

**An interpretive study of quality assurance in Zambian higher education:
Implications for teaching and learning**

Dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



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Declaration of originality

I declare that An interpretive study of quality assurance in Zambian higher education: Implications for teaching and learning as contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I am the sole author thereof, except where otherwise acknowledged. This dissertation has not been previously submitted in its entirety or in part at any university for a qualification.

Signed

Date: day of December 2018

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Dedication

To my faithful God

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I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my promoter, Distinguished Professor Yusef Waghid, for his immense knowledge and continuous support, without which my PhD study would not have been possible.

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Abstract

There is emerging consensus internationally on the value of quality assurance in higher education, because of concerns on the global transformation of the higher education system from an elite higher education system to a mass higher education system. The higher education system transformed from being an elite system to a mass higher education system because of the increasing social demand for higher education worldwide. The higher education system is central because of its ability to advance socio-economic development initiatives, which could possibly be constrained without assurance of the quality of higher education.

Being part of the global system, the Zambian higher education system was affected by massification and was liberalised to accommodate the effects of mass higher education. Liberalisation allowed participation of private providers in offering higher education. However, the National Policy on Education in Zambia does not explicitly state how quality for the university system is to be assured. The vagueness is problematic, firstly because of the liberalisation. Without adequate quality assurance, there is a danger that private providers might offer inferior qualifications to unsuspecting cohorts of students. Secondly, there is no evidence that specific quality assurance studies in Zambian universities have been undertaken, or that policy has had any influence on practice. In this undermining context, it became necessary to undertake a study on quality assurance for Zambian universities. The question addressed through this study was: How do the clarification and implementation of quality assurance strategies enable the Zambian Higher Education Authority to ensure quality educational offerings in both public and private universities?

The interpretive methodology was used with attendant methods of conceptual analysis and deconstruction analysis to answer the research question posed. The interpretive methodology was useful because it argues on the meaningfulness of human action and seeks to understand the intentions underlying the actor's reasoning in a particular context. Understanding of the meaningfulness of human actions and intentions was crucial in establishing the intent of policy in assuring quality. The use of attendant methods supported the clarification of concepts and detailed analysis of policy text, to enable me to reach a conclusion on how quality was being ensured for the Zambian university system.

This study found that quality was defined in terms of inputs, process and outputs. This understanding was demonstrated by the implemented strategies, which focus on the inputs and process to assure the outputs. The study also established that of the three strategies implemented by the Higher Education Authority, none is comprehensive in assuring the quality of the Zambian university system in its entirety but assures quality in private universities only.

As the study established the extent to which the implemented strategies are assuring quality, it provides insights to policy makers to strengthen policy on quality assurance to enable the Higher Education Authority to reach what it claims to be, namely the National Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Zambia.

Keywords: Interpretivism, conceptual analysis, deconstruction, quality, quality assurance, policy, decolonising education, decoloniality

Opsomming

Oor die wêreld heen is daar toenemend konsensus oor die waarde van gehalteversekering in hoër onderwys weens kommer oor die wêreldwye transformasie van die hoërondwysstelsel van 'n elite-hoërondwysstelsel tot 'n massa- hoërondwysstelsel. Die hoërondwysstelsel het van 'n elitestelsel na 'n massa hoër onderwysstelsel getransformeer weens die toenemende maatskaplike vraag na hoër onderwys wêreldwyd. Die hoërondwysstelsel staan sentraal weens die vermoë daarvan om sosio-ekonomiese ontwikkelingsinisiatiewe te bevorder, wat moontlik ingeperk kan wees sonder die gehalteversekering van hoër onderwys.

As deel van die wêreldwye stelsel is die Zambiese hoërondwysstelsel geraak deur massifikasie en geliberaliseer om plek te maak vir die gevolge van massa hoër onderwys. Liberalisering het deelname van privaat verskaffers by die aanbod van hoër onderwys moontlik gemaak. Die nasionale onderwysbeleid in Zambië stel dit egter nie pertinent hoe gehalte vir die universiteitstelsel verseker sal word nie. Die vaagheid is problematies, eerstens weens die liberalisering. Sonder voldoende gehalteversekering bestaan die gevaar dat privaat verskaffers moontlik minderwaardige kwalifikasies aan niksvermoedende studente kan bied. Tweedens is daar geen bewys dat spesifieke navorsing oor gehalteversekering in Zambiese universiteite onderneem is, of dat beleid enige invloed op praktyk gehad het nie. Teen hierdie ondermynende agtergrond het dit nodig geraak om navorsing oor gehalteversekering vir Zambiese universiteite te onderneem. Die vraag wat in hierdie navorsing aan bod gekom het, was: Hoe stel die opklaring en implementering van gehalteversekeringstrategieë die Zambiese hoërondwysowerheid in staat om onderrigaanbiedinge van goeie gehalte in beide openbare en privaat universiteite beskikbaar te stel?

Die interpretatiewe metodologie is gebruik met gepaardgaande metodes van konseptuele analise en dekonstruksie-analise om die navorsingsvraag te beantwoord. Die interpretatiewe metodologie was nuttig aangesien dit die betekenisvolheid van menslike optrede voorstaan en poog om die bedoelinge onderliggend aan die doener se beredenering in 'n besondere verband te begryp. Begrip van die betekenisvolheid van menslike optrede en bedoelinge was deurslaggewend by die bepaling van die oogmerk van beleid by die versekering van gehalte. Die gebruik van gepaardgaande metodes het die uitklaring van begrippe en gedetailleerde analises van beleidsteks ondersteun om my in staat te stel om tot 'n gevolgtrekking te kom oor hoe gehalte vir die Zambiese universiteitstelsel verseker is.

Hierdie studie het bevind dat gehalte gedefinieer is wat betref insette, proses en uitsette. Hierdie insig is gedemonstreer deur die geïmplementeerde strategieë, wat fokus op die insette en proses om die uitsette te verseker. Die navorsing het ook vasgestel dat van die drie strategieë wat deur die hoërondwysowerhede geïmplementeer is, geeneen allesomvattend is wat betref die versekering van

die gehalte van die Zambiese universiteitstelsel in sy geheel nie maar slegs gehalte in privaat universiteite verseker.

Aangesien die studie die mate waartoe die geïmplementeerde strategieë gehalte verseker vasgestel het, verskaf dit aan beleidmakers insig om beleid oor gehalteversekering te versterk ten einde die hoërondewysowerheid in staat te stel om te bereik wat dit voorgee om te wees, naamlik die nasionale gehalteversekeringstelsel vir hoër onderwys in Zambië.

Trefwoorde: Interpretivisme, konseptuele analise, dekonstruksie, gehalte, gehalteversekering, beleid, dekolonialisering van onderwys, dekolonialiteit

Abbreviations and acronyms

CBHE	Cross-border higher education
ENQA	European Network for Quality Assurance
ESIB	National Union of Students in Europe
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ICT	Information and communication technology
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
ODL	Open and distance learning
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SARUA	Southern African Regional Universities Association
TEVET	Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Chapter 1: Orientation

1.1 Background to the study

The university education system in Zambia experienced sluggish growth between 1966 and 2000. In 1966, the University of Zambia had 310 students and 28 years later (in 1994), the student population had only increased with 4 592 (MoE, 1996:98). A second university, Copperbelt University, was only established two decades later (in 1987) and the two universities had an enrolment of 6 000 in 1994 (MESVTEE, 2015:18; MoE, 1996:98).

Since the year 2000, there has been a notable numerical increase at institutional level and in terms of student enrolments. Public universities increased to six by 2015 and enrolments in public universities stood at 59 272 students in 2015 (MNDP, 2017:25). By 2014, there were 32 private universities (MESVTEE, 2015:18), but by 2017, the list of registered private universities on the Higher Education Authority (HEA) webpage (www.hea.org.zm) has since expanded to 58.

The increase in the number of institutions at national level can be attributed to changes in the provisions of the 1996 National Policy on Education (MoE, 1996:3), which provides for the liberalisation of university education, while globally, the increase in both student population and number of institutions could be linked to the effects of global massification of higher education (Castells, 2001:209). The liberalisation of the education system was aimed at meeting the national agenda of expanding opportunities for citizens to access university education (MoE, 1996:3). It allowed the private sector and other stakeholders to establish higher education institutions, or to participate in the offerings of higher education (MESVTEE, 2015:6; MoE, 1996:3).

Given the quantitative increase in public and private universities, the Zambian government, through the Ministry of Education (MoE), recognised the need to put in place measures for regulating quality assurance for universities by establishing the HEA through Act No. 4 of 2013 (MESVTEE, 2013:92). By adjusting the 1996 policy provisions, the MoE proactively expanded the mechanisms for quality assurance within the school system through an inspectorate sub-sector. However, quality assurance for university education remained at a strategic level (MESVTEE, 2015:2; MoE, 1996:101). The liberalisation of university education

was not aligned with a timely, clearly defined quality assurance framework or authority that was robust enough to meet the emerging challenges of a liberalised university system.

In 1998, the Zambian government established the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority to rank registered institutions based on satisfying the minimum standards in the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) sector. The establishment of other authorities followed: In 2011, the Zambia National Qualifications Authority was formed to register institutions and accredit qualifications of higher education institutions; in 2014, the Teaching Council of Zambia was created to accredit and monitor quality control in colleges of education; and in 2014, the HEA was established to promote quality assurance in universities.

Through the provisions of the 1996 National Policy on Education (MoE, 1996:100), the MoE respected the autonomy of universities to determine how they could fulfil their roles in providing quality education services. However, the seeming absence of a national quality assurance system or clearly defined policy to engage universities in formal quality assurance procedures had mixed implications. The 2009 report by the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) revealed that Copperbelt University did not have any quality assurance process in place because there was no national quality assurance policy to be followed, while the University of Zambia had in place quality assurance mechanisms despite not required by a national directive or policy (SARUA, 2009:17). The revelations of the SARUA report advanced a social concern, demanding policy direction at the national level on how quality in university education is being assured.

The liberalisation of education raises a social concern as well. This is because it is feared that the quality of university education might be compromised, as there has been a proliferation of private providers who might be associated with unqualified academic staff, hired academic staff, substandard curricula, curricula targeted towards the local market and a lack of essential facilities (Materu, 2007:16; Teferra & Altbach, 2004:31). In this regard, there is a need to reassure the public (citizens and other interested parties) about the quality of university education being offered by private providers. It is against this background that this study on quality assurance for Zambian universities became a necessity.

1.2 Rationale

The rationale for undertaking this study was the following: Firstly, the liberalised university system has the potential to compromise the quality of university education, because private

universities are business enterprises (Teferra & Altbach, 2004:35) and their motivation is to make a profit. Secondly, the HEA has been mandated by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) to ensure that universities provide genuine university education.

In view of the above, this study granted me an opportunity to:

- generate information to inform the Zambian citizens that higher education offered at both public and private universities meet acceptable local and international standards;
- provide an understanding and a perspective that will assist students to make an informed decision regarding the choice of university institution; and
- provide evidence to substantiate policy claims that the HEA as authorised by the MoHE is assuring quality in universities in Zambia.

Therefore, this study contributes to existing literature on quality assurance for universities, and as the HEA is a nascent body, it might influence the implementation of quality assurance in Zambia.

1.3 Problem statement

The Zambian National Policy on Education documents do not explicitly state how quality is to be assured in universities in the country. This vagueness is particularly problematic because of the liberalisation of university education, mentioned above. Without adequate quality assurance, there is a danger that private providers might be allowed to offer inferior qualifications to unsuspecting cohorts of students. The result of this can have far-reaching effects on the immediate financial situations of students and their families and the long-term economy of the country.

A review of literature indicates that studies on quality assurance in universities have been undertaken at regional level in parts of Africa, giving a fragmented view of quality assurance activities in sub-Saharan Africa (Materu, 2007:vii), Francophone Africa (Hayward, 2006:1) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (Kotecha, Wilson-Strydom & Fongwa, 2012), while the literature on specific activities of quality assurance in Zambia relates to launches and evaluations in the Ministry of Health (Bouchet, Francisco & Ovretveit, 2002; QAP, 2005). There is no evidence that specific quality assurance studies in Zambian universities have been undertaken or that the policy has had any influence on practice. Therefore, there is a gap in research and information regarding the issue. In the light of the

emerging, international consensus on the value of quality assurance for universities, this information gap is problematic.

1.4 Research aim

The aim of this study was to develop a reasoned account of how quality assurance strategies enable the Higher Education Authority to ensure quality educational offerings in both public and private universities.

The research objectives were formulated as follows:

- To examine the Higher Education Authority framework and practices to reach an understanding of how quality is being assured.
- To investigate whether the Higher Education Authority implements any form of quality assurance in *Zambian* universities
- To propose sustainable quality assurance practices for the Higher Education Authority.

1.5 Main research question

The main research question was formulated as follows: How do the clarification and implementation of quality assurance strategies enable the *Zambian* Higher Education Authority to ensure quality educational offerings in both public and private universities?

The following sub-questions were formulated to guide the study:

- How is the Higher Education Authority framework understood by stakeholders in the higher education field?
- How is the Higher Education Authority framework aligned with quality assurance practices?
- How does the implementation of quality assurance strategies assure quality in *Zambian* universities?
- How can quality assurance become a sustainable practice for the Higher Education Authority?

1.6 Research methodology

Before discussing the methodology for this study, I briefly engage in conceptual clarity regarding the usage of the concepts ‘paradigm’, ‘methodology’ and ‘methods’. A paradigm is a system of beliefs that guide a field of study regarding a research methodology (Boeije,

2010:6), whereas a methodology is a philosophical assumption concerned with knowledge creation (McGregor & Murnane, 2010:420) on which researchers base their methods, which are ways or procedures followed when conducting research (Holloway, 2004:105; McGregor & Murnane, 2010:420). In other words, a methodology is an interface between a paradigm and methods. To exemplify, a paradigm such as positivism or post-positivism constitutes a methodology, which may be empirical for positivism or either interpretive or critical for post-positivism, and consists of methods, which could be employed either singularly as qualitative or quantitative, or as mixed methods. Therefore, each paradigm with its attendant methodology and method produces different meanings in a study, as it infers a framework of thinking.

1.6.1 Paradigms

Every research project undertaken is informed by a paradigm, which term derives from the influential work of Thomas Kuhn (Hammersley, 2012:2). A paradigm is a basic belief system based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions shared by a scientific community (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:107; Holloway, 2004:114). The ontological and epistemological assumptions reflect issues of the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge (Boeije, 2010:6), while the methodological supposition shape diversity in the generation of new knowledge and determines the methods (McGregor & Murnane, 2010:420). In this regard, a paradigm provided me with a framework of thinking about this study and helped me to establish acceptable research methodologies available for the study.

As observed by Guba and Lincoln (1994), Holloway (2004) and McGregor and Murnane (2010), there are diverse classifications of paradigms, as they are continuously evolving to satisfy arguments in research scholarship. Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) identified four major paradigms, namely positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Holloway (2004:122–123) discusses three major paradigms, namely positivism, post-positivism and postmodernism. McGregor and Murnane (2010:420) argue for two major paradigms, positivism and post-positivism. Despite their diversity, neither of these classifications is superior to the other, nor is any of the listed worldviews considered superior to the other. Any of these paradigms may be appropriate or insufficient for a certain research purpose.

I am bringing in the issue of paradigms firstly, for conceptual clarity that the term ‘paradigm’ is understood to embrace both the philosophical (beliefs about worldview) and technical (methods) dimensions when conducting research and secondly, to minimise the risk of having

to account for the philosophical underpinnings of my research work, as stated by McGregor and Murnane (2010:420).

I aligned with the classification suggested by McGregor and Murnane (2010), adopting the post-positivistic research paradigm, which encompasses the interpretive methodology whose suppositions effected the ontological and epistemological grounding for this study. In this regard, my ontological, epistemological and methodological stance was grounded in the interpretation of meanings made by the actors (the HEA and MoHE) in policy.

1.6.2 Interpretive methodology

Interpretivism has its roots in the German intellectual traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology and was originated by the works of Max Weber (1864–1920) and Alfred Schutz (1899–1959) as a critique of positivism (Blaikie, 2011:509). Phenomenology and hermeneutics contend that human meanings, values, beliefs and feelings are transmitted through artefacts of human creations, such as language, dress, patterns of action and written texts (Yanow, 2011:13). Although phenomenology and hermeneutics are both interpretive philosophies, in the context of a policy study as this one, hermeneutics was preferred as the main philosophy grounding this study, the reason being that it constitutes analytic methods originally developed to understand biblical text that could be used to gain knowledge of text as articulated in education policy (Holloway, 2004:87; Yanow, 2011:6).

Interpretivism argues on the meaningfulness of human action and seeks to understand the intentions underlying the actor's reasoning in a particular context (Yanow, 2011:21–22). In seeking to understand human intentions, Weber (1968, cited in O'Reilly, 2012:120) suggests that one must begin with an individual actor, with the meanings attached to individual actions, with what the intent was when the intended choices were made, reviewing possible reactions, and then selected eventual action. The views of Weber as articulated by O'Reilly (2012:120) uphold the meaningfulness of human action through rationality in human actions, as individuals choose how to respond to the environment and are not simply acted upon by external factors. Construed from Weber's perspective, it became apparent that interpretivism would provide a framework for this interpretive study.

O'Reilly (2012:20) refers to interpretivism as epistemologies about how humans can gain knowledge of the world, which loosely rely on interpreting or understanding the meaning that humans attach to their actions. Similarly, Smith (2012:460) describes interpretivism as an attempt to understand the world through the subjective reasons and meanings people assign to

their social action. Blaikie (2011:509) and Heracleous (2004:176) view interpretivism as a term used in social science to identify approaches that share ontological and epistemological suppositions which aim at achieving a meaningful understanding of the actor's frame of reference. Hurworth's (2011:210) states that interpretivism is based on a philosophical framework that promotes plural perspectives and truths.

Taking an account of the perspectives shared in scholarly views regarding interpretivism, I drew on the key constituents of interpretivism that are either explicitly stated or embedded in the descriptions, such as meaning, subjectivity, understanding, plurality of truths, context and interpretation, as building blocks towards a comprehensive understanding of my interpretive study.

1.6.2.1 Meaning

Meaning is defined in terms of the intentions and actions of a person (Denzin, 2011:53). It is a triadic concept involving interactions among a person; an object, event or phenomenon; and the reaction towards that object, event or phenomenon (Denzin, 2011:53). The perception of meaning being interactional negates earlier claims that meaning of text exclusively resides in the text itself, the author's intentions or what the reader brings to text, but that it is created actively in the interactions among the three, in writing and in reading (Yanow, 2011:16).

As meaning is interactional, different meanings on the interpretation and understanding of the concept of quality and quality assurance were anticipated from different stakeholders in higher education, and in the *Zambian National Policy on Education*. The anticipation created an awareness in me to pay attention to meanings of quality and quality assurance as articulated in the *National Education Policy* and the enactment of the quality assurance policy by implementers (the HEA), and to clarify the varying meanings.

As meanings are embodied in policy language or policy text, understanding the concept of meaning is necessary for an interpretive study, as the gap that may exist between policy and practice has implications for the truth of policy intent.

1.6.2.2 Subjectivity

Subjectivity may be understood in terms of influences that a researcher may have on the studied phenomenon, such as values, beliefs or expectations. Conventionally, however, subjectivity means letting particular interests or purposes influence the research process and, consequently, distorting reality (Smith, 2012:461). An interpretive inquiry is subjective, as there is no value-

free interpretive research because researchers bring their own preconceptions and interpretations of the problem being studied (Hurworth, 2011:210; Denzin, 2011:45). In addition, it is not possible for the researcher to stand outside the policy issue being studied free of its values and meanings (Yanow, 2011:6). Interpretations are, therefore, always regarded as our own interpretations (Schwandt, 2000:201) and knowledge in interpretivism is acquired through interpretation, which is subjective (Yanow, 2011:6).

In considering claims on subjectivity, I realised that I was embarking on this study laden with my personal views of the Zambian National Policy on Education, which might have biased my interpretations, and because I was basing my study on policy documents, I also appreciated that documents, being products of human actions, are inevitably subjective. I further contended that actors in this policy situation, such as the HEA, made interpretations of the national quality assurance policy to come up with possible implementation strategies of quality assurance for universities, which act is subjective.

My standpoint, however, does not imply that I allowed my values to affect my study, but rather that I was sensitive to my personal values, the influence of authorship on text and the possible influence of interpretation on the implementation of the quality assurance policy. As the interpretations of policy language cannot be predetermined or controlled (Yanow, 2011:17), it indicates how deeply embedded the aspect of subjectivity is in an interpretive study.

1.6.2.3 Understanding

Understanding is a process of comprehending or grasping as a whole the chain of partial meanings in an act of synthesis (Ricoeur, 1976:72). In this regard, meaning forms the basis for understanding. Understanding relies on the meaningfulness of expressions such as behaviour or actions besides gestures, vocal and written signs, monuments and documents, which, as noted by Ricoeur (1976:72), share with writing a general inscription.

Understanding is also understood as interpretation (Schwandt, 2000:194). In other words, interpretation is a derivative of understanding. Understanding is key in the implementation of policy on quality assurance for universities, as implementation challenges are often created by different understandings of policy language (Yanow, 2011:9).

1.6.2.4 Plurality of truths

Multiple truths result from multiple interpretations, as there is no single correct interpretation of any text (McKee, 2011:2). In elaborating on this point of view, McKee discusses the

impossibility of two researchers describing the same text coming up with the same order of words to describe it. Smith (2012:461) explains that multiple interpretations are inevitable, because happenings in the social setting are not free of further interpretation and reinterpretation based on different interests and purposes.

Informed by the assumption of multiple truths or interpretations in the social world, I needed to explore the existence of different interpretations of quality assurance in higher education internationally. Perhaps out of the multiple voices, I can help to generate new ideas on the understanding of quality assurance in the Zambian context. In addition, multiple truths availed me of an opportunity to synthesise opposing arguments (see Yanow, 2011:18), empowering me with an attribute of open-mindedness. Therefore, I was interested in finding out the likely interpretations and not deciding on the most correct one (see McKee, 2011:2).

1.6.2.5 Context

The interpretive methodology emphasises the need to grasp the situation in which human actions are made for researchers to say they have an understanding of the particular action (Schwandt, 2000:193). In this view, understanding the context within which the HEA is operating was cardinal, as identifying the context may not only expose the influences of a liberalised education system on the HEA framework and practices, but may also establish a new grounding for their operations.

Understanding the social or political context in which text is generated or authorship enabled me to examine text with an awareness of contextual features in the policy documents, as recommended by Patton (2002:113), and sensitivity to interpreting my findings within the limits of the studied context. In addition, this study was contextual in that quality assurance for universities in Zambia was studied as a response to changes in the education policy and to the global quality atmosphere in the higher education sector as a strategy to cope with massification (see Gouws & Waghid, 2006:753).

1.6.2.6 Interpretation

Interpretation is an attempt to explain meaning (Denzin, 2011:120). An act of interpretation, as noted by Norman, enables the interpreter to translate the unfamiliar into the familiar. In this sense, interpretation clarifies meaning (Denzin, 2011:53). An interpretation may also translate what is said in one language into meanings and codes of another, or may bring out the meaning embedded in a text (Denzin, 2011:53).

As there are different stakeholders in university education, such as employers, the HEA, academics, private providers and students, there is a likelihood that each stakeholder may interpret the implementation of quality assurance for universities differently from the intent of the MoHE (the legislator). Drawing inference from Yanow (2011:11), contending interpretations among stakeholders are likely to occur not only because stakeholders focus cognitively and rationally on different elements of a policy issue, but because, the different stakeholders value different elements of a policy differently. The contending views of different stakeholders might help to offer alternative views of what quality assurance for the Zambian universities should be, rather than accepting it as a public good.

As interpretation is the basis for understanding, engaging in interpretation afforded me an opportunity to understand policy text and to clarify meaning embedded in the text as read from policy documents, to provide citizens and policy makers with evidence of how policy implementation addressed the intended social concerns.

The constituents of the interpretive methodology illuminate the potential in the applicability of interpretivism as ideal for a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of an education policy study.

1.6.2.7 Justification for interpretive methodology

The justification for utilising the interpretive methodology lies in the purpose of engaging in an interpretive study. Smith (2012:460) views the purpose of an interpretive study as understanding (interpreting) the meanings and intentions (interpretations) people give to their own actions and interaction with others. This view is consistent with that of Schwandt (2000:202), who states that the interpretation of interpretations individuals give to their own actions and activities is the purpose of an interpretive inquiry. The goal of an interpretive researcher, as suggested by Neuman (2011:102), largely aligns with the purpose of an interpretive inquiry as stated by Smith and Schwandt, as to develop an understanding and discovering how people construct meaning in social life. These scholarly articulations are in tandem with the intention of this study, which was to produce an interpretive account of quality assurance for universities in Zambia.

In the interpretive methodology there is a detailed reading of the text. This is supported by hermeneutics, as articulated in Section 1.6.2. Hermeneutics emphasises conducting a very close and detailed reading of the text to acquire a profound understanding (Neuman, 2011:101). Taking a text to mean written words, phrases or pictures (Schwandt, 2011:290), a researcher

conducts a reading to discover deeper and richer meanings that are embedded within the text (Neuman, 2011:101). As the interpretive methodology supports the detailed examination of policy text, I sought to understand sections of relevant documents on quality assurance for universities in Zambia, bearing in mind that true meaning is rarely obvious and could possibly be reached through a detailed study of the text.

1.6.3 Method

A method is a procedure that is used to gather, analyse and present data and is predetermined by methodology (McGregor & Murnane, 2010:419). There are several procedures available, classified under either qualitative or quantitative methods. I utilised qualitative methods, as they originate from an interpretive perspective (Holloway, 2004:93) and because the data for this study were textual, focusing on education policy documents. Conceptual analysis and deconstruction analysis were used as data-collection strategies in support of my research question.

1.6.3.1 Conceptual analysis

Conceptual analysis is an analytic tradition in philosophy. Although the roots of conceptual analysis are in ancient Greek geometry and philosophy and attributed to Plato's search for definitions (Kahn & Zeidler, 2017:541), contemporary advocates of conceptual analysis include George Bealer, David Chalmers, Frank Jackson and David Lewis (Laurence & Margolis, 2003:253). Even though it is primarily used by philosophers about abstract ideas, conceptual analysis is important for all other academic disciplines because it helps to understand the meaning of an idea or concept and to determine how that idea or concept relates to other philosophical problems.

Conceptual analysis is a method of analysing concepts, constructs, assertions and variables that embrace a qualitative structure (Petocz & Newbery, 2010:126). Similarly, Kahn and Zeidler (2017:540) refer to conceptual analysis as a traditional method of philosophical inquiry for clarifying constructs. Conceptual analysis aims at scrutinising concepts in academic studies. Concepts are analysed by a community of scholars because they are building blocks of research (Maggetti, Gilardi & Radaelli, 2017:36). Therefore, concepts are not produced in the mind of the researcher, but arise out of constant dialogue with empirical research (Maggetti *et al.*, 2017:24).

What then is a concept? Goertz (2006) uses realist and nominalist understanding to answer this question. From the realist position, concepts are theories about ontology (Goertz, 2006:5). Being aware that the usage of ontology may be provocative, Goertz explicated ontology to refer to what constitutes a phenomenon or a portion of reality in which one is interested. On the other hand, from a nominalist position, concepts are labels that scholars need to communicate (Goertz, 2006:5) because they travel beyond specific cases under examination (Maggetti *et al.*, 2017:22). In view of these two perspectives, I took a concept to mean a term that is difficult to articulate despite being common, or a word in a language better understood by a community of scholars.

Conceptual analysis is required in order to show that a true claim about the world is entailed by some fundamental description (Laurence & Margolis, 2003:253) through establishing logical relations and general principles guiding their usage (Waghid, 2001:24). Conceptual analysis is also required to gain knowledge and have a better understanding of a particular philosophical issue in which the concept is involved (Boston-Kemple, 2012:24). Moreover, Kahn and Zeidler (2017:538) observed that lack of conceptual analysis creates unnecessary burdens for researchers seeking to identify gaps and overlaps in their own work, and between their work and those of others studying related constructs. From this standpoint, the use of conceptual analysis facilitates communication among scholars, as the ability to communicate is enhanced by conceptual clarity. In addition, Kahn and Zeidler (2017) fear that imprecision about the meaning of constructs could also hamper theory development, justifying the necessity for conceptual analysis.

There are three basic types of conceptual analyses: generic analysis, differentiation analysis and conditions analysis (Boston-Kemple, 2012:44; Kahn & Zeidler, 2017:543–544). I bring in the types of analyses not to designate myself as adhering to one of these techniques, but rather to discuss their salient features and appreciate their blend in concretising my understanding of conceptual analysis. Therefore, the categorisation of conceptual analysis will make explicit what conceptual analysis is and help me enhance my applicability of the strategy in this academic exercise.

Generic conceptual analysis “is used to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions of a concept” (Kahn & Zeidler, 2017:543). This type of analysis determines what features X must have to be called an X. For example, Wilson (1963, cited in Kahn & Zeidler, 2017) applied a generic-type analysis of ‘punishment’ by questioning whether the child who touches an electric wire after being warned of danger and gets shocked can be said to have received punishment.

Some aspects of punishment, namely a misdeed and a negative consequence, were noted, yet it raises a question of whether the presence of another person imposing the penalty is a necessary condition for punishment to take place. It should be stated that the strength of generic analysis lies in the exposure of hidden values within the construct, made possible by mental calisthenics. Therefore, generic analysis can lead to clarification and a new understanding of the concept. As I deliberated on generic analysis, I reflected on what the necessary and sufficient conditions could be to assure quality in universities in Zambia. What key features should a quality assurance system have for it to assure quality and would these features be a necessary characteristic of the aspired national quality assurance authority?

Differentiation conceptual analysis “seeks to differentiate between the different uses of a term and makes possible the development of a schema to distinguish between different types” (Kahn & Zeidler, 2017:544). The focus shifts from the general features of the concept to different basic meanings of the concept. For example, Green (1964, cited in Kahn & Zeidler, 2017) examined the concept of teaching in the unlikely context of dog training. In undertaking this analysis, he noticed that it was acceptable to say ‘teach a dog new tricks’, but not ‘train or instruct a dog new tricks’. Green’s analysis of the usage of ‘train’ and ‘teach’ brings awareness of the need: to determine the correct usage of words in different sentences, to understand the correct meaning of words and to understand the purpose behind the usage of a sentence. This type of analysis does not only distinguish constructs but establishes relationships between them. Therefore, having a clear understanding of concept usage enabled me to relate the core concept of ‘quality assurance’ to other constructs such as ‘teaching and learning’ in universities. Differentiation analysis helped me to recognise and establish implications of quality assurance in teaching and learning in Zambian universities.

In conditions conceptual analysis, “the researcher is interested in identifying the conditions required for the proper use of the concept” (Kahn & Zeidler, 2017:544). The focus is on the context conditions that govern the use of concepts. For example, to fully use the term ‘flying’ there is a need to understand the conditions that make it feasible in whichever case it is used. In the airplane flying example, a necessary context condition of flight is boarding an airplane. It is possible to be on board an airplane, yet not be flying. To fulfil the status of flying, the airplane must leave the ground. While this condition may seem sufficient, one would ask if the baggage loaded on the airplane that leaves the ground is also flying. From this viewpoint, this type of analysis demands scrutiny of various contexts. The strength of conditions conceptual analysis is an understanding of the conceptual dimensions of a concept. For example, the term

‘quality assurance’ is used across various disciplines and is interpreted differently in each, hence clarifying context to designate its meaning will be required.

In a nutshell, conceptual analysis in research provides clarifications of constructs, uncovers hidden values in concepts, promotes usage of precise language and promotes clearer communication with non-experts who may hold misconceptions about concepts used in research.

However, conceptual analysis did not constitute a complete method for this study, because it does not provide a clear understanding of the phenomenon under study (see Botes, 2002:25). Conceptual analysis may help to reveal the boundaries of concepts available for the study, yet it cannot be used as a tool for choosing available concepts for the study (see Bennett, 1998:7). Conceptual analysis informs researchers about concepts, but does not tell researchers what concepts they ought to deploy in their study to adequately answer their research question (Bennett, 1998:3; Botes, 2002:25). Therefore, conceptual analysis is aimed at clarifying concepts contained in statements describing a situation and does not deal with subtleties implied in statements. In this view, deconstruction appeared to be a suitable ally robust enough to tease out subtleties in claims in the text beyond conceptual descriptions.

1.6.3.2 Deconstruction analysis

Deconstruction is a term that was theorised by Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), a French philosopher. Ideas surrounding deconstruction came amid Derrida’s three most influential publications, *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Speech and Phenomena* (Kelemen & Rumens, 2011:69). There seem to be reservations on defining what deconstruction ought to be, as doing so is deemed to be contrary to the spirit of Derrida’s writing (Boje, 2011:19; Moriceau, 2012:283). While Derrida’s approach (non-formulation of definitive definition for deconstruction) is being upheld in some academic spheres, other scholars decided to act to the contrary. However, I embrace the two standpoints to enrich my discussion.

Saukko (2011:135) refers to deconstruction as a theory, methodology or method used to critically analyse text (including articles, case studies, accounts, practices and decisions) in different studies. To the contrary, in interpreting Derrida’s remarks, Boje (2011:20) argues that deconstruction is neither a philosophy nor a method, but a strategy that exposes in some systematic way multiple ways in which a text can be interpreted. For Moriceau (2012:283), deconstruction alludes to “the search for new meanings, thoughts, and perspectives”. In view of these definitive explanations, I considered deconstruction as an analytic technique aiming at

revealing alternative insights. I further optimised my understanding of deconstruction by embracing Derrida's non-definitive standpoint as I engaged in a conceptual overview.

In expanding the usability of deconstruction, I use the four phrases acknowledged by Derrida to outline its various facets (see Moriceau, 2012:283–284). The first phrase is referred to as “deconstruction is America” (Moriceau, 2012:283), because Derrida's deconstruction was first debated in North America. In the early years, deconstruction was used as a literary method basically for criticism.

As a literary method, deconstruction analysis was used to look for the binary oppositions that organise a given text, such as male/female, organisation/environment, management/worker or change/resistance (Boje, 2011:23). Scrutiny of both concepts making up the binary opposition revealed that each concept was contaminated by the other. Therefore, the binary opposition was too simplistic to grasp the studied phenomenon.

In addition, deconstruction analysis also involves the search for what was not stated in the text, such as what may be presumed by the text. If such suppositions are rendered explicit, the text is then repainted with another meaning. With the change in meaning, other approaches (frames, insights, perspectives) become possible to retell the story.

‘Deconstruction is America’ made me realise that when reading documents related to the implementation of quality assurance for universities, I should be sensitive to dominating and marginalising terms or to reading between lines of the text. This awareness may have brought to light agendas that were framed in favour of dominant stakeholders or, in some way, may have exposed how policy language might be misleading. In the words of Boje (2011:23), I needed to lift the veil of propaganda and let constructs deconstruct in order to bring out insights with a new meaning.

The second phrase acknowledges that “deconstruction means speaking more than one language” (Moriceau, 2012:283). This phrase brings awareness of the way in which individuals draw on the same language when speaking of the same phenomenon. For instance, without being aware, individuals always draw on the same language or perspectives used in policy documents, such as phrases or logic. Deconstruction attempts to displace taken-for-granted concepts or phrases of text with a view to opening up new possibilities of thought (Kelemen & Rumens, 2011:70). This is done by analysing contradictions in the text.

In terms of this phrase, I reflected on policy pronouncements that often turn rhetoric and understood that a deconstructionist looks closely at how a narrative can accomplish some form

of propaganda. This phrase allowed me to analyse text and trace where rhetoric did not live to its expectations or exposed the opposite of what it did. In this respect, a comparison can be drawn between the words of the legislator and the implementation of policy in the field, with an assumption that policy text should have unambiguous (univocal) meanings (Yanow, 2011:6) to confirm policy claims. In doing so, deconstruction opened a possibility for me to enact alternative language to claim the objective truth.

Derrida's third phrase is "deconstruction is what is happening, to have something to happen" (Moriceau, 2012:283). In this phrase, clarity is made that deconstruction is neither destruction, nor is it about knocking down a concept, but about affirming something different and enabling the arising of new thoughts. Seemingly, it was with this hindsight that Boje (2011:20) argued that there was no reconstruction without deconstruction. Therefore, deconstruction is a stance of sceptical criticism of genuine sympathy for the text (Kelemen & Rumens, 2011:71).

By highlighting various frames and tracks that previously acted in constraining one's thoughts, concepts, discourses and practices, deconstruction does not claim to reveal the truth, but what the author of the text intended to communicate (Kelemen & Rumens, 2011:71). For instance, puzzles and tensions that ensue from a mismatch between what the researcher expects and the actual activities engaged by the implementer in policy analysis provide an opportunity to explain why the implementer is doing things differently (Yanow, 2011:8).

This phrase of deconstruction permitted me not only to question the limits that authorship may have imposed upon knowledge (Kelemen & Rumens, 2011:71), but also to accord different views and underlying feelings serious respect (Yanow, 2011:8). The tension between expectation and reality is a potential source of insight (Yanow, 2011:8) that might help to open up possibilities of proposing new dimensions of assuring quality in universities in this dissertation.

The fourth and last phrase acknowledged by Derrida is "deconstruction is impossible" (Moriceau, 2012:283). In this phrase, deconstruction does not look for one exception that would rule out all others; it refers to a constant striving for an inaccessible alternative. According to Derrida, deconstruction is exploiting the possibilities of meanings while accounting for the impossibility of a final interpretation (Gannon & Davies, 2014:82).

In my understanding, deconstruction is a never-ending activity, because the interpretation I may offer for a specific phenomenon may become a subject for another deconstruction, depending on the need. This entails that meaning is never final, as notions are constantly

questioned and dismantled. This phrase awakened my awareness of different meanings available relating to policy for quality assurance for universities in other relevant government documents, which might render my interpretation of quality assurance for universities from the National Policy on Education inconclusive.

In summary, deconstruction analysis helped me to expose ambiguities and subtleties in policy documents, to speak up for the privileged as well as the marginalised stakeholders in higher education regarding quality assurance for universities in Zambia, to reveal hidden meanings glossed over by propaganda in policy documents by removing the protective embeddedness of rhetoric, to consider multiple interpretations of text to allow new meanings to emerge, to pay attention to what is present in text as much as to what is absent but pertinent in policy and to open up new possibilities of thought for a possible intervention.

The analytical procedures discussed in this section constitute an important toolkit for this study.

1.6.4 Data analysis

As this was a qualitative study, I employed textual analysis in interpreting textual data. Textual analysis is rooted in the hermeneutic tradition of textual interpretation, which stresses that interpretation of the text must always be taken from the reader's viewpoint (Scott, 2011:298).

There are several definitions put across to explain textual analysis. Scott (2011:298) refers to textual analysis as a method of analysing the content of documents using qualitative procedures in assessing the significance of ideas or meanings in the documents. Similarly, Lockyer (2012:865) states that textual analysis is a method of data analysis that closely examines either the content and meaning of the text or its structure and discourse. McKee (2011:2) views textual analysis as an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of a text.

The scholarly views of textual analysis commonly identify it as a method for seeking meanings, and specifically focuses on meanings in documents, examining the meaning of text and interpretations of text, which I deemed appropriate and useful for understanding and interpreting meanings in documents related to quality assurance for universities in Zambia.

It is worth noting that even though the interpretation of the text must always be taken from the reader's viewpoint, the inference of meaning is derived from the interactions alluded to in Section 1.6.2, and by relating the text to a frame of reference from which it was produced (Scott, 2011:298). In this respect, contextual evidence such as history or doctrines equally holds

an important place in textual interpretation, as it provides a basis for conveying a correct interpretation. In recognising the importance of context, McKee (2011:66) states that one cannot do anything with a text unless one establishes its context, emphasising the significance of context in producing an interpretation.

What then is a text? A text is something from which one makes meaning (McKee, 2011:4) that is, a conversation, written words or pictures (Neuman, 2011:101). In exemplifying Neuman's viewpoint, Lockyer (2012:865) adds newspapers, television programmes, blogs, architecture and furniture to the list. Despite the diversity of text in form, in this dissertation, text refers to written words. As texts have persuasive qualities and are designed to convey a preferred meaning, they are analysed to convey a preferred reading of the text (Lockyer, 2012:865).

Therefore, textual analysis provides a platform for the careful and creative study of the text that evokes meanings in a particular content (Pälli, Tienari & Vaara, 2012:925). By availing such a platform, textual analysis provided me with an opportunity to engage in a discussion with texts to establish meanings besides exposing subtleties (see Lockyer, 2012:865) that would otherwise remain unidentified in policy documents. Performing textual analysis then is an attempt to determine the likely interpretation of text made by people who consume them (McKee, 2011:2). Textual analysis enabled me to locate meanings and interpret particular activities related to policy for quality assurance for universities.

There are various approaches that academics use to do textual analysis, and there is no single approach that tells the ultimate truth (McKee, 2011:2). The approach one uses depends on the type of information a study question requires. Different approaches produce different kinds of information, even when they are used in analysing similar questions. For example, from a realist approach, researchers look for a single text that they think represents reality most accurately and then judge other texts against that one; from the structuralist perspective, researchers look for deep structures that are ambiguous in the text, but which can be found through specialised training; and from a post-structuralist approach, researchers look for differences between text without claiming that one of them is the only accurate one (McKee, 2011:10). I argued for a stance in post-structuralist perspective, as I did not attempt to make a correct interpretation of the text, but to expose differences or tensions and contradictions and to identify the possible and likely interpretation.

The post-structuralist stance was adopted in appreciation of the multivocality of policy language, in which meanings may not only be attributed to the language used in policy or

legislators' intent alone, but to that of implementers as well (Yanow, 2011:17). Policy in the field of practice is not just read and implemented but is subjected to interpretation before the implementer implements it. If conflicting interpretations arise between the intent of policy as text and policy as practice, I may treat them as different ways of seeing or understanding that could be mediated upon and comprised into a new understanding between legislators and the implementers.

I wish to acknowledge that critics have questioned the validity of textual analysis, claiming that a reading of a text echoes the perspective of the researcher and that specific approaches used to analyse text are as ideological as text themselves (Lockyer, 2012:866). In addition, there is no interpretation of the text that is the only accurate, unbiased and true representation of a phenomenon of any part of the world, as there are always alternatives (McKee, 2011:29).

I admit that a text can never be completely understood, because all texts are socially situated and multivocal. In this regard, policy as text is interpreted and enacted by implementers, and those enactments as text are read by various stakeholders who may not share the same interpretation as the implementers. Textual analysis has made me realise that the social world is characterised by possibilities of multiple interpretations.

Doing textual analysis permitted me to make an educated guess about the most likely interpretation that might be made of a text by negotiating conflicting interpretation and drawing evidence on how quality is being assured in universities nationally. Therefore, I made meaning from the documented activities of the HEA regarding quality assurance for universities to gain a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon.

1.7 Scope of the study

This study was on quality assurance for universities in Zambia and was confined mainly to the quality function of the HEA, as it is the quality assurance body for universities. I focused on quality assurance for universities to understand how the implemented strategies have helped the HEA to assure the quality of teaching and learning. I discuss the establishment of the HEA to substantiate claims that the HEA is assuring quality as articulated in the policy documents and as outlined in its framework.

In view of universities being contributors to the formation of human capital through teaching and builders of knowledge bases through research developments, quality university education

becomes a necessity for purposes of not only meeting socio-economic development at the national level, but also for future expectations of the knowledge society.

1.8 Ethical considerations

This study was conceptual in nature, and ethical considerations were upheld by acknowledging scholars who were consulted during the study and by referencing reviewed literature.

1.9 Motivation for the research

While studying for my Master of Philosophy in Higher Education degree, on the Quota programme, I was exposed to a split-site learning experience in Europe. Higher education institutions participating in the Erasmus Mundus programme had a deliberate agreement on the transfer of credits of students involved as a symbol of mutual trust in each other's quality assurance system (EC, 2014:5; Stensaker & Maassen, 2015:30). That made me appreciate the legitimisation and value that is attached to quality assurance in the European context.

The experience led me to consider how quality assurance is viewed and implemented in my home country, Zambia. My review of the education policy found that quality assurance for universities in Zambia was at a strategic level (MoE, 1996:100), indicating to me that it was yet to be attended to upon the establishment of the HEA. While the Zambian HEA was established in 2014 as a quality assurance body, its quality assurance activities were not elaborated upon in the 2015 National Education and Skills Training Policy: Draft Zero (MESVTEE, 2015). As there seems to be a gap between policy and practice, I was motivated to study quality assurance to enhance my understanding of how the HEA assures quality in universities.

The recognition that universities are a major driver of economic advancement in the knowledge-driven global economy has made quality university education important worldwide (OECD, 2008:2). As Zambia is part of the global society, there has been a deliberate move to raise the quality of education being offered at universities, and therefore a national quality assurance authority was established. My aim was to investigate how quality assurance is articulated in policies and implemented at the national level in Zambian universities.

1.10 Chapter outline

Chapter 1 has provided an orientation to the study on how I went about to generate information in answering the research question: How do the clarification and implementation of quality

assurance strategies enable the Zambian Higher Education Authority to ensure quality educational offerings in both public and private universities?

Chapter 2 provides dimensions of debates in the higher education field surrounding the concepts of quality and quality assurance at international level. It outlines the factors that are transforming the higher education system causing concern for quality and quality assurance at both local and international level. Subsequently, I deliberate on the methods of assessing quality and quality assurance, followed by approaches for assuring quality. The chapter provides evidence of the impact of quality assurance, suggesting that it is a worthwhile undertaking, with suggestions of some attributes of an effective quality assurance system so that it can be managed effectively.

Chapter 3 presents the analysis of the policy on quality assurance for the university system in Zambia. I introduce the chapter by situating the university system in the higher education system of Zambia, and then focus on the rationale for establishing the HEA. I also discuss the legal and regulatory framework of the HEA as well as its functions as foundational to articulations of the HEA framework. The framework is articulated to provide an understanding of the operations of the HEA.

In **Chapter 4** I discuss quality assurance as a practice. I begin with an analysis of policy as a building block to understanding the articulations of quality in the 1996 National Policy on Education. Understanding of what quality is in the policy document is crucial to the design and appreciation of the strategies implemented by the HEA to assure university quality.

I therefore discuss quality assurance strategies in detail to create an understanding of how quality is assured, reflecting on what is documented as well as the actual practices as explained in the key documents. In doing so, I established how the HEA is assuring quality for the university system in Zambia.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of quality assurance for teaching and learning. In examining the implications, I analysed the components and/or elements of the criteria in each of the implemented strategies to demonstrate how each component and/or element influences the quality of teaching and learning.

Chapter 6 provides an analysis of and suggestions on how quality assurance can be sustained as a practice for the university system in Zambia. I consolidate on the justification for assuring quality and, based on a wide resource of experience at international level, suggest possibilities for assuring quality sustainably.

Chapter 7 provides a synopsis of the methodology and findings. This is followed by a discussion of the contributions and subsequently the recommendations of the study. I also discuss the challenges and limitations of the study.

Chapter 8 offers an extended view of quality assurance. I discuss the implications of the study for teaching and learning, the implications of the study for decolonised education and the effects of the study on decoloniality and I envision an African university.

Chapter 9 is a reflection on my study. I provide a summary of the findings and suggest possibilities for future research. In closing off the dissertation, I share my growth as a doctoral student as I journeyed through my PhD study.

1.11 Summary

In this introductory chapter, I have presented the background to the study, which is in essence a view of the circumstances that inspired an interest to undertake this study. The background was necessary to situate the study within the global perspective of quality in higher education.

I discussed the interpretive methodology within the perimeter of the post-positivist paradigm with the attendant qualitative methods of conceptual and deconstruction analyses. I employed text analysis for analysing data to interpret the education policy and strategies put in place to implement quality assurance by the HEA for universities.

In the next chapter, I present literature on quality and quality assurance in the higher education, to gain a better understanding of the conceptions of quality and quality assurance.

Chapter 2: Debate on quality assurance in higher education

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on a thorough examination of literature related to quality assurance in higher education, especially universities. The purpose of this endeavour was to gain insight into the conceptual understanding of quality and quality assurance, and how the conceptualisation of quality and quality assurance is translated into assuring quality, especially of teaching and learning in universities.

The chapter begins with a review of the literature on the conceptual debate of quality and quality assurance and relates the conceptual tensions in quality to the articulation of quality assurance in higher education, before tracing the origin of quality and quality assurance.

The latter part of the chapter proceeds with a review of the contexts influencing quality concerns in higher education, leading to methods and approaches of assuring quality in universities. Based on the available evidence in the literature, the impact of quality assurance in higher education is addressed. The chapter concludes a discussion of attributes of an effective external quality assurance system for universities.

2.2 Conceptions of quality

The concept of quality in higher education is conceptualised in distinct ways. Kis (2005:4) identified five ways of thinking about quality. These are quality as an exception, quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money and quality as transformation. Similarly, Ryan (2015:2) notes four broad conceptualisations of quality as exceptional, purposeful, transformative and accountable. With a relatively divergent view, Green (1994:23–26) points out five approaches to defining quality as conforming to standards, fitness for purpose, effectiveness in achieving institutional goals, meeting customers' stated needs and quality as a traditional concept.

The diverse views above illustrating how quality is understood or conceptualised confirm claims that the concept of quality is complex and loaded (Elassy, 2015:255; ESIB, 2002:10; Green, 1994:22). However, understanding of the concept of quality was key in this study. My discussion of quality aims at clarifying my understanding and broadening my application of the concept. I streamlined the views suggested by authors above to avoid repetition, while taking dissimilar viewpoints suggested to shortlist subheadings for broadening my conceptions of quality in higher education.

2.2.1 Quality as conformance to standards

According to Green (1994:23), this approach to quality has its origin in the notions of quality control in the manufacturing industry. Quality control relates to testing the product or service to determine whether it meets the set standards and rejecting that which does not conform. The quality of the product or service is measured in terms of its conformance to specific standards that are precisely stated. A standard in this sense provides the basis for measurement or a yardstick to describe a required characteristic of a product or a service. A quality product, therefore, is one that has passed a set of quality standards or checks (Harvey & Green, 1993:12).

In the higher education sector, the concept of standards means the level of conditions that must be met by institutions or programmes to be accredited by an accreditation agency (Elassy, 2015:252). In line with this approach, quality is the answer to the question “Is the institution or programme good?”, as the standards will be used to give the answer to the question of “The institution or programme is good enough” (Elassy, 2015:252).

As I reflect on Kis’s (2005) ways of thinking about quality, quality as exception and quality as value for money could be integrated into this approach. Quality as exception emphasises meeting minimum standards to achieve excellence or distinctiveness. On the other hand, quality as value for money measures outputs against inputs in a bid to create efficiency and effectiveness in a system.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using this approach in higher education, as noted by Green (1994:23–24). The advantage of using this approach to quality lies in the opportunity it offers institutions to aspire to quality, as different standards can be set for different types of institutions.

The limitation lies firstly in the failure to state the criteria used to set the standards and secondly in the implication to set standards regarding the quality of a service like higher education (see Elassy, 2015:252; Harvey & Green, 1993: 15). With respect to criteria, a product or a service may conform to standards that have been set for it, but if standards are not in line with what is deemed significant, it may be difficult to view the product as being of quality despite meeting the standards. It is therefore important to be clear on how the term ‘standard’ is being defined and applied when analysing quality in higher education.

Conformity to set standards by implication suggests a one-off specification, without the need to reconsider the standards, giving rise to a static model, while the higher education sector is

dynamic. The use of set standards also implies that services can be defined in measurable and quantifiable terms, which may not be feasible in higher education.

This dimension of quality is common in public services, as it is perceived by governments as a viable means to increase accountability and responsiveness of public service providers (Green, 1994:23).

2.2.2 Fitness for purpose

In this approach, quality is judged according to the degree to which a product or a service meets the stated purpose, as defined by the provider or the stakeholder (Green, 1994:25). A stakeholder in higher education could be a student, an institution, an employer, a government or society (Woodhouse, 2013:4), with an interest in, an impact on or as the user of products or services of higher education institutions (Elassy, 2015:253). It is argued by the exponents of this approach that quality has no meaning except in relation to the purpose of the product or service (Green, 1994:25). Quality is therefore judged in relation to the extent to which the product or service fits its purpose (Harvey & Green, 1993:16).

In the higher education sector, this approach may be used to analyse quality at a system, institutional or programme level (Green, 1994:25). Green (1994:25) explains that if the purpose of higher education is to provide an appropriately educated workforce, then the system should provide the right number of graduates in that specific course, providing the right balance of knowledge, skills and understanding. At the institutional level, the higher education institution should achieve the claimed purpose by fulfilling its mission statement.

The problem of thinking about quality in terms of purpose, as noted by Green (1994:25), is that firstly, it is difficult to be clear on what the purpose of higher education should be and consequently who should define the purpose of higher education: Should it be government, the students, the employers of students, the managers of institutions or the academics? Secondly, higher education may have multiple purposes, some of which may be conflicting, such as meeting the needs of the country's economy, for a policy maker, while the institutional purpose may be producing an employable graduate, beyond the borders of the country.

Although what is meant by quality from this perspective is influenced by the purpose of higher education, there are conflicts in judging the quality of higher education institutions and in determining who should decide the priorities. The difference in opinion about the purpose of higher education lies behind the varying conceptions of what should be meant by quality in higher education (ESIB, 2002).

The fitness for purpose approach allows for a re-evaluation of the appropriateness of the purpose of higher education over time, representing a developmental model in the higher education sector (Green, 1994:25).

2.2.3 Quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals

Quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals partly shares one version of fitness for purpose which evaluates quality at institutional level (see Green, 1994: 25). The institution determines its quality by meeting the goals or mission statement set by itself as a minimum threshold (Harvey & Green, 1993:19). In this respect, a high-quality institution is one that clearly states its goals and mission statement (or purpose) and knows how to meet the goals that it has set for itself (Green, 1994:25). In this approach, the definition of quality is centred on evaluations within the institution (Elassy, 2015:252; Green, 1994:26).

In higher education, this model has significant implications that broaden the spectrum of issues related to the debate about quality, such as aims, objectives, efficiency in the use of resources and effective management (Green, 1994:26). Aims are closely related to achievement, as institutional effectiveness may be measured in terms of the extent to which institutional aims were met (Winch, 2010:27). As the focus of this approach is on evaluations, quality is attained by fulfilling the institutional purpose as set in the mission statement or institutional objectives (Elassy, 2015:252).

However, in the higher education sector, quality may not always be synonymous with the achievement of institutional objectives. Therefore, this approach needs to state the appropriateness of institutional objectives and how they relate to broader aims of economic activity (Winch, 2010:27).

2.2.4 Quality as meeting customers' stated or implied needs

In conceptualising quality as meeting customers' stated needs, priority is placed on identifying customers' needs and the importance of knowing who the customers are, what their needs are and how to satisfy them (Elassy, 2015:252; Green, 1994:26). It is assumed that a product is of quality if it meets the specifications required by a customer (Harvey & Green, 1993:17). In this sense, quality is critical to the functioning of the market, as customers require reliable information about the product they are purchasing or a service they are receiving (Elassy, 2015:252).

However, in higher education it is not easy to pinpoint who the customer is; whether it is the student as a service user, or those who pay for the service (parents, government or employers). Furthermore, if the student is taken to be the customer, a question arises as to whether the student would be able to know his/her needs and determine what quality is or whether it is present (Green, 1994:26–27). In addition, Harvey and Green (1993:18) argue that students in higher education do not specify the product; it is the provider who determines this.

As noted from the questions posed by Green and the observation by Harvey and Green, the customer seems to be in a fragile situation. Defining quality as meeting customers' needs does not necessarily imply that the customers are best placed to determine the quality of the product or service (Harvey & Green, 1993:19). In the case of the student as a customer, the student may be able to identify the short-term needs, but does not have enough knowledge and experience to know what he/she needs in the long term (Harvey & Green, 1993:21). Consequently, the student as a customer may not be able to judge whether his/her needs are being met (Green, 1994:27).

Furthermore, while it may be easy to evaluate the physical needs of the student in terms of access and adequacy of the library and student accommodation, evaluating the intellectual needs that exist in the relationship between the lecturer and student in the teaching and learning process is challenging (Green, 1994:26). It is also argued that customer satisfaction in education is unlikely, even with increased competition and encouragement of market niches, which can lead to a readjustment of mission statements (Harvey & Green, 1993:20).

In higher education, unlike in the manufacturing industry, the lecturers and students are part of the production process, making the process both individual and personal, depending on the characteristics of the lecturer and student (Green, 1994:26). In addition, this approach declares quality based on levels of satisfaction of the customers, that is, the extent to which the product is consistent with customer expectation (Harvey & Green, 1993:21). In view of the student being the customer, Harvey and Green (1993:21) raise concerns on the significance of quality comparisons made by students, as they have little information, and in practice students do not draw links between satisfaction and quality. Because of these characteristics, standards of quality are difficult to state and maintain. Therefore, this approach leaves open the question of who should define quality in higher education and how it should be assessed.

2.2.5 The traditional concept of quality

The traditional concept of quality considers quality as the provision of a product or service that is distinctive and special and confers status on the owner or user (Elassy, 2015:253; Green, 1994:23). Quality implies exclusivity (Harvey & Green, 1993:11). In Kis's (2005:4) classification, quality as exception shares the distinctiveness that this approach advocates for defining quality as excellence. Extremely high standards of production, delivery and presentation are set and achieved at great expense with the use of scarce resources, placing the product or service beyond the reach of the largest part of the population (Green, 1994:23).

In higher education, this conception of quality might equate with most people's perception of universities such as Oxford or Cambridge, for instance, in terms of student experience that these institutions provide and in terms of graduate and research output (Green, 1994:23). In this respect, excellence came to be the answer to the question "Is it better than others?", assuming the manifestations of quality as a ranking on the linear (Elassy, 2015:253).

However, this conception of quality is not much of value when it comes to assessing quality in higher education, even if it were possible to make every university like Oxford or Cambridge, as distinctiveness or reputation cannot easily be measured in higher education (Harvey & Green, 1993:11). The interpretation of quality as excellence replaces the substantive notion of quality as "Is it good?" to a relational one, "Is it better than others?" – a context likely to limit diversity and favour imitation.

2.2.6 Quality as transformation

Quality as transformation is closely related to the notion of transformative learning, which is associated with change and the process of transformation (Cheng, 2014: 272). Transformative learning brings out a qualitative change in the student (Kis, 2005:4), while the transformation process brings about individualisation and self-understanding in the student (Cheng, 2014:274). Quality is rooted in the notion of qualitative change that results in a fundamental change of form in the product (Harvey & Green, 1993:24).

Kis (2005:4) and Teeroovengadam, Kamalanabhan and Seebaluck (2016:247) state that quality transformation comprises of enhancement and empowerment of the student. Enhancement involves students in decision making that affects their transformation, while empowerment involves giving power to students to influence their own transformation (Harvey & Green, 1993:25). In this respect, a transformative quality enhances students' ability by adding value to them in terms of knowledge and skills and empowers them by catering for personal growth

and granting them decision-making authority in their own transformation process (Teeroovengadum *et al.*, 2016:247). Quality as transformation is more of a democratisation process and leans towards a more rational frame of thinking (Cheng, 2014:273; Kis, 2005:4).

In higher education, quality as transformation has been perceived to provide the most appropriate definition of quality, as it could address the concerns of all stakeholders (Cheng, 2014:273). It is argued that an education of quality is one that enables a transformation in students and therefore improves them (Teeroovengadum *et al.*, 2016:247).

This dimension seems to be in conflict with quality as meeting customers' needs, because it argues for education doing something to the student as opposed to doing something to the consumer (Kis, 2005:4). It also argues that education is not about presenting a service to a customer, but rather a continuous process of transformation of the student (Teeroovengadum *et al.*, 2016:247). It is believed that education could help students to negotiate developmental transformations and become changed in the process (Cheng, 2014:274).

In conclusion, the conceptualisations of quality have confirmed the elusiveness of the term, despite its common usage in everyday life. Quality is an elusive concept because it is expressed in relational terms, as it lies in the perception of the beholder and assumes different meanings in varying contexts, making it difficult to reach consensus among those who wish to define quality (Elassy, 2015:254; ESIB, 2002:258). Despite the difficulties in reaching consensus on what quality is, an understanding of what quality is was critical in this study, because its implementation and sustainability are determined by the definition. Therefore, I further discuss these conceptions of quality by classifying them into an input-process-output framework.

2.3 Quality conceptions in an input-process-output framework

A framework of inputs, process and outputs offers another valuable dimension of conceptualising quality within the education system. This framework takes into account the components of the higher education system that relate to inputs, process and outputs (Shabani, Okebukola & Oyewole, 2014:144). The education system is viewed as a system that receives inputs and delivers outputs (Winch, 2010:19). In general, inputs are resources that the education system would need to produce the outputs through a transformation process. The quality of inputs is in the form of students, faculty, support staff, aims, curricula, infrastructure and modes of formative assessment; the quality of the process is in the form of the teaching and learning activity; and the quality of outputs is in the form of enlightened students moving out of the system, financially rewarding jobs and student academic performance (Chua, 2004:2;

Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2004:155; Winch, 2010:20). Although Winch (2010) does not elaborate as much on the process as on inputs and outputs, he acknowledges that the inputs, process and outputs are interconnected.

Therefore, blending the arguments of Winch (2010) with the quality dimensions of Sahney *et al.* (2004) and Chua (2004) emphasises the adoption of the input-process-output framework when discussing quality in higher education. Each constituent of the framework could be treated as a distinguishing attribute regarding the conceptions of quality discussed in Section 2.2. Quality as conformance to standards, as fitness for purpose, as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals, as distinctive and as transformative can be classified into components of the input-process-output framework, depending on the emphasis in terms of inputs and outputs or inputs, process and outputs.

2.3.1 Quality as input

This classification takes on conceptualisations of quality that focus on inputs such as quality as conformance to standards, as fitness for purpose and as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals.

2.3.1.1 Quality as conformance to standards

Quality as conformance to standards is viewed as input-based because of the emphasis on standards. Winch (2010:24) argues that the idea of standards is related to aims, implying that one cannot discuss conformity to standards without reference to the aim. A standard as a precondition for measuring education performance can therefore only be understood in terms of aims for which it provides a measure, and also needs to be understood in terms of the curricula that are designed for the aims to be achieved (Winch, 2010:26). Quality is therefore attributed to products or services that fulfil the minimum standard set by the provider or external agency (Harvey & Green, 1993:24). The setting of the standards by the provider implies an input approach to quality.

In the standards approach, standards may vary with a variation in the aims (Winch, 2010:24). In this view, standards may cease to be appropriate if more knowledge or less knowledge is required. In relation to quality and standards, quality is improved if standards are raised (Harvey & Green, 1993:13) and quality may fall if the standards are not met. Therefore, when the aims of education change, standards should be adjusted accordingly.

In the higher education system, the achievement of institutional aims implies success in upholding educational standards. However, the implication of student achievement for the maintenance of standards raises questions as to whether there is conformity to standards in education if the standards of conformance are achieved by students (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:147).

2.3.1.2 Quality as fitness for purpose

Quality as fitness for purpose is an input approach to quality, because the purposes for which people are educated are the aims (Winch, 2010:23). Although the aims of the provider of education and those for whom it is provided may differ, establishing educational aims is crucial in determining whether an educational system is worthwhile (Winch, 2010:23). Quality is judged in terms of the extent to which a product or a service meets the stated purpose (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:147). In this approach, quality only has meaning in relation to the purpose of the product or service (Harvey & Green, 1993:16).

Different stakeholders have different views as to what the purposes of higher education should be, and higher education has multiple purposes, some of which may be conflicting (Sahney *et al.*, 2004: 147). Among the many stakeholders, however, this dimension offers priority for specifying the purpose, first to the customer, and then to the provider (Harvey & Green, 1993:17). It is assumed that in meeting customers' specification, the educational product or service is meeting customer requirements (Harvey & Green, 1993:17). However, in practice, customers rarely specify their individual requirements; the providers determine them (Harvey & Green, 1993:17).

Although quality in meeting the requirements and in having students emerge educated is judged from the output, the emphasis on aims that determine the purpose to the contrary puts an input label on this approach. Taking the view that the customer's determination of requirements of the product or service is idealised, and that service production is in the hands of the provider affirms my persuasion to classify this approach as input-based.

In higher education, providers of higher education determine student requirements; students are not in a position to state what is required (Harvey & Green, 1993:18). Perhaps it is in view of this limitation that Harvey and Green (1993:18) observed that in higher education, students simply select from what is available to them.

2.3.1.3 Quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals

This conceptualisation is input-based because of the focus on institutional goals and the implication of this view of efficiency in the use of resources or effective management (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:147). Effectiveness in achieving institutional goals is about consistency in meeting the standard that the institution or the provider has set for itself, in which the issue of standards is connected to aims (Harvey & Green, 1993:19), as discussed earlier. Quality is defined in terms of fulfilling institutional objectives or a stated mission (Harvey & Green, 1993:19).

In higher education, a high-quality institution is one that clearly states its mission and is efficient and effective in meeting the objectives that it has set for itself (Harvey & Green, 1993:19). However, there is a problem of identifying whether the institution is achieving the objectives it set for itself in its mission statement (Harvey & Green, 1993:19), unless the outputs are assessed in line with stated objectives. Despite the approach being input-based, a comprehensive understanding of institutional effectiveness involves knowing the characteristics of the outputs.

2.3.2 Quality as an output

This dimension of quality emphasises outputs as the main benefit from the higher education system. Identified within this conception is quality as meeting customers' stated or implied needs and quality as a traditional concept.

2.3.2.1 Quality as meeting customers' stated or implied needs

Quality as an output takes on the conception of quality as meeting customers' stated or implied needs. The consideration is based on the definition of a customer as firstly one for whom the product or service is provided, and secondly as anyone being served (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:153), implying an output system, as it places the customer on the receiver's end. Because agreeing who the customer is in higher education is an issue of debate, the customers I refer to in this subheading are the students, parents, higher education institutions and employers (see Chua, 2004: 5; Sahney *et al.*, 2004:153), as in various ways each one of them is being served, despite my being aware that the student and parents may also be regarded as inputs. Quality is linked to the customers' requirements and is assured at every stage of service delivery (Harvey & Green, 1993:16). Therefore, customer satisfaction provides evidence of quality (Harvey & Green, 1993:21).

Contentions in this view arise regarding the understanding of the concept of quality as stated above, as customers' requirements vary. Students relate quality to the process of teaching and learning and outputs, as in academic performance; parents view quality as relating to inputs such as reputation and rankings and outputs such as employability and academic placement; higher education institutions perceive quality as relating to inputs, process and outputs; while employers see quality as an output relating to competences and skills that a student brings to the workplace (Chua, 2004:5). The different views of conceptions of quality provided by different stakeholders indicate that, in defining quality, the inputs are linked to the process and outputs. This approach seems to suggest that all the constituents of the input-process-output framework are necessary for understanding the quality concept in higher education.

In higher education, despite satisfaction being a proxy assessment of quality based on declared levels of student satisfaction, the control of products and services is in the hands of providers (Harvey & Green, 1993:21). In this regard, the quality of higher education may be difficult to determine.

2.3.2.2 The traditional concept of quality

The traditional concept of quality is output-based because of the conferment of status on the user or owner (Harvey & Green, 1993:11). It deals with quality as providing a product or service that is distinctive and special, conferring a status on the owner or user (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:147). Harvey and Green (1993:12) argue that the provision of a distinct product is linked to the provision of the best resources and the selection of the best students, which endorses a good reputation of the institution. In this view, quality is conceived as doing the right things well, or doing things correctly (Harvey & Green, 1993:12).

Although the focus of the traditional concept of quality is on the output, the issues of resources, competitive student selection and providing the right environment for students (Harvey & Green, 1993) show the importance of inputs in establishing outputs. They also confirm the claims by Winch (2010:26) that the language of inputs and outputs is conceptual, beyond what seems clear at first sight. Winch (2010:29) observed that there is a temptation to import output measures into input assessment, as confirmed in this approach.

In higher education, this notion of quality implies that quality output is a function of quality input as in the recruitment of the right graduates and qualified academic and support staff and the provision of a conducive environment for individual students to develop knowledge (Harvey & Green, 1993:12). The concept of distinctiveness implies quality that exceeds very

high standards (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:146), but this concept of quality provides no definable means of determining quality (Harvey & Green, 1993:11). The implicit view of quality is a cause of concern regarding whether higher education institutions are providing quality services.

2.3.3 Quality as an input, process and output

Quality as transformative is classified under this approach. It is argued that for one to understand how the outputs have been realised, one needs to know the process and inputs that contributed to their realisation (Winch, 2010:27).

2.3.3.1 Quality as transformative

The conceptualisation of quality as transformative challenges the exclusivity of input and output quality models, advocating for the interconnectedness of the inputs and outputs through a transformation process. Using the systems theory, education is viewed as a transformation system comprised of inputs, process and outputs encompassed within an arbitrary boundary, the environment (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:150). Inputs from the environment cross the boundary into the system, are acted upon within the transformation process and released from the system back into the environment as outputs (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:150). From this explanation, the environment is a source of the system's inputs and a destination of its outputs.

Apart from these three elements, there is the concept of feedback, that is, information about the outputs from the system which, when fed back into the system as inputs, modifies the system while the process is in progress, making the system more responsive to the needs of the components in the environment (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:150). The outputs released should satisfy the components in the environment in the form of stakeholders, without which the inputs would cease, and consequently the transformation process too (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:150–151). Quality, as explained, is a compound word and is understood as involving a fundamental change in form (Harvey & Green, 1993:24).

In higher education, the inputs to the system are resources from the environment, such as students, academic staff, funding, facilities, curricula and institutional goals; the process involves activities performed to transform inputs by adding value, such as teaching and learning, research and administrative activities; and outputs are generated through the processing of inputs, such as educated people, research findings, community service, employment and satisfaction (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:153). The notion of quality as transformative

argues that higher education is an ongoing process of transformation of the student that leads to student enhancement and empowerment (Harvey & Green, 1993:24).

Higher education institutions educate students from the time they enter the higher education system, by receiving education and by participating in the education process, with an underlying intention of modifying the student into intellectual maturity (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:152). The notion of quality as transformation, therefore, implies a change in students in all aspects as a result of the higher education they receive (Tam, 2001:51).

In conclusion, the classification of quality as inputs, as outputs, and as inputs, process and outputs reveals how different areas of emphasis could alter the label attached to quality and the expectation of quality in higher education. The different perceptions that emerge in the process of interpreting quality indicate that the concept of quality, when applied to higher education, bears a pluralistic attribute. Nonetheless, understanding the different conceptions of quality was key in this study on quality implementation to enable me to adequately articulate the existing conceptions of quality in the education policy for Zambian universities.

The next subsection relates the quality conceptions to measurement.

2.4 Quality conceptions and measurement

The discussion of the conceptions of quality provides an understanding of how the different conceptions influence the preferences of stakeholders in determining criteria for assessing quality in higher education (see Harvey & Green, 1993:9), as each view has implications for methods and approaches used to measure quality (Tam, 2001:49).

2.4.1 Measuring quality through conceptions

Harvey and Green (1993:10) suggest views of quality in terms of absolutes and in terms of absolute thresholds. In the absolute view, quality is self-evident and the provider's claim of a product being of quality suffices, while in terms of absolute thresholds, quality is judged as meeting or exceeding the threshold to obtain a quality rating.

Conceptions of quality as conformance to standards, as fitness for purpose, as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals, as meeting customers' needs and as transformation seem to judge quality in terms of absolute thresholds, as in each one of them, there is an implied benchmark, while the traditional concept of quality considers quality as absolute, upholding the existence of quality without an explicit measurement.

2.4.2 Measuring quality through inputs and outputs

The input and output framework has provided insights into other defining characteristics of quality important in the measurement of quality in higher education. However, there are limitations attributed to determining quality using the input and output framework, seemingly associated with the interrelationship among the constituents of the framework, as remarked by some writers.

2.4.2.1 Limitations in determining quality using input and output framework

Winch (2010:27) states that output measures do not provide enough information for the employers to know what students learned and how they were assessed, such that some employers are sometimes obliged to look more closely at the inputs to determine the detailed nature of the outputs. The remark by Winch entails that an understanding of the whole education process is needed to appreciate the quality of university graduates and to have a comprehensive understanding of quality.

Confounding the discussion of inputs and outputs in higher education is that some outputs of universities, such as cultivation of talents in students and dissemination of cultural values, are not amenable to quantitative measurement (Tam, 2001:51). Intangible outputs such as these, although not easily integrated into quantitative quality representation, are some common objectives of universities. Objective quality measurement becomes a challenge in terms of quantifying intangible outputs.

Tam (2001:51) contends for the application of the production model in the university sector, stating that substantiating the link between inputs and outputs is difficult because inputs are often used to produce more than one output, making it challenging to link specific inputs to specific outputs. Take, for example, a curriculum aimed at equipping students with mathematical competences. In the process of learning, students may also acquire critical thinking, self-confidence and self-discovery, which may not necessarily be linked to the input. Therefore, the homogeneous production model of quality measurement may not adequately apply in universities.

Tam (2001:51) also remarks that the inclusion of process variables such as teaching and curriculum effectiveness in the link between inputs and outputs is particularly problematic, because process variables may be difficult to measure, with a possibility of not showing a direct link between inputs and outputs. However, a variation in the process of teaching and learning might have direct implications for the quality of institutional outputs, such as graduates.

Furthermore, both input and output indicators do not and cannot comment on the quality of student experience in higher education (Tam, 2001:51). Tam argues that if higher education is a developmental process of increasing the intellectual maturity and personal growth of students (as in transformation quality), it is difficult to see how performance indicators and input–output analysis can be of any help.

In conclusion, as quality is stakeholder-relative (Harvey & Green, 1993:28) and multi-dimensional (Sahney *et al.*, 2004:148), it cannot be assessed by one indicator. Therefore, Harvey and Green (1993:28) suggest the need to define criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality as clearly as possible to allow competing views to be taken into account when quality assessments are undertaken. From this standpoint, it is justifiable to have various mechanisms that assess university quality to accommodate the various perspectives of stakeholders.

2.5 Conceptualising quality assurance

Quality assurance is a relative concept, as it exists in relation to quality. Concerns about quality in the higher education sector have heightened calls for the implementation of quality assurance, which has since occupied a central place. The literature contains many different definitions of quality assurance in higher education (Ryan, 2015:2). However, in defining quality assurance, Cheng (2003:202) proposes three paradigms of quality assurance in education which I view to be more comprehensive than individual scholarly definitions, namely internal, interface and future quality waves. I blend Cheng's (2003) paradigms of quality assurance with a selection of individual definitions in my discussion to offer a balanced view of the concept of quality assurance.

2.5.1 Internal quality or first-wave paradigm

According to Cheng (2003:203), the conception of education quality in the first wave since the 1970s has been on internal effectiveness, to achieve planned goals and objectives. In this wave paradigm, government is seen to try to improve institutional arrangements and education practices in areas of teaching methods, processes of teaching and learning, and teacher and student performance in higher education institutions.

Cheng's conception of quality assurance is supported by Hayward (2006:5), who views quality assurance as a planned and systematic review process of an institution or programme to determine whether acceptable standards of higher education are being met, maintained and

enhanced. Similarly, the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB) (2002:7) upholds Cheng's position by defining quality assurance as a "means by which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced".

In retrospect, internal quality as noted by Elassy (2015:255) reflects Green's (1994) first and third approach to quality: quality as conformance to standards and quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals. In addition, fitness for purpose, by implication, suggests the attainment of standards as a measure of fitness for a defined purpose (ESIB, 2002:8). Because quality is about standards and goals, internal quality assurance is focused on improving the internal environment and processes so that the effectiveness of teaching and learning can be ensured to achieve planned goals (Cheng, 2003:203).

2.5.2 Interface quality or second-wave paradigm

Cheng (2003:203) views the second wave of the 1990s as a response to concerns of accountability to the public and stakeholders' expectations. Interface quality is about the satisfaction of stakeholders with education services and accountability to the public. In this wave, policy efforts are directed at ensuring that the performance in teaching and the outcomes of learning meet the stakeholders' expectations and needs and on guaranteeing accountability of education services to internal and external stakeholders.

Cheng's view of quality assurance in the second-wave paradigm is supported by Pillay and Kimber (2009:2), who acknowledge that quality assurance is a suite of accountability mechanisms. Pillay and Kimber (2009:3) define accountability as to account to some authority for one's action. In this regard, quality assurance compels higher education institutions to be accountable by being answerable and responsive to stakeholders.

Taking the view that the student is a stakeholder and a user of higher education services, interface quality is linked to Green's (1994) approach to quality as meeting customers' stated or implied needs. In addition, the concern to satisfy the needs of stakeholders and ensuring accountability of education to the public relates to Green's (1994)'s fitness for purpose approach to quality. Interface quality also relates to Kis's (2005:4) value for money approach, as the value for money may be rated in terms of stakeholders' satisfaction.

Interface quality assurance, therefore, seems to have a dual purpose of ensuring that the education services satisfy the needs of stakeholders and being accountable to stakeholders (Cheng, 2003:203).

2.5.3 Future quality or third-wave paradigm

Future quality is concerned with the relevance of education to the future needs of individuals, the community and society (Cheng, 2003:203). Cheng (2003:203) attributes the emergence of future quality to doubts in the effects of the first and second waves in meeting the challenges and needs of rapid transformation in an era of globalisation and information technology. Cheng (2003) argues that people urge a paradigm shift in learning and teaching and demand reform of the aims, content, practice and management of education at different levels to ensure their relevance to the future. Policy makers and educators in this wave are rethinking how changes in the curriculum and pedagogy could prepare the youth for the future (Cheng, 2003:207).

Harman (2000:1) also holds the third paradigm view of quality assurance. Harman (2000:1) defines quality assurance as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by higher education institutions and systems to monitor performance against objectives and to ensure the achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements. The definition highlights monitoring performance against objectives and quality outputs, implying a concern for future relevance of higher education graduates, which seems to be critical in the articulations of Cheng (2003) on future quality.

Cheng's third-wave paradigm relates to "quality as transformation, which is about doing something to the student", as noted by Kis (2005:4), and to Green's (1994:25–26) approach to quality as fitness for purpose and quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals. What stands out as critical in future quality is education relevant to the future needs of the individual and the community in the new millennium.

Therefore, future quality ensures the relevance of aims, content, practices and outcomes of education to the future of the new generation in the new era of globalisation, information technology and knowledge-driven economies.

In summary, quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered (Harvey & Green, 1993:19). This articulation of quality assurance creates a buffer that cushions the implementation of various methodologies to capture what counts as quality in different circumstances.

In conclusion, despite internal quality assurance, interface quality assurance and future quality assurance being based on different paradigms, all three are important and necessary in providing some viewpoint in considering a comprehensive framework in the management of

education quality in the new century (Cheng, 2003:210). Although quality gaps identified in each wave calls for a specific approach to assure quality, Cheng observed that the three paradigm waves are supplementary to one another, taking internal improvement, interface satisfaction and accountability, and future relevance into consideration.

Furthermore, Cheng (2003:210) assumes the possibility of total quality assurance if higher education institutions can ensure internal quality, interface quality and future quality. In line with Harvey and Green's (1993) definition of quality assurance, a comprehensive approach to assure quality in universities (or higher education) is conceivable.

2.6 The origin of the concept of quality and quality assurance

Elassy (2015:251) traces the origin of the concept of quality to ancient food gatherers and hunters and ancient civilizations such as the Egyptians, Grecians and Romanians. Ancient food gatherers, in their endeavour to gather food, had to learn to gather good food from that which was not, and the hunters had to determine the best tools for their purposes. Of the ancient civilizations, Elassy particularly refers to the Egyptians, for whom quality was a sign of perfection. This indicates that quality as a concept, was used in ancient times through different civilisations.

In higher education, the literature reviewed suggests that the concepts of quality and quality assurance are not new. Charles (2007:3) relates the existence of quality to medieval times when students formed guilds to protect their mutual interest and maintain standards by holding their professors accountable to the requirements of the contract, while Woodhouse (2013:4) dates accreditation (a form of quality assurance) to more than a century before in the USA and to nearly 40 years before in the UK. Green (1994:13), like Charles and Woodhouse, views quality as part of the higher education tradition, but emphasises that issues of quality and standards are internal to higher education institutions.

Elassy (2015:251) traces the concept of quality in higher education from the business sector in the 1980s. During that time, quality was perceived in lofty and abstract terms, as there was high consensus on the issue of academic quality. Elassy (2015:251) further explains that it was in this present era when universities such as Harvard or Oxford were assumed to be the benchmark of quality without further scrutiny of the ingredients of quality, reflecting Green's (1994) traditional concept of quality (as discussed in Section 2.2.5).

Since then, quality has occupied a central place in higher education policy and remains an important attribute that creates value of educational products or services, and as a means by which service providers differentiate themselves from their competitors (ESIB, 2002:9). As such, in the 1990s, the concern for quality suggested the need for regulation, as its purpose seemed heavily weighed on accountability (as noted in interface quality) and quality came to be seen as definable and measurable (Elassy, 2015:251, 256).

Whether the historical root of quality is in business or in tradition, quality has become the decisive factor in determining the value of higher education services or products, and because businesses are leaders in quality assurance, the higher education sector stands to benefit from important lessons learned in business.

2.7 Contexts transforming the higher education sector

As significant forces are pressing the quality frontiers in the higher education system, national authorities are facing challenges in assuring quality through the traditional or collegial model in which universities are entrusted to assure quality through internal mechanisms. Therefore, external quality assurance has become a probable means and is believed to be robust enough to counter the pressures arising from national agendas, the high demand for higher education, diverse providers of higher education, the increased demand for transparency and accountability, the internationalisation of higher education and global pressure on the significance of quality assurance.

2.7.1 National agendas

Every national state has its own sovereign and national expectations for university education, such as contributing to national development and educating individuals in a range of disciplines that are key to achieving national agendas such as Education for All and the Sustainable Development Goals (Materu, 2007:7, Atchoarena, 2016:96). Quality in terms of relevance of university education is closely linked to the achievement of these national expectations.

Universities (or higher education institutions) as conduits of knowledge are expected to support national agendas and priorities of socio-economic development by meeting defined aims and goals while supporting the development of selected global capacities (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:3). Because of these important functions that universities perform, national governments have an interest in the quality of university education.

Sometimes governments, through universities, may seek to pursue their own interests and priorities, which may simultaneously conflict with each other, and with those of universities (Hayward, 2006:12), such as promoting equitable access and broadening access to university education. Firstly, promoting equitable access might be a priority to government, but maintaining equity may challenge the prevalence of educational quality in terms of entry requirements. Secondly, the expansion of higher education raises questions about the sustainability of public expenditure on higher education against other pressing social demands, placing a constraint on quality, as funding is a key ingredient in upholding quality.

2.7.2 High demand for higher education

The high demand for university education is associated with the massification of higher education in advanced societies and its global effects in other parts of the world, leading to expansions in student numbers. Trow (1973, cited in Marginson, 2016:28) provides a typology to the term ‘massification of higher education’ and uses the terms ‘elite’, ‘mass’ and ‘universal’ higher education in his focus on the growth of higher education.

Trow (1973 in Marginson, 2016:28) argues on the social dynamics of participation in higher education in every society as shifting from being a privilege in the elite phase to a right in the mass phase and to an obligation in the universal phase. In his narrative, national enrolment ratios of the relevant age group in the elite system reached up to 15%, the mass system ranged from 15% up to 50% and in the universal system participation rates exceeded 50%.

The implications of mass higher education mostly in Africa led to growth in student numbers, mainly because of the growing demand for knowledge, skills and competences. Student numbers grew through increases in enrolments, mostly in public institutions; increases in the number of universities; the use of different modes of delivery by universities such as distance and online learning; and the emergence of diverse university education providers such as virtual universities, private universities and global online providers (Hayward, 2006:12; Materu, 2007:9).

Amid achievements of access to higher education especially in Africa are quality concerns regarding the educational products or services. Firstly, an increase in student enrolments did not match public expenditure per student in public universities (Shabani *et al.*, 2014:142) and secondly, quality assurance systems lack the capacity to implement their mandates effectively to ensure the quality of different modes of delivery and that of diverse university providers (Materu, 2007:9; Shabani, 2013:2010).

2.7.3 Diverse providers of higher education

Diversification in the provision of higher education was one of the coping strategies that resulted from the high demand for higher education. New types of institutions emerged, educational programmes within institutions multiplied, private provision expanded, and new modes of delivery were introduced (OECD, 2008:3).

Many countries opted to encourage private provision to satisfy the social demand for university education within the context of restricted budgets, as the majority are not publicly funded (Martin, Pereyra, Singh & Stella, 2007:7). The participation of private providers causes quality concerns, as some operate without government recognition and many are for-profit without or with little regard for quality (Hayward, 2006:13). As a result, national authorities have found it challenging to assure higher education through the collegial model.

Cross-border higher education (CBHE) providers have also been providing higher education, eluding the physical presence of the university. Some examples of such institutions are the Zambia Open University, Alliance International University and Northrise University, in Zambia; the African Virtual University, the Open University of Tanzania, the Open University of Nigeria, the University of South Africa, in Africa; and global online providers such as Apollo Global, Laureate, University Ventures and Google (Coates & Mahat, 2014:581; Martin *et al.*, 2007:52).

The proliferation and incorporation of CBHE providers in the higher education sector have helped to diversify the fields of study, besides being more financially affordable than physical universities. However, quality concerns abide, as quality monitoring becomes complex and expensive and the lack of physical presence in the importing countries makes it difficult for the local authorities to regulate and ensure quality and authenticity (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:8).

2.7.4 Demand for transparency and accountability

With globalisation, quality concerns are increasing, resulting in public demand for transparency and accountability (Materu, 2007:8). Multinational business firms and foreign-based universities are providing higher education services through satellite campuses in countries where there is a big market, mostly driven by profit motives (Teferra & Altbach, 2004:35). If accountability is taken as being answerable for one's actions to some authority or government, and transparency as attesting the quality of an educational outcome to some authority, then understanding who the authority is for CBHE providers becomes problematic, as single jurisdiction may not apply (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:3). Quality becomes a cause for concern, as

this dilemma may be the reason for the lack of accountability and social responsibility to the importing countries.

Within public higher education institutions, the cost-sharing scheme highlights the significance of student fees to institutional budgets supplementing insufficient government funding (Materu, 2007:9), while in private higher education institutions, students are the major funding resource of institutional budgets. Therefore, the need to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of resources is eminent and the relationship of these resources to the quality of the outputs of higher education institutions (Materu, 2007:10) seems obvious.

As the custodian of the higher education system, governments have a jurisdiction to create mechanisms that require higher education institutions (in their diverse forms) to provide detailed activities regarding the usage of finances and to address the concern for quality in terms of value for money. In addition, as students and parents are seeking investment in learning, higher education providers should exercise transparency in accounting for resource expenditures to convince students that the education they are undertaking is worth their money.

2.7.5 Internationalisation of higher education

In higher education, internationalisation is closely related with the teaching function of universities (Healey, 2008:334). Internationalisation is a specific response of colleges and universities to the needs of their graduates to have competencies that will enable them to take their place in a globalised society (Maassen, 2003:7). It is manifested through changes in curriculum, by inclusion of global dimensions into the curriculum, and teaching and learning process; through academic mobility for students and staff; through collaboration in teaching and projects; through the presence of foreign students on campuses; and globalisation of education through increased emphasis on trade in higher education (Healey, 2008:335; Maassen, 2003:7; Oyewole, 2009:320).

Higher education is being internationalised because of profits, for-profit higher education providers have entered the international market and some countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom recruit international student to earn profits; for access provision and demand absorption, as international higher education providers provide access to students in countries lacking the domestic capacity to meet the demand; for traditional internationalisation, to provide international and cross-cultural perspectives for their students and enhance their curricula; for European internationalism, to encourage students to study abroad within the European Union; for individual internationalisation, in which an individual decides to study

outside their home country or a programme offered by foreign education providers; and for Developing-country internationalisation, to improve the quality and composition of student body, gain prestige, and earn income (Altbach & Knight, 2009:292-294). In Africa, however, internationalisation is being promoted mainly to build human resource capacity, promote the improvement of academic quality, and to strengthen research capacity and knowledge production (Oyewole, 2009).

There are notable internationalisation activities in countries across Africa: as foreign student support, international institutional agreements and contracts, and international student mobility in South Africa; as partnerships and collaborations with foreign institutions, student mobility and foreign language studies in Nigeria; as trans-national providers licensing, partnerships, joint programmes and student mobility in Ethiopia (Oyewole, 2009:322-324); branch campuses in Kenya (Altbach & Knight, 2007); and joint programmes, distance education and partnerships in Zambia.

As noted from the motives for internationalisation of higher education, internationalisation has an influence on quality of higher education. On one hand, internationalisation has the potential to improve quality, because for example, it promotes capacity building in human resource; and on the other, it has the potential to challenge quality because some providers of higher education, offer transnational education, “in which learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding body is based” (Healey, 2008:335). Thus, to the extent that some internationalisation activities are not regulated, internationalisation has a possibility of causing a decline in quality.

2.7.6 Global pressure on the significance of quality assurance

There have been noticeable concerns across the world about the significance of quality in higher education by international organisations. These include the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the German Academic Exchange Services (Elassy, 2015:250; El Hassan, 2013:78). These international organisations have expressed their concern for quality through funding quality projects, by regularly reflecting on quality in higher education in their reports (OECD, UNESCO, World Bank) and by being actively involved in regional activities that focus on international dialogues through conferences, visits and professional training in self- and external evaluations and capacity building (El Hassan, 2013:78–79).

Global pressure on quality assurance in higher education is attested by the establishment of organisations such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA), (Woodhouse, 2013:4), the Bologna process under the European Higher Education Area (EC, 2009:9), the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA, 2010:1; Shabani *et al.*, 2014:150), the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (Shabani, 2013:2008; Shabani *et al.*, 2014:150), the African Quality Assurance Network (Shabani, 2013:2009) and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (Elassy, 2015:250; Materu, 2007:12;) and the continued establishment of national agencies for quality assurance. The creation of such quality organisations illustrates the importance attached to quality in higher education across the world.

In conclusion, the concerns regarding educational quality arise because of the perceived dilemmas created in terms of the higher education systems in response to social and economic responsibilities. In this case, the responsibility of higher education institutions to meet the social and economic demands seems to contradict with the responsibility to keep quality in check, hence the concerns.

2.8 Purpose of quality assurance in higher education

The purpose of quality assurance in higher education results from the above factors that are transforming the higher education sector, mainly to improve higher education.

Firstly, quality assurance is a means to protect students in higher education from poor-quality delivery of programmes by ensuring that higher education of good quality is provided, considering diverse providers that have proliferated the higher education sector (Martin *et al.*, 2006:28). Similarly, as higher education is confronted with more privatisation tendencies by diversifying the funding streams in public institutions (Bernhard, 2012:164) and by making students bear the full cost of education, especially in private universities, quality assurance becomes a tool to protect students in higher education by ensuring that they get real value for the money spent.

Secondly, quality control is an important purpose for quality assurance. It is mostly practised as a requirement for establishing private universities (Martin *et al.*, 2006:28). Private providers must meet the minimum threshold of standards set by the external quality assurance agency to be granted permission to operate. By meeting the minimum standards, private providers are accountable to external quality assurance authorities for maintaining or improving the standards to protect the educational product or service.

Thirdly, quality assurance is an effective tool to harmonise the higher education sector, as it is becoming more diversified and internationalised (Martin *et al.*, 2006:28). According to Stensaker and Maassen (2015:30), trust is central in strengthening nationally and internationally attuned quality assurance activities, such as the recognition of qualifications of cross-national higher education. There are often fears that programmes offered by CBHE or private providers may not lead to nationally or internationally acceptable qualification, which is likely to limit student mobility and employability (Martin *et al.*, 2006:28).

Fourthly, quality assurance is perceived as a condition that leads to the achievement of transparency (ESIB, 2002:15). If transparency is understood as making visible the quality assurance activities of higher education institutions or of an external quality assurance agency to other stakeholders in higher education (Dalsgaard & Paulsen, 2009:2), then quality assurance makes higher education institutions or external quality assurance agencies transparent by making procedures of assuring quality explicit to stakeholders and by taking on board their interests and concerns. As quality in higher education is viewed differently by groups of stakeholders, transparency is key in consolidating what should constitute quality.

Lastly, quality assurance is a benchmark of success in the knowledge economy, as countries wishing to move towards the knowledge economy are challenged to raise the quality of higher education (Materu, 2007:7). Why higher education? Higher education is critical, as the transition to the knowledge society demands higher skill levels that are generated and transmitted from higher education, especially universities. By implication, quality becomes the means to economic success and a motivation for institutions to achieve excellence (Ryan, 2015:1).

In conclusion, quality assurance is a tool that can address transformation in the higher education system to enable the products or services of higher education to contribute to the emerging knowledge economy. It plays a key role in revitalising the higher education sector.

2.9 Methods of assessing quality

Kis (2005:8) identified three methods of assessing quality. These are self-review, peer review and external review. Self-review and peer review are internal, commonly known as internal quality assurance, whereas external review is also known as external quality assurance. Internal and external quality assurance assess quality at either institutional level, programme level or subject level.

2.9.1 Internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance takes place within higher education institutions during the teaching and learning processes (Materu, 2007:31). Internal quality has been the responsibility of universities from inception (Elassy, 2015:251).

Internal quality assurance is multidimensional and is based on the core activities of the institution. It is the outcome of the interaction of the quality of students and staff and activities involving curriculum reviews; research, teaching and learning, and learning facilities; assessment procedures; strategic planning; student evaluations of staff; external examiners; academic reviews; market forces; and audits (ESIB, 2002:13; Materu, 2007:31).

To strengthen internal quality, higher education systems sometimes engage a peer-review system and/or external examiner system. Peer review is an evaluation carried out by another academic, usually within the same discipline, either within the institution or outside the institution, to ensure that the programmes being offered, and the standards being applied are consistent with the agreed practice (Kis, 2005:8; Materu, 2007:32). On the other hand, an external examiner system serves as a peer-review mechanism that ensures that final examinations in academic programmes are reviewed to maintain agreed standards in affiliated institutions (Hayward, 2006:11; Materu, 2007:32). The two mechanisms are established by higher education institutions as methods of assessment of their own academic activities by peers.

2.9.1.1 Significance of internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance provides a basis for accountability of the academic system within the institutional framework (OECD, 2008:9). It is in the context of accountability that universities establish measurable objectives and evaluate their outcomes to weigh whether programmes meet the educational objectives or stated goals. In addition, it is still in the sphere of accountability that information regarding academic activities of the higher education institution is provided to stakeholders.

As a prerequisite for accreditation, internal quality assurance affirms that the institution upholds a certain threshold of standards and guarantees quality educational products or services (ESIB, 2002:15). It is mandatory before accreditation that universities engage in self-evaluation and peer evaluation to measure the worthiness of an institution to offer university education.

Peer reviews are initiated by higher education institutions to bring more legitimacy to internal quality assurance, as academics are more likely to listen to their peers' opinion than to administrators or inspectors, who may be associated with power relations (Hayward, 2006:30; Kis, 2005:17). Because of this likelihood, peer reviews can contribute effectively to quality improvement by changing the attitude of academics regarding their contribution to a programme (Kis, 2005:17).

Self-review provides a standard against which the higher education institution can measure itself and a framework for building up the definition of quality (Kis, 2005:8). It helps the higher education institution to gauge the achievement of its mission and goals and to prepare an action plan for further development (Kis, 2005:8). Self-reviews are a source of intrinsic motivation to improve internal quality.

2.9.1.2 Challenges in assuring quality internally

The cost of quality assurance is a challenge. Although the real cost of quality assurance cannot be quantified, universities need to secure the monetary, time and human resources to assure quality (Kis, 2005:16). Materu (2007:45) maintains that financing decisions in Africa do not link quality assurance processes to institutional funding. The missing link between quality assurance activities and public financing in universities constrains institutional involvement in quality assurance activities, as the cost is borne by the institution itself.

An increased workload results from large student numbers (Materu, 2007:31). When academic staff are overloaded with teaching and learning activities, the implementation of quality assurance practices becomes a challenge. Increases in student enrolments, especially in public universities, require a matching increase in the teaching staff to maintain the quality of teaching and learning when the mode of learning used is contact.

The guaranteed demand for and *de jure* accreditation earned by public higher education institutions by their being public institutions expose them to a likelihood of trading off quality to accommodate the social demand for access and to offset effects of reduced funding from government (Materu, 2007:31). The trading off of quality at the expense of access or funding instead of searching for alternative solutions challenges the existence of quality in public universities.

Assuring quality for non-public institutions such as private universities and CBHE institutions is problematic. Firstly, CBHE providers that collaborate with non-university institutions to offer degree programmes where facilities to support the degree programme may not be

adequate undermine the quality of teaching and learning, and secondly, ODL modes such as e-learning embraced by CBHE providers because of developments in ICT have imposed challenges in ensuring quality because of insufficient numbers of peer reviewers who may be qualified to handle assessments at that level (Martin *et al.*, 2007:14).

The peer-review system raises questions about the legitimacy of the quality process to those outside the borders of higher education institutions, as peers are colleagues (Kis, 2005:17). Similarly, the external examiners system, despite providing some level of internal quality assurance, began to weaken in the 1980s and 1990s because of expansions in student populations constraining the capacities of external examiners to thoroughly read through all examinations of large classes (Hayward, 2006:12), challenging quality.

In conclusion, the gaps in assuring internal quality call for an intensely focused approach to assure educational quality beyond the borders of higher education institutions. Therefore, external quality assurance became an option.

2.9.2 External quality assurance

External quality bodies such as the national quality assurance authorities, international quality agencies and professional bodies carry out external quality assurance. It is external because quality activities are being steered from outside the confines of universities. Previously, external quality agencies focused on the physical campus and inputs such as students, faculty qualifications, available funds and facilities, but the evolving environment of higher education has expanded the workload of external quality agencies to paying attention to invisible structures of virtual universities, e-learning modes of learning and outcomes of higher education (Woodhouse, 2013:4).

Most quality assurance agencies in Africa focus on assuring quality at the institutional level rather than the programme level (Materu, 2007:25) and in general, quality assurance agencies envisage to embrace quality guarding or control, accountability and improvement (ESIB, 2002:38; Martin *et al.*, 2007:28).

In guarding quality, the external quality agencies require private providers to request for permission to operate through licencing or accreditation, while in accounting for institutional or programme quality, external quality agencies accredit institutions or programmes to ensure that minimum standards are upheld throughout the higher education system and quality improvement is addressed through follow-ups to recommendations made by external quality agencies to higher education institutions (Martin *et al.*, 2007:28–29).

2.9.2.1 Significance of external quality assurance

As the collegial model of quality assurance could no longer sustain public trust in safeguarding stakeholders regarding educational services or products, external quality assurance was embraced (Materu, 2007:16). Calls for value for money from students, parents and taxpayers and for a higher quality of graduates from employers, the need for governments to meet national agendas and the recognition of the need to be competitive and meet the demands of the knowledge society in part have been the basis for setting up national quality assurance authorities or external quality agencies to assure quality in universities (Materu, 2007:16; Pillay & Kimber, 2009:4).

External quality assurance arises from ethical concerns that the higher education sector as a service provider could not be the right entity to set the minimum standards for its services or products (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:6). In the absence of an external quality assurance system, consumers of university education are increasingly concerned about the quality of degree programmes, especially when an independent source of information is lacking to provide information on universities or CBHE providers, and when governments do not seem to have a robust mechanism for holding these providers accountable for the quality of their programmes (Materu, 2007:11).

The participation of CBHE providers in higher education demands greater awareness of the credibility and value of higher education services or products in view of the commercialisation of higher education, as market forces are deemed to be amoral (Martin *et al.*, 2007:52). It is by means of external quality assurance that governments ensure that universities serve societies, account for monies from stakeholders in a desirable way and produce results desired by various stakeholders (Woodhouse, 2013:5).

Another related concern regarding CBHE providers is their growing complexity and the fear that the lack of explicit regulation regarding external quality assurance may result in academic fraud, such as the deliberate provision of false information on the nature and validity of credentials, the selling of credentials and diploma mills (Martin *et al.*, 2007:7).

Pressure from private participation, stemming from the rapid growth of private universities in Africa in the 1990s, triggered the setting up of national quality assurance agencies to regulate private higher education providers (Materu, 2007:16). The suggested need to regulate private providers originated from the belief that some private universities operated without licences, had unqualified academic staff or had hired academic staff from public universities, had

substandard curricula and offered programmes with a narrow coverage, and lacked essential facilities besides them operating for profit (Materu, 2007:16; Teferra & Altbach, 2004:34). Therefore, the quest for external quality assurance is not only realised through its significance, but the benefits as well, as elaborated in the next section.

2.9.2.2 Benefits of external quality assurance

External quality assurance is likely to strengthen the credibility of private universities, which in some countries have been regarded as delivering inferior education, as external quality agencies may substantiate claims made about quality and the level of outcomes achieved at the institutional level (Harman, 2000:1).

External quality assurance ensures integrity and results in legitimisation of higher education at both national and international level (Kis, 2005:14). Legitimation is realised through the mandatory creation of internal quality assurance systems in universities, where external quality assurance agencies conduct periodical validations (OECD, 2008:9).

External quality assurance act as a catalyst for internal improvement within higher education institutions, as external quality assurance agencies engage in dialogue and take on an advisory role in making academic staff realise that quality assurance for the institution is their own responsibility and that external quality reflects institutional quality (Kis, 2005:15; Woodhouse, 2013:5). Despite high expectations from external quality agencies that their existence should highly motivate universities to set up internal quality mechanisms on their own, Kis (2005:15) states that universities would seldom carry on quality activities on their own.

External quality assurance provides information to various stakeholders, such as prospective students and parents, employers and funders, on the quality of higher education (Harman, 2000:2). Because external quality agencies are external to higher education institutions, they are likely to create a sense of impartiality, credibility, comprehensiveness and transparency among stakeholders (Kis, 2005:15), while contributing to the overall improvement of the system.

Bearing in mind that the existence of external quality assurance can act as a deterrent to the stated shortcomings across diverse providers of higher education, there are challenges in assuring quality externally.

2.9.2.3 Challenges of external quality assurance

The emergence of virtual universities, private offshore companies and universities operating independently in twinning programmes makes continuous quality monitoring a complex and expensive adventure (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:8). Bearing in mind that most quality assurance agencies in developing countries rely on donor funds, it casts doubt on whether quality assurance agencies would sustainably undertake quality assurance activities as demanded by complex structures of virtual universities or even have staff with professional competence to manage quality assurance in a dynamic higher education sector.

The difficulty to justify the refusal by national quality assurance authorities to grant programme accreditation of a well-known international university accredited in their home country is challenging (Martin *et al.*, 2007:52). It is doubtful that quality, as defined in one niche (such as exporting countries), could be transplanted and defined as such in another (importing countries). It also raises questions of whose interests are being served and what exactly is being assured (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:10).

The issue of autonomy and academic freedom in universities often conflicts with the functioning of an external quality assurance system (ESIB, 2002:14). The resistivity arises from the seeming invasion of non-academics into the academic sphere, accountability that may lead to self-exposure and an additional workload in preparation for external quality assessments. Despite wide consultations and debates on external quality assurance, Materu (2007:25) refers to fear among academics in universities where external requirements have been applied. The prevalence of tension between external quality agencies and academics is seen to challenge the success of quality assurance in universities, as it requires a concerted effort.

In general, external quality assurance authorities rely on donor support, which makes it difficult to ensure sustainability, as there is no guarantee of continued funding (Materu, 2007:48), in addition to challenges in budgeting outside the agreed terms. Reliance on donor funding is a challenge in view of weak economies or lack of political will to prioritise such activities in most African countries, as sustainability and responsiveness to new needs and priorities become questionable.

The proliferation of new modes of delivery, such as e-learning, poses a challenge to external quality assurance because external quality assurance is nascent in most African countries and there is an absence of standards and expertise to regulate quality at that level (Materu, 2007:11).

In addition, Pillay and Kimber (2009:9) attribute the challenge to the perceived quality of transnational providers through *de facto* indicators, such as being from the OECD countries, in most developing countries.

In conclusion, external quality is linked to internal quality, as internal quality assurance is a prerequisite to external quality assurance. Quality assurance needs a concerted effort from both internal and external actors to achieve intended goals.

2.9.3 Internal versus external quality assurance

There seems to be general consensus that quality assurance and improvement is primarily the responsibility of an individual higher education institution and that the establishment of external quality assurance systems by national authorities should not be seen as transferring the responsibility for quality assurance to external bodies, but as validating and reinforcing institutional capacity (Hayward, 2006:11; Martin *et al.*, 2007:30; Materu, 2007:56; Woodhouse, 2013:5). In view of this argument, the establishment of external quality assurance becomes necessary to create a legal basis for the operation of an institutional quality assurance system so that the quality assurance structure is entrusted with clear responsibilities and tasks (Martin *et al.*, 2007:30).

It is argued that sustainable improvement of quality assurance relies on internal engagement, as higher education providers are deemed to have an appropriate focus of improvement, knowledge of the means of achieving the objectives of improvement and an appreciation of the benefits that accrue from the effort (Kis, 2005:16). In support of this standpoint, it is noted that reliance on external quality assurance seems not to be an option; rather, it is essential to ensure that the results of external assessments are not just temporary adjustments due to compliance but lead to lasting improvement in higher education institutions (Kis, 2005:16; Woodhouse, 2013:5).

It is contended that external quality assurance mechanisms are likely to be costly and an inefficient means of achieving lasting quality improvement (Kis, 2005:17). Firstly, external quality assurance is costly taking into consideration the site visits that external agencies engage in to validate self-review reports. Secondly, likely inefficiency could possibly result from external quality assurance authorities that are established by governments who may be reluctant to dissolve quality assurance agencies when they do not fulfil their mandate, as that may be deemed as an admission of failure (Kis, 2005:17). In addition, external quality assurance authorities may be inefficient bearing in mind that the actual status of institutional quality may

be elusive, as higher education institutions may choose impression management and compliance instead of quality improvement (Kis, 2005:17).

In some way, external quality assurance may translate into a loss of academic autonomy and an excessive workload (Kis, 2005:29–30). The corporate requirement that educational products or services should meet external assessment requirements suggests the search for greater efficiencies beyond individual higher education institutions. Because of that, some academics feel that their autonomy and integrity are offended by demands for increased transparency and by suggestions that quality might be improved through deliberate policy (Kis, 2005:30). Reportedly, an excessive workload results from external quality assurance due to bureaucratic demands, paperwork and increased time spent on meetings (Kis, 2005:30).

Despite the consensus that higher education institutions are better placed in assuring quality, Pillay and Kimber (2009:6) argue that higher education institutions as service providers have a limited role in setting standards and regulating quality, suggesting that establishing external quality bodies is an excellent way to separate those who set standards from the service providers. Pillay and Kimber (2009) further explain that it would be unethical for higher education institutions to set standards and provide services, as that would result in a conflict of interest. Therefore, involving external quality assurance bodies increases transparency, accountability and credibility.

In conclusion, emerging from the discussion of internal and external quality assurance is the realisation that internal and external quality should prevail for total quality to be attained at institutional and national level.

2.10 Approaches to assuring quality in higher education

External quality assurance is reportedly carried out through one or more approaches to assuring quality, such as accreditation, assessment, quality audits and academic reviews, depending on the education system that is prevalent (Hayward, 2006:5; Kis, 2005:5; Materu, 2007:3).

2.10.1 Accreditation

Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution or programme meets a threshold of standards and qualifies for a certain status (Kis, 2005:5; Woodhouse, 2013:3). It involves self-evaluation of individual programmes, an internal review at the institutional level and an external quality review, which includes site visits during which external agencies scrutinise

universities or higher education institutions and their programmes for quality assurance and improvement (Hayward, 2006:5).

A higher education institution or programme is granted accreditation when it meets or exceeds the minimum published standards for accreditation (Woodhouse, 2013:3). A threshold of standards is used by quality agencies as the basis for making a judgement, recommendations and decisions on whether an institution or programme should be accredited (Ryan, 2015:3). Beyond fulfilling a threshold of standards, accrediting agencies develop standards and procedures to secure not only commitment to assuring quality, but also voluntary continuous commitment to quality improvement (Hayward, 2006:5; Ryan, 2015:3).

2.10.1.1 Benefits of accreditation

Hayward (2006:29, 31) identified some benefits that higher education institutions may realise from accreditation, such as the value of an external perspective provided by reviewers, international recognition, legitimizing international credit transfers, useful in obtaining recognition of degrees of students seeking for advanced study outside the country, protecting the public from fraud and excessive entrepreneurialism (a common problem with private institutions) and a culture of quality.

The value of an external perspective provided by external reviewers fulfils the institutional desire for recognition through external judgements made about the institution or programme, which results in awarding an accreditation certificate as authentication for meeting specified standards (ESIB, 2002:15; Hayward, 2006:8). In addition, national quality assurance agencies as external accreditors facilitate the recognition of degrees internationally and may consequently ease student mobility, as they provide higher education institutions with the independent approval of programmes at other universities from which students may come (ESIB, 2002:16).

Institutions or programmes that are accredited gain not only international recognition, but national recognition as well for achieving the standards that are set to meet either international or national criteria, which are important in attracting foreign students seeking opportunities to study abroad (Hayward, 2006: 29). Institutions or programmes that are accredited also obtain recognition of degrees of students seeking admission for advanced study outside the country, because international criteria can be made (ESIB, 2002:22; Hayward, 2006: 29).

Accreditation is seen as a mechanism that guarantees quality in higher education institutions and protects the public from fraud, especially with regard to private universities (Hayward,

2006:29; Teferra & Altbach, 2004:35). In this sense, accreditation provides assurance that higher education institutions or programmes in which students are enrolled or are considering are capable of achieving what they set out to do in view of the belief that private higher education institutions are entrepreneurial, hence are more interested in making money than providing a quality education ((ESIB, 2002:15; Hayward, 2006:27).

Accreditation has contributed to creating a culture of quality in higher education institutions, as faculty members are involved in accreditation, which gives them in-depth exposure to other tertiary institutions (Hayward, 2006:31). Through the site visits made by external reviewers, faculty members during this interaction are exposed to valuable information useful in improving quality at their own institutions (Hayward, 2006:31).

In summary, accreditation results in an institution or programme being licensed to operate after fulfilling the set standards and have implications for students.

2.10.2 Assessment

In higher education, assessment is a self-initiated activity that has multiple purposes that may focus on an institution, a programme, a course or an individual student. Assessment provides information about student learning, student progress, teaching quality, and programme and institutional accountability with a purpose to improve the quality of programmes and enhance student learning (Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, & Rees, 2012:119). In addition, Kis (2005:5) views assessment as an evaluation that results in a graded judgement about quality. It goes beyond accreditation, which makes a binary judgement of either 'yes' or 'no' or 'pass' or 'fail', to quantifying the output of an institution or programme (Kis, 2005:5; Woodhouse, 2013:3). Kis further elaborates that the focus in assessment is on 'how good the institutional outputs are', and to attend to this request, the output of assessment becomes a quantitative evaluation. Woodhouse (2013:3) identified the grading system attached to assessment as numeric (percentage or 1–4), literal (A–F) or descriptive (excellent, good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory), in which an assessment may result from one of these scores.

Despite programme and institutional assessments being widely used by European quality assurance agencies, Kis (2005:5) observed that programme assessment was more frequently used than institutional assessments, comparatively.

2.10.2.1 Benefits of assessment

Assessment provides accountability to stakeholders in higher education. For instance, management within a faculty may want to know what students are learning by demanding that academic staff provide evidence of students' learning. Placing emphasis on what students learn and on what students do helps to effectively drive improvement in the learning process and programme planning, and, in general, to gauge whether the academic staff are delivering the programmes of study to appropriate academic standards (Fletcher *et al.*, 2012:120).

In addition, assessment adds transparency to the teaching and learning process, as it provides feedback on the measurement of objectives and evaluation of outcomes to stakeholders, who are likely to hold different views of programmes offered by universities (Green, 1994:20). The articulation of criteria used in assessments is transparent to demonstrate the effectiveness of student learning and to encourage collective commitment to maintaining standards among stakeholders in an environment where standards could easily be understood and appreciated (Fletcher *et al.*, 2012:120).

2.10.3 Quality audits

An institutional audit or quality audit is a review of an institution or programme by external reviewers or external quality agencies to determine whether the stated missions, aims and objectives are being met (Materu, 2007:3). In other words, a quality audit checks the extent to which an institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit goals or objectives (Woodhouse, 2013:3).

This is a three-part process that involves checking the suitability of planned quality procedures in relation to stated objectives, the conformity of the actual quality activities with the plans and the effectiveness of the activities in achieving the stated objectives (Kis, 2005:5–6; Woodhouse, 2013:3) through self-study, peer review and site visits (Materu, 2007:3). In this process, the external reviewers seek to evaluate whether the quality assurance system that the university has established is successfully achieving its aims and objectives (Harvey & Green, 1993:20).

Higher education institutions conduct self-evaluations and produce audit portfolios that form the basis for external assessment by external panels of evaluators during site visits (Martin *et al.*, 2007:26). These activities entail that an audit does not only focus on assuring quality, but also on improving the quality of teaching and learning (Kis, 2005:6), as the standards set are

internally generated by higher education institutions. Therefore, according to Kis (2005:6), the main question in an institutional audit is, “Are your processes effective?”

By implication, if the processes engaged are effective, the institution is living up to its aspirations; while if not, the institution should strive to attain success to realise the claim. The assumption implicit in the development of quality assurance is that if mechanisms exist, then quality can be assured (Harvey & Green, 1993:20).

2.10.3.1 Benefits of quality audits

There seems to be consensus that quality audits lead to quality improvement. Martin *et al.* (2007:29) explain that an audit is a preferred option for quality improvement because it investigates and makes recommendations on higher education institutions’ capacity for quality assurance or the accreditation of academic programmes. In this case, if institutions work on the recommendations, institutional quality may be realised or improved. In a similar voice, Woodhouse (2013:3) explains improvement in terms of a quality loop using the initials OADRI, referring to the objectives approach (e.g. plans), deployment (e.g. the actual activities), results (e.g. the consequences of all planning and activity) and improvement, in which he sees improvement as adjusting the objectives or deployment when the loop is not closed or, if closed, perhaps setting more ambitious objectives (Woodhouse, 2013:3). An audit ensures that institutional processes are not counterproductive and by making recommendations on which institutions are expected to draw improvement plans, external reviewers set out the context for institutional improvement (Martin *et al.*, 2007:26; Woodhouse, 2013:4).

Quality audits hold institutions accountable for achieving their stated and published goals. Because a quality audit focuses on the claims made by the higher education institution about itself, assessors in a quality audit check for successes of an institution in achieving its own goals or objectives (Materu, 2007:3; Woodhouse, 2013:3). As an audit is self-managed, an institution is held accountable for meeting what it explicitly or implicitly claims to do or offer. In view of the aforesaid, an audit increases the accountability of higher education institutions as service providers to stakeholders such as the public or government and gives an opportunity for institutions to aspire to quality, as different standards are set by individual higher education institutions.

2.10.4 Academic reviews

An academic review is a diagnostic self-assessment and evaluation of teaching, learning, research, service and outcomes based on a detailed examination of curricula that reflect the quality of programmes and activities of the faculty (Hayward, 2006:5). It is a collegial approach based on peer review designed to evaluate academic activities within an institution through self-assessment by peers with appropriate disciplinary and experiential expertise (Lockett, 2007:101; Materu, 2007:3). It involves self-assessment by the unit, peer review by colleagues outside the programme and the generation of a report based on the findings, which may be used to effect improvement (Hayward, 2006:5).

Unlike accreditation and audits, an academic review can be limited to a single programme and does not involve site visits by external reviewers to the higher education institution (Materu, 2007:4).

2.10.4.1 Benefits of academic reviews

There is an intrinsic commitment from academic staff to improve practice based on the findings of the academic review. As the issue of autonomy and academic freedom within academic life is one of the most contentious areas, there is a likelihood that a collegial atmosphere may encourage openness and growth towards promoting and improving quality assurance within various units of the university (ESIB, 2002:14).

Academic reviewers make judgements about the quality of academic activities within the shared meanings of a disciplinary community (Lockett, 2007:101) to comparatively encourage quality assurance across various university programmes. Because due attention is paid to specific institutional units, academic reviews consider diversity to avoid conformity (ESIB, 2002:3), strengthening internal quality within institutions.

The consequences of an academic review are usually non-threatening and do not attract extrinsic rewards or punishments, despite the critique of emphasising disciplinary excellence and being confined to the academic guild (Lockett, 2007:101).

2.10.5 Challenges of approaches to assuring quality

The approaches to assuring quality (accreditation, assessment, quality audits and academic reviews) are challenged by similar and related factors.

Time is a challenge in all approaches used to assure quality. However, a substantial amount of time is required both in accreditation and auditing to accommodate activities such as self-review, peer view, site visits and reporting (Kis, 2005; Materu, 2007:26). Materu (2007:26) suggests a timeframe of 12 to 18 months of self-assessment being invested by institutions to prepare for external audits and accreditation. Time is a challenge, as routine university activity must be carried out as scheduled as well as quality assurance activities.

The cost associated with the activities that go with approaches to assuring quality is a challenge. Costs are incurred in terms of travel, boarding and lodging for site visits, administrative and faculty time for self-assessment and site visits, and administrative time for preparation of data and follow-up (Materu, 2007:26). In view of a variation in activities of aforementioned approaches, the costs of audits, accreditation and quality assurance procedures that focus on programmes are substantial (Kis, 2005:12). In some cases, because of substantial amounts involved, the cost of accreditation and audits has steered debate on who should pay for the cost incurred – whether government or the institutions reviewed, external quality agencies or donors, or a combination of them should meet the cost (Hayward, 2006:32). Comparatively, the amount of money required for audits and accreditation appears to be substantial compared to the amounts required for assessment and academic review (Martin *et al.*, 2007:26; Materu, 2007:26), as the processes involved in institutional audits and accreditation are similar (self-assessment, peer review, site visits and writing of a report).

The complexity of higher education institutions limits the effective utilisation of approaches to assuring quality. To exemplify, quality assurance agencies had previously not focused on assessing or accrediting imported or exported academic programmes of CBHE institutions (Ryan, 2015:7). The process of accreditation provides information that programmes or institutions are meeting the expected standards – the information that can help students and parents make decisions about where to enrol (Hayward, 2006:8). Because approaches to assuring quality provide accountability to information about the adequacy of institutional performance or academic programmes, the limitations might place stakeholders such as students at a disadvantage.

Stakeholders in the higher education sector have mixed views of the appropriateness of quality standards, which are fundamental in each approach to assuring quality (Hayward, 2006:8; Ryan, 2015:7). For instance, in assessing institutional quality, the focus of attention of faculty and academic staff might be on the results of assessments and feedback, while the focus of employers might be on the performance of university graduates. From this standpoint, it is

unlikely that a single approach to assuring quality may satisfy the standards of all interested parties in making judgements.

There is resistivity by academic staff due to the seeming invasion of the university system to stakeholders' scrutiny or accountability and the burden of additional work involved in self-assessment activities. The university system had previously conducted its activities within the confines of the academic guild and issues of quality emerged as part of the university system rather than mandatory from external agencies, creating a sense of a power struggle. Resentment from academic staff impact negatively on approaches to assuring quality, as the academic core is at the centre of quality assurance activities.

There is a challenge to find a sufficient number of personnel in accrediting agencies and academics in institutions who are qualified and willing to serve in the processes of accreditation, assessment, quality audits and academic reviews (Hayward, 2006:30; Shabani, 2013:2009). The approaches to assuring quality demand human capacity, as the success of each approach depends on the quality, dedication and integrity of administrators and faculty members who prepare self-assessments and those who serve as peer reviewers at institutions being reviewed (Hayward, 2006:30). Adequate numbers of qualified staff are necessary to legitimise the approaches to assuring quality.

There is a feeling of victimisation by private universities to accreditation (Stander & Herman, 2017:220). Private universities seem to view external quality assurance, particularly accreditation, as over regulating them and an intrusion into the free market enterprise. Private providers argue that they are more flexible and better able to respond to business needs and public demand, but that accreditation is limiting them to compete favourably with public universities (Hayward, 2006:29). However, whatever contentions may arise between private and public universities regarding accreditation, a national accrediting authority should include public and private universities, as both have needs that require external evaluation to protect the public, students and their families (Hayward, 2006:29).

In conclusion, approaches to assuring quality focus on initiating quality improvements in achieving academic excellence and to provide evidence of the quality of services in higher education institutions.

2.11 Evidence of the impact of quality assurance systems in higher education

The discussion of the impact of quality assurance schemes focuses on changes or outcomes that link quality assurance to higher education (Leiber, Stensaker & Harvey, 2015:292). With that in mind, an impact may be based on a comparison of the situation before and after the initiation of quality assurance schemes (Bejan, Janatuinen, Jurvelin, Klöpping, Malinen, Minke & Vacareanu, 2015), particularly on the difference created by quality assurance interventions in the higher education sector.

It is, however, arising from the methodological problem, difficult to isolate the impact of quality assurance from other forces affecting higher education (Kis, 2005:26; Liu, Tan & Meng, 2015: 19; Szymenderski, Yagudina & Burenkova, 2015:16). Similarly, Liu *et al.* (2015:19) explain that ascertaining impacts of quality assurance is complicated, because it is almost impossible to control related factors when finding causal relationships.

In addition, different actors of the higher education sector hold different opinions of the impact of quality assurance schemes (Amaral, 2017:2). This is possibly so because quality assurance has many purposes defined differently by the stakeholders (Liu *et al.*, 2015:19). With that in mind, it is probable to accept the argument noted by Kis (2005:26), that a search for possible impacts on external quality needs broad openness to simultaneous events and changes exerting the impact on various levels and aspects of the entire system of higher education.

Despite the challenges, there are empirical studies and literature reviews on the impact of quality assurance in higher education.

2.11.1 Impact on teaching and learning

Quality assessments of teaching have caused considerable attention to be paid to the teaching function in higher education institutions (Kis, 2005:27; Liu *et al.*, 2015:20). It has been noted that teaching quality assessment has particularly motivated discussions on teaching, monitoring of teaching, seeking ways to improve teaching and cooperation between academic staff, and has provided an avenue for students to participate in teaching quality management (Kis, 2005:27; Liu *et al.*, 2015:20; Szymenderski *et al.*, 2015:22). In addition, students' learning outcomes and the relationship between teaching methods and learning outcomes have attracted attention (Liu *et al.*, 2015:23). However, sceptics have argued that time devoted to the monitoring of teaching is at the expense of time dedicated to teaching itself (Kis, 2005:27).

A case study in Chile by Silva, Reich and Gallegos (1997:30) on effects of external quality evaluation recorded outstanding improvements in the teaching environment. According to Silva *et al.* (1997), the outstanding effects in teaching included curriculum reforms, especially in programme content; higher standards in student assessment and improvement of assessment instruments; the creation of degree programmes; and the implementation of upgrading programmes for instructors, mainly in pedagogical aspects.

Related findings were reported by Zapata and Torre (2015:25) on the results of a study on the impact of external quality assurance of higher education in Ibero-America. There was recognition of an increased value attributed to teaching within universities. Zapata and Torre (2015:25) report on the association of quality assurance with changes in curricular management, which translated into more participatory designs, which in turn led to consideration of new demands in teaching.

A report by Bejan *et al.* (2015:348) on the results of the IMPALA (Pluralistic Methodology and Application of a Formative Transdisciplinary Impact Evaluation) project in which stakeholders came from three European higher education institutions, that is, Finland, Germany and Romania, acknowledged that quality assessments have been an effective tool in recognising development areas in programmes, such as the development of pedagogy, e-learning and student participation in planning. It was reported that academic staff had an opportunity to acquire knowledge from other programmes and that students were involved in providing feedback to lecturers, particularly on the suitability of teaching methods (Bejan *et al.*, 2015:348). By making considerations based on course feedback from students, lecturers developed their own teaching, as adjustments in course implementation were made by the lecturers (Bejan *et al.*, 2015: 349; Zapata & Torre, 2015:25).

2.11.2 Impact on the institutionalisation of quality assurance

The study by Silva *et al.* (1997:30) on effects of external quality evaluation in Chile reports on some of the most important effects observed or acknowledged in external quality evaluation. The finding on the creation of permanent quality control or accrediting structures in universities by Silva *et al.* is supported by Liu *et al.* (2015:23) in a literature review on empirical studies conducted in various national context especially countries with mature quality assurance mechanisms and studies published from 2000s, in which accreditation is attributed to the development of continuous internal quality assurance mechanisms in universities. Liu *et al.* (2015) further report that during audit visits, higher education institutions were informed by

the audit team about the development needs of the quality assurance system, which naturally helped in shaping the development targets in terms of quality.

Quality assessments attract rewards for universities (Liu *et al.*, 2015:19–20). Such rewards include reputation, status allocation, increased funding (in some countries) and greater influence, especially when an assessment is quantifiably judged. Rewards lead to increased morale among staff and students, resulting in higher levels of productivity at different levels of the institution, such as the individual, faculty and institutional levels (Liu *et al.*, 2015:20). Similarly, Materu (2007:10) states that a good rating by external agencies is likely to boost students' morale and commitment to their institution, with a likelihood to increase readiness to contribute to the cost of their education.

2.11.3 Impact on institutional management and administration

In reporting on the impact on institutional structures and policies, Liu *et al.* (2015:20) explain that an external quality assessment contributes to the development of institutional quality management policies and procedures, which lead to substantial changes in areas of curricular and institutional policies. Zapata and Torre (2015:34) also view the establishment of a managerial style of decision making that values the results of self-assessment as an important input for institutional planning. A policy shift in decision making was also reported by Liu *et al.* (2015:20) from basic academic units such as a department or faculty to the central administration and the development of evidence-based approaches to decision making. However, Liu *et al.* (2015:20) argue that the centralisation of internal quality management procedures has weakened the subject-based culture at the level of the basic unit by making group boundaries between departments porous.

External evaluation stimulates changes in the administration of personnel. The study by Silva *et al.* (1997:33) reports changes in criteria and practice for academic hiring and promotion systems, in which demand was placed on higher standards and requirements for staff, stimuli to publish in refereed journals and revision of teaching and administration workloads. Similarly, Zapata and Torre (2015:26) report mounting pressure on the number of credentials universities demanded from the teaching body to ensure their academic, professional and pedagogical training. By implication, practices put in place by administrators indicate a desire for efficient management through academic productivity of a highly competent academic body.

Quality assurance in higher education institutions seems to have implanted bureaucratic managerial or administrative tendencies. Liu *et al.* (2015:22) found that centralised procedures

of decision making at organisational and management level render higher education institutions bureaucratic. Zapata and Torre (2015:12) maintain that institutional management exercise greater responsibility, by following up on external evaluations, to legitimise internal evaluative mechanisms.

2.11.4 Impact on academic staff

It was found that quality assurance in higher education leads to an increase in academic staff participation. Silva *et al.* (1997:30) on the study of effects of external quality evaluation in Chile report an increase in faculty staff participation in institutional affairs, particularly in teaching-related activities. Similarly, Bejan *et al.* (2015:346) based on the results of the IMPALA project in three European higher education institutions found that academic staff participated in external audits, which helped them to develop a sense of solidarity, because the audit preparation processes were open and staff members were well informed about the ongoing process. In addition, through participation in the audit process, academic staff stood to benefit from the quality assurance practices and processes by increasing their knowledge of the role of quality assurance in the operations of higher education institutions (Bejan *et al.*, 2015:346).

Silva *et al.* (1997:32) found that external evaluation creates a platform for socialisation among faculty staff, students, administrators and external reviewers. The interactions among these groups at different levels result in identifiable benefits. Audits promote a sense of community and commitment to the institution, encouraging institutions to learn from one another (Bejan *et al.*, 2015:354), while external peer visits and reporting contribute to a better perception of the internal situation of the unit or institution (Silva *et al.*, 1997:33). The platform for socialisation encourages learning from others (Bejan *et al.*, 2015:348).

A literature review by Liu *et al.* (2015: 22) on impact studies conducted in various national especially countries with mature quality assurance mechanisms and studies published from 2000s revealed that academics feel that they are being scrutinised and inspected, while Gouws and Waghid (2006:573) point out the fear of infringement of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. The feelings of being surveyed and being encroached upon could be pointers that external quality mechanisms could become instruments of suppression, resulting in overt compliance, declined trust and creativity, and less meaningful teaching and learning (Liu *et al.*, 2015:24). It has been also noted by Gouws and Waghid (2006:753) that the continuous erosion of academic borders through the need to comply with quality assurance

measures has had a negative impact on external quality assurance. However, while believing that compliance or surveillance is unlikely to cultivate quality in universities, Kis (2005:11) argues that some higher education institutions are too weak to improve quality assurance on their own without coercion from a quality assurance agency.

A study by Szymenderski *et al.* (2015:22) on two universities, one in Russia and the other in Germany, revealed that academic staff feared the bureaucracy of quality evaluations. The fears perhaps relate to the formalisations, which have created excessive routine burdens. Formalities are in the form of written routines, scripts, rules and handbooks providing hints on when to do what and the persons in charge (Liu *et al.*, 2015:25). Zapata and Torre (2015:5) see the tendency towards bureaucratisation as a barrier to a quality culture.

2.11.5 Impact on national quality assurance systems

Quality assurance has brought about increased collaboration among quality assurance agencies to ensure that no higher education institution falls through the cracks between national quality agencies and sub-regional quality agencies, or between the national quality agency and international quality agencies (Woodhouse, 2013:5). Quality assurance has also enhanced collaboration among quality agencies because of the internationalisation of higher education (ESIB, 2002:25). Networking has provided an opportunity for quality assurance agencies to exchange information, particularly on how to improve the professional expertise of staff in national quality assurance agencies (El Hassan, 2013:78). However, collaboration is difficult, as various agencies have a range of different details of their operations, and even if agencies agree to collaborate, effectiveness depends on government agreement (Woodhouse, 2013:5).

2.11.6 Impact on information systems

Quality assurance activities are accompanied by the establishment of information systems within higher education institutions where they were non-existent, and significant improvements where they previously existed (Zapata & Torre, 2015:23). The information system could possibly serve a dual purpose: to disseminate information firstly within higher education institutions and secondly to stakeholders outside higher education institutions.

In higher education institutions, the information systems mostly serve institutional management because of their managerial responsibilities to provide policy makers with an overall picture of what is happening in their institution and to steer quality assurance activities within higher education institutions (Kis, 2005:18). The information system also enhances

coordination between assessment and actions for improvement, and between self-assessment and planning, helping to integrate institutional development (Zapata & Torre, 2015:25). In addition, Zapata and Torre (2015:14) report a significant improvement in the provision of information to government, policy makers and the public (students and their families). However, they note that academic staff feel increasingly under pressure from the demand to provide the required information (Zapata & Torre, 2015:14).

The demand for more effective use of data in providing evidence of quality performance (Woodhouse, 2013:7) has influenced the inclusion of non-academic professionals specialised in process management to support the quality assurance structure (Zapata & Torre, 2015:25). However, the need for improved information systems mainly supported by non-academics has an impact on the way universities are governed (Zapata & Torre, 2015:25).

In conclusion, there are noticeable changes in the higher education sector related to the implementation of quality assurance. However, much of the change in the higher education system is invisible, incremental and slow, sustaining arguments on whether the measured impact is because of quality assurance systems.

2.12 Attributes of an effective external quality assurance system

An effective quality assurance system serves to continually monitor new knowledge creation and obliges institutions to regularly update curricula, teaching methods and learning approaches to ensure that graduates have knowledge and skills relevant to current and future labour market needs (Materu, 2007:11). Some of the features of an effective external quality assurance system as identified in literature are discussed below.

2.12.1 Clarity of purpose

To build a national commitment to quality, it is important that the aim of the quality assurance system is clear and that expectations are formulated according to the higher education strategy and the shared expectations of stakeholders (OECD, 2008:9). Strategies and values of university education are outlined in universities' mandates or mission statements or in national development plans, mostly aimed at meeting expectations in developing national capacities and selected global capacities.

Therefore, an effective quality assurance system should be consistent with the mission and core values of the higher education sector, and the process of evaluation should be visibly attached to these key areas (Kis, 2005:30).

2.12.2 Legitimacy

An effective quality assurance system earns legitimacy by keeping the quality assurance processes transparent, open and free from political and special-interest influences (Materu, 2007:55). Special-interest influences might permeate through appointments of personnel for the quality agency, who may feel obliged to serve interests of appointing authorities; and through financing of the quality agency. It is necessary for the quality assurance system to be transparent to allow stakeholders to appreciate the outcomes, and because there is no other oversight body responsible for assuring the quality of the quality agency (Materu, 2007:55; Ryan, 2015:9).

An effective quality assurance system needs to gather consensus among different stakeholders based on shared expectations of purpose and outcomes (OECD, 2008:9). In this respect, the involvement of stakeholders is important, particularly the academic community, as quality judgements that lack legitimacy in the eyes of those who receive them are not likely to be acted upon if action can be avoided (Kis, 2005:30). Therefore, academic support is key in the legitimization of external quality systems.

However, most quality agencies are instituted and funded by government, especially in Africa – a situation that is likely to expose quality assurance agencies to government influence or political influences (Materu, 2007:55). Considering this, an effective quality assurance system should be independent to protect itself from special-interest influences and to protect its legitimacy.

2.12.3 Link between internal and external processes

An effective quality assurance system should link internal and external quality processes. It is argued that improvement in quality assurance seems to occur when external quality arrangements mesh with internal processes (Kis, 2005:30).

Kis (2005) states that the process of monitoring should be collaborative and not perceived as something done *to* the institution, because quality improvement is likely to be achieved through a balance of power and trust between internal and external actors (Kis, 2005:31). The linkage between internal and external quality assurance is necessary to accommodate the different purposes and interests of stakeholders at all levels of the system to avoid imbalances of power that may risk damage to the quality and the integrity of the higher education sector (Kis, 2005:31).

The link between internal and external quality is crucial for the effectiveness of a quality assurance system to earn and maintain the support of academics so that both improvement and accountability can be achieved (OECD, 2008:9). If the two are achieved, it is hoped that over time the external quality system may place less emphasis on accountability, as there will be evidence of stronger adherence to baseline standards (OECD, 2008:9).

A combination of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms could be used to address different purposes of quality assurance (OECD, 2008:9). Internal quality mechanisms provide data for external audits to bring about quality improvement, while performance indicators as set by external quality bodies address the issue of accountability in universities (OECD, 2008:9).

The link between external and internal quality systems is necessary because external agencies may set the context for institutional improvement and can ensure that their processes are not counterproductive, yet it is the higher education institution itself that must improve (Woodhouse, 2013:4). By implication, external quality assurance is insufficient in achieving quality assurance in higher education institutions.

2.12.4 Follow-up procedures

An effective quality assurance system should have an adequate follow-up procedure that accounts for recommendations suggested by external reviewers. The follow-up procedure places the responsibility to take subsequent action on government, the quality assurance agency and higher education institutions. It is suggested that higher education institutions have the responsibility to do follow-ups on the outcomes of external reviews and that government should take measures only when a higher education institution has not acted on the recommendations (Kis, 2005:32). The emphasis in the follow-up procedure is that feedback should be linked to action.

2.12.5 Regular and cyclic monitoring

An effective quality assurance system should have the ability to reflect on improvements after a certain period (Kis, 2005:32). In this view, external quality assurance is not a one-off event, but a process that is regular and cyclic. It provides a useful feedback loop to those involved in the quality assurance process (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:5). However, for external quality assurance to achieve lasting internal benefits, the process should less comply with external requirements (Kis, 2005:32).

2.12.6 Linking quality results to funding

Kis (2005:11) states that linking evaluation results to the allocation of public funding to higher education institutions, whether partially or wholly, is highly controversial. Kis (2005:11) traced the controversy to the inside view of academics, who argue that basing funding on teaching would lead to problems being concealed rather than solved. Besides concealing the shortcomings, linking funding to evaluation results would lead to compliance at the expense of innovation and diversity.

However, it is suggested that linking public funding to quality assurance processes and outcomes could strengthen accountability and encourage higher education institutions to undertake improvement (Materu, 2007:48). Proponents of linkages between quality results and funding also argue that linking funding to evaluation serves the accountability purpose despite constituting an obstacle to quality improvement (Kis, 2005:32). The proponents further suggest flexibility in the allocation of financial resources to both good and poor performers, and to avoid negative sanctions wherever possible (Kis, 2005:32).

In conclusion, it is challenging to offer a comprehensive outline of the attributes of an effective quality assurance system because it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of a quality system. However, the identified attributes represent a commitment to design and implement a comprehensive external quality system.

2.13 Difficulties in implementing an effective quality assurance system

The difficulties in implementing an effective quality assurance system are reportedly arising from the different interests and conceptions of quality among stakeholders, the implementation gap and external ownership leading to compliance instead of improvement, as discussed below.

2.13.1 Different interests and conceptions of quality among stakeholders

It is argued that government and higher education institutions are in most countries opponents of the why of external quality assurance because of differences in interest and conceptualisation of quality (Kis, 2005:23). Governments are interested in both accountability and improvement, aimed at demonstrating to society that they make justifiable decisions on the educational policy, for instance in the allocation of funding or termination of academic programmes (Kis, 2005:23). Universities, to the contrary, focus on quality improvement with a concern to offer high-quality education within the conditions set by government and to convince the public that the quality of their educational provision is the best possible (Kis, 2005:23).

The difference in the conception of quality among stakeholders can make the successful implementation of the quality assurance system more difficult (Kis, 2005:24). For example, if academic staff in a department have dissenting views of the nature of the curriculum and how it should be delivered, academics with dissenting views are unlikely to accept group ownership of a self-assessment report or have allegiance to values adopted within it (Kis, 2005:24). The different degrees of commitment of academic staff in implementing the suggested changes in the self-assessment report may have a profound effect on the effectiveness of the quality assurance system.

2.13.2 Implementation gap

The implementation gap is the difference between planned outcomes of policy and the outcomes of the implementation process (Kis, 2005:24). The issue of the implementation gap is how policy is received and decoded by the implementers (or actors) and not the rigour of the application document. There is a disconnection between government and the university concerning the definition of objectives of quality assurance, which inhibits the effective implementation of policies (Kis, 2005:25).

In addition, lack of mechanisms that can analyse information gathered during quality reviews as a result of inadequacies in the selection of and training offered to evaluators and lack of effectiveness of evaluation committees weakens the efficiency of the quality assurance system (Kis, 2005:25). Kis (2005:25) further states that lack of sufficient training in conducting self-reviews, the insufficiently explicit indicators and standards, and inconsistency in the membership of visiting committees hinder the success of quality assurance systems.

2.13.3 External ownership leading to compliance instead of improvement

When the development of the quality assurance system is carried out at a distance from the academics to whom and by whom the system is applied, it is unlikely that the system will achieve the intended outcomes, the reason being lack of ownership, as the quality assurance system seems imposed on academics who, through internal mechanisms of audits and reviews, are encouraged to use them (Kis, 2005:25). With the risk of the quality assurance systems leading to compliance, quality improvement in higher education institutions may not easily be attained.

In conclusion, the difficulties in implementing an effective quality assurance system are embedded in the varied understanding of education quality. It is probable, with the identification of problematic areas, that an efficient means to assure quality is possible.

2.14 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed and analysed literature related to quality and quality assurance in higher education. The various descriptions of the concept of quality and quality assurance imply that there is no common understanding of quality and quality assurance and reflects the different concerns of stakeholders at various levels regarding assuring quality in the higher education sector.

I described the contexts transforming the higher education sector to demonstrate how each context played a role in raising concerns for quality assurance in higher education. Thereafter, I discussed the purpose of quality assurance with an intention to begin to address transformation using the various methods of and approaches to quality assurance. The methods and approaches discussed provide insights into the possibilities of achieving quality in higher education, with possible achievements exemplified in empirical studies on the impact of quality assurance.

In the latter part of this chapter, I discussed the identified attributes of an effective quality assurance system, a synopsis worth considering when creating or implementing a quality assurance system in higher education. The recognition of challenges in the implementation of an effective quality system suggests that it was tenable but is a difficult endeavour because of the complex environment in which the higher education system is operating.

The next chapter is on the implementation of policy on quality assurance. In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for the establishment of the HEA, its establishment, and its functions.

Chapter 3: Policy on quality assurance for universities

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the quality assurance policy for universities in Zambia. The intention was to gain an understanding of the rationale behind quality assurance for universities in Zambia and the frameworks put in place to support the establishment of the national quality assurance authority and the consequent implementation of quality assurance.

In doing so, I describe the higher education system in general as a way of situating the university system within the higher education system. I further outline and discuss some factors that compelled the Zambian government to focus on quality in universities as motivators for the establishment of the HEA.

With the supposition of interpretivism being characterised by multiple interpretations and subjectivity (as discussed in Section 1.6.2.), key documents such as the 1996 National Policy on Education, and the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 and specific documentation on the HEA; The Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Zambia (April 2015) and Regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions and the Accreditation of Higher Education Learning Programmes (July 2015) were referred to in addition to the 2015 National Education and Skills Training Policy: Draft Zero, Vision 2030 (RZ, 2006), the country profiles by SARUA (2009) and other relevant literature on quality assurance in higher education to validate and consolidate the discussion.

A brief descriptive detail on the content of the key documents highlighted above is as follows: the 1996 National Policy on Education, provided information regarding the provision of education in Zambia; while the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 provided information on the regulation of the higher education system; the Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Zambia (April 2015), and Regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions and the Accreditation of Higher Education Learning Programmes (July 2015), provided information on the quality assurance activities of the HEA; whereas the 2015 National Education and Skills Training Policy: Draft Zero, provided information on reflections on the state of quality assurance in higher education; Vision 2030 (RZ, 2006) provided information on education in view of the aspirations of Zambia becoming a middle income country by 2030; and finally, the country profiles by SARUA (2009) provided information on public higher education institutions. The highlight on the content of the different types of

documents provide a sense of their significance, in informing the argument presented in this study.

3.2 The higher education system

Higher education is understood as tertiary education leading to the qualification of a diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree or doctorate degree (HEA, 2015:3b; MESVTEE, 2013:98). With this understanding, the higher education system of Zambia is housed under two ministries: the MoHE and the Ministry of General Education (MoGE), established in September 2015 after a split of the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, which existed as an integrated ministry since 2011 (Saeki, Nomura, Hong, Bashir, Gardner & Kadiresan, 2016:11).

The MoGE has the mandate over colleges of education, consisting of 15 government-supported colleges and 17 privately run colleges, besides the school system from early education to secondary education (MoGE, 2013). On the other hand, the MoHE has the mandate over universities; vocational education and training institutions; and science, technology, and innovation institutions (MoHE, 2017). In particular, under the MoHE, there are 27 TEVET institutions, six public universities and 58 registered private universities, four Science and Technology Service institutions and one Research and Development institution (HEA, 2016; MoHE, 2017).

Having the MoHE without a complete mandate on higher education institutions seems problematic in the understanding of what higher education should be in Zambia. It calls for a rethinking on what the MoHE should be, or the need to redefine what higher education should be in Zambia, because as defined in the Higher Education Act of 2013, the colleges of education under the mandate of MoGE are higher education institutions. In addition, this assignment does not clearly designate the remaining 248 TEVET institutions (Saeki *et al.*, 2016:20). Because some TEVET institutions offer qualifications below a diploma, such as Craft Certificates and Trade Test Certificates, one would assume that they might not be part of the higher education institutions, but that is arguable going by the 2012 display of qualifications in the TEVET prospectus (TEVETA, 2011).

Therefore, the higher education system in Zambia consists of universities and colleges. In other words, universities are part of the higher education system and exist under the jurisdiction of the MoHE. My intention in this section was to situate the university system within the higher education system.

3.2.1 The university system

The university system comprises a mix of public and private universities. This is because the 1996 National Policy on Education was developed in the context of Zambia being a liberal democratic society, in which the liberal democratic values paved the way for citizens, the private sector and other interested parties to participate in the development of education (MESVTEE, 2015:45). The education system was liberalised. Liberalisation allows those with resources to establish universities and run them in accordance with their own principles, but subject to stipulated rules and regulation from government (MESVTEE, 2015:47; MoE, 1996:3).

3.2.1.1 Liberalisation of the university system

As issues of politics are never silent in the discussion of education (see Hayward, 2006:6, 11, 13; Materu, 2007:10, 13, 16; Robbins, Wilson-Strydom & Hoosen, 2009: 5), in the Zambian context, the emergence of democracy through the 1991 elections greatly influenced the articulation of the 1996 National Policy on Education document. Since Zambia became a liberal democracy, policy makers desired to run a democratic education system by integrating principles such as liberalisation, which formed the basis for a shared commitment among all partners interested in the development of education, including higher education (MoE, 1996:vii, 1).

Liberalisation has resulted in diversity in the provision of university education, as each institution performs distinctive tasks aimed at meeting its institutional aims and objectives within national higher education provision (MoE, 1996:92). As a result of institutional diversity, liberalisation has not only broadened the educational choices of students (or parents) of choosing the type of university education that would meet their personal choices (MoE, 1996:3), but has also permitted diverse institutions to contribute to meeting the social and economic needs and expectations of society (MoE, 1996:91).

Liberalisation was embraced with a view to expanding educational opportunities for accessing university education (MoE, 1996:3). The number of students in higher education per 100 000 inhabitants in 2012 was 229, and Zambia ranked the lowest among African countries (Atchoarena, 2016: 63; MESVTEE, 2015:19). This was compounded by stagnation in the growth of the university system, as alluded to in Section 1.1, which limited access to university education. By 2014, 8% of secondary education school leavers were accessing public

universities (MoF, 2014:100). By 2016, the target was to reach an absorption rate of 20% of secondary school leavers into public universities (MNDP, 2017:24).

Although private higher education institutions account for up to 20% of enrolments in sub-Saharan Africa (Materu, 2007:9), it is not easy to determine the quantitative contribution of private universities currently in Zambia, as data of students enrolled in private universities are difficult to access (Kotecha *et al.*, 2012:108). The HEA, which started operating in 2015, was reported in 2016 to still being in the process of collecting statistics from all private institutions (Saeki *et al.*, 2016:34), hence, data on students in private universities at the time of this study (2018) were not in documents in the public domain.

Therefore, the contribution of private Zambian universities to widening access to university education currently (2018) could only be noted in terms of the number of registered private universities, which stands at 58. Although it is remarked by Butcher, Wilson-Strydom, Hoosen, Macdonald, Moore and Barnes (2009:72) that despite outnumbering public higher education institutions, private higher education institutions in the SADC region, of which Zambia is part, account for a minimal share of student enrolments.

In the context of meeting the agenda of expanding opportunities for prospective students to access university education, a liberalised university system has been supporting the cause.

3.2.1.2 Establishment of universities

The establishment of public and private universities is stipulated in the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013, which repealed and replaced the University Act of 1999 (MESVTEE, 2013). The Higher Education Act of 2013 provides for the establishment, governance and regulation of public higher education institutions and for the registration and regulation of private higher education institutions ((MESVTEE, 2013).

A public university may be established through a declaration as a public higher education institution by the Minister of Higher Education (MESVTEE, 2013:107). The legislation under which public universities operate makes them responsible to parliament through the MoHE and permits the universities academic and managerial freedom (MESVTEE, 2015:22; MoE, 1996:98).

A private university is established through certification by the HEA upon fulfilling defined conditions and parameters for establishment as stipulated in the Higher Education Act of 2013. The criteria for registration include an application for registration and submission of an

operational plan by the private provider. Upon payment of stipulated fees for registration of the private university, the HEA may within the 30 days of receipt of an application approve the application or reject the application based on the determination of terms and conditions (MESVTEE, 2013:109). If approved, a certificate of registration is issued by the HEA to the proprietor of a private university.

3.2.1.3 Governance and management of the university system

The governance structure of a university consists of the council, while senate constitutes the management structure, as regulated by the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 (MESVTEE, 2013).

In a public university, the Minister of Higher Education appoints members that compose the university council, which appointment is on a part-time basis for a period of three years, while proprietors of private universities appoint a council of their institution (MESVTEE, 2013: 112). The university council is responsible for governance, control and administration of the university, and is expected to work in the best interest of the university (MESVTEE, 2013:113). It is the decision-making authority of the university regarding university activities (MESVTEE, 2010:43). In a public university, if the university council is deemed to have failed to function under the provisions of the 2013 Higher Education Act, the Minister of Higher Education may dissolve the council and appoint a caretaker committee to exercise its duties (MESVTEE, 2013: 115).

The senate forms the management system in a university and is the supreme academic authority of a university (MESVTEE, 2013:116). The senate organises, controls and directs the academic work of a university in both teaching and research. The senate also controls education standards, assessment and research within the university. It oversees the academic activities within institutions themselves.

The guide on the composition of the senate is stipulated in the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013. At the top of the senate structure is the vice-chancellor and the deputy vice-chancellor (MESVTEE, 2013:142). In a public university, the vice-chancellor and the deputy vice-chancellor are appointed by the Minister of Higher Education based on the recommendation of the university council (MESVTEE, 2013). In the case of a private university, the vice-chancellor and the deputy vice-chancellor are appointed by the council of the private university (MESVTEE, 2013). Although the removal of the vice-chancellor and the deputy vice-chancellor in case of challenges is silent for a private university, in a public university, the

university council can recommend to the Minister of Higher Education the removal of the vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellor on grounds of misconduct or inability to perform official functions (MESVTEE, 2013).

The system of governance and management as articulated in the 2013 Higher Education Act indicates that universities are semi-autonomous institutions. The university senate and council exercise autonomy and freedom in determining university programmes, determining and regulating requirements for admission, regulating and conducting examinations and conferring degrees, while administratively, each university defines its own organisational structure and internal working regulations, engages its own staff and manages its own affairs (MESVTEE, 2013:113; MoE, 1996:98), as provided for by legislation on the operations of a university system.

In summary, the university system, as noted in Section 3.2, has expanded, implying some measure of success on the rationale for liberalising the higher education system. As the university system is semi-autonomous and liberalised, government's role to provide guidelines on the provision of university education becomes significant to help to protect the right to quality university education.

3.3 Rationale for policy on quality assurance for universities

The rationale for assuring quality in Zambian universities might be viewed as an adjustment to global effects of mass higher education and as a need to meet national agendas. Because the adjustment to global effects is done by each sovereign state, these effects are manifested as national concerns that need to be addressed regarding university education. In the Zambian scenario, these concerns include a decline in public funding, an increase in private institutions, a low participation rate, the role of higher education institutions, the need for regional collaboration and quality reflections on the 1996 National Policy on Education.

3.3.1 Decline in public funding

In Zambia, the allocation of public expenditure on education accounts for more than 20% of total public spending (Saeki *et al.*, 2016:36) and government grants have been a major source of funding for publicly funded universities (MoE, 1996:102). Drawing percentages from the SARUA (2009:16, 22) report, the University of Zambia (54%) and Copperbelt University (74%) received more than half of their income from government. The University of Zambia received 38% of its income in student fees, while Copperbelt University received 25% in

student fees. On the other hand, private universities get much of their funding from student fees, as many of them in the SADC, of which Zambia is part, are for-profit (Pillay, 2009:128). The extent of public expenditure on university education places the responsibility on universities for public accountability in terms of value for money for the quality of education being provided (MoE, 1996:100).

Despite universities receiving more than half of their funding from government, the funding allocated to public universities is insufficient for effective operations, and in acknowledging that, government allowed public universities to implement cost sharing (MoE, 1996:103) as a mitigatory measure. Cost sharing is the financing of higher education on a shared basis among government, universities and students (MoE, 1996:105). In this initiative, public universities in collaboration with the MoHE determine student fees, which, because of the need for the MoHE to ensure access, does not allow universities to charge economic fees that reflect the real cost of providing university education (MESVTEE, 2010:43). Therefore, the effects of cost sharing in public universities as an income-generating venture seem constrained by the intervention provided by the MoHE, limiting resource generation towards the provision of quality education.

There are also other students in the category of self-sponsorship, accessing public universities by paying full fees for their university education (Pillay, 2009:180). In such cases, full fee-paying students may be offered placement in a programme with a comparatively lower score than a government-sponsored student, although meeting the minimum threshold as required for admission. Mitigatory initiatives of financing university education present difficulties in regulating the quality of higher education when market mechanisms play an increasingly important role in managing demands and budgetary deficits (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:5).

Percentage estimates of student fees for publicly funded universities and the assumption that most private universities offering university education in Zambia are for-profit confirm that student fees form the largest resource base for universities. Because they incur such an expense, students and parents expect a benefit in return (Psacharopoulos, 2006:113). As government is the custodian of public interests pertaining to university education (MoE, 1996:100), the individual expenses that parents and students incur place more responsibility on government to establish a policy that mandates universities to be responsive to the needs of stakeholders, especially students and parents, as investors in university education.

A tabulation on expenditure on university education by Kelly (1999:349) from 1970 to 1994 shows a decline in expenditure on universities in the 1990s. This decline could be attributed to the input and output method that was used to determine the value of university education advocated for in the World Bank reports, which influenced a rethink on funding higher education (Psacharopoulos, 2006:113). The argument lies in the comparison of educational inputs and outputs as a measure of efficiency in the utilisation of resources. The inputs are resources committed to education by families, students and government, while the outputs are the products of the education system such as a higher standard of living enjoyed by more educated people relative to the less educated (Psacharopoulos, 2006:113).

It is argued from this viewpoint that the calculated percentages of social returns among the three levels of education show that the highest social returns are in primary education with 18%, followed by secondary education at 13% and lastly higher education at 10.8% – a picture implying that there is less justification for funding higher education (Psacharopoulos, 2006:125, 133). The high public investment in university education has had the least social returns, justifying higher funding priorities for the lowest level with the highest social return. The decline in funding for universities in favour of lower levels of education is a cause for concern in terms of the quality of university education being offered. As funding is highly correlated with quality, a decline in funding impacts negatively on quality (BETUZ, n.d:26).

3.3.2 Increase in private institutions

Higher education in Zambia is liberalised. The reasons for liberalising education are intertwined; besides increasing access, as discussed in Section 3.2.1.1, there was a funding implication. A report on public spending on education shows a decline from 5% to 4.7% per annum between 1965 and 1986 to an average of 2.3% between 1987 and 2000, as a share of the gross domestic product (RZ, 2006:35). The decrease in funding, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, resulted in little investment in infrastructure in public universities, although enrolments were significantly increasing, leading to the dilapidation of existing infrastructure and overcrowding (RZ, 2006:35). To mitigate for declining resources and guard quality in public universities, government allowed private participation in offering higher education, which includes university education (MESVTEE, 2015:7).

While the participation of private providers helps to address the capacity gaps in access and funding, in the provision of university education, there is a perception that education offered by private universities is inferior to that offered by public universities (Materu, 2007:9). This

perception is a challenge to policy makers in Zambia amid efforts by government to widen access to university education. It places responsibility on policy makers to guard the quality of university education in private universities and to protect consumers of university education from fraud. The state is obliged, in a liberal university system, to protect the rights of individuals to quality education by establishing regulations and rules to guide education provision and to make private universities accountable to win the confidence of stakeholders in the higher education field.

3.3.3 Low participation rate

With acknowledgement of the low participation rate by 2011 estimated at 6% in university education (MNDP, 2017:24), Zambia could be classified within the elite system in Martin Trow's typology, although the manifestations of the mass system cannot be excluded. To increase the participation rate, government, through the MoHE, has expanded enrolments in the three existing public universities, upgraded three public colleges to university status (Chalimbana, Nkrumah and Mukuba) and encouraged the establishment of private universities (MESVTEE, 2015:1).

In addition to expansion in enrolments and participation of private providers, the methods of delivery contribute to increasing participation rates. Of the current 64 Zambian universities, 12 private universities offer full-time programmes only; four public and 33 private universities offer full-time and ODL programmes; 12 private universities offer ODL programmes only; two public universities offer full-time, part-time and ODL programmes; and one private university offers ODL and part-time programmes only (HEA, 2016). As most universities offer programmes on dual mode, it is assumed that more students are accessing university education. The diversity in the delivery modes calls for attention to the type and content of programmes being offered to ensure the quality of university education.

The desire by government to increase the participation rates in universities could be justified by the link between higher education and economic growth. Countries with higher levels of economic growth have higher participation rates in higher education, resulting in a highly skilled labour force with a higher possibility of contributing to economic growth. The increase in the participation rate in public universities that is not accompanied by investments in the existing resources suggests an overuse of resources such as physical facilities, books and equipment, and an increase in student–lecturer ratios, with a possibility of compromising the quality of university education.

3.3.4 Role of higher education institutions

The two cardinal principles under which the universities operate are being responsive to the real needs of Zambia and winning on merit the respect and recognition as a world university (MoE, 1996:98).

The principles articulated reaffirm government's recognition of the important role universities play in the development of human resources and in supporting the development of selected global capacities (MoE, 1996:2; Pillay & Kimber, 2009:4). As Zambia is part of the global knowledge society, universities are placed with a responsibility to produce some highly educated personnel who can contribute to national development and accommodate the interests of the global economy. The responsibility that universities are placed with, in this regard, require upholding locally and internationally recognised quality measures for university education.

The roles of universities as guided by the 1996 National Policy on Education entail that universities provide not only educated workers, but also knowledge workers who stimulate the social and economic growth of the nation with a possibility of charting a direction for future developments (HEA, 2015a:7; MESVTEE, 2013:106-107; MoE, 1996:91). The articulations of the 1996 National Policy on Education reflect the strength of the link globally placed between higher education productivity and the prosperity of a nation (Maassen, 2003:5). The role of higher education institutions in transforming students into educated recipients of higher education advances a concern about quality to preserve society's intellectual endeavours.

The important role that higher education plays in socio-economic development requires government to pay attention to the national quality assurance mechanisms for the universities to protect national interests and the interests of global society.

3.3.5 Need for regional collaboration

The Zambian government emphasises regional collaboration and integration regarding the higher education sector (SARUA, 2009:10). Through the relevant ministries of education, government implements programmes and activities required by the SADC protocols and reports progress on the SADC protocols to the SADC Minister of Education meetings (SARUA, 2009:10).

Some of the elements of the SADC protocols on education and training that have had a direct influence on higher education policy and practice are strengthening quality assessments, the

Educational Management Information System and specific regional development priorities (SARUA, 2009:10). In strengthening quality assessment, Zambia has focused on the development of monitoring tools for quality control and the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework; regarding the Educational Management Information System, there are reported national improvements in the availability of accurate data on education to ensure evidence-based planning, policy formulation and monitoring of higher education; while in meeting the specific regional development priorities, Zambia has focused on university entry requirements, consideration of credit transfer from one university to another and the harmonisation of the academic year across SADC countries (SARUA, 2009:10).

As noted from the SADC protocols, the benefits of regional collaboration abound, such as recognition of degrees, mobility of students and faculty, collaboration in providing peer reviewers and external examiners, besides other potential benefits such as mutual recognition of accredited status, regional accreditation and quality assurance (Materu, 2007:37). In addition, quality agencies benefit from collaboration by sharing ideas and good practices, by working together in quality assurance work and by advancing a stronger face to government on behalf of others (Woodhouse, 2013:6).

Collaboration in quality assurance is also driven by the global considerations of higher education as a tradable service. The GATS by the WTO has encouraged the growth of the higher education service industry. Higher education services are primarily traded through student mobility across borders, who pay student fees for the higher education services received when attending universities in host countries (Maassen, 2003:8). Although the number of students from across the borders learning in Zambia is too little (Robbins, Wilson-Strydom & Hoosen, 2009:113, 115) for Zambia to fully realise the benefits of the trade in education services in terms of tuition fees and living expenses, in 2012 approximately 5 000 Zambians studied outside the country. As a participant in the global market for higher education services, Zambia needs to have quality measures in place to win the trust of the global market.

CBHE providers have changed the structure of the higher education system by eroding national borders and reaching the student right in the location of convenience through distance learning via the Internet, radio and television (Maassen, 2003:9). These developments are challenging the traditional approach to assuring quality, because without collaboration in quality assurance, CBHE providers cannot easily be regulated by national quality assurance agencies (Materu, 2007:37). In elaborating on this point of view, Woodhouse (2013:5) remarks that most quality assurance agencies like the HEA are national, while higher education institutions are

increasingly operating across national borders. Without authority for national agencies to operate outside national borders, it becomes difficult to assure the quality of CBHE institutions without collaboration.

Therefore, to protect consumers of higher education and to ensure that the quality of CBHE providers is judged by standards appropriate to importing countries (Maassen, 2003:5; Pillay & Kimber, 2009:8), the solution seems to be in networking through regional and international quality assurance collaboration. However, a national quality assurance system remains a prerequisite in protecting the unsuspecting cohorts of consumers of higher education services.

3.3.6 Quality reflections on the 1996 National Policy on Education

The revelations on quality achievements as aimed at in the 1996 National Policy on Education in the 2015 National Education and Skills Training Policy: Draft Zero are an area of concern. The 2015 National Education and Skills Training Policy: Draft Zero revealed that the quality of education and its relevance to the persuasion of Zambians remained elusive and part of the unfinished business (MESVTEE, 2015:2). It was noted that quality aims of the 1996 National Policy on Education remained a challenge for the higher education system because of weak guidelines for establishment of institutions; weak mechanisms for effective coordination; poor linkages among higher education institutions and between these institutions and industry; inappropriate curricula, particularly in science, technology and innovation; inadequate qualifications of academic staff; insufficient training materials; and poor library facilities (MESVTEE, 2015:19). The need to secure quality in view of these quality constraints legitimises the establishment of the national quality assurance authority.

Universities in Zambia are semi-autonomous institutions that enjoy academic freedom and managerial autonomy (MESVTEE, 2015:22). Academic freedom refers to the kind of immunity that the university lecturer, as a professional, enjoys without any hindrance, except where such accounts infringe on the rights of others (Divala & Waghid, 2008:3). Universities are conferred managerial autonomy, which upon establishment allows them to determine and regulate their own academic and administrative operations, as stipulated in the Higher Education Act of 2013 (MESVTEE, 2013:112–114, 116–117) and the 1996 National Policy on Education (MoE, 1996:98). The enjoyment of academic freedom and managerial autonomy renders responsibility on universities to assure the quality of university education, which responsibility was not undertaken then by CBU according to the 2009 SARUA report (p. 17).

In addition, quality monitoring practices through internal mechanisms for public universities and affiliations for private universities noted in the SARUA Country Profile Report on Zambia (SARUA, 2009:10) are a quality concern in view of the weak guidelines and, as argued, in view of ethical concerns too, as universities as service providers cannot set ultimate standards for services provided as well (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:6). Without the engagement of a national authority to guide quality activities for universities, the credibility of the quality of university education being offered is questioned.

In conclusion, the justification for quality assurance is the need to ensure that university education meets the purposes for which it is established, regardless of the circumstances that may impact on higher education institutions. As Zambia is a liberal society, government is obliged to develop quality assurance policies that protect the consumers of higher education services.

3.4 Establishment of the Higher Education Authority

The establishment of the HEA was articulated in the National Policy on Education of 1996 and was provided for in the establishment in the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 (MESVTEE, 2013:97; MoE, 1996:100). The HEA was mandated to operate in 2014 (MESVTEE, 2015:20) and the implementation of its functions was in 2015 (HEA, 2015a:9).

The HEA was established to coordinate the fragmented higher education system and higher education provided at higher education institutions, particularly universities (MoE, 1996:101). As articulated in the 1996 National Policy on Education, the concern was not just about quality, but that higher education institutions that existed under the responsibility of various government ministries, parastatals and private bodies required coordination and regulation as well (MoE, 1996:100).

3.4.1 Legal and regulatory framework

The legal mandate of the HEA is the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013, which, besides providing for its establishment, defines its functions and powers. The Higher Education Act of 2013 repealed and replaced the University Act of 1999; therefore, private higher education institutions that were licensed under the repealed University Act of 1999 were required to seek registration under the Higher Education Act of 2013 (HEA, 2015a:8-9; MESVTEE, 2013:125). In addition, the Higher Education Act of 2013 requires new private providers to make

applications for the establishment and operation of new private higher education institutions (HEA, 2015a:8-9; MESVTEE, 2013:108).

The Higher Education Act of 2013 also provides for the establishment, governance and regulation of public higher education, in addition to registration and regulation of private higher institutions (HEA, 2015a:5; MESVTEE, 2013:112-113). In this regard, the framework for universities is contained in the Higher Education Act of 2013. The quality assurance and quality promotion functions of the HEA in higher education are stipulated in the Higher Education Act of 2013.

3.4.2 Functions of the Higher Education Authority

The HEA performs advisory, planning, quality assurance, financial and administrative functions (MoE, 1996:101), which are specifically outlined in the National Policy on Education (MoE, 1996:101) and the Higher Education Act of 2013 (MESVTEE, 2013: 101–102), though there is a variation in wording between the two. Thus, for clarity, the functions of the authority are as articulated in the Higher Education Act of 2013 as:

- i. advising the Minister of higher education on any aspect of higher education;
- ii. developing and recommending policy on higher education, including the establishment of public higher education institutions and the registration of private higher education institutions;
- iii. establishing a coordinated higher education system which promotes corporate governance and provides for a programme based higher education;
- iv. regulating higher education institutions and coordinating the development of higher education;
- v. promoting quality assurance in higher education;
- vi. auditing the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education;
- vii. restructuring and transforming higher education institutions and programmes to be responsive to the human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic;
- viii. promoting the access of students to higher education institutions;
- ix. designing and recommending an institutional quality assurance system for higher education institutions, and recommending to the Minister institutional quality assurance standards for -
 - a. the establishment, standardization, and registration of higher education institutions, including standards of plant and equipment;

- b. the preparation and amendment of statutes;
- c. development of curricula;
- d. libraries, laboratories, workshops and other facilities; and
- e. student transfers among higher education institutions;
- x. advising Minister on funding arrangements for the public higher education institutions;
- xi. advising the Minister on staff development for higher education;
- xii. promoting equity in access to higher education through the provision of student assistance programmes;
- xiii. promoting international cooperation and facilitate exchange through the provision of student assistance research and teaching; and

Although the HEA performs advisory, planning, quality assurance, financial and administrative functions, separately, the 13 outlined functions show the interconnectedness of the execution of those responsibilities. Therefore, functions v, vi, vii and ix explicitly relate to quality assurance and could be taken as the basis of articulations of the HEA framework.

3.5 The Higher Education Authority framework

The HEA framework is constructed from the functions provided for by the Higher Education Act of 2013, especially those focusing on the quality function. The framework is aimed at clarifying the activities of the HEA and provide an understanding of the quality assurance practices to stakeholders in higher education.

Because the suggested framework is derived from functions v, vi, vii and ix, as stated earlier, I took note of certain significant expressions from the outline of the listed functions, such as promotion of quality assurance (v), auditing of quality assurance mechanisms (vi), restructuring and transforming higher education institutions and programmes to be responsive to needs (vii), designing and recommending an institutional quality assurance system, and recommending to the Minister of Higher Education institutional quality assurance standards (ix).

3.5.1 Promotion of quality assurance

Promotion of quality assurance is a compound statement consisting of quality promotion and quality assurance. Quality promotion is the encouragement of the development and maintenance of quality standards in institutions of higher learning, while quality assurance means providing tangible evidence to demonstrate compliance with standards that are accepted

and recognised by employers and other educational institutions nationally and internationally (HEA, 2015a:3; MESVTEE, 2013:99–100). Quality promotion in this regard suggests that the HEA is supporting individual universities to develop their own internal quality mechanisms and maintain institutional standards. Therefore, in promoting quality assurance, the HEA places the responsibility of assuring quality on the universities themselves, as the authority takes on the responsibility of validating standards.

The validation of standards implies the monitoring of quality standards. The HEA has a responsibility to monitor quality standards to determine the maintenance of institutional standards as set by universities themselves, as well as the standards that apply to universities in general as provided for in the Higher Education Act of 2013. The monitoring of standards by the HEA implies the need for sustenance of quality in the provision of university education, demonstrated by institutional compliance with set standards. In addition to validation and sustenance of standards, the involvement of the HEA adds value to the institutional standards and legitimises the internal quality mechanisms in universities.

Therefore, in promoting quality assurance, the HEA helps universities to provide quality education through the development of appropriate mechanisms and maintenance of standards through monitoring to produce a quality university graduate who meets the expectations of stakeholders.

3.5.2 Auditing of quality assurance mechanisms

The Higher Education Act of 2013 describes an institutional audit as a quality assurance tool that involves the evaluation of institutions, policies, systems, strategies and resources for quality management of the core functions of teaching, learning, research and public service using set audit criteria. Therefore, auditing quality assurance mechanisms for universities by the HEA means assessing institutional arrangements for assuring quality in teaching and learning, research and public service.

Taking auditing of the quality of institutional quality assurance mechanisms as involving a three-part process, discussed in Section 2.10.3, namely checking the appropriateness of quality assurance mechanisms in relation to the core functions of the individual university, conformity of quality practices with plans and the effectiveness of quality practices in achieving the core functions, then auditing of quality mechanisms embraces quality promotion and monitoring. As the quality audit is driven by institutional engagement, the involvement of the HEA as an external auditor indicates the willingness of universities to show their quality externally, with

a view to improving it. Therefore, auditing embraces quality promotion, as it nurtures a quality culture by encouraging self-evaluation.

3.5.3 Restructuring and transforming higher education institutions and programmes to be responsive to needs

Although the restructuring and transformation of higher education institutions and programmes are aimed at institutions and programmes being responsive to the human resource, economic and development needs of Zambia, the 1996 National Policy on Education (MoE, 1996:95) claims that the only comprehensive labour market survey was done in 1976. If universities exist for the sake of responding to human resource, economic and development needs, it is doubtful whether they can confidently do so, as they do not have precise information as to what those needs are (MoE, 1996:95).

Ensuring the responsiveness of university programmes to national needs requires interaction between the universities and government, professional and industry bodies such as the Zambia Federation of Employers and the Zambia Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, relevant government ministries and organisations. It is noted in the 1996 National Policy on Education that participation of the various bodies would ensure that programmes offered by universities would be what government, society, industry and commerce require (MoE, 1996:95). However, it is noted in the same policy that there was little participation by employers in the development of curricula for higher education institutions (MoE, 1996:95). The task of the HEA in this regard is promoting coordination between universities and stakeholders to ensure accountability in terms of responsiveness to the needs of the republic.

Although it is understood that responsiveness to the demands of stakeholders such as government, society and employers is one way of being accountable to them, the use of market mechanisms might create a demand for programmes that have not been fully assessed as relevant to local needs (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:10) or programmes producing graduates without the kinds of lifelong skills they need to be successful in their professions (Shah, Grebennikov & Nair, 2015:263). Because market mechanisms might not meet the noted responsiveness to the demands of stakeholders because of likely distortions, there is a need for regulation to ensure that programmes offered match the expectations of government, employers and society.

Therefore, the need for accountability seems to be the reason for the HEA to restructure and transform higher education institutions and programmes to be responsive to the needs of the country. With the growing number of types of universities offering different programmes, the

policy considerations regarding this function imply the need to coordinate the fragmented higher education system to make it accountable in terms of meeting stakeholders' needs at various levels.

3.5.4 Designing and recommending an institutional quality assurance system

The HEA design and recommend an institutional quality assurance system for universities, and recommend to the Minister of Higher Education institutional quality assurance standards for:

- The establishment, standardisation and registration of higher education institutions, including standards of plant and equipment
- The preparation and amendment of statutes
- The development of curricula
- Libraries, laboratories, workshops and other facilities
- Student transfers between academic programmes among higher education institutions.

As noted, this function is in two parts. Firstly, in designing and recommending for an institution a quality assurance system, the HEA is performing the quality promotion function, as discussed in Section 3.5.1. Designing and recommending are two important elements that contribute to the promotion of quality. By designing an institutional quality assurance system, the HEA provides guidance on what a credible quality assurance system should be, while a recommendation on an institutional quality assurance system may be taken to be advisory.

Secondly, the recommendations to the MoHE on institutional quality assurance standards listed in the sub-points above, imply regulation. The recommendations being articulated for institutional quality standards for the Minister of Higher Education are to keep the regulatory mechanism for the university system in check and in line with the responsibilities of the MoHE in which the HEA is expected to operate. The issue of standards as highlighted in the sub-points, besides regulation, implies control.

Therefore, this function demands control through observance of a stipulated threshold of standards at programme level as well as at institutional level with the intention of protecting university students from substandard educational programmes and to provide students with an opportunity to carry their credits across universities within Zambia. As standards are being used to provide criteria for institutions to evaluate their programmes for qualifications for external comparison by the HEA, the HEA is also harmonising of the university system through standardisation.

In this function, therefore, the HEA is providing advisory services and regulating and harmonising the university system to create compatibility.

In conclusion, the purpose of this section was to establish a framework for the HEA that guides the quality assurance activities of universities. The constituents of the HEA framework, as discussed, are quality promotion, quality assurance, quality accountability, advisory services and regulation/control services. The framework is aimed at providing an understanding of the operations of the HEA in line with the provisions of the Higher Education Act of 2013.

3.6 Summary

The need for quality assurance emerges partly from the practices that result from the contradictory functions that the university system plays as well as the circumstances that work to transform the higher education system globally. Considering the major role that universities play in the provision of human capital, critical to meeting national needs as well as the needs of the knowledge society, government has an interest and a responsibility to ensure that providers of university education provide quality educational services. In meeting this responsibility, government has mandated the MoHE to establish the HEA, which, among other functions, assures the quality of university education.

Therefore, this chapter discussed the motivation for establishing the HEA and the framework that supports its operations in assuring and promoting quality for Zambian universities.

In the next chapter, I discuss how the HEA assures and promotes quality for universities in Zambia.

Chapter 4: Quality assurance policy as a practice

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the implementation of the quality assurance policy as intended in the 1996 National Policy on Education and as provided for by the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013. The 1996 National Policy on Education provides an understanding of quality as policy text, while the provisions of the Higher Education Act of 2013 provide the HEA with a guide in the implementation of quality assurance practices. The argument being pursued is on the provisions of the Higher Education Act of 2013 and on how the Act as the mandate for the HEA offers opportunities in the formulation of strategies to enable the HEA to assure quality for the university system.

As this chapter deals with policy issues, assumptions that emanate from the umbrella of the post-positivist approach adopted apply, namely that there is no single objective understanding of policy, making no pretence of analytical neutrality (see Peter, 2012:27), as all actors in a policy situation interpret information as they seek to make sense of policy (Yanow, 2011:6). In this case, actors such as the researcher, legislator and the implementing authority operate within a value framework that cannot be freed from the physical and social context (Peter, 2012:27), hence the realisation that perceptions held by the implementers sometimes influence what is ultimately implemented.

4.2 Understanding the quality assurance policy

In discussing the quality assurance policy, I reflect on the views of Psacharopoulos (2006:132) that education has value not only to the individual who invests in it, but to the nation as well, placing responsibility on government to generate policies that uphold educational quality, especially in a liberal democracy such as Zambia – policies that protect the individual and collective rights of the Zambian citizens who are consumers of university education. As in any democratic government, the Zambian government is expected to protect the plight of the citizens it represents by formulating policies that govern the provision of university education in the higher education sector.

4.2.1 The concept of policy

There are several explanations of what constitutes a policy. Howlett, Ramesh and Perl (2009) describe policy in three dimensions: as an outcome of a reconciliatory process, as an initiative

sanctioned by government and as decisions that cumulatively contribute to an outcome. The facets as described by Howlett *et al.* illustrate the elusiveness of the concept and the difficulty writers have in agreeing on what the term ‘policy’ ought to be.

By definition, Howlett *et al.* (2009:4) describe a policy as an intended government action containing articulated goal(s), however articulately or poorly the goals may have been identified, justified and formulated and the means to achieve them, and notwithstanding how well or poorly the means have been connected to the goal(s). In this view, a policy consists of interrelated elements such as intentions, actions and means, constituted to achieve a goal. A policy is a formal plan by government intended at pursuing a specific purpose through a specified means in a given environment. Despite a policy being an intentional government action, sometimes a policy does not produce only intended outcomes, because the environment that a policy is seeking to manipulate is sometimes complex.

Easton (1953, cited in Hill, 2013:15) defines policy as consisting of a web of decisions and actions that allocate values. Lingard (2013:116, 118) seemingly expanded Easton’s definition by explaining that the allocation of values is authoritative, linked to politics and ideology, and framed by political intentions of government. In this vein, the policy is seen as the re-articulation of political intentions, suggesting that policy making is a political activity mediated by state structures through the logic of the practice of the state and policy makers (Lingard, 2013:118). Therefore, a policy can be impacted upon by a political system because the values ingrained in the policies, through the policy process, the policy implementation and the outcomes, may be crafted towards the political intentions of the state.

Dye (1972, cited in Howlett, 2011:15) defines policy as “what government chooses to do or not to do”. As a policy in Dye’s definition is viewed as a choice of a course of action, it indicates that policies are conscious decisive actions made by government to meet a purpose. This policy view is shared by Smith (1976, cited in Hill, 2013:15), who suggests that policy is a deliberate action or inaction. Both definitions bear a remainder that attention to policy should not focus exclusively on decisions that produce change, but also on those decisions that resist change and are difficult to observe because they are not represented in the policy-making process by legislative enactment (Hill, 2013:15). Said differently, chosen courses of action made by government are policies, whether they result in negative decisions that consciously avoid changing a status quo or a positive decision that alters some aspect of the current circumstances (Howlett, 2011:15). In this regard, a policy is an action-oriented decision focused on attaining tangible or less tangible outputs that result from a choice made by government.

As observed by Howlett *et al.* (2009), the scholarly definitions articulated above in general are in agreement with the dimensions outlined earlier (in the introduction of this sub-section). In addition, the above definitions suggest that government occupies an important position in policy making. Howlett *et al.* (2009:5) observed that government enjoys a special position in policy making because of its unique ability to make authoritative decisions on behalf of citizens, which are backed up by sanctions for transgressors in the event of non-compliance.

In the context of education, just as generally articulated, policies are intended to provide guidance, goals and means of improving the quality of the outcomes of the education system. Although the higher education system in Zambia has been one of the areas in which public provision of educational services has been dominant, the higher education landscape in Zambia is slowly changing because of the emergence of private providers. Bearing in mind that education is a policy area where the actual characteristics of policy are likely to be considerably influenced at the points of delivery (Hill, 2013:136), the Zambian government has formulated the quality assurance policy to influence university education through policy regulation of services provided.

4.2.2 Policy making: The quality assurance policy

As suggested by the conceptual analysis of policy, policy making is a conscious activity of attempting to match formulated policy goals to the means of policy implementation. Policy goals are aims and expectations government has in deciding to pursue or not to pursue some course of action, while policy means are the techniques designed or suggested to attain the goals (Howlett, 2011:16). Howlett (2011:16) further elaborates that the means to achieve the policy goals exist at different levels, such as abstract, for specific forms of policy implementation, for example the use of government or non-governmental organisations to implement policy goals; concrete, for use of specific governing mechanisms, such as regulation, information campaigns or government subsidies to alter actor behaviour; and a most specific level, of deciding exactly how tools should be calibrated to achieve policy targets. Despite the means of achieving policy goals being at different levels, the Zambian situation demands a combination of the stated levels to meet the quality assurance goal. The HEA as quasi-government authority through regulation assures the quality of universities using specified criteria to achieve quality intentions. Therefore, the existence of means at different levels helps to understand the techniques available to attain the intended goals.

Policy making is not a one-off activity, but a process. Lasswell (1956, cited in Howlett, 2011:16), describes policy making as a process involving a set of interrelated stages through which policy issues and deliberations flow in a sequential fashion from ‘input’ problems to ‘output’ policies. As cited in Howlett *et al.* (2009:10) and Howlett (2011:18), Lasswell (1971) suggests that the policy process be divided into seven stages: intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination and appraisal; while Brewer (1974, cited in Howlett *et al.* (2009:11) views the policy process as being composed of only six stages: initiation, estimation, selection, implementation, evaluation and termination. The stages suggested in policy making, besides confirming that policy making is a process, also help to understand how the distinct stages result in a policy and provide an understanding of activities involved in the production of public policies.

With the awareness of policy development, the 1996 National Policy on Education in its preamble indicates that it was a product of broad-based consultation and research (MoE, 1996:vii), suggesting the existence of the sequence of inseparable activities that guided policy making, but possibly emphasising that consultation and research were key in the entire process of policy making. The 1996 National Policy on Education is the national policy guiding the entire education system in Zambia, and as a government initiative, it was greatly influenced by the political environment of liberal democracy, as it was premised on the democratic principles upholding the tenet of stakeholders participating in the development of the education policy. The 1996 National Policy on Education as the blueprint for educational provision in Zambia that addresses the needs and problems that the country has and is yet to encounter (MoE, 1996:vii) emerged out of a concerted effort in light of the democratic values.

4.3 Quality as policy text

The endeavour to discuss quality as policy text is in recognition that the expressions of quality as text sometimes do not translate into what is implemented. The basis of the argument at this point is not to focus on constraining factors at the level of practice, but to seek clarity on what quality is in the 1996 National Policy on Education, as there is variation in the conceptualisation of quality among stakeholders.

There are several expressions of how quality is understood in the 1996 National Policy on Education (MoE, 1996), such as:

- i. “All learners should be facilitated in the attainment of the highest standards of learning through the teaching of excellent quality” (p. 4).

- ii. “Quality is brought about by maximizing efforts of all those responsible for education of learners and by coordinating all the structures of the system so that centres of education, from preschool to university are places where effective teaching, learning, and research take place, and where the highest standards of achievement, in accordance with ability, are obtained by every student” (p. 4).
- iii. “The government has a bounden duty to promote the highest standard of education and learning for all. This entails giving attention to various interdependent factors, including the quality of the curriculum, teaching and assessment, the quality of teachers in school and institutional arrangements, and planning processes” (p. 4).
- iv. “The ability of a graduate to perform in the labour market in line with the learning outcomes of the curriculum provides the ultimate quality standards” (p. 19).
- v. “For university education to be effective in the development of society, the quality of university products (graduates, research, and public service) need to be of high standard. To achieve this necessitates the ability to recruit and retain high-quality staff, to admit and stimulate high-quality students, and to function in a supportive and enabling environment” (p. 20).
- vi. “Government has a duty to promote the highest standard of education and learning for all and will give attention to various interdependent factors, including the quality of the curriculum, teaching, and assessment, the quality of teachers, leadership and management, institutional arrangements, and planning and budgeting processes” (p. 45).
- vii. “A high standard of quality is a *sine qua non* for relevant higher education. The calibre of the teaching staff, adequacy of physical facilities, the sufficiency of consumables, quality of library holdings, and availability of necessary transport, all play an important role in determining the quality of those who emerge from higher level institutions” (p. 96).

4.3.1 Quality as policy text and conceptions of quality

Considering the expressions of quality in the 1996 National Policy on Education, the conceptualisations of quality shows the complexity in the understanding of quality, as there is no single dimension with which the National Policy on Education is aligned. The understanding of quality cuts across conceptions of quality as conformance to standards, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as meeting customers’ needs, the traditional concept of quality and quality as transformation as well as quality as an input, process and output. The blended view of quality

conceptions in the 1996 National Policy on Education, on one hand, reflects how the various dimensions are appreciated in defining what quality should be for Zambian universities, while on the other hand, relates to the attribute of quality being a philosophical concept, attracting competing understandings of quality.

Quality is articulated in terms of high or highest standards, as in the listed understandings of quality. This conception of quality in the 1996 National Policy on Education is more related to the traditional understanding of quality as excellence. Excellence sees quality in terms of high standards (Harvey & Green, 1993:12). As noted, in the explanations of quality above, the notion of quality as excellence identifies what the components of excellence are, as explicitly outlined in points i, iii, v, vii and viii. With effort, the components of excellence are achievable, supporting the argument of Harvey and Green (1993:12) that the best is required if excellence is to result. The standards provide the basis for judgement. To ensure quality, standards become the determinants in decision making on whether to register an institution or not, or whether a programme has to be approved or rejected.

Understood from the context of points ii, iii and vi, quality is a product of inputs, process and outputs, in which interdependent factors such as putting maximum effort in the provision of education, coordination of structures and setting of standards by government (MoE) would result in effective teaching and learning by reviewing teaching methodologies, assessment instruments and programme content and the achievement of high standards of learning, which ultimately translate into quality of university education. Quality results from a chain of interrelated activities carried out by universities and the MoE. The content displayed in this view implies that the responsibility for assuring quality to a larger extent lies with each university, because the university system determines the ingredients (inputs, process and outputs) of the entire production process. On the part of the government (MoE), assuring quality means scrutinising university activities and ensuring that through measurement of activities, quality prevails.

The 1996 National Policy on Education in points iii, v, vi and viii explains quality in terms of inputs and outputs, with the process contained in the 'black box'. In this sense, quality results from the ability to recruit and retain quality staff and management; to admit and stimulate high-quality students; to give attention to quality institutional arrangements, leadership and management, and planning and budgeting processes; to have adequate physical facilities; and to function in a supportive environment. As processes involved in the interaction of inputs are not clearly stated (as they are contained in the 'black box'), it is understood that quality results

from a compound of inputs that are stimulated in a supportive and enabling environment to produce a high-quality university graduate. This dimension considers quality as resulting from worthwhile inputs, as implied in the use of ‘quality’ and ‘adequate’. In this understanding, quality inputs produce quality outputs.

In point iv the 1996 National Policy on Education describes quality in terms of outputs. Quality is judged in relation to the employability of the university graduate. The relevance of acquired knowledge and skills to the labour market qualifies a graduate to be of quality. This view is closely related to quality as fitness for purpose and quality as meeting customers’ needs, although these two conceptions are perceived as ‘two sides of the same coin’, as the former emphasises the input system while the latter emphasises the output system. The interpretation one would get from the policy text that the “ability of a graduate to perform in the labour market provides the ultimate quality standards” undermines the importance of the aims at the expense of outputs. It is difficult to debate in this respect whether outputs outweigh inputs, but quality is understood to result from the satisfaction of the labour market. From this understanding, quality is determined by the relevance of university programmes.

As quality in universities is viewed in terms of the input, process and output and reference to high or highest standards, the inputs must meet the standards to effectively deliver the outputs that are of quality. By implication, if any of the inputs do not meet the stated standards, the quality of the product is affected. Quality, as described in the 1996 National Policy on Education, is understood in terms of the input, process and output system, in which components of the system are measured to ensure quality.

4.4 Quality assurance practices

Quality assurance practices consist of policy actions. The focus is on the implementation of the quality assurance policy and the actual activities being carried out by the implementing agency, the HEA, to assure university quality. The Higher Education Act of 2013 assigns responsibility for quality assurance for universities to the HEA, as regulated. However, the means used to guide the quality assurance practices such as procedures and criteria are designed by the HEA.

4.4.1 Implementation strategies

Policy implementation is a stage in the policy-making process concerned with turning policy intentions into actions (Peter, 2012:185). In a similar voice, Howlett *et al.* (2009) define implementation as what government does to put policies into effect, and further explains that

effort, knowledge and resources are devoted to translating policy decisions into actions. In this respect, implementation involves carrying out policy assumptions to realise policy goals. As implementation presupposes a prior act of formulating strategies (Hill, 2013:207), it takes on an active form: action.

In providing quality assurance for the university system, the HEA has implemented strategies in three parts, by registering private universities, classifying universities and accrediting university programmes (HEA, 2015a:4), in support of the Zambia Qualifications Framework. These implementation strategies are practices that the HEA engages to assure the quality of Zambian universities.

4.4.2 Registration of private universities

An individual or an entity seeking to establish a private university is required by Section 19 (1) of the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 to submit an application for registration to the HEA in the manner prescribed upon payment of the prescribed fees (HEA, 2015b:2; MESVTEE, 2013:109). The ‘prescribed manner’ entails the use of a standardised procedure in tendering in an application for registration. Therefore, during registration, the applicant is required to submit a completed standard application form, an operational plan and a non-refundable application fee to the HEA. It is required that the submitted operational plan is developed according to contents prescribed for the plan (HEA, 2015b:4).

There are four types of applicants that the HEA deals with despite having the standardised application form. The first type is applicants registering existing private higher education institutions that were licensed under the repealed University Act of 1999. The revocation of the University Act of 1999 required existing private universities to seek registration under the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 by 30 September 2015, as determined by the HEA. The second type of applicants are new private higher education institutions seeking establishment, the third type foreign universities seeking to establish institutions in Zambia, and the fourth private higher education institutions submitting applications to effect changes to their registration status (HEA, 2015b:2; 2015a:8). The various categories of applicants seeking registration of private universities are expected to follow requirements for registration as documented in the Higher Education Act of 2013.

Among the documents recommended for submission, the operational plan is one of the key documents in the application process. Information required in the operational plan include the proposed education level or course of study which the private higher education institution

intends to offer; the governance structure of the private higher education institution; the premises where the higher education institution is to operate in Zambia, including the facilities and resources; requirements of the course or level of education to achieve the learning outcomes; and the level and name of the award that may be attained on successful completion of the course or level of education (MESVTEE, 2013:108). The content of the operational plan as outlined in Section 17 (1) of the Higher Education Act of 2013 and as articulated in the HEA document for “Regulation for Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions and the Accreditation of Higher Education Learning Programmes” provides a basis for evaluation of a submitted application and criteria for decision making on whether to approve or reject the application for registration.

A criterion is understood to be a standard used to measure performance and accountability across a system with a focus on inputs, process and outputs (Luckett, 2007:102). The criteria for registration as developed by the HEA comprise two sets of measures: the core requirements and the non-core requirements (HEA, 2015b:5). The areas of concern in the core requirements are governance and management; academic programmes; student admission and support; staff, both academic and non-academic; physical infrastructure; financial resources; and health and safety. The areas of concern regarding non-core requirements are vision, mission and strategy; research; and technological infrastructure. The elements of the core requirements and non-core requirements form the basis for evaluation of the applications for registration.

During the application process, the HEA undertakes two evaluations. The initial evaluation is based on scrutiny of documents submitted by the applicant, while the consequent evaluation requires a site visit to authenticate documented claims. In other words, the second evaluation requires the HEA to conduct an institutional audit. In this sense, an institutional audit is a quality assurance tool used in the evaluation of institutions, policies, systems, strategies and resources for quality management of core functions of teaching, research and public service using the set audit criteria (HEA, 2015a:2). In the interest of conceptual clarity, the institutional audit conducted by the HEA determines whether an institution meets the stated criteria before establishment, while the widely recognised institutional audit aims at assessing the success of an institution in achieving its own goals (Materu, 2007:3), while both audits form the foundation for external assessments during site visits (Martin *et al.*, 2007:26). The HEA conducts an institutional audit for verification of information provided by the applicant and to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Higher Education Act of 2013.

It is during an institutional audit when the HEA determines the extent to which an applicant meets the elements of the core and non-core requirements through quantification. Quantification helps to determine the aggregated score, which consequently enables the HEA to decide to either register or not register the private university. An aggregate score of 60% and above for a private institution licensed under the repealed University Act of 1999 results in full registration, while an institution scoring below 60% is not registered; an aggregate score of 50% and above for new applications for establishment results in full registration, while a new private university scoring below 50% is not registered; an aggregate score of 70% and above for change of registration status of a private university leads to full approval, while changes are not approved if the score is below 70%; and an aggregate score of 60% and above for renewal of registration after deregistration results in full registration, while a score below 60% means that renewal is not approved (HEA, 2015b:26).

When the HEA approves an application for registration, the applicant is issued with a certificate of registration on the prescribed form (HEA, 2015b:5). Issuance of a certificate of registration allows the proprietor of the private university to operate the private university on the premises specified in the certificate of registration (HEA, 2015b:5; MESVTEE, 2013:108). The certificate of registration for a private university has unlimited duration unless withdrawn by the HEA in accordance with Section 23 (1) of the Higher Education Act of 2013 (HEA, 2015b:4; MESVTEE, 2013:111). Although the end of the registration process for the successful applicant is marked by the receipt of the certificate of registration, the unsuccessful applicant, if aggrieved by the decision, may appeal to the Minister of Higher Education within 30 days of the decision by the HEA (HEA, 2015a:26). On the part of the HEA, the end of the registration process is marked by the publication of registered institutions in the government gazette and Daily Mail Newspaper (HEA, 2015b:34).

4.4.2.1 Implications of registration of a private university

The development of an operational plan by each applicant by category as prescribed and adherence to criteria stipulated for registration by an applicant imply a system of standards in assuring quality. Prescriptions or criteria provide conditions that must be met by an eligible applicant to be permitted to operate a private university. The HEA qualifies a private university for registration upon fulfilling the registration requirements. In this sense, standards are being used to attest to consumers of university education that the registered private university is good enough to operate.

By developing criteria for registration consisting of the core and non-core requirements, the HEA reflects an understanding of quality as consisting of inputs and outputs. It could be implied that in ensuring adherence to core and non-core requirements, the HEA believes that a private university with, for example, an effective system of leadership staffed by qualified administrators; academic programmes that are systematically designed; an admission policy on the selection of students; and adequate human, physical and financial resources could produce quality outputs. As private universities as institutions of learning are required to provide the right environment to an individual student for the development of knowledge and skills, quality is being conceived as doing the right things well (Harvey & Green, 1993:12). By specifically stipulating the areas of concern as the basis for evaluation, the HEA supports Winch's (2010:19) view of a university being a system that receives inputs and delivers outputs through various processes within the system. Quality outputs as implied from the registration criteria are a function of quality inputs.

By using quality standards and a system of measurement, the HEA is providing a platform for monitoring and accountability (HEA, 2015b:7). This approach to quality assumes that standards are objective, and in the light of the dynamic environments in which universities exist, monitoring helps to provide a reference base for the maintenance of standards (Harvey & Green, 1993:13; HEA, 2015b:7). In addition, monitoring promotes quality, which in turn creates a reputation for a university, as reputation implies maintenance of standards. Reflecting on the HEA framework, the issue of monitoring is meant to promote and assure quality in universities, because the checks provided during monitoring are based on criteria that are not only familiar to the universities, but also attainable.

The registration of private universities implies regulation. The Higher Education Act of 2013, Section 15 (1), explicitly states that registration for establishment of any private university is compulsory, as unregistered private universities are prohibited from offering university education (MESVTEE, 2013:108). As noted from the Higher Education Act, regulation on the establishment of a university strictly prohibits a private university from operating without registration, possibly, as pointed out by Pillay (2009:128), because private universities in most SADC countries are for-profit, resulting in a perception that private universities are interested in making money without providing quality education (Hayward, 2006:27), while it appears that poor citizens seek access to university education from the private universities (Pillay, 2009:128). It could be inferred that regulation on the establishment and operation of a private university seems strict to protect the Zambian citizens from fraud and to make universities

accountable. In addition, the interest to regulate private universities also reflects the current concern that links university provision with economic productivity and prosperity of the nation (Maassen, 2003:5). As good governance suggests, each country should have its own legislation and regulatory framework to protect its national interests (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:8).

4.4.3 Classification of universities

The classification of universities involves designating universities that meet the required threshold of core and non-core requirements into groups. This is in line with the understanding of quality assurance as providing tangible evidence that universities are meeting the required standards (MESVTEE, 2013:99) as well as judging quality in terms of absolute thresholds that have to be exceeded to obtain a quality rating (Harvey & Green, 1993:10), as in the tier system used by the HEA.

The HEA uses the quality assessment platform to classify universities on the basis of the calculation of the aggregate score. The aggregate score is the summation of the core and non-core requirements, in which the aggregated scores are tiered from Tier 1 to Tier 4. Universities in Tier 1 are rated higher in terms of quality than those in Tier 4; in this sense, a quality university is one that has met the minimum threshold of quality requirements. Quality is therefore understood in terms of absolute levels of achievement, as in the fulfilment of the minimum threshold of requirements as set by the HEA.

4.4.3.1 Implications of the classification of universities

Although the grading of universities is not a legal requirement in Zambia, universities are encouraged to seek classification on the quality assessment platform (HEA, 2015a:28). By encouraging universities to seek quality assessment, the HEA is promoting quality not only internally, but also overtly. The classification platform provides information to the public on the ability of the university to satisfy the minimum quality standards for the provision of higher education (HEA, 2015b:28). Implicitly, although the quality assessment is by choice, it is putting pressure on all universities to make their internal operations on the criteria set by the HEA more public.

As quality is judged and understood in terms of meeting the standards, the grading system is an overt approach to communicate to the Zambian citizens that the HEA is maintaining and improving the quality of university education in Zambia. The validation procedures undertaken in grading established universities confirm the maintenance of quality inputs and reassure the

consumers of university education that the standards are being maintained, hence quality is being assured. Through the HEA, government is ensuring that universities are serving society and that they use their money appropriately.

The grading system gives an opportunity for universities to aspire for higher ratings; presumably, those in tiers other than 1 would strive to get to higher levels of classification. The grading system provides an explicit means of equating quality to value for money (Harvey & Green, 1993:22). Universities are accountable to funders such as students, parents, taxpayers and government for the services they offer. The grading of universities helps the consumers of university education to make an informed decision about a university in a bid to get real value for their money. In creating the quality assessment platform, the HEA is closing the link between quality of university education and value for money, as stakeholders are provided with the basis to hold universities accountable. The platform is also meant to inform students and their parents which university they should attend and why.

4.4.4 Accreditation of learning programmes

Accreditation is understood as the evaluation and recognition of academic programmes to ensure that they meet the necessary quality requirements (MESVTEE, 2013:97). It is an external quality review used by the HEA to scrutinise university programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement (HEA, 2015b:30). Accreditation is both a status and a process (HEA, 2015a:30), although seemingly cyclic, as the process leads to status, and status to process. Although the status, on one hand, reflects accreditation of an institution, the process, on the other hand, focuses on both the activities that enable an institution to earn the accreditation status and the activities that the institution and the quality assurance agency engage in to accredit the learning programmes.

4.4.4.1 Accreditation as a process

As a process, accreditation involves a series of tasks. The HEA requires an institution to undertake a defined sequence of activities that result in the accreditation of learning programmes before being granted accreditation status. A learning programme is understood to be a course of learning and/or research leading to a qualification upon successful completion of a process of assessment and certification (HEA, 2015a:30). The procedure for accrediting learning programmes by the HEA involves institutional self-evaluation, application for accreditation, assessment of the application and decision making, leading to either accreditation or non-accreditation of a learning programme (HEA, 2015b:33).

Institutional self-evaluation is the first step in the accreditation process. It is a key step in the evaluation procedure, as it provides a standard against which a university can measure itself and a framework for building up the definition of quality (Kis, 2005:8). The HEA provides accreditation criteria to guide and facilitate the conduction of self-evaluations. An institutional self-evaluation is an internal assessment in which a university engages, based on the set criteria and components for registration of learning programmes (HEA, 2015a:33). Through self-evaluation, a university produces a self-assessment report that is assessed by the HEA to make recommendations on the accreditation of learning programmes. When submitted to the HEA, the self-review report at this initial stage is evaluated as a document. It is recommended by the HEA that a university undertake self-assessment before applying for accreditation (HEA, 2015a:33).

The application for accreditation of a learning programme is submitted as prescribed to the HEA. In applying for accreditation, an applicant is required to provide information on the learning programmes that the university intends to offer using the accreditation criteria (HEA, 2015b:51). The criteria for accreditation relate to aims and objectives, curricula, assessment, staff, facilities for programme delivery, teaching and learning support, internal quality assurance and financial resources, which are further subdivided into components (HEA, 2015b:31). Based on these criteria, judgement is made on the quality of each component in the criterion to determine the viability of a learning programme for accreditation, and the minimum score of 50% is required for a learning programme to be accredited (HEA, 2015a:32).

The assessment of the application follows once an application has been submitted. In evaluating the application form, the HEA constitutes a team of experienced and qualified experts to carry out the evaluation (HEA, 2015b:33). The need to constitute a team of experienced and qualified experts arises from the recognition that unlike institutional reviews, programme reviews require more depth and detail, as well as from the realisation that external quality agencies cannot operate on the basis of power, as their authority needs legitimisation opinionated by the judgement of peers (Kis, 2005:17). The team of assessors undertakes a site visit, involving the physical inspection of the institution qualifying for accreditation (HEA, 2015b:34). The evaluators make a graded judgement about quality, focusing on the quality of the inputs, process and outputs, as outlined in the accreditation criteria and components.

A decision based on the quantifiable findings is made to either accredit or not accredit the learning programmes, and a certificate of accreditation is issued in accordance with the accreditation criteria (HEA, 2015a:34). The HEA accredits learning programmes of a

university that meets the requirements. The registered university and the learning programmes that a university has been accredited to offer are published in the government gazette and the Daily Mail Newspaper (HEA, 2015b:34).

4.4.4.2 Accreditation as a status

Accreditation as a status results from the process of accrediting learning programmes. If the minimum standards are met by the institution in the learning programmes, the institution earns accreditation status. By possessing accreditation status, a university agrees to uphold quality standards set by the HEA and to regularly, as may be determined, submit to the HEA requests for accreditation renewal and review (HEA, 2015b:30). The recognition of accreditation status comes with the issuance of a certificate of accreditation. At institutional level, the accredited institution is required to display a certificate of accreditation in a conspicuous place on its premises to declare status, while nationally, an accredited university is listed in the government gazette to communicate the accreditation status to the public (HEA, 2015b:34). In addition, accreditation status offers a university recognition internationally for having achieved standards of quality recognised nationally and demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement (Hayward, 2006:30).

4.4.4.3 Implications of accrediting learning programmes

As a process, the accreditation of an institution or programme by the HEA requires the accredited university to be committed to self-study and external review by peers and to continuously seek ways of improving the quality of university education provided (HEA, 2015b:30). As a status, on the other hand, accreditation provides public notification that an institution or programme meets standards of quality set forth by the HEA (HEA, 2015b:30). Accreditation verifies the fulfilment of predefined criteria and represents a quality seal for the learning programme (Sin, Tavares & Amaral, 2017:861). The university's reputation as a result of status may qualify its graduates for certain employment opportunities (Woodhouse, 2013:3). Therefore, accreditation can be essential for an institution to be competitive.

The accreditation of learning programmes implies safeguarding the quality of academic programmes offered by both public and private universities (HEA, 2015b:30). In accrediting learning programmes, the HEA is guaranteeing that the standards measured during the accreditation process can be upheld in the long term, as accreditation goes with a commitment to continuously seek ways of enhancing the quality of university education. In addition, the accreditation of learning programmes enables the HEA to take account of national and global

developments in the higher education system, as university programmes sometimes have the potential to threaten and possibly erode the cultural fabric of a nation.

By gazetting accredited universities and their learning programmes, the HEA provides independent accountable information to the public that enables stakeholders, especially students and parents, to access information about universities, especially on learning programmes and qualifications that universities offer (HEA, 2015b:30). As accredited programmes are clearly defined, assurance is provided to students or potential students that the programmes in which they are enrolled or are considering to be enrolled in are capable of achieving what the students set out to do (ESIB, 2002:15). In addition, the HEA provides information bearing in mind that society pays for university education in terms of either student fees or taxes. Society therefore has a legitimate claim to check what it gets and pays for (ESIB, 2002:16).

Accreditation of universities implies that the HEA as an accreditation authority becomes a source of information for stakeholders such as students, parents, employers, government, society and the universities themselves about the quality of university products and services. For students, as primary recipients of university education and whose potential performance is defined by the quality of university education, accreditation provides information that helps to make decisions about where to enrol; for parents, who often pay for university education, accreditation provides information about the adequacy of institutional performance to guide investment in university education; for employers, accreditation provides reliable data to guide graduate recruitment and information about the quality of graduates; for government, accreditation provides public accountability for public spending and information about the adequacy of institutional performance; for society, accreditation provides information about the relative quality of universities, bearing in mind that society benefits or suffers from the effects of a variation in quality; and for institutions, accreditation provides information on independent judgements about their performance in recognition of their competitiveness in the global higher education system (Coates & Mahat, 2014:579; Hayward, 2006:8). As the quality assurance authority for universities, the HEA provides authentic information through accreditation by holding universities accountable to internally assure quality and to externally show it to interested stakeholders.

By accrediting universities, the HEA not only promotes quality and quality assurance in universities, but also coordinates and communicates the activities of Zambian universities to a wider range of stakeholders beyond national borders. Accreditation of learning programmes in

Zambian universities by the HEA provides the possible means to communicate to the SADC region that the MoHE, as committed in the SADC protocol regarding quality in higher education, promotes and strengthens the quality of university education (SARUA, 2009:10) as a way to progressively move towards regional harmonisation and standardisation of higher education (Butcher *et al.*, 2009:60). Beyond the SADC region, the HEA communicates with and assures the global community that, through accreditation, it is licensing, regulating and monitoring established universities to contain the inevitable pressure of liberalising university education, as spelled out in the 1996 National Policy on Education and as a result of the creeping in of the GATS (Pillay, 2003:17).

In accrediting universities, the HEA regulates universities through licensing. The issuance of the certificate of accreditation implies licensing. Contravening with regulation on the accreditation of learning programmes is an offence and attracts imprisonment and finable charges. Although the intention of accrediting learning programmes is to promote quality in Zambian universities, the issuing of licences and sanctions implies that the HEA is implementing what Woodhouse (2013:3) calls the gatekeeper role of accreditation – an unintended action which could possibly provide an obstacle to promoting quality. However, in regulating universities through the accreditation of learning programmes, the HEA is monitoring the performance of universities to ensure the maintenance of required standards.

Self-evaluation as a procedure in accreditation is tied to compliance as stipulated by the HEA. The connection of self-evaluation to the accreditation procedure in the Zambian context contradicts the widely recognised role that self-review plays in achieving improvement (Kis, 2005:15), as quality engagements at this level are externally motivated (HEA, 2015a:33). If self-study comes as a committal to the HEA for upholding standards, then compliance with quality requirements overrides intrinsic quality improvement. It is feared that in using self-evaluation as the first step there is a threat of subsequent external judgements to tend to force universities into a defensive mode that limits the potential for improvement (Lockett, 2007:102). While on one hand the HEA is aware that compliance is unlikely to promote quality, on the other hand it is doubtful that universities can assure the quality of learning programmes without making it mandatory.

In accrediting learning programmes, the HEA acts as a catalyst for internal quality improvement within universities by giving the advice to cement institutional arrangements for ensuring and enhancing the quality of learning programmes (HEA, 2015b:30). The submission of self-review reports to the HEA periodically entails that the HEA is available to universities

for advice and to further help develop internal quality mechanisms. It is also possible to argue that through self-reflection, a university is likely to adopt ownership of self-evaluation to improve quality, and not seeing self-evaluation as a mere source of information for external reviewers' reports. In strengthening the development of internal institutional arrangements for quality assurance, the HEA is steering quality promotion.

4.5. Subtleties in quality assurance practices

Going by the policy articulation of Hill (2013) in Section 4.2.1, in which policy is a 'deliberate action or inaction', the silence in Part IV of the Higher Education Act of 2013 about quality procedures after establishment of a public university, on when a public university should accredit learning and on what happens to a public university that offers learning programmes that are not accredited exposes a subtlety in policy implementation, which, if not calculated, requires re-interpretation of the policy.

As discussed in Section 3.2, the public and private universities are established by different authorities; the former by ministerial declaration and the latter by certification. Sections 15 to 23 of the Higher Education Act 2013 outline the quality process that results in the establishment of a private university, while Section 14 establishes a public university and is silent on the quality process of a public university. The silence on the initial quality of a public university indicates that the public university and the private university at establishment are not on the same quality foothold. In addition, Section 12 (3) of the Higher Education Act of 2013 allows a university to establish learning programmes, which as per requirement are accredited by the HEA. Notably, the HEA regulations state that "a proprietor of a private university shall not offer a programme for which they are not credited" (HEA, 2015b:34); with respect to a public university, there is a distinct silence on the same.

The silence in the Higher Education Act of 2013 regarding quality provisions upon establishment of a public university, on when a public university should accredit learning programmes and on programmes not accredited indicates that regulation does not apply equally across the university system. The policy content as stipulated in Part IV of the Higher Education Act of 2013 influences the quality practices of the HEA. Without re-interpretation of the Higher Education Act of 2013, as the HEA did with Section 20 (h) of Part IV to extend accreditation to public universities through Statutory Instrument No. 5 of 2016, the quality assurance activities may be mainly confined to private universities.

The seeming bias in regulation towards private universities confirms arguments in the literature that it was pressure from private participation that triggered the establishment of national quality assurance agencies in sub-Saharan Africa (Materu, 2007:16). The observed biases in quality assurance practices by the HEA have a possibility of causing resistance to external quality assurance besides compliance, as private universities may feel victimised by the HEA in an environment where they have been called to fully participate, as the higher education sector is liberalised. The bias also appears to push the HEA aside the majority of national quality assurance agencies in sub-Saharan Africa who developed their standards (strategies) through a highly consultative process (Materu, 2007:24). It appears that the quality assurance strategies as implemented are aligned to the stipulations of the Higher Education Act of 2013, but consultations with stakeholders, especially universities, as key actors would have resulted in the deployment of balanced strategies.

Similarly, if the mandate of the HEA is to assure quality for the university system in Zambia, policy as articulated in the Higher Education Act of 2013 does not adequately guide and influence the HEA to make informed decisions regarding quality in relation to the effects of mass higher education in public institutions, as discussed in Section 3.3. The operational plan and the criteria for registration of a private university are the foundation to the quality assurance strategies employed by the HEA to assure university quality. If a public university does not submit an operational plan at establishment and is not required to undergo an institutional audit at establishment, then the silence with respect to the quality of a public university at establishment is a concern in view of the massification factors. If quality, as interpreted, is viewed in terms of inputs, process and outputs, there is need to equally undertake an institutional audit of a public university using the existing operational plan designed for private universities if the HEA is to sustain the claim of being the quality assurance system for Zambian universities.

The quality assessment platform, as stated earlier, provides optional quality assessments for public and private universities based on core and non-core requirements of criteria for the registration of private universities. The expression “both private and public higher education institutions may seek classification on the quality assessment platform” (HEA, 2015b:28) implies an option. The quality assessment platform being categorically open to public and private universities should have provided an opportunity for ensuring quality for the university system in its entirety if it was mandatory. As the classification strategy is non-obligatory, this

quality strategy does not comprehensively assure the quality of the university system in Zambia.

4.6. Summary

The quality assurance strategies implemented by the HEA are registration of private universities, classification of universities and accreditation of learning programmes. Registration of a private university and accreditation of learning programmes involve processes with explicit criteria to guide registration and accreditation, while quantification is used in the classification of universities on the grounds of core and non-core requirements based on the criteria for the registration of private universities.

The use of criteria in the establishment of private universities consisting of core and non-core requirements and criteria consisting of components in the accreditation of learning programmes implies the understanding of university quality as resulting from inputs, process and outputs. It also implies that quality assurance in Zambian higher education is procedural and not substantive. Quality is qualified in relation to the performance of a university against the set criteria. An institution that meets a threshold of standards is registered, accredit the learning programmes and the institution, and optionally seek classification. Quality for Zambian universities is understood as a product of inputs, process and outputs.

The criteria for registration of private universities and the accreditation of learning programmes are not only meant to ensure quality, but also to build quality assurance mechanisms in universities. By implication, the quality assurance practices indicate that the HEA is assuring and promoting quality through coordination, monitoring, regulating, advising and accountability. Through the quality assurance practices of registration, classification and accreditation of learning programmes, the HEA is providing evidence to substantiate claims on the implementation of the quality assurance policy and enables stakeholders to have information about the management of university quality and the level of outcomes achieved.

This chapter focused on the quality assurance policy as a practice, creating the base for the discussion in the next chapter of how quality assurance practices result in the quality of teaching and learning.

Chapter 5: Implications of quality assurance practices for teaching and learning

5.1 Introduction

As quality assurance is understood in terms of inputs, process and outputs, the core and non-core requirements become the focus. In assuring quality, criteria permeate the quality assurance strategies designed by the HEA, despite variations in constituents of criteria for the registration of private universities and criteria for accreditation. The elements of the core and non-core requirements for the criteria for registration, namely governance and management; academic programmes; student admission and support; staff; physical infrastructure; financial resources; health and safety; vision, mission and strategy; research; and technological infrastructure, and the components in the criteria for accreditation, namely aims and objectives, curricula, assessment, staff, facilities for teaching and learning support, internal quality assurance and financial resources provide a point of reference for the implications of teaching and learning in universities.

5.2 Criteria and implications for teaching and learning

In discussing the implications for teaching and learning, the criteria for registration of a private university and the criteria for the accreditation of learning programmes have been integrated and streamlined to avoid repetition and regrouped into input, process and output systems in which the quality strategies seem to be embedded. In other words, the articulation of the implications for teaching and learning is shaped by the understanding of quality. As quality is understood as resulting from ensuring the quality of inputs and process, each criterion used for assuring university quality by the HEA can easily be fitted in the input-process-output framework of analysis to produce quality outputs.

5.2.1 Governance and management as an input

The inputs may be seen as the boundary conditions to achieve goals (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:85). As discussed in Section 3.2.1.3, the university council and senate form the governance and management structures of the university. An analysis of personnel in governance and management is conducted by the HEA to establish whether the university leadership is staffed with qualified leadership and administrators, whether the governance system reflects the

institution's mission and strategy, whether the governing board has defined roles and responsibilities, and whether there is a clearly defined management structure (HEA, 2015b:6).

The assumption in the analysis of governance and management structure is that the strength to steer quality assurance activities comes from internal management. It is management that steers the formulation of policies to put in place appropriate internal quality mechanisms for monitoring and assuring quality, as quality assurance and showing externally that quality is being assured are the responsibility of an individual institution (ESIB, 2002:32; Vroeijenstijn, 2003:79). The concern for management is in the belief that effective quality assurance depends on the availability of highly qualified faculty members and administrators, because the faculty members and administrators play a key role in the collection of data and preparation of self-assessments (Hayward, 2006:30).

5.2.2 Student admission as an input

Quality also depends on the academic level of students on entry into the university system (Sin *et al.*, 2017:862; Vroeijenstijn, 2003:86). The general quality concerns about student admissions are on whether there is any selection system for students, how the selection of students is done, what stakeholders think about the starting level of students, and how they are sustained within the university system (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:86). The analysis of the HEA on student admissions is not very different from what Vroeijenstijn suggests, as their focus on the admission policy is on the selection of students, the academic calendar and a system for verification of students enrolled at the institution (HEA, 2015b:6).

It is supposed that if a university has an admission policy, with documented guidelines, and clear student selection criteria for each programme, then it is possible to influence universities to select quality students. The admission of students is a concern because of reports on the rigorous selection process and fierce competition for limited places in public (Teferra & Altbach, 2004:34) rather than in private universities and accounts of students who enter private universities having lower grades (Sin *et al.*, 2017:863). The requirement for student admission helps to remove the prejudices regarding the calibre of the student that is easily associated with the image of the university to the outside community (Sin *et al.*, 2017:863), to the disadvantage particularly of students graduating from private universities.

The admission policies and structures for student admission help the academic staff to determine the readiness of students as they embark on a university education, because the process and the output have the possibility of being affected by the adequacy of student

preparation prior to enrolment in a university. It is believed that if the policies and structures for admission have the desired parameters, academic progression for the student is certain. Academic progression of students is highly correlated with teaching and learning, because if students are not progressing as scheduled, the teaching and learning process is questioned.

Similarly, the student management system, besides being a storehouse for enrolment data and student records, shows academic progress (HEA, 2015b:6). The student management system provides verification of student enrolments at a university, information that can be used to calculate levels of attrition and student ratios in learning programmes as a quality measure to provide information on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. If the attrition levels are high, the teaching and learning process is questioned and scrutinised for possible modifications. Besides helping to gauge the adequacy of the admission policy, the student management system is an important source of information, especially of students enrolled at a private university, as there has been a notable information gap (Kotecha *et al.*, 2012:108).

5.2.3 Staff as an input

The quality of an institution is determined by the quality of the staff (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:86). The academic and non-academic staff are at the heart of the institution producing graduates, research products and services to the institution, community and nation (Hayward, 2006:5; Materu, 2007:3). As the academic staff are particularly responsible for the implementation of institutional quality, their qualifications are an indicator of educational quality.

The analysis by the HEA of staff focuses on policy on staff recruitment and staff development, proven sufficient numbers of qualified full-time personnel to support academic operations, the supply of academic support staff and assistants for carrying out academic programmes and conditions of service for all staff (HEA, 2015b:6).

The assumption is that if the competences of the academic staff cover the learning programmes offered and the conditions of service are competitive to attract quality staff and to mitigate for high staff turnover, quality can be maintained. The availability of qualified staff, whether full-time or part-time, impacts on the commitment to quality service delivery and on the student–staff ratio, which affects the quality of teaching and learning.

The concern regarding staff at universities by the HEA can be attributed to reports on private universities that they place less value on staff stability; as a result, private universities often have a high staff turnover, resort to employing retired staff from public universities and employ staff with lower qualifications than public universities (Sin *et al.*, 2017:863). It could be in

regard of less value attached to staff stability that hired academic staff from public universities would rather moonlight in private universities while maintaining their basis in public universities (Teferra & Altbach, 2004:34). High staff turnover and moonlighting among academic staff lead to work overload, as the same amount of work has to be managed by fewer staff, while the burden of the second job affects work performance, ultimately affecting the quality of teaching and learning.

5.2.4 Physical infrastructure as an input

Physical infrastructure to deliver university education should be sufficient in quantity and quality to ensure teaching and learning (HEA, 2015b:6). In addition, academic support services for the enhancement of teaching and learning should be adequate in quantity and quality (HEA, 2015a:32). As infrastructures are a precondition to teaching and learning, Vroeijsstijn (2003:86) suggests analysing the available facilities for mission support, the adequacy of equipment for teaching and learning, and the conduciveness of the lecture rooms for teaching and learning. Similarly, in examining physical infrastructure, the HEA focuses on the sufficiency in quantity and quality of physical facilities to ensure teaching and learning, such as lecture theatres or rooms; the quantity and quality of physical infrastructure for support services, such as libraries, bookstores, counselling services and laboratories; the quantity and quality of technological support for teaching and learning; and the quantity and quality of technology systems to support management and operational functions (HEA, 2015b:6).

The need to analyse physical infrastructure results from the recognition that physical infrastructure houses learning resources and that the activity of teaching and learning is supported by the learning infrastructure. When the quantity and quality of the learning infrastructure are inadequate, lecture rooms are likely to be overcrowded, making the teaching and learning environment un conducive to effective teaching and learning, negatively affecting quality. Likewise, if academic support services such as library facilities are inadequate to support the student population, the use of physical resources such as books and chairs is likely to result in a shortened lifespan, limited access and ICT system overloads, limiting access of the academic community to technological infrastructure and lowering the quality of teaching and learning through limitations of the teaching and learning platforms.

The HEA has a concern in learning infrastructure because of the expansions in enrolments and the proliferation of private universities, as discussed in Section 2.7. The demand for university education, as noted by Teferra and Altbach (2004:25), pressured public universities to admit

more students into spaces that were originally designed for fewer students, and without keeping pace with infrastructure development due to financial constraints, the quality of teaching and learning is feared to be sacrificed at the expense of expansions. The analysis of learning infrastructure in private universities, on the contrary, results from a possibility of them operating without commensurate resources and appropriate infrastructure (Teferra & Altbach, 2004:34). When the learning infrastructure does not appropriately support the learning programmes, the quality of teaching and learning is affected negatively.

5.2.5 Financial resources as an input

Quality depends on the adequacy of financial resources to support the operations of an institution. As earlier alluded to in Section 3.3.1, government funds public universities in the form of operational grants, bursaries and infrastructure development, while private universities are privately funded.

Saeki *et al.* (2016:77, 79) report an increase in government expenditure from ZMW 67 million in 2006 to ZMW 111 million in 2013, despite the decrease in total government spending per student per year in the same period from ZMW 14 460 in 2006 to ZMW 12 921 in 2013. The decline in the unit cost per student regardless of an increase in expenditure can be attributed to expansions in enrolments, as government spending per student per year is computed as a quotient of the recurrent budget allocated to a university by the total number of enrolments in the same fiscal year. The reduction in the cost impact on teaching and learning because financial resources support institutional operations. Therefore, the analysis of financial resources by the HEA concerns the availability of finances to support operations and the accounting system being in line with acceptable standards and financial risk management policy with risk management arrangements (HEA, 2015b:6).

The concern in the analysis implies a connection between financial resources and quality. The ingredients of the teaching and learning process, such as academic staff, equipment and learning materials to support teaching and learning, have a cost that has to be achieved within the given constraints of funding. When available financial resources do not adequately support the teaching and learning process, quality is impacted upon by the high student ratios if the conditions of service for lecturers are not attractive enough to curb staff turnover; by increasing ratios to library resources, such as books, if the library is not adequately financed, reducing the chance of students to access required information; and by limiting access to available ICT

facilities if funding is inadequate, limiting students' access to computing facilities and supply of information.

5.2.6 Health and safety as an input

With respect to health and safety, quality is an integrated concept. Health and safety is an attribute of quality because where quality prevails, health and safety should be regarded as important. Safety is a human need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow, humans have many needs that they try to satisfy at any given moment, and the needs that are lower in the hierarchy are the most basic, which must at least be satisfied before a person satisfies the higher-level needs (Slavin, 2006:319). The basic needs, of which safety is one, are critical to the physical and psychological well-being of an individual.

In the analysis of health and safety, the HEA checks on the compliance of an institution with prescribed minimum requirements of health and safety, and whether the buildings conform to regulation as stipulated by the law (HEA, 2015b:6). The HEA also checks the provision of safety and security to students and staff (HEA, 2015b:6).

Safety is implicit in quality. A safe and secure environment is a prerequisite for teaching and learning. The academic staff may not focus on quality outputs unless their safety needs are met, as safety and quality are highly correlated in a work environment. Equally, students in a learning environment where physical danger is imminent will have little psychological energy to put into learning (Slavin, 2006:320). The provision of safety and security to students and staff is important, because if these basic needs are not met, teaching and learning would suffer.

5.2.7 Vision, mission and strategy as an input

As each university has a vision, mission and strategy, a supposed agreement that an objective definition of quality in higher education does not exist is possible, as quality is seen to be context-bound and multidimensional (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:85). Each university within the higher education system is encouraged to reflect on its own mission to judge the achievement of what it claims to achieve as a quality measure, hence the possibility of defining quality differently.

Besides using their visions, missions, mottos and strategies, universities are encouraged to carve out their market niches (Green & Harvey, 1993:19) and consider providing different forms of education as suitable for different sections of the population (Winch, 2010:23). As such, the higher education system appears to endorse the definition of quality as that of

fulfilling the mission of the institution (Harvey & Green, 1993:19). Quality is in the eye of the beholder, which means that every quality assessment and self-analysis have to reflect the formulated vision, mission statement, goals, aims and expected outputs and/or outcomes (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:85). Without a clear picture of why one is doing what one is doing, assessment of quality is impossible (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:85).

The concern in the analysis of the HEA is on the vision, mission and strategy formulated by an institution. The following questions are considered during analysis: Is the vision adopted by the institution?, Is the mission statement clearly formulated?, Is the mission statement operationalised in clear goals and aims?, Does it reflect the character of the institution? and Does the strategy of the institution indicate the short-, medium- and long-term objectives of the institution? (HEA, 2015b:7).

As quality is seen as fulfilling the institution's mission and goals, establishing the goals and missions and determining whether they are worthwhile are important. The goal of the provider of university education may help to inform the consumers of university education on what opportunities, responsibilities and life experiences they are being prepared for as they embark on higher education. The mission, aims and goals of a university define the learning programmes, as the institutional leadership and academics in the formulation of learning programmes consider fields of study that need to be strengthened to realise their mission, goals and aims (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:87). In addition, even though aims or goals are embedded within the system of an institution as an input, the assessment of the institutional capacity to achieve the aims is partly related to the learning that has to be achieved by students (Winch, 2010:35).

5.2.8 Learning programmes as a process

The learning programmes are part of the core activities of the university, besides research projects and community service. The learning programmes are sometimes targeted to clean the system of sub-standard study programmes, to safeguard the core practices of higher education from erosion or neglect, and as a means of guaranteeing compliance (Sin *et al.*, 2017:864).

In analysing learning programmes, the HEA focuses on aims and objectives, curricula and assessment in light of the preconditions of the learning environment (HEA, 2015b:6). The preconditions of the learning environment include the students, the student population, their selection and student follow-ups; staff, competences and the way staff members are cooperating; satisfactory facilities to deliver the learning programmes; internal quality assurance, policy on quality assurance and institutional management arrangements for internal

quality assurance; and financial resources, strategies and plans for resource allocation to learning programmes (HEA, 2015b:6), as broadly discussed in sections 5.2.2 to 5.2.5.

5.2.8.1 The aims and objectives

In analysing the aims and objectives of learning programmes, the HEA is concerned with how the aims and objectives of the learning programme relate to national or regional human resource development (HEA, 2015a:31). The analysis of the aims and objectives of learning programmes is conducted within the framework of institutional goals and aims, and with a reflection on how each learning programme contributes to the achievement of the mission statement of the institution and the needs of the nation. In addition, it is supposed that when formulating the aims and objectives of learning programmes, an institution should take into account the expectations of all stakeholders, weigh the expectations and balance them when formulating the expected outcomes of the programmes (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:88).

5.2.8.2 The curriculum

When analysing curricula, some of the aspects generally considered are the programme content, the organisation of content, assessment, methodologies and learning outcomes (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:89). Likewise, the concern of the HEA in analysing curricula is on whether the intended learning outcomes are clearly defined, whether the curricula show responsiveness to the demands of the labour market, whether the university has a teaching plan, whether the projected student enrolments are clearly determined and whether the university shows the levels of qualifications in line with the articulations of the Zambia Qualifications Framework (HEA, 2015a:31).

5.2.8.3 Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of curriculum design. Assessment is meant to inform student learning in general in terms of programme selection decisions, determining student progression towards qualification, providing information to faculty about the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and measuring student learning towards attaining graduate profiles (Fletcher *et al.*, 2012:120). Therefore, the teaching and learning process is strengthened by assessment, as it is student assessments that academics use to measure the achievement of the aims and objectives set for the programme.

In analysing assessment, the concern of HEA is on whether the assessment methods are clearly defined; whether the university has a policy and arrangements for moderation, validity and

security of examinations; and whether the university has arrangements for assessments of dissertations and theses in postgraduate programmes (HEA, 2015a:31). In addition, assessment at programme level may also include analysis of the level of the examinations and questions set, that is, whether the examinations indeed reflect the content of the programmes (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:89).

The implications of learning programmes for teaching and learning are diverse. Firstly, stating the aims and objectives indicates that university education has a purpose; according to Winch (2010:23), the purpose of education lies in the aims – the aims of the nation, the aims of the provider of university education, and the aims of those to which it is provided. Because the aims for which university education is provided differ among stakeholders, the HEA ensures that universities clearly define their academic programmes to show that the learning programmes are aligned to national human resource needs and that they are providing detailed information about programmes on offer to consumers of university education. When a programme is clearly defined, students would easily identify with programmes whose purpose for education is the same as theirs.

In addition, the focus on aims and objectives cuts across different views of appreciating quality, such as fulfilling institutional goals or aims, for an institution; fitting the purpose for which university education is offered, for government, students and employers; and meeting the needs of the consumers of university education, for students and employers. Therefore, stating the aims and objectives of learning programmes indicates clearly what is expected from the graduate after completing the programme (Vroeijenstijn, 2003:88).

Secondly, the analysis of learning programmes by the HEA considering aims and objectives implies the need for relevance. The HEA is concerned with the relevance of university programmes because what constitutes relevance and quality in a different jurisdiction may not be the same (Pillay & Kimber, 2009:8), especially as some of the private universities are established by foreign providers. The HEA is concerned with learning programmes to ensure relevance so that programmes are essential for national development (Butcher *et al.*, 2009:50) and because of the need for a higher quality of graduates by employers and government in recognition of the need to be competitive internationally and meet the demands of the knowledge society (Materu, 2007:16). By implication, the learning programme defines graduate capability, because it is the curriculum of the programme that is manipulated: by the graduate to meet national needs and by the employer for graduate placement and to gauge the capacities of a graduate to contribute to the knowledge society.

Thirdly, the requirement by the HEA for learning programmes in universities that are systematically designed suggests an effort to eliminate sub-standard programmes from the university system and to harmonise the Zambian university system for the possibility of the transfer of credits from one university to another in view of the deliberations for a credit transfer system in the SADC region (SARUA, 2009:10). The criteria set by the HEA for programme accreditation have helped universities to clearly structure curricula that show components of courses that would possibly allow students to carry their credits between universities. When university programmes are systematically designed, and learning outcomes clearly defined, the pathways to achieving intended goals are clarified, making it easier for the academic staff to direct the teaching and learning process.

In addition, the requirement to systematically design learning programmes is intended at changing the perception that exists between public and private universities, according to which learning programmes in private universities are deemed to be of narrow coverage and with substandard curricula (Materu, 2007:16, Teferra & Altbach, 2004:34), resulting in poor-quality degrees. The systematic design of learning programmes is helping the HEA to safeguard the educational standards of the university system from cheap and popular degrees reported to be associated with private providers. As the analysis of learning programmes is the basis for safeguarding the quality of learning programmes in public and private universities, there is justification for the HEA to extend the requirement of the operational plan to public universities to ensure the quality of programmes at establishment and to qualify claims of the HEA assuring quality for the university system.

Fourthly, the clear organisation of faculties and/or directorates is a concern to the HEA because it helps to clarify responsibility for improving quality in teaching and learning at the individual, academic unit, faculty and institutional level (Kis, 2005:27). When there is a clear definition of responsibility, it facilitates cooperation in discussing the means to improve teaching and learning between administrators and academics, and among academics within the faculty (Kis, 2005:29).

Fifthly, the analysis of assessments and qualification guidelines by the HEA suggests the need for universities to continuously follow assessment guidelines for quality performance in teaching and learning and to build integrity in the assessment process (Fletcher *et al.*, 2012:121). The guidelines on assessments are needed to cultivate the right attitudes towards assessment. Attitudes towards assessment by the university faculty have an impact on the assessment they use and how the assessments are incorporated into the teaching and learning

process, while attitudes towards assessment by students affect their approach to teaching and learning in terms of deciding whether to utilise assessment feedback for their future study and/or to develop skills to self-assess (Fletcher *et al.*, 2012:120). As teaching and learning are part of an integrated process, the academics and the students need to have a shared understanding of what is provided for in the guidelines about the valued learning outcomes to promote mutual trust in the educational process, as distrust undermines the assessment integrity and the quality of student learning (Fletcher *et al.*, 2012:121).

In addition, the motivation for analysing assessment is, on one hand, from employers, due to poor performance of university graduates, while on another hand, from the public universities that have been experiencing growth in enrolments, weakening the external examiner system because of increased enrolments (Hayward, 2006:11). Knowing where points of weaknesses exist allows the HEA to reconcile reported views to improve teaching and learning. Clarity on assessment policies and practices helps to validate the teaching and learning process in the awarding of graduate qualifications.

5.2.9 Internal quality assurance as a process

Internal quality assurance as a process refers to the activities of assuring quality through the internal quality assurance mechanism, as defined by the university itself. The assumption implicit in the development of the internal quality assurance system is that if the mechanism exists, then quality can be assured (Harvey & Green, 1993:20). In analysing internal quality assurance, the HEA determines whether a university has a policy on quality assurance and whether there is an institutional management arrangement for internal quality assurance (HEA, 2015b:31).

Internal quality assurance helps the academic staff and departments in the institution to monitor and improve the teaching and learning process. It is believed that if universities create internal quality assurance systems, there is a likelihood of providing evidence-based quality improvement in teaching and assessment (Woodhouse, 2013:7). Institutional quality assurance validates the award of qualifications and hence ensures the quality of graduates. Internal quality assurance also helps academics to realise the strengths and weaknesses of the learning programmes – this realisation becomes the basis for the department or institution to build a plan for quality improvement in the teaching and learning process. The internal quality assurance system helps to establish whether the quality mechanism is ensuring that students get what has been offered (Harvey & Green, 1993:20).

5.2.10 Quality graduates as an output

Vroeiijstijn (2003:84) and Sahney *et al.* (2004:152) share the view that graduates, scientific production and community service are the outputs of the higher education system. While acknowledging the diversity of outputs, the question arises on why the HEA is assuring quality in *Zambian universities*: Is it for the sake of graduates, scientific production or community service? As implied from the criteria for registration of private universities, the grading of universities and the criteria for accreditation of learning programmes, the focus is on the student. I therefore restrict the discussion of the implications for teaching and learning to the university graduate as an output of the university system.

It is understood from quality assurance practices that the inputs and the process determine the quality of the university graduate. Having assured the inputs and process in the university, it is assumed that a quality graduate is tenable. The concern of the individual institution and external evaluators is whether the graduates have indeed achieved the aims and objectives that were set at the beginning of the learning programme, within the scheduled time and within the anticipated costs. It is assumed that as the educational environment has been assured, the graduate that emerges is of quality, satisfying the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.

Producing a quality graduate implies concerted effort between universities and the HEA. The conditions that are manipulated to produce a quality graduate are much under the control of the individual university, while the HEA ensures the integrity of the teaching and learning process by asking universities to account for their activities externally through compliance with requirements. By monitoring compliance using criteria in the accreditation of programmes, the HEA is attesting to the adequacy of teaching and learning process in *Zambian universities*. This scenario suggests that internal quality and external quality assurance are complementary in assuring the production of a quality graduate.

5.3 Summary

The implications of quality assurance practices for teaching and learning centre on the quality of inputs, such as human, physical and financial resources; the quality of the process, that is, teaching and learning, and internal quality mechanisms; and the quality of outputs, particularly the graduate. The analysis of implications using the inputs, process and outputs system reflects what the HEA is doing to assure the quality of university education to legitimise the expectations of stakeholders.

The next chapter offers suggestions for sustaining quality assurance for *Zambian universities*. It aims at strengthening the future performance of the HEA.

Chapter 6: Sustaining quality assurance as a practice

6.1 Introduction

Sustaining quality assurance as a practice in universities is a need, because the higher education system worldwide has been transforming from elite higher education to mass higher education. The shift to mass higher education has attracted stakeholders' attention to quality in higher education, resulting in the building of quality assurance systems at various levels, whether nationally, regionally or internationally. Guangli (2016:39) warns against the payment of a heavy price to those who choose to neglect quality in higher education, an indication that quality assurance is inevitable. Therefore, with the awareness of quality assurance being a necessity in higher education, this chapter focuses on suggestions for sustaining it as a practice for the Zambian university system.

6.2 The universality of the quality assurance system

As discussed, quality assurance is a crucial issue in higher education. So far, it has been established that quality must be assured internally and externally to demonstrate to stakeholders inside and outside the university system that the quality of university education is being assured. In addition, the internationalisation of higher education has created the need for countries to demonstrate that the quality standards of their higher education institutions and programmes are being assured. Is it then possible to have a universal quality assurance system?

6.2.1 The elusiveness of the quality concept

The elusiveness of the concept of quality challenges suggestions to have a universal quality assurance system, because cultural traditions and historical, economic and social backgrounds influence the understanding of quality in higher education, which consequently influences the understanding of quality responsibilities (Mengquan, Kai & Le, 2016:78) and affects the operating mechanisms of assuring quality and the methods of assessing it in higher education (Guangli, 2016:40). To exemplify, in the Zambian situation, as discussed in Chapter 4, the understanding of quality in the 1996 National Policy on Education is reflected in the strategies designed by the HEA to assure quality in Zambian universities. Similarly, in the construction of the European and American higher education quality assurance frameworks, the operating mechanisms were harmoniously developed to suit national education systems as well as cultural and social backgrounds (Mengquan *et al.*, 2016:72).

As different countries have different histories, political systems and social and cultural backgrounds, they have different understandings of quality of higher education and how it should be measured. In addition, without understanding the different thoughts about quality that inform the preferences of different stakeholders, it is difficult to find the core criteria for assessing quality in higher education universally.

6.2.2 Internationalisation of graduate quality assurance building

Internationalisation has been a specific response of colleges and universities to provide their graduates with competences that enable them to take their place in a globalised society (Maassen, 2003:7). Internationalisation has occurred in many ways: through changes in curricula, through student and faculty mobility, through the presence of foreign students in higher education institutions and through the establishment of foreign universities and learning programmes (Maassen, 2003:7), increasing stakeholders' concern over the quality of the university graduate.

Against the background of economic globalisation, the quality of a university graduate is central, because of the increased dependence of the world economies on cross-border trade of commodities and services such as education (Pillay, Maassen & Cloete, 2003:1; Shangquan, 2000:1), making quality assurance in higher education both local and international (Mengquan *et al.*, 2016:84). Quality assurance is local in that higher education systems determine the basic framework of a national quality assurance system (Mengquan *et al.*, 2016:73), while it is international because it is the national quality assurance agency that engages in international cooperation and exchange to promote the international quality of higher education while preserving the individuality of higher education institutions (Morse, 2006:245).

The effects of economic globalisation on the national quality assurance systems demands the establishment of internationally recognised and comparable quality standards to ensure that the quality of degrees and training represented by different higher education institutions falls within the parameters that are acceptable to countries involved in the transnational exchange of education (Mengquan *et al.*, 2016:84; Morse, 2006:245). However, as noted by Morse (2006:245), the differences between nations and regions make it practically challenging to standardise learning goals, as quality assurance mechanisms in universities are designed to measure the achievement of stipulated goals, which in part include institutional and national goals that need to be safeguarded when designing a national quality assurance system. The

embeddedness of quality within individual higher education institutions and national contexts challenges ideas on the universality of the quality assurance system.

Therefore, the interaction of the national quality assurance system with international quality frameworks helps the national quality assurance system to customise contextual features to international trends to win international recognition. Even in the light of economic globalisation, national quality assurance systems retain local features with internationalisation as an enabler in this context of graduate recognition. The retention of contextual features in consideration of international quality frameworks implies that designing a universal quality assurance system for higher education is a challenge.

6.2.3 Guidelines on assuring external quality

Several guidelines on good practice in external quality assurance in higher education have been suggested for the sustenance of national quality assurance systems (Martin, 2011:4; Mengquan *et al.*, 2016:84). UNESCO and the OECD in 2005 jointly formulated the Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, INQAAHE in 2007 formulated the Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance, ENQA in 2009 formulated the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, recognised by the European Higher Education Area countries (Mengquan *et al.*, 2016:84), and the International Institute for Educational Planning has designed training modules for external quality assurance in higher education (Martin, 2011:4). Although the purpose of the creation of guidelines is to contribute to the improvement of national quality assurance mechanisms and the promotion of international quality in higher education (Morse, 2006:245), the concept of guidelines suggests harmonisation towards an integrated model of assuring quality.

The provision of guidelines for external quality assurance entails the existence of commonalities among external quality assurance systems. Martin (2011:4) argues that the basic principles of good practice in quality assurance are the same, whatever the size of the tertiary education sector, and that the international and regional guidelines of good practice can guide countries in implementing the principles. The awareness of commonalities inspires a thought on whether quality assurance frameworks can be transferred from one country to another (Billing, 2004:128). Scholars, however, are sceptical of such a transfer being achievable, as the peculiarities of each higher education system shape the fundamental choices for the external quality assurance system (Billing, 2004:128, 130; Martin, 2011:4). The articulations of Billing

(2011:128) and Martin (2011:4) suggest a challenge in advocating for a universal model for assuring higher education quality.

6.2.4 Assuring the quality of quality assurance agencies

The quality assurance of quality assurance agencies consists of internal and external quality assurance, which are two sides of the same coin (Hou, Ince, Tsai & Chiang, 2015:97). Internal quality assurance is a quality review process undertaken within an institution for its own sake and is considered as part of the external process that the quality agency undertakes in preparation for external quality assurance, which uses people external to the agency to evaluate quality or standards (Hou *et al.*, 2015:97– 98). In view of the need to assure the quality of quality assurance agencies, international networks have engaged in developing guidelines for quality assurance agencies to put in place internal quality assurance procedures for their own accountability (Hou *et al.*, 2015:98). The guidelines in part emphasise the need for quality assurance agencies to continuously improve their own quality activities to effectively operate and contribute towards the achievement of their objectives (Hou *et al.*, 2015:98).

As stakeholders in higher education are interested in the quality of quality assurance agencies, the concern over accountability of quality assurance agencies escalates, demonstrating that they are serious about assuring quality and that they have a positive impact on the quality of higher education (Hou *et al.*, 2015:95). Efforts to attend to this concern have resulted in debates and studies on the impact of quality assurance systems in higher education, as in the study by Silva *et al.* (1997) in Chile, the study by Bejan *et al.* (2015) in Germany, Finland and Romania, and as reviewed by Liu *et al.* (2015), discussed in detail in Section 2.9.

The need for accountability has led to the development of international recognition systems for quality assurance agencies such as the Council for Higher Education in the USA, ENQA in Europe and the National Network for Quality Assurance Agencies and Federation of Accrediting Agencies in the Philippines (Hou *et al.*, 2015:96). The expectation to account for the quality of their activities has led quality assurance agencies to seek recognition from umbrella bodies to legitimise their activities at national and international level. The global quality forces are challenging quality assurance agencies to demonstrate that the quality of their own operations meets externally determined standards as well as international standards (Hou *et al.*, 2015:96).

As the quality assurance agencies are required to guarantee the credibility of their quality process, the proposition is also meant to ensure that the quality agencies remain current and

relevant in response to the changing nature of higher education (Hou *et al.*, 2015:98). Stakeholders desire to have quality assurance agencies that are self-critical, objective and open-minded when checking the quality of higher education institutions (Hou *et al.*, 2015:95). International quality assurance networks are considered the final quality guardians to review reviewers; they scrutinise agency reviewers to see whether the reviews were conducted in an appropriate manner and in adherence to international standards (Hou *et al.*, 2015:97).

The effort to assure the internal quality of quality assurance agencies, to create umbrella bodies to oversee national quality assurance agencies and to create guidelines to define the operations of quality assurance agencies implies aspirations for universality in assuring the quality of higher education using a single quality mechanism. Nonetheless, the internal quality mechanisms of quality assurance agencies reflect peculiar contexts that define their existence and usefulness rendering attempts for designing a universal quality assurance system unattainable.

In conclusion, it is a challenge to have a universal quality assurance system for higher education, the reason being that the definition of quality varies, as it is stakeholder-relative and contextual. However, the internationalisation of graduate quality, the guidelines on assuring external quality and efforts to assure the quality of quality assurance agencies show that there are commonalities in assuring external quality. Therefore, it is in view of the commonalities that researchers have continued to seek effective ways of assuring quality in the higher education system.

6.3 Quest for effectiveness in assuring external quality

The conclusion that a universal recipe for assuring quality in higher education would be difficult to design does not necessarily liberate external quality assurance agencies from the responsibility of sustaining quality. It is just a pragmatic reality. As such, scholars have continued to establish suggestions that can help to effectively assure and sustain quality in higher education. Some of these suggestions are discussed in the subsequent sub-sections.

6.3.1 Features of an effective quality assurance system

Quality assurance agencies have a responsibility to demonstrate the effectiveness of their quality assurance system. Kis (2005:30–32) suggests the following as some features of an effective quality assurance system:

- Clarity of purpose: Expectations among stakeholders regarding the aims and the outcomes for assuring quality differ, hence the aim of assuring quality must be clear.
- Legitimacy: The external quality system needs legitimation to create impact in assuring quality through either regulation or support from stakeholders.
- Dynamic link between internal and external processes: External quality arrangements should be complementary to the internal quality process.
- Flexibility and confidence in higher education institutions and internal processes: External quality agencies should emphasise the re-establishment of trust and confidence in the internal quality process.
- Adequate follow-up procedures and feedback linked to action: External quality agencies should have clear follow-up procedures leading to appropriate action and improvement from successful evaluation.
- Regular and cyclic quality monitoring viewed as a process: External quality assurance must be regular and cyclical to encourage continuous improvement in assuring quality.
- Prudence and flexibility in linking results to funding: A careful balance of performance and consequences should be maintained, as the issue of linking quality results to funding is controversial.

The features of an effective quality assurance system as suggested by Kis provide insights for policy makers and implementers of the quality assurance policy into the considerations applicable to establishing and sustaining quality for higher education.

6.3.2 Characteristics of good practice in external quality assurance

Grifoll, Hopbach, Kekalainen, Lugano, Rozsnyai and Shopov (2012: 26) in the third ENQA survey on external quality procedures in Europe invited quality agencies to identify some of the characteristics of good practice with which quality assurance agencies were mostly satisfied, and which could impact positively on the development and implementation of quality assurance activities in the future.

The areas of good practices reported by Grifoll *et al.* (2012:25–27) are the following:

- Practices regarding external quality assurance procedures: Good practices involve embracing a variety of approaches at both programme and institutional levels, such as accreditation, certification, auditing, validation and recognition.

- Practices that enhance stakeholders' involvement: Good practices enhance involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance of higher education and attempt to increase the participation of different stakeholders in external quality assurance procedures.
- Practices regarding infrastructure and resources of agencies: Good practices aim at improving the internal infrastructure of agencies and centre on the growing importance of the use of information and the generation of electronic platforms and software tools to deal with the external quality assurance procedures of agencies.

The survey identified areas that quality assurance agencies could consider for implementation and the authors suggest a vision for the future of quality assurance reviews and elucidate the type of activities on which agencies concentrate part of their energy and interests (Grifoll *et al.*, 2012:25).

6.3.3 Common elements of national quality assurance frameworks

There have been international efforts through studies, literature reviews and conferences to consider commonalities in national external quality assurance frameworks.

Following the survey for the European Union on national quality frameworks in France, the Netherlands and the UK, by van Vught and Westerheijden (1993 cited in Billing 2004:117), van Vught and Westerheijden (1993) list common elements of quality assurance frameworks for higher education:

- A national agency is required to coordinate and support quality assurance within institutions and which is independent of government.
- Self-evaluation as a vital focus for the external quality assurance process.
- External peer review should be conducted to explore self-evaluation in the higher education institution through site visits.
- These evaluation activities should be publicly reported.
- There is no direct relationship of the results of external quality assurance to funding of higher education institutions.

Vroeijenstijn (2003:81–82) suggests the following for a general quality assurance model:

- Self-analysis and external assessment by peers
- External assessment organised by an independent agency
- A public report of the external assessment

- Internal quality care in institutions in which the quality agency looks beyond quality procedures put in place to the quality of inputs, process and outputs
- Accountability of external assessment.

Shabani *et al.*, (2014:148) in a conceptual framework for analysing quality assurance in higher education in Africa, identified the following as functions quality assurance agencies perform:

- Assessing institutions and /or programmes
- Approving higher education public and private institutions
- Approving new academic programmes and higher education institutions
- Establishing minimum academic standards
- Carrying out annual performance reviews
- Monitoring and accrediting institutions and programmes

Harman (1996:43, 88) considered the following common elements of new systems of quality assurance that have emerged internationally:

- Peer review and site visits
- High degree of independence of managing agent
- Reporting of results and method used
- Link between outcomes of assessments and funding decisions
- Levels of evaluation, at either systems level (national reviews of disciplines and institutional evaluations) or at institutional level (departments, faculties, schools, programmes)
- Follow-up activities after reporting.

Materu (2007:23) and, Okebukelo and Fonteyne (2014:19) considered the activities of quality assurance agencies in countries across the African continent and noted a convergence in the activities of quality assurance agencies despite quality agencies being at different levels of development. Quality assurance agencies at programme and/or institutional level used accreditation and auditing as approaches to assure quality in higher education while going through similar methodological elements of:

- Self-assessment,
- Peer review,
- Site visits,
- A written report,

- Declaration of status.

The attempt by scholars to show the commonalities among individual national quality assurance systems provides a direction in thinking about higher education quality and the practices available in the management of quality assurance in higher education systems (Harman, 1996:45). The common elements are therefore a rich source of information providing alternative or additional data to better the existing quality assurance frameworks and helping to indicate points of strength and weakness in the quality assurance frameworks.

6.3.4 Recommended strategies for assuring quality in the higher education system

Harman (1996:91–96) recommends some strategies to consider when assuring quality in the higher education system. The recommendations are particularly suggested to ministers and senior officials, the academic core and quality agencies, as outlined below:

- Accept that new initiatives and approaches may be necessary: Traditional approaches to assuring quality have proved to be inadequate to operate in the new international environment with increased competition in tradable services such as education and increased mobility of skilled and professional labour.
- Choose from a wide variety of approaches and methodologies that are available and that have been widely tested in several countries and institutions: Extensive experiential data and documentation about the value of a variety of different approaches are available for analysis before any decision is made.
- Look for an approach and methodology that not only suit the system, but are also cost-effective and likely to gain the support of academic staff: The quality initiative should fit well the culture and operational norms of institutions. If a good fit is not achieved, there is a likelihood of resistance, especially from academic staff. In addition, cost-effectiveness is important in view of the pressure on institutional budgets.
- Try to include an approach that incorporates elements of self-study, peer review and external reporting: International experience demonstrates clearly the value of self-studies, peer review and external reporting of the results of an evaluation process.
- Place major emphasis on clear guidelines, openness, review of documentation and analysis of evidence: A quality assurance mechanism should have clearly written guidelines, and processes should be as open as possible to develop confidence of all those involved.

- Develop mechanisms that ensure fairness in the processes employed: Fairness in processes involved is essential to generate and maintain wide support for the process.
- At systems level, consider the desirability of incorporating elements of both disciplinary reviews and institutional assessments: The quality assurance mechanism should consider horizontal reviews of disciplines or departments and reviews of institutions.
- Place major emphasis on improvement in quality at institutional level: A quality assurance system should desire to achieve continuous improvement by emphasising quality management at institutional level.
- Take care to work out and specify clear external reporting arrangements prior to the commencement of the first review: The issue of a report after evaluation should be openly discussed in the development phase of any quality assurance mechanism. There should be a clear specification of external reporting requirements.

Why discuss generalisations? I discuss generalisations in a quest to establish sustenance in assuring quality for the Zambian higher education system. In this quest, I appreciate that all quality assurance agencies operate in their own national context and that a quality assurance system cannot be transplanted from one country to another. The generalisations provide data that can be used to design quality assurance systems that can work in specific contexts. In other words, the point of convergence provides a useful resource base for moving forward towards improving and sustaining quality in the higher education system.

With the support of Vroeijenstijn's (2003:81) argument that there are more similarities than differences in answering the question, "How is quality assured in the higher education?" than in "Why is quality being assured?", generalisations have provided insights into how quality can be assured and sustained.

6.4 Considerations for sustaining quality assurance for the Higher Education

Authority

The discussion of sustaining quality assurance for the university system in Zambia is suggestive, arising from the understanding and interpretation of the current quality assurance activities of the HEA. I consider the suggested aspects effective in sustaining quality assurance for Zambian universities because of the likely impact these aspects may have on sustaining quality in the university system. The articulations are made with an appreciation of quality

assurance being both local and international, and that assuring quality is cyclic, requiring sustainability.

6.4.1 Legitimacy

The aspect of legitimacy, understood as acceptance of authority, is central in determining the sustenance of quality assurance activities for the university system. Traditionally, state regulation seems to ease acceptance of external quality assurance in the higher education system (Billing, 2004:122). Recently, however, besides regulation, stakeholders such as students, academics, quality assurance bodies, experts and the labour market legitimise the quality assurance activities of quality assurance agencies, as quality has a stakeholder-specific meaning (Cheung, 2015:155).

Why seek legitimisation of the quality assurance agency? The first reason is ownership. If the core actors such as academics accept external quality assurance as part of their own actions, the internal quality assurance system will succeed in improving and sustaining the quality assurance activities (Cheung, 2015:155). To create ownership of external quality assurance, the quality assurance agency should be involved in higher education institutions in the development of internal quality assurance mechanisms, in monitoring the major phases of internal quality assurance, in training peer reviewers and in orienting universities for preparation for institutional reviews.

In addition, the quality assurance agency can create ownership of quality assurance activities by including stakeholders in the quality assurance activities of the agency. Students can for example be allowed to participate in quality assurance evaluations and to provide experiences from their perspectives (Ryan, 2015:8). Academics can be involved for expert advice on learning programmes as designers of academic programmes; employers to opine on the relevance of learning programmes in the labour market and, when solicited, to provide feedback on graduate performance; and international stakeholders for the purpose of increasing the visibility of the agency's independence (Grifoll *et al.*, 2012:26).

The second reason for seeking legitimisation of the quality assurance agency is recognition. The recognition modes of quality assurance agencies available include built-in checks, the umbrella organisations mechanism, periodic assessment of agencies, the registration of agencies and following the practices or principles of international networks (Hou *et al.*, 2015:97). Hou *et al.* (2015:97) explain that in the built-in checks mode, quality assurance agencies are required to submit their plans and annual reports to government, which makes the plans and annual reports

public to ensure transparency and strengthen accountability. In the umbrella organisations mode, quality assurance agencies need to obtain regular national recognition from an independent umbrella body, as an accountability measure. In the periodic assessment mode, the periodic assessment of agencies by external assessors is necessitated by some internal need, as in meta-evaluation, while in the registration mode, the quality assurance agencies comply substantially with a specific standard in order to be admitted to an international register, as in the European Quality Assurance Register for higher education. Lastly, in the mode of following the practices or principles of international networks, quality assurance agencies conduct a regular external review based on criteria and guidelines of international networks to maintain their membership.

The HEA tends to belong to the built-in checks mode, as it is a grant-aided institution. The MoHE performs the role of recognition. The recognition of the quality assurance agency demands greater awareness of the attributes and requirements of quality assurance organisations worldwide (Ryan, 2015:3). The international quality assurance networks are considered as the final quality guardians to review the reviewers; they scrutinise agency reviewers to determine whether reviews are conducted in an appropriate manner and in adherence to international standards (Hou *et al.*, 2015:97). Recognition of the national quality assurance agency by the external quality assurance network is essential in order to convince external stakeholders of the quality of programmes and that higher education institutions are acting responsibly (Harman, 1996:43). Stakeholders should be well engaged for the ultimate success of quality assurance.

Therefore, for a quality assurance agency to sustain quality assurance activities in higher education, it needs not only regulation, but also to earn support from stakeholders. External quality assurance activities might be steered by compliance with regulation, but sustenance is dependent on the extent to which external quality activities are supported by stakeholders.

6.4.2 Independence of quality assurance agencies

In general, national quality assurance systems are established by law, governments and ministries of education and funded by the state; sometimes they are established privately and owned collectively by higher education institutions, and sometimes they could still be privately established, but nominally independent of government and the higher education institutions (Billing, 2004:120; ESIB, 2002:31). Despite most quality assurance agencies being established and funded by the state, these agencies should be independent of government (ESIB, 2002:31).

It is necessary to have an independent quality assurance agency to free the system from government and/or political influence that might favour some stakeholders (Materu, 2007:55). It is supposed that if external quality assurance is to be sustained, the quality assurance agency should be independent to allow fairness and flexibility in its practices. It is argued that without independence, as with any quality assurance system, there are possibilities that reviews and assessment procedures used may be aimed at particular participants and hence the quality assurance system may not strictly operate fairly (Harman, 1996:94).

When the quality assurance agency is independent, it has the ability to exercise fairness. Fairness is essential in quality assurance procedures to generate and maintain wide support for the quality assurance process (Harman, 1996:94). Support from stakeholders, especially academics, generates commitment rather than compliance, which works towards sustaining external quality assurance. In addition, when the quality assurance system is independent, it is free from special influences, accepting diverse views and interests of stakeholders and moving towards reconciling those views and interests (Cheung, 2015:155).

Materu (2007:55) suggests greater institutional participation in covering costs as a way of increasing the independence of the quality assurance agency, as external quality assurance involves considerable cost. The independence of the quality assurance agency could also be increased if the agency is governed by elected boards of nominees from universities, such as academic and administrative staff, student representatives nominated by university unions, representatives of employers, other stakeholders, and lay members representing the role of higher education in the wider society (ESIB, 2002:31). This would allow challenges to proposed nominations and if an appropriate reason is given, the nomination can be removed and another person chosen (Harman, 1996:94). When the governing board is established by political and/or government appointment, there is reluctance to dissolve the quality assurance governing board when it is underperforming, as that would appear to be an admission of failure by the appointing authorities (Kis, 2005:16).

The HEA is semi-autonomous. As a quality assurance system established by the Zambian government, the Minister of Higher Education appoints the 11 members of the board of the quality assurance agency to implement directives, as stipulated in the provisions of the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 (MESVTEE, 2013:103). Considering the possible influences of governments on quality assurance agencies, as discussed above, it is hoped that the HEA will aspire to be independent as the agency matures. As the Zambian quality assurance system is

nascent, special influences from stakeholders such as government need to be kept in check to sustain quality assurance in the university system.

6.4.3 The cost of assuring external quality

The cost of assuring external quality involves the setting up of the quality assurance agency and the setting up of procedures for assuring quality (Kis, 2005:11). Other costs incurred are in relation to site visits, remuneration of experts, administrative and faculty time for self-study, administrative time for preparation of data and follow-up (Kis, 2005:12; Materu, 2007:26). There are also factors with direct cost implications, such as the number of higher education institutions in the national system; the focus of the quality review, whether higher education institutions or academic programmes; the frequency of evaluations, whether reviews are carried out as part of periodic monitoring or on demand; or groupings of subjects/disciplines being reviewed (Kis, 2005:12)

Except in the USA, where quality assurance agencies are generally private, independent of government but established by law and government-funded (Mengquan *et al.*, 2016:76), most quality assurance agencies are public and funded by government (Hou *et al.*, 2015:100; Materu, 2007:19–20). The cost of assuring quality in the higher education system is critical to the success and sustenance of quality assurance activities, although the source of funding for the quality assurance agency sometimes affects its independence (Materu, 2007:19–20), the reason being that the quality assurance agency may feel obliged to carry out the funders' wishes rather than those suggested by its agenda and mission or by stakeholders with an interest in university education (Hou *et al.*, 2015:104).

In a survey of 17 members of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network, Hou *et al.* (2015:103) found that the cost of external quality assurance was considered more prohibitive by private quality assurance agencies than by public quality assurance agencies. This implies that the cost of assuring quality threatens the legitimation and independence of quality assurance agencies as well as the existence of privately owned quality assurance agencies, yet the monetary resource is important for quality assurance activities to be sustained.

Therefore, to sustain quality assurance activities, the quality assurance agency should engage approaches and methods that do not only suit the system, but are also cost-effective and likely to gain the support of academics (Harman, 1996:91). Such a consideration is necessary because universally there has been increasing pressure on institutional budgets and decreased funding per student. In addition, the consideration is necessary because critics of external quality

assurance argue that it is costly and inefficient in achieving lasting improvement in universities, that the excessive cost incurred does not reflect value gained from the process and that significant resources spent on quality bureaucracies could be better spent on internal quality assurance mechanisms instead, as it carries the risk of impression management (Kis, 2005:16).

6.4.4 Professionalisation of quality assurance

Professionalism is understood as having capacities and competences to successfully exercise an occupation, while professionalisation refers to a status or authority of a profession (Cheung, 2015:152). Effective quality assurance depends largely on the availability of highly qualified faculty members and administrators within institutions and competent professional and technical staff in national quality assurance agencies (Materu, 2007:48). Consequently, those working in quality assurance, whether internal or external quality assurance, need to perform their jobs with high levels of professionalism (Woodhouse, 2013:6). The need for professionalism in quality assurance agencies led to the creation of Guidelines for Good Practice in Quality Assurance by the INQAAHE in 2003, and later to devising a postgraduate certificate in quality assurance (Woodhouse, 2013:6).

Professionalisation is necessary because of the challenges that are posed by some learning modes such as online programmes and the existence of virtual and CBHE institutions. Without the required competences it might be challenging for quality assurance agencies to ascertain the quality of services being provided and sustain quality assurance in higher education. It might also be challenging for the quality assurance agency without professionalism to provide quality services in a responsible manner, to commit to improvement in professional practice, to uphold ethical considerations and to seek integrity in the provision of quality assurance services (Cheung, 2015:153).

Professionalisation enables quality assurance agencies to be in a better position to make informed decisions concerning the recognition of qualifications earned abroad and to be able to compare the level of foreign and local qualifications (Martin, 2011:2). Professionalisation of quality assurance agencies also avails an opportunity to national authorities that often lack competent human resources and efficient tools and infrastructure for monitoring to build the capacity of personnel of quality assurance agencies according to the role they envisage to play in quality assurance.

Developing the skills and attitudes of individuals who are to lead in quality assurance initiatives is the real requisite for sustaining quality assurance development (Cheung, 2015:157). As

professionalisation is aimed at building the capacities of those entrusted with assuring quality for higher education, it is one way of improving and sustaining quality. It comes with the realisation of the huge responsibility quality assurance agencies have of reviewing quality mechanisms within higher education institutions, of working with stakeholders in higher education, of creating and implementing quality assurance strategies and of measuring learning outputs/outcomes to safeguard the interests of students, academic standards and the quality of higher education and to provide employers and students with academic standards to help them in decision making.

6.4.5 The quality of quality assurance agencies

Quality assurance agencies as quality guardians of higher education institutions have an obligation to demonstrate that the quality assurance process as implemented by them achieves the desired objectives effectively (AUQA, 2006:29; Hou *et al.*, 2015:95). To this end, they become accountable to many stakeholders to prove the credibility of the process and to ensure the objectivity of the outcome (AUQA, 2006:29; Hou *et al.*, 2015:95).

To demonstrate the quality of quality assurance, national quality agencies monitor their operations through internal controls such as internal audits, annual reporting to stakeholders and performance against targets; engaging in self-evaluation against targets and action plans; collecting feedback from higher education institutions, peer reviewers (such as well-regarded academics and/or experts) and other stakeholders; participating in international conferences and workshops; and sharing information with other quality agencies and international and intergovernmental organisations with an interest in quality assurance (AUQA, 2006:29).

To assure the quality of quality assurance agencies, valuable experiences from regional networks have been suggested, such as the creation of regional umbrella bodies in charge of overseeing and supporting national quality assurance agencies; the creation of regional pools of external reviewers from which national quality assurance bodies could draw to solve the problem of a limited number of local reviewers; the use of a neighbouring country's quality assurance body for certain quality assurance tasks, such as institutional audits, for which it would be difficult to develop local cost-effective solutions; and linking up with quality assurance units of regional universities (Martin, 2011:7), such as the Association of African Universities and SARUA, when designing a mechanism for external quality assurance.

In addition to the above, the quality of the quality assurance agency is supported by qualified staff working in quality assurance agencies. However, Materu (2007:49) observed that quality

assurance systems in Africa experience difficulties in finding sufficient numbers of academics qualified and available to serve as peer reviewers and that those involved in the accrediting agencies lack appropriate training. There is a possibility that the HEA, being in Zambia, which is part of sub-Saharan Africa, may not be spared from the human capacity constraint, yet quality assurance agencies should be able to practise what they preach and demonstrate their quality to stakeholders in a systematic manner (AUQA, 2006:29).

Therefore, to sustain quality assurance, ensuring the quality of the quality assurance agency is necessary to keep in check new developments and to adhere to set standards. The responsibility for assuring the quality of the quality agency mainly lies with the quality assurance agency, although sometimes government or a recognised authority reviews quality agencies externally (Hou *et al.*, 2015:101; Materu, 2007:55).

6.4.6 Reporting

Reporting is necessary because it is the channel for providing available information on the quality assurance activities of the quality assurance agency and higher education institutions. It is also within the sphere of reporting that the power of sharing information is realized as stakeholders are availed an opportunity to suggest ways for improving and sustaining quality assurance for the higher education system.

Reports should be transparent and related to goals of the quality assurance agency and the distinct missions and goals of individual higher education institutions to sustain quality assurance. In addition, external quality assurance is a significant undertaking for any government and its higher education sector in terms of time, cost and implications for the quality assurance processes, which is why decisions must be reported appropriately (AUQA, 2006:23).

Whenever the quality assurance exercise results in a report, the report generally focuses on the conclusions and recommendations of the self-assessment and the site visit, although with considerable national variations on how conclusions and recommendations are formulated (AUQA, 2006:24). Some reports are summative and present only the analysis of results, that is, the judgement of experts in the form of conclusions or recommendations, for example on recognition of an institution for accreditation or approval to offer a learning programme, which might just state accredited or not accredited (AUQA, 2006:24). Other reports are formative, in which expert judgements are represented in a relevant analytical context together with the argumentation and documentation on why specific recommendations were offered, as in

institutional audits (AUQA, 2006:24). The trend in reports generated by quality assurance agencies highlights commendations as well as areas that need improvement (AUQA, 2006:24).

There are arguments regarding to whom the final report should be made available. In some systems, reports are published, while in others they are not (Kis, 2005:11). It is argued that report publication depends on the approach used by the quality assurance agency: a report is not published when the agency carries out accreditation as the primary activity, while reports are published when the agency is doing evaluations (Kis, 2005:11). Report publication also depends on the purpose, that is, for accountability, improvement or information. Therefore, some agencies make the reports available to stakeholders such as government or funding agencies, others make the summary alone available to the public, while agencies that believe in full disclosure place the full report on their website (AUQA, 2006:25). Whatever the case, Harman (1996:44) recommends that the institution being reviewed should have an opportunity to comment on the draft report before it is finalised. This possibly helps to clarify misunderstandings and build trust essential for sustaining quality assurance.

The argument against disclosure of reports by higher education institutions and external reviewers relates to the implications of full disclosure of the actual weaknesses of the programme or institution if they know that the report has to be published (AUQA, 2006:24). In this regard, some agencies maintain that reports are for higher education institutions and what the public needs is only the knowledge of accreditation status, while those who support disclosure argue that it is better to have an honest and complete but confidential report at the introductory stage of quality assurance processes than to have bowdlerised but published reports (AUQA, 2006:24).

Therefore, the concern regarding access to quality assurance reports indicates increasing pressure faced by quality assurance agencies in making known the results of the reviews, yet the content of the review report has the potential to either jeopardise or sustain quality assurance for the higher education system. The quality assurance agency should therefore discuss reporting issues openly and specifically state the external reporting requirements to stakeholders (Harman, 1996:96).

6.4.7 Follow-up and appeals

A follow-up is expected after the disclosure of the quality assurance outcome. The higher education institution is expected to take whatever actions necessary in relation to the recommendations or issues noted in the review (AUQA, 2006:26). In some quality assurance

systems, funding links, incentives and sanctions may be motivating factors for higher education institutions to act on the review outcomes, while in most systems the professional commitment of higher education institutions leads to actions and improvement (AUQA, 2006:26; Kis, 2005:32).

Who should be responsible for follow-up? Is it government, the quality assurance agency or higher education institutions? The higher education institutions are responsible for planning and implementing follow-up measures (AUQA, 2006:26; Kis, 2005:32), although depending on the recommendation, other stakeholders such as government or the MoE may react on the review (AUQA, 2006:26).

Various approaches are used in follow-ups. Some quality assurance agencies have built-in follow-up procedures that require binding actions to be taken by higher education institutions; others have a 'soft touch' in which higher education institutions are expected on their own to make follow-ups based on professional commitment; and yet another approach links follow-up to subsequent reviews (AUQA, 2006:26). Although the responsibility for follow-up lies with the higher education institution, government or the quality assurance agency should take measures when the higher education institution does nothing with the recommendations (Kis, 2005:32).

The follow-up approaches render quality assurance as a cyclic process, as the responsibility to check on whether recommendations have been acted upon lies with either government or the quality assurance agency. Because the quality assurance agency can investigate improvements of the review process, quality assurance for the higher education system can be sustained.

Besides follow-ups, appeals may result after disclosure of an outcome. Quality assurance agencies should have a clear policy on the appeals mechanism that allows the higher education institution to express its reservations about objections to the outcome or lack of confidence in the quality assurance outcome (AUQA, 2006:25). The agencies that have a formal accreditation function that has consequences for the survival of the higher education institutions and programmes, such as recognition of a higher education institution or approval to offer a programme, need to have a well-defined appeals procedure (AUQA, 2006:25). The appeals help quality assurance agencies to pay careful attention to their declared principles and to ensure that their processes are managed professionally (AUQA, 2006:25).

In offering an opportunity for stakeholders to contest decisions resulting from a review, the quality assurance agency builds trust in the quality assurance system, which is essential for sustaining quality assurance for the higher education sector.

6.4.8 Clarity of purpose

Expectations regarding the aims and the outcomes of quality assurance may differ among stakeholders, hence the aim of external quality assurance must be clear (Kis, 2005:30). The aims define the purposes for which quality assurance systems are established, which appear to be variants of a mix of the same functions, such as the developmental (improvement or information) and judgemental (legal, financial or planning) functions (Billing, 2004:115). Commonly, the purposes for external quality assurance in higher education are improvement of quality, to publicly avail information on quality and standards, to accredit higher education institutions and programmes, to provide public accountability for standards achieved and for use of money, and to contribute to the higher education sector planning process (Billing, 2004:115; Mengquan *et al.*, 2016:74).

Whatever the purpose might be, one of the characteristics of best practices for quality assurance agencies is to be consistent with the mission and core values of the higher education institutions (Kis, 2005:30). Promoting diversity helps higher education institutions to experience ownership of the quality assurance system, which is essential for sustaining quality in higher education institutions.

6.4.9 Information platform

The information platform for the quality assurance agency is necessary because information empowers stakeholders, particularly higher education institutions, to make an informed decision on options available for quality improvement and for sustaining quality in the higher education system.

The information platform of the quality assurance agency is a forum for the publication of guidelines, handbooks and resource materials for the use of higher education institutions; training programmes to management, coordinators and reviewers; and meetings and conferences (AUQA, 2006:28). In providing resources for assuring the quality of higher education institutions, the quality assurance agency aims at nurturing an academic community that is sensitive to quality-related issues and that might contribute to the sustenance of quality assurance of their own higher education institutions.

The information platform, besides being a resource, provides information to the quality assurance agency to counter possible resistance: from academic staff who may feel threatened by external quality requirements and those who may feel overburdened because quality assurance is time-consuming and costly, as academics have their core activities alongside quality assurance activities; because it is difficult to define quality except as academics and the quality assurance agency might have different definitions of quality; and because of power relations that might arise between academic staff and management, and academics and the quality assurance agency (IUCEA, 2010:7).

The information platform serves as a learning platform that disseminates good practices regarding quality improvement and sustenance particularly for higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies.

6.4.10 Feedback

Feedback is a dialogue between the quality assurance agency and stakeholders meant to improve and sustain quality assurance in the higher education system. The proof of the success of quality assurance is not only in the execution of evaluations by the quality assurance agency, but also in the satisfaction of stakeholders.

In seeking feedback, the quality assurance agency may ask for the opinion of students about the programmes offered and the way in which they are offered; on how the alumni think about their higher education; of academics and society about higher education and its graduates; and of employers and the labour market about the graduates (Vroeijerstijn, 2003:87, 90). Therefore, to sustain quality, the quality assurance agency should have a structured method to obtain feedback from all stakeholders for the measurement of their satisfaction.

To visualise the impact of the quality assurance strategies widely, the HEA may need to conduct a customer satisfaction survey, as its purpose in assuring quality, is to ensure delivery of quality higher education services. Since the HEA started operating in 2015, it is yet to begin executing responsibilities related to service quality (Mwiya, Bwalya, Siachinji, Sikombe, Chanda & Chawala, 2017: 1044). This will give confidence to universities in the provision of higher education, as more than 70% of universities are uncertain of their response to the human resource need since the last comprehensive survey was undertaken in 1976 (MoE, 1996:92).

In conclusion, the considerations for sustaining quality assurance in higher education reveal the strong linkage between internal and external quality assurance systems. For the quality

assurance agency to sustain quality in universities, it needs to interact with higher education institutions and nurture a spirit of collaboration.

6.5 Summary

Sustaining the practices of assuring quality in higher education institutions is a necessity. With the massification, internationalisation and individualisation of higher education institutions and the diversification of higher education providers, external quality assurance mechanism of varied types, based on a range of purposes, have been established worldwide to assure quality and consequently sustain it in the higher education system.

To ensure the sustainability of quality assurance practices, there is a need to acknowledge that quality is a co-product resulting from the meshing of external quality arrangements with the internal quality mechanism. The reason is that the responsibility for assuring higher education quality lies with the individual higher education institutions, while external quality agencies are responsible for reviewing the higher education quality guarantee mechanism and academic quality within higher education institutions. In other words, internal quality assurance is the cornerstone of quality assurance in higher education, while external quality assurance is the condition for ensuring the credibility of the results of the internal evaluation.

Considering that quality assurance is not a one-off activity, sustainability is required. Consensus on how quality can be assured and the commonalities that have been established to seek effectiveness in assuring external quality provide a valuable resource to consider ways of sustaining it. Consequently, the suggested considerations for sustaining quality are areas that possibly need strengthening or consideration as the Zambian quality assurance system matures, bearing in mind that the national quality assurance agency, the HEA, is embryonic.

Therefore, this chapter discussed the necessity for sustaining quality in universities and suggested options that the HEA might consider as it matures. The next chapter is a reflection on the quality assurance activities of the HEA, and upon this reflection, the chapter draws recommendations for the HEA.

Chapter 7: Towards a sustainable quality assurance system for higher education

7.1 Introduction

This study aimed at establishing how the strategies articulated and implemented by the national quality assurance agency in Zambia, the HEA, ensured quality educational services in the Zambian university system in view of its establishment in 2014. The research question that guided the study was: How do the clarification and implementation of quality assurance strategies enable the Zambian Higher Education Authority to ensure quality educational offerings in both public and private universities? In seeking clarity to answer the main research question, I developed four subsidiary questions (see Section 1.5.). The reason was to diffuse this primary research question into manageable and focused areas, namely the conceptual analysis of quality and quality assurance, the HEA framework, the strategies used by the HEA to assure quality in universities and assuring quality as a sustainable practice for the HEA, which I oriented into attendant chapters to address these areas.

In addition to the closure provided to the reader in the chapters as indicated above, I briefly reflect on the methodology and then elaborate on the findings of the study. I also explicate the contributions of this study to the Zambian university system and consequently make recommendations to encourage the HEA to move towards sustaining quality assurance for universities. Thereafter, I deliberate on the challenges and limitations of this study.

7.2 How useful was the interpretive methodology?

Interpretivism focuses on the meaningfulness of human action, arguing that there is rationality in human actions, as humans are not passive but actively choose how to respond to the environment. As meaning is the basis for interpretation and understanding, using interpretivism gave me an opportunity to articulate the rationality behind the establishment of the national quality assurance agency for the higher education system in Zambia, the HEA, and to deliberate on how the implemented strategies are assuring quality for the university system.

The establishment of the HEA and its intended purpose are discussed in the 1996 National Policy on Education and the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013. This entails that as a researcher, I engaged in a detailed reading of the text, supported by the interpretive methodology. As true meaning is rarely obvious, except by detailed study of the text, I

employed conceptual analysis and deconstruction analysis within the perimeters of the interpretive methodology to deepen my understanding.

7.2.1 Conceptual analysis

Conceptual analysis was understood as an analytic method of analysing and clarifying concepts. A concept is a term that is difficult to articulate despite being in common usage, such as ‘quality’, ‘quality assurance’ and ‘policy’ (see Section 1.6.3.1). Conceptual analysis was required because concepts are part of the text, and in the interpretation of the text, clarifying meaning or designating meaning in the usage of concepts was required to facilitate communication among scholars and non-experts (see Section 1.6.3.1). In this study, the clarification of the concepts of quality and quality assurance formed part of Chapter 2, as the two concepts were critical in the understanding of how quality is understood in the 1996 National Policy on Education document and the consequent implementation of quality assurance strategies that seemed to have emerged from this understanding.

As conceptual analysis mainly aims at clarity of meaning of constructs contained in statements describing a phenomenon, such as quality assurance, it does not adequately deal with subtleties implied in statements or claims, such as policy claims. To mitigate this limitation, deconstruction analysis was used.

7.2.2 Deconstruction analysis

Deconstruction analysis was useful in unravelling subtleties in statements or claims. It enabled me to actively question policy statements by critically analysing text (see Section 1.6.3.2; also Section 1.6.4). In analysing text critically, deconstruction helped to expose subtleties and to search for multiple ways in which text can be interpreted, bringing new insights into perspective. In addition, deconstruction made me appreciate that narratives sometimes do not live up to their own expectations, therefore, as I endeavoured to seek clarification on how quality in universities is assured, I needed to pay attention to what was articulated in the policy text as much as to what was absent, but pertinent.

The synopsis of the interpretive methodology demonstrates its adequacy in dealing with textual data, which data were critical in the generation of knowledge regarding quality assurance for universities in the Zambian higher education system.

7.3 Concisely, what were my findings?

7.3.1 Finding 1

Of the three strategies implemented by the HEA to assure quality in universities, none seems to cover both public and private universities comprehensively and equally (see Section 4.4).

Firstly, the strategy on the registration of private higher education institutions covers only private universities. It requires private universities to fulfil the registration requirements before establishment. The criteria for registration are important in establishing the quality of inputs and the quality of the process at the very initial and crucial stage of university establishment, but these criteria are only applicable to private universities, as public universities are established by the Minister of Higher Education through a declaration and are not subject to these criteria.

Secondly, the strategy on classification is not a legal requirement for both private and public universities. The classification platform provides an assessment of quality on all the core and non-core requirements used in assessment for registration of private higher education institutions. Although an important strategy, to my understanding, as it provides an opportunity for public universities to be assessed as they are exempted at establishment, this strategy is optional. Universities are at liberty whether to seek or not to seek classification. While quality for private universities is assured at establishment through registration, this criterion is not robust enough to capture public universities, which are established by declaration.

Thirdly, the accreditation of learning programmes in all public and private universities is a requirement. The regulation for the establishment of a private university demands the submission of an operational plan from which learning programmes are scrutinised by the HEA before establishment, and the regulation explicitly states that the proprietor of the private university shall not offer a programme for which they are not accredited. By implication, programmes in private universities that are operational are accredited. However, the Statutory Instrument No. 25 of 2016 that modifies earlier provisions of Part IV, Section 20 (h) of the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 neither states at what point a public university should accredit learning programmes, nor does it stipulate any implication if a public university offers a programme without accrediting it.

Therefore, as articulated above and discussed in Section 4.5, the HEA is currently (at the time of the study) is assuring quality for private universities as opposed to public universities in Zambia.

7.3.2 Finding 2

By establishment in terms of Part II, Section 6 (2, a; b), the HEA is mandated to publish on a regular basis information regarding developments in higher education institutions, including a list of higher education institutions established or registered, and an annual report on the state of higher education in Zambia (MESVTEE, 2013:102). Publication informs the Zambian citizens and other stakeholders on the ability of universities to satisfy the minimum quality standards for the provision of university education.

How then has the HEA fared? In view of the three implemented strategies, registered private universities as well as established public universities are published on the HEA website and in the government gazette. However, information on how public and private universities are performing on the classification platform and on the accreditation of institutions and accredited learning programmes in universities is currently neither on the HEA website nor published in the government gazette.

It was found that the HEA keeps stakeholders informed on the established and registered universities but does not provide information regarding the accreditation of learning programmes, which is essential in assuring stakeholders that the education being offered in universities meets acceptable local and international standards, and crucial also in providing a standpoint to parents and students to make an informed decision regarding the choice of programme and university. Therefore, the HEA is not adequately providing information to stakeholders.

7.3.3 Finding 3

The democratic environment in which the 1996 National Policy on Education was created had an influence in the articulation of the functions of the HEA. The liberal democratic environment encouraged the participation of private providers in the provision of university education, while the obligation to formulate policies that protect the Zambian citizens in a liberalised higher education system weighed heavy on government. Therefore, the analysis of the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 indicated that the focus in the formulation of policy regarding

quality assurance was more on private providers than on the massification factors that were changing the traditional operations of public universities.

This means that quality assurance is context-bound. Contextual features of liberalisation influenced policy formulation in the 1996 National Policy on Education to establish the HEA and consequently, the articulations of the implementation act, the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013. It is the liberal contextual features that influenced the design of the quality assurance strategies that the HEA is using to assure quality in universities.

7.3.4 Finding 4

In Chapter 2 I analysed the conception of quality assurance, which concept is relative to quality. As quality assurance is a relative concept, defined in relation to quality, it was also difficult to define (see Section 2.5). Nevertheless, quality assurance was understood as ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality is delivered, however defined and measured. This understanding of quality assurance implies that the mechanism or procedure designed to measure quality is based on the articulated definition. In other words, the understanding of quality determines the strategy for assuring it.

In the 1996 National Policy on Education, a quality graduate results from the quality of inputs and the quality of the process. This understanding of quality is reflected in quality assurance strategies implemented by the HEA to assure university quality, which focus on assuring the quality of inputs such as academic staff, management, facilities and students, and the process, namely the accreditation of learning programmes, to produce a quality graduate. In addition, the understanding of quality outputs as resulting from quality inputs and the quality of the process was largely demonstrated by the criteria for registration of private higher education institutions and the criteria for the accreditation of learning programmes, which were set to produce a quality graduate (see Section 5.2).

Therefore, the understanding of the concept of quality determines the mechanisms by which quality is assured. This is demonstrated by the strategies implemented by HEA to assure quality for the Zambian university system.

7.3.5 Finding 5

It was noted that although the input, process and output system provide the frame in which quality is understood and assured, the HEA concentrates more on the quality of inputs and the quality of the process rather than on the quality of outputs, as illustrated in the criteria for the

accreditation of learning programmes. The criteria for the accreditation of learning programmes do not have a component on feedback, addressing the opinion of stakeholders such as students, alumni, the labour market/employers and academic staff to make the system comprehensive and self-sustaining. Therefore, without the feedback loop, the strategies implemented by the HEA are more on control than improvement, as improvement results from the utilisation of the feedback loop.

7.4 How does this study inform stakeholders on quality assurance in higher education?

7.4.1 Contribution 1

This study has shown that there is a huge price that is to be paid if the quality of universities is not assured at both institutional and national level, as higher education generates positive externalities that are materialised in different ways. So far, the articulations of the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013 have indicated that policy on quality assurance is biased towards the private universities, hence a balanced approach is required. By identifying this subtlety in policy implementation, this study may strengthen policy on quality assurance bearing in mind that quality assurance is a tool for dealing with the massification of higher education in the entire higher education system.

7.4.2 Contribution 2

To some degree, I have discussed the extent of the impact of the national quality assurance agency of Zambia, the HEA. Of the three strategies used, firstly, the HEA adequately regulates the registration of private universities and adequately avails information on registered and established universities; secondly, the HEA accredits learning programmes in private universities based on the implication that “the proprietor of a private higher education institution shall not offer a programme for which they are not accredited”(HEA, 2015b: 34), although there is no information in the public domain yet, including the website of HEA, on the accreditation of universities and their learning programmes; and thirdly, the HEA has not accounted for the classification of universities strategy, despite classification of universities being one of the quality assurance strategies (there is no information to account for this activity).

Therefore, in the extent to which strategies are implemented, the HEA is currently (at the time of this study) assuring quality in private universities and not in public universities.

7.4.3 Contribution 3

The discussion of the extent of the impact of quality assurance (as in Contribution 2) by the HEA has provided an opportunity for the national quality assurance agency to refocus as it aspires to be the quality assurance system for higher education in Zambia. This study has also provided insights to policy makers to strengthen policy on quality assurance to enable the HEA to reach what it claims to be, namely the National Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Zambia.

7.4.4 Contribution 4

Though studies and literature reviews on the activities of quality assurance agencies on the African continent have increased, there has been an information gap in the literature on the specific activities of the quality assurance agency in Zambia. This study has mitigated this gap by providing information on how the HEA assures quality for the university system in Zambia, and to some extent has shown what the achievement of the HEA has been since it started assuring university quality in 2015.

7.5 So, what?

7.5.1 Recommendation 1

Quality assurance is inevitable for the higher education system. I recommend that the formulation of strategies for assuring quality for the university system reflect on quality assurance as a necessity for both public and private universities. The seeming silence on how quality is being assured in public universities is a point of weakness in the operations of the HEA. Therefore, the HEA should adopt strategies that ensure fairness in carrying out quality assurance activities for the university system.

7.5.2 Recommendation 2

As the HEA is nascent, this study has provided a wide resource for improving and sustaining its quality assurance activities. Currently, the HEA is focused more on control and regulation than on improvement and sustainability. The aspiration to become the National Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Zambia requires the support of other stakeholders in addition to regulation.

To ensure improvement, the HEA should emphasise institutional quality, as the responsibility of assuring quality lies with universities themselves, while, to ensure sustainability, the HEA

should establish a feedback link. The strategy for accrediting learning programmes should on one end deal with appeals, and on the other with feedback. As quality assurance is cyclic, improvement and sustainability come through feedback from stakeholders.

7.5.3 Recommendation 3

The HEA should expand the interaction platform with universities. The academics are at the core of quality assurance. They are part of the inputs into the university system, they design and run the process, and they produce the outputs. With the awareness that external quality is almost like an intrusion into the activities of academics, increasing their participation as peers with varied expertise is recommended. I also recommend an increase in the participation of other stakeholders besides the academics to increase the visibility of the HEA's independence.

7.6 Challenges and limitations of the study

Firstly, the information regarding the activities of the HEA was mainly obtained from their website, www.hea.org.zm, which kept updating information on documents and the number of private universities.

By April 2016, there were 13 registered private universities, which number increased to 36 by August 2016 (Gazette Notice No. 227 of 2016; Gazette Notice No. 232 & 561 of 2016); by April 2017 there were 55 private universities (I visited the HEA website on 20 April 2017), by September the total was 58 (I visited the website on 3 September 2017), and on 21 May 2018, the number of private universities was 60. The challenge was keeping the discussion regarding universities up to date.

Similarly, when I started writing, I was using the "Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Zambia March 2015 Draft 4", but in April 2015, this document was updated into final copy and later uploaded. The final document had nine additional pages from 53 to 62 with some information shifted to other pages. I preferred to use the final document "Quality Assurance System in Higher Education in Zambia April 2015", and I had to obtain both documents to check what was added and shifted to replace my references to the final document.

Secondly, the study was conceptual. I only used data that were in the public domain. I did not capture narratives of the HEA regarding its activities on quality assurance for Zambian universities.

Lastly, the study was interpretive, and despite the attempts that I made to maintain scholarly rigour through a detailed examination of the text, it is not free from further interpretation and re-interpretation, depending on the reader's interest and purpose.

7.7 Summary

In this chapter, I suggested a move towards a sustainable quality assurance system by discussing the findings, contributions, recommendations, challenges and limitations of the study in an effort to define the extent to which quality is being assured. The appreciation of the extent to which quality is being assured, I supposed, would motivate the HEA to self-reflection, as they strive, on one hand, to be the national quality assurance system, and on the other hand, to assure quality sustainably.

The next chapter is on implications. Discussing implications extends the value of this study beyond the quality assurance activities of the HEA.

Chapter 8: Extending the view of quality assurance in higher education

8.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to develop a reasoned account of how quality assurance strategies enable the HEA to ensure quality educational offerings at both public and private universities. I reached the understanding of how the HEA assures quality of universities by analysing the three implemented strategies. In extending the view of quality assurance in higher education, I address the implications of my findings for teaching and learning, the implications of the study for decolonised education and the effects of the study on decoloniality, and I envision the African university.

8.2 Implications of the findings for teaching and learning

8.2.1 The implications for assuring quality for private universities

Based on the finding that quality in private universities is assured, it is assumed that teaching and learning in private universities are of quality, meeting the articulated purpose for university education as anticipated by different stakeholders such as the students, government, employers and the university itself. The implication of this finding is that students will be motivated to engage in learning because they know that the purpose for which they are educated is being met. It is the appreciation of quality prevalent in the university by the individual student that other stakeholders such as government, employers and the university itself are likely to receive external benefits such as socio-economic development, for the government; a performance-oriented graduate, for the employer; and attainment of goals and missions, for the university.

Assuring quality for private universities implies that academics in private universities will be overburdened with the requirements of external quality assurance, as accreditation of the institution and learning programmes by default entails that the university agrees to periodic submission of accreditation renewal and review by the HEA (see Section 4.4.4). The extra workload that the academic staff do for external quality review and, consequently, the time that the academic staff spend on preparing for external reviews for the HEA, are at the expense of the time required for preparation for teaching. The workload and time constraint may compromise the quality of teaching and learning, bearing in mind that quality assurance is not a one-off activity.

In assuring quality for private universities, the HEA is creating an atmosphere that compels the entire university system to pay attention to the quality of teaching and learning. As articulated in Section 4.4., despite the subtleties stated in Section 4.5, the claim remains that the HEA assures quality for the university system of Zambia. The template for applying for accreditation of learning programmes for both public and private universities has practical guidelines on how to create learning programmes, in addition to the form particularly providing information on how the submission on learning programmes must be made which the higher education institution wishes to offer.

It could be argued too that by accrediting learning programmes, the HEA is encouraging universities to pay attention to the teaching and learning process, as the components in the criteria for accreditation focus on the aims and objectives of the programme; curricula; assessment; staff qualifications; facilities provided and available for teaching and learning; facilities, equipment and networks available to support teaching and learning; methods of delivery; and relevance of learning programmes to the labour market and other stakeholders (see Section 4.4.4). It is anticipated that the existence of criteria will generate stimuli for the entire university to align its activities to the requirements of the HEA, heightening a possibility of positive reactions to occur towards teaching and learning despite the quality assurance being selective. As universities are engrained with autonomy, the prevalence of quality assurance in the university atmosphere is assumed to be enough to steer them into action.

As the HEA is mandated to assure quality for the entire university system, assuring quality only in private universities may not result in quality teaching and learning, because the ‘significant others’, the public universities, are not meted by the same parameters. Regulation and sanctions to ensure implementation of quality assurance by the HEA may lead to a feeling of unfairness and imposition of the quality assurance system on academics in private universities, negatively affecting the quality of teaching and learning, as the staff may not possess intrinsic motivation to ensure quality for its own value.

Understanding that quality is being assured in private universities implies a possible redistribution of the university student population. Although, as discussed in sections 1.1 and 3.3, the number of students in private universities is not yet known, in general, student enrolments in public institutions on the African continent outnumber enrolments in private institutions (Teferra & Altbach, 2004:33). As quality is being assured in private universities, there is a possibility that Zambian citizens and others interested in university education may change their perception of private universities, in terms of which public universities are deemed

to be better than private universities. As a result, the possible redistribution of the student population, when realised, may lead to manageable student ratios in public universities, which is likely to positively enhance teaching and learning, as attention will be more focused on individual students.

8.2.2 The implication for quality as a co-product

As quality assurance ensures that the mechanisms for assuring quality in universities are in place to effect measurement of the desired quality, however defined, it is possible for the HEA and universities to reach consensus on what quality is and how it should be determined. Reaching consensus implies engaging in dialogue, which is a precondition for the HEA to implement quality assurance without universities having a feeling of imposition of external quality assurance. To the extent that universities might not be adequately consulted and engaged in decision making, quality assurance might have minimal impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The academics may not be motivated to put effort into teaching and learning as a way of resisting the imposition of the quality assurance system.

8.3 Implications of the study for decolonised education

8.3.1 What is decolonised education?

Education is a means by which individuals acquire knowledge about themselves (Joseph Mbembe, 2016:35) and the world around them. Joseph Mbembe (2016:35) emphasises that individuals should have knowledge of themselves before radiating outwards to discover peoples and the world around them. The emphasis on individuals having knowledge about themselves before radiating outwards is in view of the subjectivity of knowledge. As noted by Arukwe (2014:185), knowledge is never innocent, as it expresses the interests of its producers. Therefore, decolonising education is the call to address the epistemic violence of colonial knowledge (Heleta, 2016:12) through the de-Europeanisation of knowledge (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15). In decolonising education, knowledge must be generated from an African perspective. Africa has to be placed at the centre and not as a satellite of other countries (Joseph Mbembe, 2016:35).

Subsequently, decolonising education is a struggle over who generates knowledge and from where, what materials students should be exposed to, in what order and perspective, what is to be taught and the terms of what should be taught, not to some generic figure of a student but to the African child (Joseph Mbembe, 2016:35). Education promotes the acquisition of

knowledge. Knowledge is key in the decolonisation of education because it belongs to the epistemic domain (Mamdani, 2016:81), which has an influence in recreating the mindset. Therefore, decolonising education involves dismantling Eurocentric epistemic frameworks of knowledge production by engaging in new ways of thinking about creating knowledge.

8.3.2 What are the implications for decolonised education?

8.3.2.1 Implications for relevance

In decolonising higher education, one of the concerns is the quest for relevance. As quality assurance is stakeholder-relative and interpreted in context, continued assurance of the relevance of indigenous knowledge systems is possible once the decolonisation process is completed. The argument in decolonising higher education is that Africa is saddled with irrelevant knowledge (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:11), as the African higher education system remains a colonial outpost (Heleta, 2016:3). There is a need to decolonise to reclaim indigenous knowledge systems and cultures of Africa to inform, underpin and undergird the reawakening of the continent endogenously (Lebakeng, 2018:252). Therefore, decolonisation, when properly implemented, might produce a historically and socially grounded university that delivers relevant education to overcome obstacles to the socio-economic development of Africa.

The materials students are exposed to and the perspective that the learning materials hold continue to pollute the African mind with coloniality (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:11). The learning materials are deemed poisonous because they prevent the emergence of other thinking and do not empower students to question the present asymmetrical world order (Heleta, 2016:11; Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:11). The learning materials continue to alienate African children from the African context from the very moment they step into the university, as Africa is a victim of externally generated knowledge that is not informed by the geo- and biographical contextual understanding of the African condition (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:11, 14). Therefore, despite quality being assured by the national quality assurance system, including the quality of the learning materials to which students are exposed, the knowledge acquired through these learning materials is irrelevant to cultivating an alternative thought in students that liberates them from a domineering Eurocentric perspective.

8.3.2.2 Implications for scholarship

The terms under which teaching and learning should take place as well as what should be taught are largely determined by the individual university. Universities design the learning programmes, which activity includes determining objectives, content and assessments – aspects key in decolonising education. Universities therefore have a vantage position to support the cause for decoloniality, which involves the task of decolonisation of knowledge (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:14). With the mandate to create and design learning programmes, as well as being points of knowledge generation, universities could help to decolonise education by generating territorialised knowledge to counter imperialist epistemologies.

The current quality assurance systems in Africa do not seem to be grounded in an Afrocentric view despite quality assurance being situated. One of the reasons for this is the dependency syndrome of African scholarship, in which the intellectual does not write in a vacuum, but in a world saturated with others, while the other reason being that scholarship in Africa has been conditioned to respond to the reality and epistemology created by outsiders (Lebakeng, 2018:254). Subsequently, learning programmes are grounded in Western values that contradict the African value system (Kabanda, 2016:21). For these reasons, higher education institutions must undergo a process of decolonisation of both knowledge and the university as an institution (Joseph Mbembe, 2016:33) to dismantle the promotion of coloniality.

Similarly, less transformation has taken place to promote decolonisation of education in politically decolonised states (Kabanda, 2016:22) because academics in most African universities grapple with autonomy and initiative to design programmes that can be of value and relevant to the African context. This is as a result of epistemic violence, which convinces African academics that they do not have anything to offer to their national educational systems, with only the option of adopting the worldviews of the ‘enlightened’ colonisers (Heleta, 2016:7). Decolonisation becomes the reason for this epistemic disempowerment, to allow academics to systematically critique the education system that is still housed in the Eurocentric domain close to 54 years after political decolonisation (for the Zambian situation).

8.3.2.3 Implications for quality conceptions

Quality conceptions such as fitness for purpose and meeting customers’ implied and stated needs (see Section 2.2) embrace commodification, in which higher education is seen as a tradable commodity and knowledge as a quantifiable commodity (Joseph Mbembe, 2016:40). Commodification has turned universities into a marketplace and blurred the functions of

university education (Heleta, 2016:7), focusing more on ensuring that students gain skills and competences that are required by the job market, while students are focusing more on obtaining credits for their degrees to allow them to competitively enter the job market, diverting the focus of both from seeking knowledge that is free and open to epistemic diversity. Knowledge produced in universities does not allow students to fundamentally change the status quo in society and the economy (Heleta, 2016:7), a reason for decolonising because it is deterring students and academics from the pursuit of valuable knowledge (Joseph Mbembe, 2016:30).

8.3.2.4 Curriculum implications

Decolonising education has implications for university curricula, especially the content and the depth of what is to be taught. The curriculum is key because knowledge is embedded in the university curriculum (Khala-Phiri, 2017:93) and it is an area of intellectual dislocation (Heleta, 2016:8; Lebakeng, 2018:256). The mindset is created by the curriculum. To decolonise a university, academics should seek a more situational engagement with the immediate African context (Lebakeng, 2018:256). The university curriculum is the means academics can use to help African people to define themselves according to their own realities so that Africans can be agents of their own history and masters of their own destiny (Lebakeng, 2018:251). As the curriculum is crucial in decolonising a university, scholars desiring to decolonise university education should engage in practical approaches (Khala-Phiri, 2017:94), such as transforming the university curriculum.

In conclusion, decolonising education is an effort to mitigate against the continuing epistemological damage by colonisation in education. Although the policies for education, for example in Zambia, have been changing since political decolonisation, the epistemological traditions that guide the education system have remained Eurocentric. Concisely, the implications of this study for decolonising education is in terms of knowledge, as it hinges on quality assurance.

8.4 Effects of the study on decoloniality

8.4.1 What is decoloniality?

Decoloniality struggles to bring into intervening existence another interpretation that, on the one hand, brings forward a silenced view of the event and, on the other hand, shows the limits of imperial ideology disguised as the true interpretation of events in the making of the modern world (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:13). Decoloniality is a liberatory option for decolonising the

mind, having realised the continued demolition of Africanity through condemnation of beliefs, structures and systems that define Africa and an African. Decoloniality is also a struggle for freedom of thought that has never been genuinely attained since political decolonisation of the African states in the early 1960s.

It consists of analytic and practical options confronting and delinking the colonial matrix of power with a focus on epistemological liberation seeking to delink from the tyranny of abstract universals (Kabanda, 2016:21; Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 13). Decoloniality is a decolonial turn that involves the task of decolonising knowledge, including institutions such as universities (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:14). It is a struggle to shift the geography and biography of knowledge generation in and on Africa from Euro-American epistemologies to epistemologies from the South (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15). It is a call to generate knowledge of Africa that promotes African consciousness. Therefore, I discuss the effects of this study on decoloniality in terms of knowledge, that is, knowledge production and pedagogies.

8.4.2 Effect on knowledge production

The university has been highlighted as an authorised centre of knowledge production. The learning programmes are designed and produced by universities, and universities have the mandate to hire academics, who are also key in knowledge production. As knowledge emanates from universities, recentring Africa in knowledge production is possible. The strategies of designing programmes that the academics have been using to legalise Eurocentrism empower them to rethink how to break out of the current epistemic crisis (Arukwe, 2014:182) and enter into a process of removing coloniality (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:13) by privileging indigenous knowledges in the design of programmes. Therefore, this study points to academics having increased opportunities for using available strategies for a strategic transformation of the university curriculum to support the decoloniality of university education.

The assurance of the quality of academic programmes requires articulation of learning programmes. Such articulation is sometimes done to establish the relevance of academic programmes besides determining the content and establishing the order of courses. As academics are the originators of learning programmes, they can interrogate all forms of knowledge to advance the establishment of new learning programmes and/or review existing programmes to strengthen their relevance. The expertise beholden by academics enables them to give a systematic critique of the inadequacies of the dominant Eurocentric model of knowledge production and possibly suggest an alternative model that advances decoloniality.

8.4.3 Effect on pedagogies

The process of assuring the quality of the process of teaching and learning entails that academics are familiar with pedagogies of the current knowledge system. The pedagogies are strategies for teaching and learning used in embedding desired knowledge. Pedagogies are suggested during programme design of university education founded on Eurocentrism. The involvement of academics in designing academic programmes suggests their capability to analyse pedagogies to support the cause for decoloniality. Academics have academic freedom, and the exercise of that freedom privileges them to take the lead in critiquing existing pedagogies of equilibrium and to suggest alternatives in support of decoloniality. Therefore, knowledge of how systems work in the pursuit of decoloniality is vital to permit academics to engage in practices that challenge colonial education and dismantle the structures of coloniality (Madden, 2015:6).

8.5 Envisioning an African university

The African university is being envisioned because at present, there are universities in Africa and not African universities (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:11), as the former derive aspirations from the modern European university (Mamdani, 2016:71). The reflection on the African university stems from the failure of modern Eurocentric universities to fulfil the promises of Euro-American modernity to humanity (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:12). This brings in the argument of knowledge being relational, not comprising universality, but understood within the context of production (Waghid, 2002:467). As universities in Africa as points of knowledge production have never been closed from external influences and have been excessively exposed to Euro-American paradigms, it makes the case for decoloniality relevant, which is pushing the agenda for decolonising knowledge (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15).

In envisioning an African university, I focus on the functions of the university, especially in relation to knowledge production and the concern for the underdevelopment of African continent. What should an African university be? An African university should be pluriversal, one that acknowledges plurality of experience and perspective (Mamdani, 2016:70); a site for multilingualism, putting African languages at the centre of teaching and learning (Joseph Mbembe, 2016:36); one distinguished by impactful research agendas and focused fields of study that are directly informed by the desire to address African issues, problems and challenges; a site of cognitive and social justice that embraces the idea that all humans are born into valid, relevant and legitimate knowledge systems (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15); one that

embraces *ubuntu* philosophy, that is a home for every human being (Lebakeng, 2018:257); one that is authentically African, without imitative tendencies to seek Western orientation; one that acknowledges Africanity as a legitimate combative ontology and indigenous knowledge as appropriate and empowering epistemology (Lebakeng, 2018:257).

It is hoped that at the end of decolonisation, there will no longer be a university, but a pluriversity in Africa, one whose knowledge production is open to different epistemic traditions (Joseph Mbembe, 2016:36–37) and puts Africa at the centre of knowledge production, removing the continent from the peripheral. Therefore, the envisioned African university is a socially responsive institution with enriched insights to guarantee relevance to the immediate African environment as well as internationally (Lebakeng, 2018:257). It will be an institution that empowers individuals and the society in which they belong.

8.6 Summary

The dimensions discussed in this chapter centred on knowledge, that is, knowledge is situated and contextual. In stating that knowledge is situated and contextual, I am in support of the view of Lebakeng (2018:257) that authentic knowledge is local, and that knowledge makes effective meaning on condition that it is located within its own cultural context, dispelling colonial myths of the universality of knowledge. Therefore, the rejection of the universality of knowledge suggests the importance of endogenous and indigenous knowledges and their relevance in addressing the challenges of Africa, making the case for decoloniality relevant in pushing the agenda for decolonising knowledge.

The next chapter is a reflection, in which I concisely reflect on the findings and on my growth as a doctoral candidate.

Chapter 9: Reflections on my study

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter of the dissertation provides a summary of my findings and recommendations for future research. The chapter also reflects on my doctoral journey and my growth as a doctoral candidate.

9.2 Summary of findings

Quality, as expressed in the 1996 National Policy on Education, results from the quality of the inputs and the quality of the process. The study showed that to assure quality, there is a need to understand the concept of quality, as quality assurance is a relative concept, derived from the understanding of quality, which subsequently determines the strategies for assuring quality, as demonstrated in the strategies implemented by the HEA.

The study found that the strategies implemented by the HEA assure quality for private universities. To some extent, the liberal contextual features could have influenced the design of the quality assurance strategies, which seem biased towards private providers, as the government in a liberal environment is duty-bound to formulate policies that protect consumers of higher education.

It was also found that the strategies implemented by the HEA were more on the control side than the improvement side, because the link for feedback is missing. However, success was notable in the provision of information to stakeholders regarding established and registered universities, although not adequate for stakeholders to make informed choices on learning programmes.

Finally, this study has advanced an understanding of how quality assurance strategies implemented by the HEA assure quality for universities in Zambia. The understanding that has been advanced in this study is believed to be useful to enable the HEA to fulfil their purpose effectively and improve practice. This study has also provided evidence on the influence of policy on the practice regarding quality assurance activities of the HEA.

9.3 Recommendation for future research

I recommend further studies on the following:

9.3.1 In Zambia

- A study on the attitude of academics towards external quality assurance should be undertaken. It would help the HEA to reposition itself on how quality assurance should be regulated and improved.
- It is not known yet whether the HEA has adequate and competent human resources to assure quality for the university system. Literature on quality assurance in Africa, however, indicates that most quality assurance agencies do not have the human capacity to ensure the quality of higher education. Therefore, further research is needed to focus on the human capacity and priorities available for the HEA for capacity building.
- So far, the HEA has been regulating the registration of private universities. It would be interesting to know whether the regulation on the registration of private universities has embedded a quality culture in private universities. This suggestion is in consideration of the institutional audit that private universities undergo as part of the requirement for establishment.

9.3.2 In Africa

In my review of the literature on the impact of quality assurance systems in higher education (see Section 2.11), I only came across studies on quality assurance systems in Africa, but not on the impact thereof. It seems that little is known about the impact of quality assurance systems in Africa. Therefore, I suggest that impact studies be conducted to determine the value of quality assurance in higher education in Africa.

9.4 My growth as a doctoral candidate

In this section, I reflect on my PhD journey, particularly on my growth as a doctoral candidate. As I reflect, I can say it was a journey of faith, because I knew what I ultimately wanted, even when I did not know exactly what I was getting into as I started. It is a journey that comes with challenges that are diverse and unique to each candidate, but the desire to accomplish renewed my strength each day that went by.

Undertaking the doctoral study has been a transformative act, in which my attitude towards myself changed from placing myself at the periphery of my study to centring myself with a conviction that I was able. I also came to realise that a doctorate was not just a qualification alone, but a package. In the package, there are struggles, triumphs and challenges, transform which not only the thought process, but the personality as well, to one different from what I

was when I started the journey. However, I will focus on how this journey enhanced my intellectual growth by highlighting developmental milestones in relation to academic writing, methodological challenges, academic interaction and finding my own voice.

9.4.1 Academic writing

What is academic writing? Murray (2005:10) refers to academic writing as a set of conventions seen in the thesis or published paper, implying that it becomes clearer to know what academic writing is, as one pays attention to the writing style in the thesis or by scrutinising the structure of published writing. Concurring with Murray's view, Osmond (2016:10) suggests reading published papers beyond content as the best way of developing one's own writing. Similarly, it is the paying of attention to the structure or style of the thesis during reading that enables the writer to discover the rules (conventions) of academic writing. Academic writing has rules because the writer is writing about potentially complex ideas that should be as simple as possible to make ideas clear (Osmond, 2016:10).

The feedback from the first draft of my proposal had a comment that related to academic writing. My supervisor raised a concern over clarity of what I intended to investigate, which I alone knew. As I reflected on the comment, I realised that the writing skills that I have been using in routine writing were not adequate for this academic exercise, and I needed to be aware of the fundamentals of academic writing. A remark by Phillips and Pugh (2010:138) that students must ensure that they are precisely aware of what is needed for the thesis to be written to the required standard compelled me to find the means. It was my responsibility to learn to be clear in my writing, as academic writing can be learned, as alluded to by Murray and Osmond, above.

In recognising that academic writing was not innate, I signed up for workshops facilitated by Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service staff and the Postgraduate Skills Development programme. Through these workshops, as also pointed out by Osmond (2016:135), I learned that academic writing should be simple, easy to read and to the point. I found this understanding of academic writing useful, because it emphasises conciseness and clarity, my points of weakness. I understood that by writing concisely and clearly, I was demonstrating to my audience that I had clarity of thought about my topic. As outlined by Murray (2005:4) in terms of 'new writers' errors', the comment on clarity aligned with the errors of 'not saying what I meant, thereby losing focus through indirect writing'. Therefore, I

found purpose in the workshops and acquired knowledge of the techniques of academic writing.

9.4.2 Methodological challenges

When I embarked on this research journey, I did not really know how to determine an appropriate research methodology for my study. My supervisor observed this problem in my first draft, which he linked to lack of clarity of thought on what I wanted to examine. I needed to make an informed decision on the appropriateness of the attendant methodology. It is the methodology that determines how the research is to be carried out, and how the identified problem is to be solved, hence clarity on methodology is crucial. In addition, it is important to have the methodology sorted out because it interconnects the paradigm and the methods.

Relatedly, I had the challenge to justify why I used two methods during the proposal defence, namely conceptual analysis and deconstruction analysis. I did not make a convincing justification on the limitation of conceptual analysis to warrant complementing it with deconstruction analysis. I realised there was truth in the comment of Osmond (2016:136) that “clear writing is clear thinking”. My writing created room for doubt in the examiners’ mind as they read the proposal, because at that time my thoughts were not well grounded or articulated enough. Although uncomfortable with the feeling of inadequacy within myself, I had to immerse myself back in literature to gain a firm grasp of the limitations to confidently and comfortably make additions, as was advised. As I clearly articulated the distinction, it did not just mean attending to the concern, but was also an added milestone in my intellectual development.

My resolve on the methods can be linked to the idea of reflexivity, which refers to the human capability of turning the attention of the conscious back to itself, or to thinking about thinking (Jackson & Hogg, 2010:627). In line with this view, I continuously created and recreated my thoughts and ideas through my interaction with text to have a concrete understanding to situate myself firmly in the research methods. It was not an easy process, as it did not happen automatically. Reflexivity offered me an opportunity to clarify my thoughts and to move into a new intellectual space.

9.4.3 Finding my own voice

Academic writing is mostly depersonalised. However, some fields, such as philosophy, allow for more personal involvement than fields such as law, for instance (Blanpain, 2012:51). This

entails that disciplines vary in degree of formality expected (Blanpain, 2012:49). The doubt on whether the writer should be present or absent in the text he/she writes was part of the dilemma of finding my own voice. It was uncertainty that made me hesitate to include my own voice until I had information on what was considered appropriate for my field on one hand, while on the other hand, it was the inner critic that made me feel inadequate and intimidated by literature published in my field to add my voice.

What is voice? Voice is the overall impression one has of the creator behind what one creates (Haarhoff, 1998:157). The echoes of Haarhoff in furthering this definition were an encouragement as I personalised the explanations. I understood that writing is about trusting my own vision and drawing from the angle of who I am; it is about imagining another position, besides what is in the text; it is about the writer being a mapmaker, rather than a follower of the charted routes; and primarily, it is about finding my own voice (see Haarhoff, 1998: 94, 157). With this understanding, I gained the courage to take my position as a scholar to make my voice heard.

To find my own voice, I further reflected on the meaning of Donald Murray's thought that "a reader can read without writing but a writer cannot write without reading" (1990, cited in Haarhoff, 1998:94). The advice I received was to read widely in my area of study to find my own voice. Therefore, to find my own voice, firstly I immersed myself in literature to help me gain support of my articulations, and secondly, I had guidance from my supervisor with vast experience, whose feedback was honest and whose supervision style impressed on me confidence to find my voice as he left the final decision of my writing with me, the writer.

9.4.4 Academic interaction

Academic interaction relates to what Haarhoff (1998:35) calls people as an environment. My writing and non-writing friends, colleagues, family and academics in the scholarly field were part of my writing environment, as my interaction with them impacted on my writing. Dorothea Brande (1981, cited in Haarhoff, 1998:35) urges writers to find people who for some mysterious reason leave them full of energy, feed them with ideas, or have the effect of filling them with self-confidence and eagerness to write. This remark made me realise the importance of interacting with peers and academics to sustain my writing momentum and to remain vibrant throughout this academic journey.

As I actively engaged in shaping my writing environment, I learned about the "Shut up and Write" sessions organised as part of the Postgraduate Skills Development programme every

Tuesday. This academic forum formally offered me writing tips, encouragement and advice on how to continue writing, and informally helped me to create a social network with postgraduate students from across faculties. The “Shut up and Write” sessions enhanced a collegial environment in which I shared writing decisions with peers, while the session helped with writing dilemmas. Therefore, attending these sessions helped me to persevere with my writing and to grow intellectually.

I was also invited for a presentation by the Department of Education Policy Studies where a visiting professor, Prof. Dr Wolfram Weisse from the University of Hamburg, was presenting part of the findings of the project on “Religion and Dialogue in Modern Societies”. After highlighting the findings of the project, Prof. Dr Wolfram Weisse focused the discussion on the writing of Emmanuel Levinas. The discussion was a highly interactive academic session that privileged me with an experience of critical thinking, and to learn critical analysis when the visiting and the hosting professors were teasing out the writing of Emmanuel Levinas. Listening to these respected scholars added a practical dimension to my analytical skills, as I was able to weave in new arguments in my writing. Therefore, through this interaction, my analytical skills improved, which expanding my intellectual growth.

In conclusion, the doctoral study transformed me into an independent and resilient researcher. The transformation was tough and uncomfortable, because it required of me to move into a new intellectual space, which required effort to overcome struggles and challenges to succeed. The struggles were in relation to my study being part of my lifetime event, in which I experienced constant tension with family relationships. The culmination of my struggles was a shift in my personality to being resilient. The challenges I strived through were academic writing, methodological difficulties and finding my own voice. Each of these challenges was a doorway into new space, which enabled me to be an independent researcher to complete this scholarly study.

9.5 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined a summary of the findings of the study and suggested possibilities for future research. I have also reflected on my growth as a doctoral student, which was attained by crossing thresholds to succeed. Finally, I am satisfied that this study has provided an answer to the research question.

9.6 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I used a philosophical lens of interpretivism to articulate as to how the strategies implemented by the HEA assure quality in higher education in Zambia. The argument I presented is that quality assurance in Zambia is procedural and not substantive enough. Of course, the University of Zambia can have a Quality Assurance Directorate and even amend its academic programmes according to standards of quality formulated by the HEA in the country. However, such procedural changes, although necessary, might not necessarily enhance quality as pointed out throughout this dissertation. The existence of procedures on how quality is assured does not translate into the quality of teaching and learning, in particular. As has been alluded to in the dissertation, higher education institutions in Zambia, like many African higher education institutions, seem to be soft on critique, deliberative engagement and autonomous human agency on the part of both students and academics. In this way, it can be argued that having procedures or standards in place might not always be responsive to substantive change within higher education – that is, demonstrating quality through student learning that is critical enough, might just be a way as to why substantive change can be justified. In essence, I argue that an education of quality is one that results in a substantive change by a continuous process of transformation of students and academics in relation to critique. The implication on teaching and learning is that quality procedures do not translate into quality of teaching and learning but quality resides in the deliberative interactions that are cultivated among students and academics.

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