



Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Philippines

Adela Jamorabo RUIZ, & Cecilia JUNIO-SABIO
Polytechnic University of the Philippines
cesjunio@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT :

Quality assurance is the process of verifying whether products or services meet or exceed customer expectations. It is a process-driven approach with specific steps to help define and attain goals. Various efforts for quality assurance are used in the Philippines. Particularly at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, quality assurance is an essentially dynamic operation and cannot be assured by a static process. Thus, there is the need to recognize and validate different institutional models, and learn about the features that make them effective, finding new ways to define quality, adaptable to different circumstances. Standards that are too rigid, and the application of procedures or standards that are too homogeneous, should be avoided. Standards that are too formal or a strong focus on quantitative indicators make it difficult to pay attention to the substantive, underlying issues. This paper gives a brief overview of the quality assurance systems in the higher education institutions in the Philippines. The overall conclusion is that quality assurance must become an essential part of institutional management and planning. Tertiary education is always changing, and quality assurance processes must change with it, or become irrelevant. It is a process that takes time and continuous efforts.

1. INTRODUCTION :

Quality assurance is the process of verifying whether products or services meet or exceed customer expectations. It is a process-driven approach with specific steps to help define and attain goals. For UNESCO, quality assurance is the systematic review of educational programs to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained. A quality assurance system in the case of a university is said to increase student confidence and the university's credibility as a provider of quality services to improve processes and efficiency and to enable a university to better compete with others (Pavlenko, Bojan & Trif, 2008). It has been established that there is a link between educated manpower and economic development. In the world of globalization the room for advancement lies in the ability of countries

to understand how to make the best use of their resources - both human and natural. Quality Assurance must become an essential part of institutional management and planning. Tertiary education is changing, and quality assurance processes must change with it, or become irrelevant. It is a process that takes time. It must be done with HEIs, learning to trust them and to help them improve themselves (Lemaitre, 2009). Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines are either colleges or universities, and are generally classified as public or private. Private colleges and universities may either be "sectarian" or "non-sectarian" entities. Public HEIs are all non-sectarian entities, and are further classified as State University and College (SUC) or Local College and University (LCU). SUCs are fully funded by the national government as determined by the Philippine Congress. LCUs, on the other hand, are run by local government unit.

1.1 Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity : Efforts from UNESCO

The rise in the internationalization and globalization of higher education, in particular the rapid development of cross-border higher education, has underlined an urgent need to establish robust frameworks for quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications (UNESCO, 2011).

UNESCO's actions in this area focus on providing information and capacity to empower higher education stakeholders to make better informed decisions in the new world of higher education. This initiative aims to provide information to protect students from inadequate learning resources and low-quality provisions.

Quality assurance (as defined by UNESCO) is an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving) the quality of higher education systems, institutions or programmes. Recognition refers to the acceptance of a foreign certificate, diploma or degree of higher education as a valid credential by the competent authorities and the granting to its holder the same rights enjoyed by persons who possess a national qualification for which the foreign one is assessed as comparable.

The Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications is key in UNESCO initiatives in this area. The forum was launched to serve as a platform for exchange between the various partners and stakeholders in international and cross-border higher education and to address the social, political, economic and cultural dimensions underpinning globalization and higher education. It is designed to complement other UNESCO initiatives of the Medium-Term Plan 2002-2007.

UNESCO states that Quality assurance can only be effective when all stakeholders understand and embrace its challenges and benefits. Developing a culture of quality requires strong, committed stewardship from global leaders in higher education. GIQAC provides the framework to support

the global higher education community in its efforts to foster a culture of quality.

In 2007 the World Bank and UNESCO established a partnership that launched the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) to support the evolution of quality assurance in higher education in developing countries and countries-in-transition by facilitating and advancing the efforts of its participating inter-regional and regional quality assurance networks. In that regard, GIQAC assists emerging and existing quality assurance systems by facilitating global and regional knowledge sharing of good practices; promoting communication among a diverse set of agencies and professionals; supporting the production of analyses and guidelines; and engendering plans for long-term network sustainability.

GIQAC is currently implementing its third grant period (2011).

Initial seed funding for GIQAC comes from the World Bank's Development Grant Facility (DGF) along with substantial in-kind and other support from UNESCO. A formal agreement, signed between the World Bank and UNESCO, provides the overall framework for financing and implementation.

UNESCO, as the only UN organization with a mandate in higher education, is linked to ministries, international agencies and other implementing partners in 194 countries, thus placing it in a position to achieve its mission to provide leadership, standard setting and capacity building in higher education.

GIQAC aims to build on UNESCO's work through the Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications and the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education.

1.2 Quality Assurance : Philippines

Higher education exerts considerable influence on the larger society. The concern for quality in the Philippine Higher Education is enunciated in the Section 1 of

Article 14 of the 1987 Philippines Constitution which provides that “the State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels.” The enactment of Republic Act 7722, otherwise known as the Higher Education Act of 1994 created the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and directed it to promote and support higher education in the country. It further mandates CHED to monitor and evaluate performance of programs and institutions of higher learning.

Quality assurance is an all-embracing term covering all the policies, processes, and actions through which the quality of higher education is maintained and developed (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002). In higher education, quality assurance refers to explicit commitment and practices of higher education institutions to the development of an institutional culture which recognizes the importance of quality and the continuous enhancement of quality of services (Defensor, 2011).

Quality assurance mechanisms can be classified as program-based and institution-based mechanisms.

Program-based mechanisms include :

- a. CHED authority to grant permit, recognition
- b. CHED Standards Setting
 - Policies and Standards (PS) for minimum standards
 - Technical Panels, Task Forces, Technical Committees and Technical Working Group
 - Regional Quality Assessment Teams (RQATS)
- c. Accreditation - conducted by accrediting bodies federated under FAAP and NNQAA
- d. International Certifications - APEC Registry; Washington Accord, etc.
- e. Center of Development (COD); Center of Excellence (COE)
- f. International Benchmarking

The institution-based mechanisms are :

- a. IQUAME
- b. Assessment for SUC Leveling
- c. Philippine Quality Award (PQA)
- d. Autonomous and Deregulated Status of

Private HEIs

- e. PSG for University Status
- f. Local Colleges and Universities
- g. Government Quality Management System

2. METHODS :

2.1 Institutional Quality Assurance through Monitoring and Evaluation

The CHED 2009 Annual Report mentioned that the Institutional Quality Assurance through Monitoring and Evaluation (IQuAME) which was issued through CHED Memorandum Order Nos. 15 and 16. series of 2005 is a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of the programs, processes and services of higher education institution in the key are of quality of teaching and learning as supported by the governance and management, support students, relations with community and management of resources.

It is the declared policy of the Commission to support and value the significant role of higher education institutions, academic community, and other stakeholders in establishing a quality assurance system for higher education sector. Institutional monitoring and evaluation for quality assurance is deemed complementary to accreditation (Lagrada, 2007).

The Institutional Quality Assurance through Monitoring and Evaluation (IQuAME) looks at the effectiveness of an institution in its entirety, particularly, the development of an institutional system that ensures the quality and standards of programs. Its objectives are :

- To enhance an institution’s capacity in designing, delivering and managing programs and services ;
- To identify areas for reform and intervention along the key areas of governance and management, quality of teaching and learning, support for students, relations with the community and management of resources ;

- To ensure that quality learning outcomes are responsive to the changing needs and comparable to international standards ;
- To provide accurate, up-to-date and accessible information on performance of higher education institutions to enable stakeholders to make informed choices ; and
- To provide the Commission with bases for policy options on higher education and informed decisions for development assistance and incentives to HEIs.

Director Castañeda at the Seminar on Knowledge for Development: Role of Universities in Sri Lanka (2006) reported that IQuAME is a flagship program of the Commission aimed at enhancing educational institutions' capacity in designing, delivering and managing its programs and services, identify its areas for reform and intervention and ensure that quality learning outcomes are responsive to changing domestic needs and comparable to international standards.

HEIs who wish to attain autonomous status apply for it and set a schedule for a CHED visit and undergo strict evaluation on four key areas: 1) Governance and management, 2) Quality of teaching and research, 3) Support for students, 4) Relations with the community, and, 5) Management of resources. If the so-called "evidences" that the HEI compiles and shows matches with the criteria laid out by the Commission, then the subject HEI will most likely pass the acid test and attain autonomy.

2.2 The Government Quality Management System Standards

Administrative Order No. 161 dated 05 October 2006 ("Institutionalizing Quality Management Systems in the Government"), as amended by Executive Order No. (EO) 605 dated 23 February 2007 ("Institutionalizing the Structure, Mechanisms and Standards to Implement the Government Quality Management

Program, Amending for the Purpose Administrative Order No. 161 s. 2006), were issued to effect improvements in public sector performance recognizing the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000 series which ensures consistency of products and services through quality processes.

EO 605 directs all department and agencies of the Executive Branch, including all government owned and/or controlled corporations (GOCCs) and government financial institutions (GFIs) to adopt ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management Systems and the applicable Government Quality Management Systems Standards (GQMSS) as part of the implementation of a Government-wide Quality Management Program (GQMP). Likewise, it encourages Local Government Units (LGUs), State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Constitutional Offices to establish ISO-Quality Management Systems and pursue certification. The document was developed to :

- build a quality culture and foster continuing improvement characterized by citizen-driven organizations and thus further strengthen global competitiveness among its sectors ;
- promote and enhance transparency and accountability in governance and provide a framework for assessing quality excellence among the government organizations ; and
- ensure consistency of the quality of the products and services through quality processes

2.3 Accreditation (Voluntary)

CHED Memorandum Order No. 01 series of 2005 - Revised Policies and Guidelines on Voluntary Accreditation in Aid of Quality and Excellence in Higher Education defined Accreditation as a process for assessing and upgrading the educational quality of higher education institutions and programs through self evaluation and peer judgment. It leads to the accreditation status

by an accrediting agency and provides public recognition and information on educational quality.

It is a CHED policy to encourage and assist HEIs which desire to attain standards of quality over and above the minimum required. The minimum requirements are defined in the Policies, Standards and Guidelines (PSG) issued by CHED per curricular program.

There are five (5) accrediting bodies for Higher Education in the Philippines and these bodies are grouped into two federations that grant the accreditation status:

Federation of Accrediting Agencies in the Philippines (FAAP)

1. Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU)
2. Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACU-COA)
3. Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities Accrediting Agency, Inc. (ACSCU-AAI)

National Network of Quality Accrediting Agencies (NNQAA)

4. Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines (AACCUP)
5. Association of Local Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (ALCU-COA)

AACCUP, as well as PAASCU are active members of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education, (INQAAHE), and both are members of the Asia Pacific Quality.

All accrediting agencies are helping CHED in the promotion of quality improvement in the HEIS. It is noted that that the accreditation status of the programs of HEIs serves in several ways :

- Levels of accreditation are used as a major criterion in (1) the identification of Centers of Excellence (COEs) and Centers of Development (COD) which entitles the HEIs financial support from

the Commission for their flagship programs and projects; and (2) the selection of private schools to be granted autonomous or deregulated status with certain benefits to be enjoyed ;

- Level III accreditation status is a major consideration in the conversion of a private college to a university status ;
- Level III accreditation status in the corresponding undergraduate program is used as major requirement for HEIs applying for government authority to open new graduate programs and conduct of extension classes or programs.

Some benefits to public sector institutions with accredited programs are the following :

- Accreditation Level is used by the CHED and DBM in recommending budgetary allocations ;
- HEIs with accredited programs enjoy priority in terms of available funding assistance from CHED for scholarships & faculty development, facilities improvement and other development programs ;
- Accreditation is used as a criterion in the leveling of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs); it is also used as a criterion in the selection of schools for foreign students.

Private sector institutions with accredited programs can be granted an autonomous or deregulated status by CHED. Attainment of this status would mean enjoyment of certain benefits by the institution. Some benefits enjoyed by autonomous HEIS are the following :

- Exemption from the issuance of Special Order (S.O.) ;
- Free from monitoring and evaluation activities of the CHED ;
- Entitlement to grant of subsidies and other financial incentives/assistance from the Commission on Higher Education, whenever funds are available ;
- Privilege to determine, and to prescribe

their curricular programs to achieve global competence ;

- Privilege to offer a new course/program in the undergraduate/graduate level/s without securing permit/authority from the CHED. However, the higher education institution must inform the CHED Regional Office concerned of the new course/program to be offered ;
- Privilege to establish branch/es or satellite campus/es without the prior approval of the CHED, but with information to the CHED Regional Office where the new branch/campus is to be located ;
- Privilege to offer extension classes and distance education course/program to expand access to higher education and to establish affiliation with recognized foreign higher education institution/s in pursuit of international standard of education ;
- Authority to grant Honoris Causa to those deserving, per pertinent provisions of existing CHED issuance on conferment of honorary degrees.

HEIs with deregulated status enjoy the same privilege as autonomous HEIs, but they must still secure permits for new programs and campuses.

Basically, IQuAME enhances accreditation and accreditation enhances IQuAME. Program accreditation shows the HEIs ability to set and achieve program standards, while IQuAME looks at the effectiveness of an institution in its entirety, particularly the development of institutional systems that ensure the quality and standards of programs.

3. RESULTS : Issues and Concerns on Quality Assurance in the Philippines

In the paper entitled: “Quality Assurance in Southeast Asia : The Philippine Experience” written by Dr. Nenaly Defensor (CHED Commissioner) delivered at the SEAMEO RIHED Seminar on Quality Assurance in Southeast Asian Countries, held in Bangkok, Thailand, in

2010, she mentioned among the current issues in Philippine Quality Assurance are the following :

- The Coordinating Council on Accreditation has yet to fully function;
- Since accreditation is voluntary, only a minimal percentage of schools avail of it;
- A number of higher education institutions do not perform well in the licensure examinations;
- There is an overlapping function between CHED and other government agencies with respect to regulatory functions over schools.

Quality in higher education as well as defining a way to measure is not a simple issue. The complexity of the process increases since the set of quality attributes to be measured and their relative weight is not constant but varies according to the different stakeholder point of view (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis and Fitsilis, 2010). According to Doherty (2008) presenting his reflections on quality in education for the last 30 years, the definition of quality should differ somewhat for each individual institution, since all universities have a unique mission, history and set of priorities. There are no set methods for ranking institutions in the Philippines. Aside from comparisons in terms of accreditation, autonomy, and centers of excellence awarded by the Commission on Higher Education, attempts to rank schools were based on performance in board exams conducted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC).

In view of the foregoing discussion on both IQuAME and GQMSS we would like to include the following as among the issues and concerns on quality assurance in the Philippine Higher Education, as a separate framework should be developed among private institutions different to that of the public higher education institution as there are peculiarities in the government operations that cannot be made applicable to both, given as follows :

- State Universities and Colleges (SUCs)'s personnel practices are governed by the Civil Service Commission (CSC), therefore, quality of instruction depends on the quality of faculty being recruited which should conform with the minimum qualification standards set forth by the CSC, not like those from private institutions which exercises flexibility on the hiring of faculty;
- Local Colleges and Universities' (LCUs)'s are governed by the Local Government Units and pertinent provisions of the Local Government Code applies, which is not a concern of private institutions;
- Administration component of the above and the overall operations of both SUCs and LCUs is covered by the General Appropriations Act (GAA) on the SUCs and IRA on the LCUs therefore subject to auditing and pertinent requirements of GAA on the liquidation and disposition of expenses/disbursements, not like the private HEIs which again exercises some degree of flexibility – this already affect the Accreditation process (especially on the perspective of research, instruction and extension) – as there are limited funds available for public HEIs than the private ones.

Moreover there should be a separate framework of accreditation should be made, one for public HEIs and one for private HEIs as all operational aspects varies and differs substantially. One is driven by profit while the other is motivated by public service – that is, making education accessible and equitable to all.

- Coordination among international standards and accrediting bodies should be made, however, it would be of help if the prescriptions are in adherence to UNESCO's.
- Government authorities should sit down together to align provisions of GQMSS and that of IQuAME so that all parameters/criteria of quality assurance on both document should be met as Accreditation process itself (while also

ensuring quality) is a tedious exercise and a very expensive one – if only to consider that SUC operations is one that involves public funds. It would be difficult to conform to one without regard to the other.

- CHED should put as part of its priority cascading of GIQAC and conforming as well in its provisions and that all their accreditation efforts should be in conformance to it.

4. CONCLUSION :

Various efforts for quality assurance have been made by the government with solicited cooperation of the private sector. HEIs are essentially dynamic operations – their quality cannot be assured with a static process. Thus, the need to recognize and validate different institutional models, and learn about the features that make them effective, finding new ways to define quality, adaptable to different circumstances. Avoid standards that are too rigid, or the application of procedures or standards that are too homogeneous. Standards that are too formal or a strong focus on quantitative indicators make it difficult to pay attention to the substantive, underlying issues.

There is need to avoid prescribing a preferred way of doing things – HEIs are different, and there may be many different ways of achieving the desired outcome. At present, there is a need to revise the definition of quality, the criteria, the procedures, the mechanisms for self and external review, on the basis of experience. HEIs need to learn – and to un-learn and need to work towards the development of self regulation policies, mechanisms and procedures.

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Dr Adela Jamorabo RUIZ is Director of the Curriculum Planning & Development Office, at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. Cecilia JUNIO-SABIO is Professor at Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila, and was previously Head of the Research and Industry Engagement Center (RIEC), in the Gulf College of Oman. Prior to this she was at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, 1016 Manila, Philippines.

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