



Challenges faced by academics in uptake of quality assurance measures

Vivian Olebogeng Jappie¹, Reginald Oats²

^{1,2} Department of Educational Foundations, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

Abstract

Quality Assurance in higher education has become a major preoccupation in the global world. As such, governments globally are emphasizing the need for higher education institutions to provide quality education to students. Although academics as one of the major stakeholders in the provision of quality education are committed to quality teaching, they continue to display some elements of resistance to quality processes at Universities. This study as explored the causes behind the low uptake of Quality Assurance measures on teaching and learning by academic staff at BA ISAGO University. Mixed research methodology was employed for this study through administration of questionnaires consisting mostly open ended and a dash of closed ended questionnaires to academic staff/lecturers. In-depth individual or one-on-one interviews were also conducted with the deans of faculties. The participants consisted of 22 academic staff and 4 deans of faculties.

Keywords: Assurance measures, ISAGO, global

Introduction

Quality Assurance in higher education has become a major preoccupation in the global world. As such, governments globally are emphasizing the need for higher education institutions to provide quality education to students. For this reason BA ISAGO University has in place quality assurance measures meant to promote quality teaching and learning. Despite these measures, quality assurance at BA ISAGO University seems to be a challenge to academic staff members. Academic staffs usually adhere to formulated institutional structures nevertheless inspections and other monitoring activities outside the academic institutional structures are usually not welcome. Quality assurance measures, which should be correctional and improvement tools, generally should be well comprehended by academic staff and as opposed to this, the Quality Assurance Unit often experience late submission of documentation. Academic staff is often unwilling to compile reports as required for example internal and external moderation reports, some of the academic staff are unenthusiastic about the quality audit and other monitoring activities. They hardly prepare for internal quality audit or always too busy for it. There is also late coming and even absenteeism of academic staff for classes. In addition, Classroom instruction is not diversified, lesson preparation is not done by some staff members and lesson planning is not standardized. It is based on this observation by the researcher that this study intends to explore several options for making the quality assurance measures receptive and appreciated to all BA ISAGO academic staff members. An investigation into this problem was triggered by the observations made by the researchers from interactions with the quality assurance system at BA ISAGO University. Addressing this problem will create a culture of quality in all aspects of academic service delivery including improved

teaching, improved curriculum, and acquisition of the 21st century skills on the part of learners to mention a few. This study therefore sought to investigate quality assurance devotion challenges of academic staff of BA ISAGO University.

Objectives

The main objective of the study was to find out the challenges faced by academic staff in their effort to adhere to quality assurance measures. Along the same the study sought to solicit views of academic staff with regard to possible interventions to improve quality assurance at their institution.

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted is for this study is the Attribution theory which is meant to guide and inform the study. Over the years, Attribution Theory has been very influential in Social Psychology. The origins of this theory are traced back to Heider (1958) and adopted by Weiner (2000). Attribution theory can be linked to theories of motivation, which at one time, were only considered in behavioral views of psychology and learning (Driscoll 2005). Weiner focused his attribution theory on achievement and he identified ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck as the most important factors affecting attributions for achievement (Weiner, 1974).

The Attribution theory explains that the purpose behind making attributions is meant to achieve cognitive control over one's environment by explaining and understanding the causes behind behaviors and environmental occurrences (Oghojafor, 2012). Given this, the framework would guide in the analysis of the motives behind academic staffs' low uptake of QA measures and to ascertain what informs them. The Attribution theory basically tries to find out the reasons for people's behaviors (Weiner, 2007). The theory maintains that people

try to determine why other people do what they do or interpret causes to certain behaviors or events. The theory asserts that one of the aspects that underlie attribution is that behavior is attributed to internal or external attributes. That is, the theory tries to explain whether the behavior is internally or externally caused (Robbins, Judge, Odendaal & Roodt, 2009).

For this study, attribution theory is used to understand academic staff practices since the basic motive of attribution theory is essentially to look for understanding (Pan, Zhu & Zhu 2008). Internal factors denote one's personality that comes from within and comprise of ones' personal reasons relating to practicing quality for instance academic staff's teaching philosophy educational qualification, attitude or one's own understanding of quality.

On the other hand, external causes of factors speak of institutional or environmental factors which could include institutional student's evaluations of the lecturers, peer reviews, institutional quality processes or other factors that are related to the arrangements of an institution. These factors determine the overall reception of quality in a particular institution. As a result, both internal and external factors are substantial in assuring quality teaching and learning. They are both concepts of attribution theory which will be used to understand academic staff quality perceptions and practices.

Literature review

Genesis quality assurance at BA ISAGO university

BA ISAGO University is a private tertiary education institution with campuses located in Gaborone (main campus), Francistown and Maun. The University first opened in Francistown City in 2002 as a small campus and grew significantly over the years. The university strives to strategically position itself to be able to optimally exploit the local and regional markets as a key player in the tertiary education landscape. To realise this vision, quality assurance is a priority area. Simply put, at BA ISAGO University (2016), Quality is at the heart of all activities. This is reflected in the mission statement which states to provide quality, market driven academic and training programmes, in its endeavor to contribute meaningfully to human resources development in Botswana and beyond. At BA ISAGO, the Quality Assurance procedures implemented by the University have developed over the 15 years of the life of the University. The underpinning principles of these procedures are equity, fairness and standards.

The University is committed to the provision of flexible, accessible and affordable niche focused Higher Education. In fulfilling the commitment to quality, the University has in place quality assurance and monitoring procedures ensuring achievement of the mission through best practice, the ability to make informed judgments in relation to standards of performance and the identification of areas for further development. Certain measures and mechanisms have been put forth by the university and are meant to enhance instruction for the provision of quality education. The quality assurance measures adopted by the university include student's evaluation of lecturers, performance appraisals, use of varied teaching methodologies, peer evaluations and conducting internal audits to monitor compliance to standards as set by the university and the regulatory authorities (BA

ISAGO, 2011).

In addition, the university set up a division named Curriculum Development and Quality Assurance which plays a key role in the development, monitoring and reporting of quality across the institution. The main aim of the division is to ensure the highest quality learning, teaching, curricula, research and administration, through the development, implementation and continuous improvement and enhancement of quality assurance systems. It provides administrative and substantive support for ensuring quality delivery of services at all levels. The division also facilitates institutional and programme accreditation processes. BA ISAGO University's strategic goal number 2, which seeks to promote quality culture in all aspects of academic and support service delivery (BA ISAGO University Strategic Plan, 2015) is indicative of the fact that the university is committed to providing quality education and also defines the direction that must be followed in order to achieve quality in higher education. Key to achieving this strategy is the development of an effective and efficient quality assurance system underpinned by quality teaching and learning, research development, curriculum development, student progression and welfare, focused on the needs of the University, the country, and the African region and beyond. This will mean ensuring that BA ISAGO departments adhere to the agreed quality standards and that every individual clearly understands the role that they need to play as quality assurance agents.

Challenges facing tertiary institutions with regards to QA

Tertiary Institutions are challenged to offer quality teaching to help address societal challenges. Different stakeholders within Tertiary Institutions have different roles to play in ensuring that the teaching provided is of high quality. These stakeholders include academic staff, facilities departments, university senior management as well as the students themselves. Academics are one of the important stakeholders, who need to ensure that there is quality teaching taking place. Parker and Jary (1995) derive four stakeholder groups in higher education, namely government and quality agencies, institutions and individuals such as academic staff. Students might not have been specifically referred to in their classification, but Watty (2003) ^[49] describes students as a legitimate stakeholder-group.

Boateng (2014) looked at barriers to internal quality assurance in private tertiary institutions in Ghana. The thrust of the study was on the perception of staff and students selected from private tertiary institutions on national quality assurance and the barriers to the implementation of quality assurance requirements by the government quality assurance agencies. The study examined the understanding of the national quality assurance system and existing barriers to the implementation of internal quality assurance in some Private Tertiary Institutions in Ghana. Academic, administrative staff and students from the private institutions completed a set of questionnaires that tapped their perceptions on issues causing implementation barriers to internal quality assurance.

From the findings, quality management decisions emerged as a major barrier to the implementation of internal quality assurance, especially the failure to link identification of quality objectives to the institutional strategic plan. Student

involvement, lack of effective coordination, weaker emphasis on strategic planning and quality management as well as dominance culture not opened to change and improvement were barriers that adversely affected the implementation of internal quality assurance. The study concluded that transparency, openness, responsiveness and creativity should form the basis of the ideal culture for quality improvement in private Tertiary Institutions.

Owino *et al* (2011) ^[28] investigated how effectively university managers have played their role in quality assurance among Kenyan public and private universities. The results indicated that private universities performed better than public universities in management of quality education. However, public and private universities suffered from interference by political and religious patronage. The other barrier to provision of effective management for quality assurance among Kenyan public and private universities was found to be negative ethnicity and nepotism. Kenyan public universities suffered from insufficient teaching and learning resources and a leadership that did not satisfactorily engage its stakeholders in decision making.

Nonso *et al.* (2015) conducted a study on the analysis of the internal measures that are used in public and private universities in south east geo-political zone of Nigeria for quality assurance. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The sample of the study comprised 2,106 respondents which were made up of 936 lecturers and 1, 170 students from four universities sampled. The Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency of the items and this yielded a result of 0.74. The research questions were analyzed using the mean, while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance.

The findings of the study revealed that both public and private universities in the south-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria did not adequately use internal measures (students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness, guidance and counseling services, quality student intake, evaluation of students' learning experience and teacher quality) towards quality assurance. The finding of this study is in line with Ajadi (2010) who found out among others that most lecturers are not adequately trained towards enhancing their professional growth. The finding was further in corroboration with Awe and Ajadi (2010) who found out that quality of academic staff is a quality assurance measure for academic programmes in universities and that there are deficiencies in the quality of academic staff in Nigeria universities.

Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015) ^[36] argued that tertiary institutions in developing countries including those in the Sub-Saharan Africa region are usually confronted with a number of challenges. One of such challenges identified by respondents was inadequate staffing and the non-availability of offices across the campuses of the University. The authors conducted a study to examine the implementation challenges of quality assurance in public universities in Ghana with a focus on University for Development Studies (UDS). The study adopted a qualitative case study design. The data for the study was collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis and participants observation.

The findings of the study suggested that University for Development Studies had taken pragmatic steps to assure

quality in its operations. However, the implementation challenges of quality assurance include: staffing and offices; quality culture; physical and financial resources; commitment and support for quality assurance and absence of a current strategic plan.

Research design

Polit *et al* (2001) ^[31] defines a research design as the researcher's overall technique for answering the research question or testing the research hypothesis. A research design refers to the strategy used to integrate the different components of the research project in a cohesive and coherent way, rather than a "cookbook" from which you choose the best recipe; it is a means to structure a research project in order to address a defined set of questions. Trochim (1996) states that a research design can be thought of as the structure of research, it holds all of the elements in a research project together and often describe a design using a concise notation that enables us to summarize a complex design structure efficiently. According to Jackson and Trochim (2002), a research design provides the glue that holds the research project together. As such, a design is used to structure the research study, to show how all of the major parts of the research project like the samples or groups, measures, treatments or programs, and methods of assignment work together to try to address the central research questions, similarly, other questions are usually answered through research methodology, like how the study is actually going to be conducted.

The primary design adopted for this study is a Case study utilising the mixed methods approach. This study was an exploratory type of a single case design that explored a contemporary problem (Yin, 2003) ^[56]. The Qualitative aspect of this study was useful in soliciting in-depth knowledge and experiences from academic staff members utilising its descriptive nature. This approach enabled the researchers to better understand human experience. This Case study dealt with a specific research phenomenon to understand its uniqueness. The specific objective for this study was to investigate the dynamics of some single bounded system, usually of a social nature, such as family, group, and community, participants in a project, institution and practice (Zucker, 2009) ^[59]; (Brown, 2004) ^[9] has added that, the case study does not claim any specific data collection methods, but focusses on holistic description and explanation.

For this study, sampling procedure was applied in order to avoid the selection bias. In particular simple Random Sampling method was carried out so that the selection of a sample size of BA ISAGO University academic staff became representative of the entire population of the academic staff. The data was collected from the academic staff across all faculties and all departments and management team members. Questionnaires and interviews were the main data collection instruments for this study.

Ethical Considerations

Botswana has a standards procedure that states that before pursuing any research in the country, permission should be sought from the permanent secretary of the relevant ministry. As such, prior to the actual collection of data researchers

sought permission from the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science and Technology to conduct the study. After permission was granted the researchers got in the field to collect the data. The researchers did the actual collection, that is the distribution of questionnaires and collection of the completed questionnaires and conduct interviews. Permission to carry out the research was sought from University of Botswana Office of Research & Development and the Ministry of Tertiary Education Research Science and Technology. There was also official introduction and permission seeking form BA ISAGO management through the School of Graduate Studies and Research (SGSR). The questionnaires were distributed during working hours especially during tea break and appointments on collection were set. Times for interviews were agreed upon with the deans to avoid disturbing their schedules.

Research Ethics were generally considered for this study. Permission letter was presented to BA ISAGO University School of Graduate Studies and Research, which was responsible for giving permission to all who wish to conduct studies in BA ISAGO. After receiving the permission, data collection phase took place first by undertaking informed consent from the participants; basically this entailed informing all the participants about the purpose of the study for their own understanding and their freedom of participation. next we informed participants that all data would be kept confidential and their responses will be coded to determine how many academic staff members took part. Data were kept safely until such a time when the research had been completed following which it was destroyed.

Findings and discussion

Challenges faced by staff in their quest to adhere to Quality Assurance

This section presents the challenges faced by academic staff at BA ISAGO in their efforts to adhere to QA. In this endeavor, academic staff members were asked to state that challenges that they face at the University that distracts them to execute the quality duties and/or requirements as expected with respect to QA.

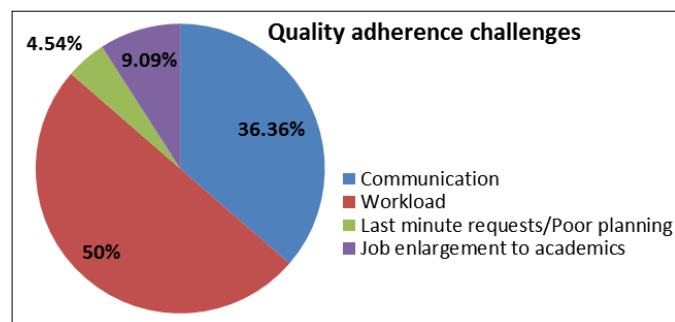


Fig 1: Challenges faced by staff in their quest to adhere to QA

The researchers sought to find out the perceptions of academic staff on what they identify to be challenges making their adherence to quality assurance compromised. Four key themes were extracted from the responses and are set out in figure 1 above. Workload garnered a significant 50% popularity score. The respondents seemed to suggest that too much work is

significantly influencing their commitment to quality. Second in popularity was lack of communication (36.36%) where employees bemoaned poor planning and communication practices to be contributing to the compromised quality levels. These two were said to be complimented by poor planning (9.09%) and job enlargement especially to academic staff that do comprehensive administrative work. These findings confirm relevance of the engagement of people principle for ISO 9000 which prescribes that organisations expectations should centre on ensuring that people’s abilities are used and valued by the organisation. The organisation must make its employees accountable for all their actions while enabling participation in continual improvement, evaluating individual performance, enable learning and knowledge sharing and enabling open discussion of problems and constraints (Brad, 2008).

The above responses are complemented by the Deans of Faculties who responded as follows with perspective to the challenges that academic staff face in their attempt to adhere to quality assurance measures in place.

Table 1: Summary Deans responses regarding challenges faced by academic staff (n=22)

Deans	Responses
Dean 1	Academics see QA as policing and they end up just abiding for the sake of it.
Dean 2	Resource constraints -The faculties do not have administrators, teaching assistants or secretaries therefore academic staff find themselves immensely consumed in different tasks that make it difficult to comprehend the quality assurance measures
Dean 3	Mechanisms are there but implementation need be improved e.g workload, and execution of other duties becomes almost impossible because of the systems in place
Dean 4	There is always outside pressure which frustrates them and there is need for autonomy in the teaching environment.

Among other challenges as raised by academic staff, Workload is confirmed by Dean 3 and implied by Dean 4. It could therefore be concluded that workload imposed on academic staff is of an alarming concern. The university should have other academic support staff such as faculty administrators, teaching assistants and those that provide secretarial services to relief the academics of other administrative commitments. Harvey (2006) affirms this and asserts that academics complain about the significant bureaucracy involved in quality assurance, the lack of time to deal with its requirements and, inherently, the diversion of their attention from the really important aspects of academic life, namely teaching and research. Agreeable to this finding also is the assertion made by Laughton (2003) [23] who explained academics’ perception of quality assurance as being based on imposition and prescription and, thus, clashing with the values characterising academic culture, namely academic freedom.

The findings with regard to this subsection also unveiled that when there is poor planning and communication gaps, academic staffs’ compliance levels are compromised. This refers to cases whereby academic staff are not initially involved in the process such as the development of procedures

and QA instruments and later expected to understand and comply. As revealed, this leaves academic staff with no choices but to comply just for the sake of it without owning the process. These findings is in accord with Loukkola and Zhang (2010) who pointed out that the fact that academics are not always effectively integrated in the development of quality assurance procedures, namely those occurring within institutions could be related to the fact that quality assurance is seen by academics as generating reports that do not engage with the heart of the academic endeavor (Harvey and Williams (2010). On the contrary, Veiga *et al.* (2012) refer to the absence of statistically significant differences between the answers of academics involved and not involved in quality assessment activities.

Possible interventions to improve quality assurance

The researchers found it fitting to seek improvement strategies from the participants as a means to improve the QA system at BA ISAGO University. According to the feedback analysis table 2, question 4 had a 90.90% response rate with two respondents abstaining from answering the question. The themes obtained from the open ended question were grouped and quantified as set out in table below.

Table 2: Summary of interventions for QA improvement

Obtaining theme	Number proposing	Popularity %
Form Quality forums	6	30%
Stakeholder involvement on crafting of QA instruments	6	30%
Students training on evaluation objectives	6	30%
Should be open and transparent	2	10%

Three themes which are formation of quality forums, training students on program and lecturer evaluation objectives, and stakeholder involvement in the crafting of the quality assurance instruments obtained prominence at 30% vote each. It can be ascertained that the respondents are suggesting a lack of the said variables in the current quality assurance mechanisms being applied at BA ISAGO University.

Transparency in Quality assurance had marginal score of 10% popularity. This suggests that the current quality assurance mechanisms in place at BA ISAGO University do not have commendable levels of transparency. This finding speaks in the context of the responses to question three that sought to evaluate the level of reasonableness and usefulness of quality assurance measures at BA ISAGO University. Mixed reactions obtained with majority suggesting negative evaluation of the systems in place. In line with these observations, Tony (2012) contends that “there are no easy solutions to addressing the negotiation of standards that undermine quality human performance. All customers of higher education deserve the best we can offer, as higher education.”

From interviews conducted with the Deans, another set of improvement mechanisms emanated. These were summed up in table 3 below.

Table 3: Summation of Dean’s proposals regarding QA Improvement strategies

Deans	Responses
Dean 1	I believe all is in its rightful place
Dean 2	Continuous review of QA instruments and mechanisms
Dean 3	2 to 3 hours orientation is not enough to take the new academic staff on board, extensive time is needed for better results.
Dean 4	There is need to continuously reviewing the instruments that are in place so that the academic staff members that are in the system currently are involved in the process.

As indicated above one common proposal that proved eminent to both Deans and academic staff members is the involvement of staff when crafting the QA instruments or launching new QA measures. Whilst academic staff members indicated earlier in the findings that they were not involved in the crafting of the QA instruments, the Deans indicated that academic staff are involved in such. The gap that exists could be that when the instruments were crafted, probably the available stream of academic staff was not there and the developers have long left the University. This comes from the recommendation given by one Dean that called for continuous review of the instruments and such could close the gap in varied views raised to this effect. Continuous review of the QA mechanisms was also advised.

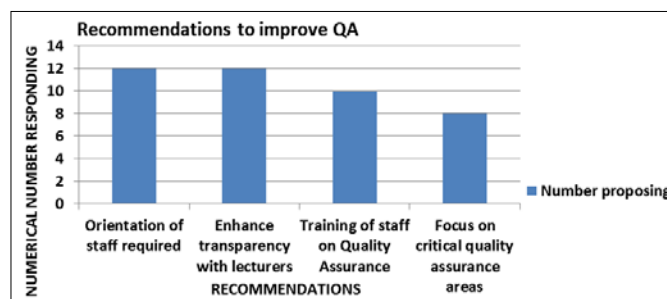


Fig 2: General recommendations on quality assurance at BA ISAGO

The researchers afforded respondents to suggest interventions to improve and/or maintain the quality assurance standards at BA ISAGO University. Figure 3 above outlines four key recommendations each with varying levels of popularity. Orientation of staffs and enhancing transparency were each suggested by 100% of the 12 respondents who attended to the question. Training of staff and recommendation to focus on critical quality assurance issues had 83% and 67% popularity respectively. This confirms what Martinez-Costa & Martinez-Lorente (2008); ISO 9000 (2011) explain. They argue that there are seven quality management principles that senior management can apply for organizational improvement as prescribed by the ISO 9000 standards. The quality management principles comprise customer focus, leadership, engagement of people, process approach, improvement, evidence based decision making, and relationship Management.

Implications of the study & final thoughts

The findings of the study have implications on quality education in tertiary education in general and BA ISAGO University specifically. Previous studies have demonstrated a relationship between reception of QA and views of academic staff. If academic staff observes some disparities within implementation of the QA system, they tend to have negative views of QA measures.

This study also found that the varied perceptions of academic staff to QA were influenced by various practices within the QA system. Although academic staff found QA measures useful, they continued to display some elements of discontent with the implementation practices. For example, if student's evaluation of lecturers is done and the data gathered is not put to effective use, it becomes rather discouraging. Therefore there is little to no way that academic staff would fully, as required comply willingly if there is something they found inappropriate within the system. In a sense, academic staff would resist the QA measures and ultimately failure in the whole QA system where efforts made by the University to promote quality teaching and learning would be unsuccessful. Furthermore, it has been gathered that there is more focus on compliance rather than improvement as the findings reveal, QA measures will not be put to use by academic staff because their efforts would be in vain. Since QA is all about improvement, this could indicate that BA ISAGO should evaluate its processes to be able to create a quality culture within the University. The persistence of such a culture where improvement is not considered would possibly deem QA unnecessary hence lack of compliance to QA measures by academic staff.

Moreover, the conclusion made was also that communication and academic staff workload appeared to be major challenges faced by academic staff in their effort to adhere to the QA measures. On one hand, Communication on quality matters between the quality assurance division, management staff and academic staff was inadequate. If the quality assurance division or the academic staffs' supervisors, does not communicate some new developments in time, and end up requiring certain documentation from staff, staff then work within short deadlines and the quality of submitted documentation would never meet the set standards.

Finally it can also be concluded that the renowned challenges that academics face in their attempt to comply with the QA measures negatively impacts the rate at which they fully appreciate QA in general and comprehend the specific measures in place. These included lack of communication on the part of implementers and work overload which is coupled with lack of flexi hours.

A need for implementation of an improved internal QA system at BA ISAGO cannot be emphasized. Absence of which would lead to ultimate failure of the institution's regulatory authorities' audits which pose threats to the institutions operations. Internal quality assurance is the gateway to the prolonged life of an institution. Generally, QA at BA ISAGO is acceptable, leaving room for improvement. QA in higher education is an important aspect that promotes quality instruction and if there is one thing that should not be compromised in TEIs is quality. It is the quality of education students receive in tertiary schools that makes them

employable, contributing to the human resources of Botswana and beyond.

Recommendations based on the findings

Based on the findings, it is recommended as follows

1. Recommendations for BA ISAGO University and other TEIs
 - There is need to involve academic staff members in the crafting of QA guidelines and instruments and further periodically review them.
 - Quality forums need to be formed for staff to get used to quality culture and get new staff on board
 - There is need to train students on the significance of students evaluation of lecturers such that they use them for the purpose which they are intended to address-Improvement of teaching and learning
 - It is vital to have other academic support staff such as teaching assistants and faculty administrators to relieve academic staff in other administrative work.
 - There is need to implement the findings/data that result from QA measures. The findings should be put to effective use by the University

Further research

Since this study was conducted in a private tertiary institution, there is need to explore views of academic staff of QA measures at public tertiary institutions. The need to explore the same in other private institutions in Botswana is necessary to inform the regulators of QA challenges at institutions. Other methods of data collection could be used to explore the views of academic staff and triangulation could yield more useful results. There is need to also include quality assurance custodians and students in future research for objectivity.

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