongoing basis, the formative review of courses and modules should occur more frequently.

5.2.11 Suggested good practice regarding Guidelines & Support for Academic Review

Quality assurance practitioners should be able to inform and support professors and institutional administrators in the review process and should have experience and professional knowledge of higher education and evaluation. Evaluation preparation should be required as part of the program for staff growth. The university should also confirm that operating systems are available for the design, processing and review of survey instruments by teaching staff. There should be awareness of reviews so that reviews are comprehended as part of an ongoing cycle involving the examination and questioning of practice and are not associated with sanctions or threats if the insights derived from the evaluation are considered. The university should ensure that teaching staff and those who support them are continuous or ongoing professional development, such as quality assurance staff.

5.2.12 Suggested good practice regarding Review method

In any review, whether at program or course level, information is repositioned from several viewpoints to gain a comprehensive understanding, and the University of Venda should ensure

that the perspective of students, those on the program, external examiners and other stakeholders such as professional bodies and workers is sought. Same should happen at a level where students, course or module coordinators, and ideally peers, have a perspective.

Venda University must make sure they use a range of analysis methods to collect data based on the group size. Such analysis methods may include questionnaires that include both closed-ended and open-ended questions, focus group interviews and individual interviews, as well as other more informal data collection tools to allow ongoing data collection.

The university should also ensure that data analyzes from different sources are conducted in a quantitative and qualitative manner and are appropriate to the nature of the questions asked and the amount of data collected. The accuracy of the findings from the data of the analysis should be challenged in the same way as validating the conclusions drawn from the study.

5.2.13 Suggested good practice regarding Use of feedback for Curriculum improvement

The review process at the University of Venda requires identifying and addressing areas for improvement through the development of detailed improvement plans. These plans need to be documented as part of the review report, and the program coordinators or department heads should resource and monitor the implementation of these plans. In addition, the review should be conducted to verify the effectiveness of the improvements.

5.2.14 Suggested good practice regarding staff Development and Support

The University of Venda should ensure the availability of educational expertise to support academic staff in interpreting the conclusions of the review and planning for enhancement. Ideally, these plans should be based on sound theory of learning. If necessary, such support should be available to academic staff in the form of individual consultations. Once the development plans have been established, training is given to ensure that those who work on the curriculum have the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out the improvement. Support should be continuous and typically informal, but can also be connected to formal staff

development programs and support should be scheduled as part of the review process at the end of the day.

5.2.15 Suggested good practice regarding Equity and Access

University of Venda should ensure that its admissions targets address equity concerns in line with the Higher Education and Training Department's requirement and that access routes and a range of adaptable entry routes are designed to support its objectives. Management information will demonstrate that progress is being made through colleges, services and rates in achieving these goals.

5.2.16 Suggested good practice regarding alignment between Admission policy and strategic and Academic Planning

University of Venda should ensure that it uses an approved and published admission policy so that the stakeholders can be aware of the requirements to enroll in whatever they wish to enroll for. The admission policy should be aligned to the institution's mission, enrolments targets, strategic plan and the Programme and Qualification Mix of the university. The policy should also consider access demand and the socio-economic context of the institution and include realistic plans to meet specified size and shape enrolment targets within specified time frames that are clearly defined in terms of enrollment targets for both regular and flexible entry routes.

5.2.17 Suggested good practice regarding policy and Management structure

As a good practice in line with other higher education institutions in South Africa, University of Venda should ensure that there is clarity on the roles, functions and reporting lines of those responsible for developing and implementing admissions policy, for example, University should have a clearly defined admissions policy development structure which is driven by a senior executive officer who will be directly accountable for the admission policy. The implementation of the policy should also be driven by a senior manager with structures clearly accountable to that office or individual.

The policy and management structure should allow the convergence and coordination of functions directly affecting student admissions, in particular functional links, to be developed and maintained between structures or divisions such as the Committee on Institutional Admissions, academic development programmes, alternative assessment services, students data or record system, school administrators, school admission and re –admission committees, academic planning , financial aid and student housing and the student representative council (SRC). This means that a position offer to an applicant requires the allocation of accommodation and, where appropriate and practicable, a financial assistance package that guarantees that the students are effectively settled upon arrival at the college.

5.2.18 Suggested good practice regarding internal dissemination and consistency of application

The university's admission policy should be open to everyone who wants it, e.g. it should be listed on the institution's website. Admission officers, school deans and student administration staff should be familiar with and able to interpret the institutional admission policy and procedures at any time for those in need, and the policy stipulations should be consistently applied throughout the institution.

5.2.19 Suggested good practice regarding Recruitment & dissemination of admissions information

The University will ensure that information on its educational opportunities, admission regulations and application procedures is disseminated to prospective students in a timely manner so that they can make suitable decisions. A variety of open, student-centered communication approaches should be used to improve institution size achievement and form targets such as blogs, tool packs for students who present themselves at registration for the first time. The university should also ensure that the information being disseminated is accurate and comprehensive and that unrealistic promises are not made.

5.2.20 Suggested good practice regarding Institutional culture & diversity

Regarding institutional culture and diversity, University of Venda will strive to create an enabling environment conducive to successful learning in which the power relationships between teachers and learners are not a stumbling block or source of student alienation.

The profiles of institutional culture and staffing will reflect the diversity of the student population of the university and foster an ethic of reciprocity, service and tolerance. Institutional culture should be embraced by under-prepared college students, women and minorities, SADC students, other international students, HIV-positive students, students with disabilities, mature or working / time students and other underrepresented groups.

The management, communication, support and curricula of Venda University should represent and respect diversity, For example, if working class or parallel students are targeted, previous learning and student development programs should be acknowledged so that mature students can re-enter the university after prolonged periods of study, childcare facilities should be available, & curriculum and administrative structures should be flexible enough to accommodate the circumstances of such students.

5.2.21 Suggested good practice regarding Comprehensiveness & accessibility of student support services

The University of Venda should provide a broad range of student development and support services that meet the needs of its students, strengthen their educational experience and the learning environment and provide care for a diverse student body Examples of proposed best practice involve financial assistance, apartments, library and experimental services, sports and leisure facilities, career guidance, curriculum guidance, gender outreach programs, health and counseling services, and support for disadvantaged students.

The university should ensure that services are provided at the three most important phases of a student career at first entering the institution, promoting retention during a student's stay, and

facilitating the move from the university to the world of work.

5.2.22 Suggested good practice regarding Models of Academic Development

University of Venda must ensure that its academic development models are sufficient and sensitive to its students' needs and that the university can provide a well-argued basis for its academic development approaches in terms of its equity objectives, the student profile, pre-learning students, language proficiency levels of students and general academic skills and unique disciplinary skills criteria of its curriculum.

5.2.23 Suggested good practice regarding Curriculum Development

The University should promote and fund curriculum development programs that relate to the needs of its student body and incorporate teaching and learning approaches to improve language skills, including additional enrichment programmes, academic and academic literacy skills, and linguistic, cognitive and epistemological access to and practice of specific academic discourses.

5.2.24 Suggested good practice regarding policy and procedures about Assessment

Venda University should ensure that there is an institutional evaluation policy that makes the values, theories or evaluation philosophy on which it is based explicit. The policy should aim to ensure that valid, reliable and transparent evaluation practices are developed in accordance with academic and professional standards. The legislation should also provide for successful confirmation of evaluation processes and procedures through which schools and agencies are responsible for implementing the policy of institutional evaluation. The policy should include guidelines or legislation for formative evaluation, student feedback, class mark weighting, ongoing evaluation and examination, security procedures, disciplinary and appeal procedures, marking regulations, grading, additional examinations, passes condoned and plagiarism.

The University will ensure that the evaluation program is enforced, tracked and reviewed at

institutional level, at school level, at departmental level. External peer experts should validate evaluation decisions made by the committees, school boards at these levels.

5.2.25 Suggested good practice regarding Moderation System

It will be in the best interest of University of Venda to ensure that its academic staff who teach subject / course / module are responsible for designing, running and marking both formative and summative evaluations for recording the results and providing students with feedback. The university should also make allowance for new staff members, including time release for staff growth in assessment.

The element of internal assessment should be performed to provide the marking process with a reliability test and to provide workers with constructive input on their appraisal activity. For summative evaluation where more than one marker is involved, at least effective sampling should be carried out via an appropriate internal system which includes checking the marking's reliability.

5.2.26 Suggested good practice regarding Institutional Policies, Guidelines or plans on Staff Development

University of Venda should ensure that its staff development policy is consistent with its mission and objectives, as well as its teaching and learning strategy. The policy must be based on an analysis of staff needs that also considers relevant developments in the market, social and national. For example, the policy or plan for staff development should be consistent with the following legislative frameworks:

- The National Plan on Higher Education Act no. 101 of 1997 which takes cognizance of the requirement for improved staff equity
- The Employment Equity Act no. 55 of 1998 which takes cognizance of an equity plan to recruit staff from designated groups and to provide professional development activities to attain equity in the university's staff profile
- The Skills Development Act no. 97 of 1998 which conforms to these requirements

like skills development facilitator is appointed to integrate the academic staff development plan with a broader institutional training and development plan.

The university should ensure that academic leadership supports the staff development policy and is widely disseminated and adhered to across the institution, and that the university has allocated adequate resources and time in staff workloads to implement its staff development policy.

5.2.27 Suggested good practice regarding Alignment of Recruitment Strategies, & Selection & Promotion Criteria

As part of the suggested good practice in line with recruitment strategies, selection and promotion criteria for staff development, the University of Venda should ensure that its Selection methods and requirements are closely matched with human resources and staff recruitment policies. In the recruitment strategy, qualities and abilities other than formal qualifications such as personality, principles and dedication should also be considered. It is also critical for the university to have clear policies related to performance and equity targets for staff mobility and growth. These elements should be made very clear and applied transparently to prospective and current staff.

5.2.28 Suggested good practice regarding Effective Management of the Postgraduate System

The University should ensure that it has developed a clearly defined policies and procedures for:

- “Recruitment, admission and induction of postgraduate students,
- The approval of post graduate proposals,
- The supervisory relationship,
- The appointment of supervisors and examiners,
- Thesis presentation and examination;
- The award of degrees,

- Students complains and appeals, and
- Postgraduate publications”

The university will ensure that financial, administrative and organizational support and recruitment of staff support the research agenda. There should be clear lines of responsibility for the monitoring process. A means of coordinating research degrees, monitoring the progress of postgraduate students and supervising evaluation procedures should be provided at a school or departmental level to a senior academic. The same person should ensure that the courses and research are properly coordinated for the master's degree. The supervisors should be required to regularly document and report on the process of the supervisors to a senior academic. This system should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis and includes feedback from students.

5.2.29 Suggested good practice regarding Post Graduate Policies and Procedures

Venda University must ensure that policies, regulations and procedures for postgraduate studies are developed in line with its general research policy. Policy and regulations for postgraduates should be widely disseminated, understood by students, administrative and academic staff, and consistently implemented across the institution.

One of the critical activities that the University must provide for its post graduate students is the Training for proposal development. The criteria for the approval of research projects should include recognition of the following issues, the appropriateness of the project for awarding in terms of research questions and conceptualization of research, the appropriateness of the methodology and the analysis and scientific integrity of the proposed research. Specific criteria should include proof that the student has the research skills required to complete the project, evidence that a suitable teacher is available, and the availability of facilities and services to complete the project.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following are the recommendations of the study that are made based on the analysis, interviews, observations and participation by the researcher of the study from the challenges of implementing Quality Assurance as a policy instrument in the University of Venda.

5.3.1 Recommendation on the challenges of Programme Planning, Design and Management in the University of Venda

Based on the document analysis, interviews, observation and participation by the researcher in programme planning, design and management, it is recommended that the University of Venda ensures that all its programmes are approved by the DHET and forming part of the university's PQM, they are accredited by the CHE and are also registered by the SAQA. This is to ensure that all the qualifications that are conferred are legitimate and recognized by the statutory bodies that govern South African higher education institutions. The University of Venda should have clear policies and reliable methods to assess the need for a program and to plan and authorize programs and their modules / courses. At the same time the prior to a new programme approval, University of Venda should consider issues of feasibility and resource implication of running such a programme than doing the feasibility only when the programme is approved, accredited and registered and ready to be offered.

5.3.2 Recommendation on the role of Programme and Course Review at the University of Venda

It is recommended that the University of Venda should have a comprehensive and clearly laid out policy for the Quality Assurance of its academic offering which allocate the responsibility for Quality Assurance academic line managers which are Deans and Heads of departments in this case. The policy will ensure that programs and courses are reviewed in compliance with the regularly defined process. The policy should also ensure the aggregation of data collected at the course level to feed into program review.

It is also recommended that University of Venda's quality management system for program reviews should include clear reporting lines and accountability, ensuring that the management

system is reported and followed up with monitored improvement plans based on sound education theory and supported by the provision of resources and staff development.

5.3.3 Recommendation on the Access and Admission policy of the University of Venda

Regarding the University of Venda's access and admission policy, it is recommended that information procedures (both regular and flexible) be disseminated to prospective students in good time so that appropriate decisions can be taken by the students. This suggests that a range of open communication approaches focused on students should be used to facilitate the achievement of the size and shape targets of the university. For example, websites, resource packs for students presenting at registration platforms and social media platforms for the first time.

5.3.4 Recommendation on Student Development and Support processes and procedures at the University of Venda

Out of the observation, participation and engagement with the University of Venda's Student Development and support processes and procedures, the researcher recommends that the University should ensure that their academic development models are appropriate and responsive to their students' needs. Therefore, the University should provide a well-argued rationale for its academic development strategies in terms of its equity goals, student profile, student prior learning, language proficiency levels of students, and general academic competencies.

5.3.5 Recommendation on the Assessment of student learning at the University of Venda

It is recommended that University of Venda have procedures to evaluate and recognize prior learning that should include selecting potential RPL candidates and staff, including structures to support them through the RPL process. These should include recognizing, recording, reviewing, evaluating and transcribing previous learning toward specific learning outcomes to express that learning with admission requirements to appropriate programs and be accepted for entry,

exemption or accreditation purposes. The evaluation tools developed for RPL should be designed and implemented in accordance with the fair and transparent evaluation policies of the universities.

5.3.6 Recommendation on Staff development at the University of Venda

It is recommended that the University's staff development plan be operationalized in an institutional performance management system. An internal analysis of personnel education and training requirements should also inform the program. The University should also ensure that its employee development plan aligns with teaching and learning approaches and curriculum development plans to ensure relevance to teaching practice.

5.3.7 Recommendation on post graduate research and supervision at the University of Venda

Regarding the postgraduate research and supervision, it is recommended that University of Venda should provide a research conducive infrastructure and environment for its post graduate students. For example, students should be inducted into an active research community, and provided with suitably skilled and knowledgeable supervisor. Adequate research facilities and equipment should be provided, such as computing and information technology facilities, library facilities, study and laboratory space and technical equipment and accommodation. Postgraduate students should have access to other academics in their specialization, visiting researchers and other experts. Postgraduate students should also have access to financial support for conference attendance and publication.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The aim of the study was to investigate the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument in the University of Venda and to make recommendations on strategies that can enhance its effectiveness. The research was based only at the University of Venda and some examples were given in line with South African Higher Education context on quality assurance

issues.

This study recommends that similar research should be conducted in other South African higher education institution with the very same topic to determine the impact of the implementation of quality assurance as a policy instrument in other Universities. The findings will assist higher education institutions to realize the challenges, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of enhancing quality assurance in South African context.

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