Impact(s) of Quality Assurance Requirements for Private Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

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Abstract

The surge and expansion of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in South Africa is an indication that the private sector education is making significant progress. As a result, the PHEIs are considered as being in competition with Public Higher Institutions. This situation is envisaged to influence the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to tighten its policies in order to control the PHEIS. Using the Octet quality theory, developed by Zaki and Zaki Rashidi. and the documentary content analysis research method, this study analyses ways in which quality assurance is used to curtail the growth of PHEIS. The findings of the study showed that some of the contributions of PHEIs are driven by the demand for higher learning opportunities in the republic, though faced by various challenges and barriers in fulfilling the quality assurance requirements in respect of accreditation the DHET. The paper submits that PHEIS are not in competition with Public Higher Educational Institutions, rather they are to be seen as complementing the vision of the DHET in its efforts to improve the South African Higher Education System. Thus, partnership between the private and the public institutions is recommended for the achievement of desired positive impacts.

Keywords: curriculum, higher education, private higher learning institutions, quality assurance, teaching and learning

Introduction

Each year, South African public institutions receive countless first year applicants into tertiary education. However, the public sector does not have the capacity to accommodate all the applicants (Coetzee, 2019; Ramlachan, 2019). Over and above the shortage of space, another challenge was the instability of these institutions caused by student activism such as the such "Fees Must fall" movement, contested Student Representative Committee (SRC) elections, general students' unrest and in some instances issues of equality. (Coan, 2017). The said challenges created a gap for private institutions to fill in the Higher education sector. It is

argued that Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) are exponentially growing like mushrooms (Stander & Herman, 2017). Moreover, while PHEIs are emerging, there is an issue of quality assurance. It is argued that quality assurance procedures are used by the Department of Higher Educational as a tool to protect the public higher education institutions against what it calls illegal activities by these PHEIs in the higher education sector (Stander& Herman, 2017). Furthermore, it has been submitted that PHEIs are more in search of profit escalation than advancing the vision of the Department of Higher education in the Republic (CHE 2016, 84). It is against this backdrop that this study intends to analyse the quality assurance issue within the private higher education sector.

Research Methodology

This article uses documentary content analysis research method. According to Ahmed (2010), it entails the reviewing, analysing and examining of information, recorded media and texts. Thus, this paper analyses the ways in which quality assurance is used to curtail the growth of PHEIS. This is done through reviews of the policies and procedures that underpin quality assurance in PHEIs. It further presents the challenges these institutions presently face with the view of establishing their chances of survival. To this end, attempts are made to proffer answers to the following questions: What exactly is the role of PHEIs? Are they competing with the public higher education? Or are they simply completing the public higher education sector? What must be done to guarantee the effective functioning of the PHEIs? As a result, this paper firstly discusses the historical background of PHEIs and the relevance to the higher education sector. It further critically discusses the theoretical framework of quality assurance. In addition to that, it analyses the quality assurance issue at PHEIS. The paper concludes by stating the researchers' recommendations.

Historical background of private higher education institutions and their role in the South African educational system.

This section focuses on two points. Firstly, it provides an overview of the historical background of the PHEIS. It also discusses the role of PHEIS and their impact on the higher educational system.

Historical background

It is worth noting that the private higher education issue is not new. It has been part of the South African higher education arena from the onset (Varghese & Ajayi, 2006). Stander (2017)

indicates that the history of private higher education in South Africa has been drastically impacted by the history of legacy and policy demands. In 1829, the first private university was founded (Stander, 2017). The said institution was named "South African College" (it was affiliated to the University of London) (Stander, 2017). It is in 1918 that the same institution received the status of a University and today known as the University of Cape Town (Stander, 2017).

Furthermore, during colonial times, private individuals or organisations created PHEIs that served for specific needs of industry (Stander, 2017). For instance, the Kimberley School of mines was created to fulfil the needs of the mining industry. (Stander, 2017). Subsequent to that, this institution relocated and was divided in two campuses. The first campus in 1921 became the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The second one in 1930 became the University of Pretoria (Ngengebule, 2003). Another example is the South African Nursing Council (SANC'S) Nursing Education Institutions (NEIS) which according to Stander (2016) were compelled to offer their 'legacy' programmes and were encouraged to register with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as PHEIS. These institutions offer various Council on Higher Education (CHE) accredited programmes in the field of nursing (Stander,2016).

Moreover, religious Affairs of colonials also had an impact on the establishment of PHEIS. During the 19th century as Fuhnel (2006) indicated, both the Anglican and reformed churches started several colleges in tertiary education. The latter developed into public institutions in the 20th century (Fuhnel, 2006). It is worth noting that religious institutions still have a significant impact on the private higher education sector, specifically in offering theological training programmes (DHET,2016). Thereafter in the 20th century, most private education providers shifted their focus onto addressing the need for basic education through distance learning. (Ngengebule,2003). As a result, INTEC College became the first private correspondence college in South Africa which focused on the area of Further Education and Training (FET) (Ngengebule, 2003). Similarly, other forerunners in distance learning were established, like the Rapid Results College, Success College, Lyceum College and Damelin (now, part of the Educor Group) (Ngengebule, 2003). It is argued that in 21th century South Africa has experienced expansion growth of the Further Education and Training private institutions (FETs). This is confirmed by the white paper (DHET,2013) which indicates that the FET constitutes 20.5 percent of the national registration in post school education. However, 93 percent of the qualifications obtained in FETs were at or below NQF level 5, between 1991

and 2010 (DHET, 2013). In as much as the distance learning experience fast increased, and so did the private sector education. The public sector also joined in distance learning (Stander, 2016). The distance learning improved access to higher education by many students.

In 1946, the University of South Africa (Unisa) became the main public distance University in the country (Ngengebule, 2003). UNISA worked in partnership with PHEIs whereby the latter will function as tuition centres for the former (Stander,2016). It is worth noting that learning from UNISA, these public-private partnerships became common at several public universities (Jansen, 2004). In many occasions, students would register at public universities that would provide materials and then students would pay the PHEIs for tuition and learning support. (Jansen, 2004). According to Varghese and Ajayi (2006) between 2002 and 2003, 55 private providers were in partnership with 12 public institutions. The public-private partnerships were categorised in two: tuition partnership and professional partnership. (Varghese & Ajayi, 2006). The tuition partnership is subdivided into specialist, comprehensive, capacity development and access partnership. These are not part of discussion ((Varghese & Ajayi, 2006).

What transpires from these partnerships is that some PHEIS matured to offer their own accredited programmes. However, these have been an issue, given that most of the programmes were offered through distance learning. It had its challenges. Issues of poor students' support and quality assurance were raised. (Stander, 2016). The white paper on post school education and training raised a concern. It stated that the PHEIs should ensure that students involved in higher distance learning should be given proper support in their learning process. However, it appears that many students were not coping with their studies (DHET,2013). It follows that since the enactment of the DEHT's Amended Regulations for PHEIs in 2016, this franchise or outsourcing of educational services has been revoked (DHET,2016).

Besides the regulations for PHEIS as alluded to above, it is also worth noting that previously there were a number of instruments that regulated the operations of the PHEIS. The Eiselem Commission in 1951 dealt with the correspondence education among black people in South Africa (Varghese & Ajayi, 2006). The De Villiers Commission of Enquiry on Technical and Vocational Education in 1948 examined the credibility of some courses in collaborative arrangements between private and public institutions (Varghese & Ajayi, 2006). These were followed by the Correspondence College Act 59 of 1965 that was the first legislative provision that dealt with private provision of post-secondary education in South Africa. (Varghese & Ajayi, 2006). After 1994, with the new Constitutional dispensation post 1996, emphasis was

placed on the independence of private educational institutions being established at their expense (S 29(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). This provision becomes a leeway for the establishment and the recognition of PHEIs (Varghese & Ajayi, 2006). As a result, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) which was a temporary body during the first democratic government, gave advice to the higher education sector on the recognition- of PHEIs. (Varghese & Ajayi, 2006). Subsequently, the white paper on the Department of Higher Education (DoE,1997a) also acknowledges that the private provision of education plays a significant role. The Higher Education Act of 1997 echoes the 1996 Constitution provision (S29 (3)), the recommendation of National Council on Higher Education as well as the White Paper Policy. Section 5 of the Higher Education Act states that:

> *"No person other than a public higher education institution or an organ of state may provide higher education unless that person is registered or conditionally registered as a private higher education institution in terms of this Act."*

What stands out from the above provision is that there are procedures that PHEIs need to follow what enable them to function appropriately. These processes have been clearly stated in the regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions Act 101 of 2016. This legislation controls the application process, requirements for registration, registration, as well as registration certificate of all private higher learning institutions in South Africa. In the same way, Ellis and Stey (2014) provide a summary of different legislations that regulated the operations of the PHEIs. The legislations include the following:

- Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997 (Department of Education, 1997b).
- Higher Education Amendment Acts: No. 55 of 1999; No. 54 of 2000; No. 23 of 2001; No. 63 of 2002; No. 38 of 2003 and No. 39 of 2008; (Department of Education, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002b, 2003b, 2008b).
- Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997: Regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions (hereafter referred as the Regulations) (Department of Education, 2002a).
- Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificates, Diplomas and Bachelor's Degrees Programmes (Admission Requirements) (Department of Education, 2005).
- Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) (Department of Education, 2007).

- National Qualifications Framework Act, No. 67 of 2008 (NQF Act 2008) (Department of Education, 2009a).
- Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes requiring a National Certificate (Vocational) at Level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (Department of Education, 2009b; Council on Higher Education, 2006a:2; Department of Education, 2007:3; Department of Education, 2009a:2; Department of Education, 2009b:1).

It is submitted that the South African Department of Higher Education regulates all these provisions to ensure that the PHEIs offer quality education. It seeks to guarantee that students, as well as the community are protected against dishonest providers. However, despite all these arrangements, there is difference between private and public institutions of higher learning in respect of the social agenda. A discussion of the role of PHEIS and their impact on the South African higher education system follows below.

The role and the impact of Private Higher Education Institutions in the South African Education system.

As previously mentioned, the expansion of PHEIS has been influenced by the demands that could not be met by the public higher education sector (Tamrat, 2018). Mohamedbhai (2008) describes this unavoidable situation as "massification". Mohamedbhai further avers that both public and private sector experience an increase in the number of admissions without a supplementary flow in the different types of resources. According to Tankou & al (2019) massification does not only entails the rise in enrolment, but also a number of issues associated with the "*make-up of students, curricula and qualifications, the broad range of qualifications offered, the launch of several entry and exit points within the higher education system and shifts with the vision and the mission of these institution"*. It is submitted that despite the doubt that people might have about PHEIs, these institutions serve as a canal to fill the gaps pertaining to skills at the work place. (Tankou&al, 2019). These authors further argue that PHEIs play a significant role in South Africa as they offer quality, universal learning programmes. Moreover, Ramchalan (2019) argues that, based on their suppleness and footprint in international arena, PHEIs can significantly contribute to internationalisation of higher Education. Ramchalan claims that the PHEIs can positively contribute to both growth as well as expansion of access to higher education in South Africa. He supports an inclusive education.

It should be noted that in South Africa the issue of accreditation and registration process reduced the number of private institutions. However, few influential PHEIs are still operating (Macgregor, 2008). According to the DEHT, there are 96 PHEIs that operate regularly and legally in South Africa. A total of 30 still hold the provisional status. However, the public sector has over 25 public universities and several higher learning institutions. (DEHT, 2015.2015/2016- 2019/2020). This *etat de lieu* implies that despite the scepticism and arduous regulations, PHEIs still attract a large number of students away from public universities. Ramlachan (2019) clearly elaborates on the great impact of PHEIs such as Damelin, Varsity College, and Heidelberg College, to mention just a few.

What stands out from the above discussion is that PHEIs are an old and a new reality (Chernostan & Verovska, 2016) This has been the case since the dawn of the 18th century. Notwithstanding, some have merged and become public institutions. The following are the strong characteristics of PHEIs quoted with permission, from Dittrich & Weck-Hannerman (2010):

1. Demand-driven: quite a number of PHEIs are established because of specific demands from the labour market. Employers, corporations and even governments may have specific wishes for education of their staff, especially after they have been working for a couple of years. Private institutions seem to be more apt to react to these wishes;

2. Customer-oriented: since the majority of PHEIs is dependent on all types of private funding and fees, they are more inclined to listen to their students and treat them as customers. The satisfaction of the students with the PHEIs is in general quite large. Of course, the PHEIs have to satisfy their "customers", since they might stop their studies or move to another provider. That means a loss of income, which might influence the existence of the PHEI;

3. Innovation: PHEIs seem to have more possibilities to develop innovative ways of teaching and learning. PHEIs have less trouble with vested interests, which may paralyze innovation. Some experiences suggest that PHEIs are therefore drivers for innovation, both in pedagogical methods and in the content of the programmes;

4. Other types of students: a large number of the public HEIs still are mainly directed towards their traditional clientele, young students in the age of 18-25 years. Most of these HEIs have trouble organizing themselves to be able to deliver

programmes for other types of students: those that work that combine jobs and studies, women entering the labour market after their motherhood, etc. PHEIs seem (better) able to respond to the specific wishes of these types of students;

5. Lifelong learning: in addition to that, PHEIs seem better inclined to open up to the necessity of lifelong learning. It might be true that students in their initial programmes are taught to develop an attitude of "learning to learn" and "continuous development", but in reality the same HEIs that teach those attitudes are not able to put that in practice. PHEIs are more "lean", are able to react directly, and quick to new questions and demands by offering courses, programmes, trainings, executive courses, modules etc.

6. Success rates: in some cases, it is striking to see that PHEIs seem more efficient and effective than public HEIs. In quite a number of cases, both the number of students that get their degrees and the duration of their periods of study appear to be better than those in the public HEIs. Of course, the customer-oriented attitude of the PHEIs will stimulate these results, but the way PHEIs have to take care of their finances might have led to more effective teaching methods as well!

The above summary reflects that PHEIs play a significant role in the world in general, and in South Africa in particular. Hence, these 6 features are the PHEIs' potential strengths: demand-driven, customer –oriented, innovation, diversity of students, lifelong learning and success rates. Jeanne-Badenhorst (2019) opines that South Africa is facing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment that affect the socio-economic and the political conditions in the country. As a result, the PHEIs' distance learning could potentially assist to address these three challenges. For that reason, Coan (2007) indicates that higher education should not be a competition arena between private and public institutions. Instead, there is a need to work together. More so, Coetzee (2019) emphasises that *"[i]nstitutions in private education sector focus on a more direct entrepreneurial approach".* Despite all the recommendations raised by authors in respect of PHEIs, the reality is that quality assurance and accreditation remains the weapons that are used by the higher education sector to undermine and restrict the operations of PHEIs. That being said, this article analyses the quality assurance in PHEIs to find out its impact on the operations and prospects of these institutions. The methodology of the study hereunder discussed followed by the theoretical framework, thereafter the challenges that are faced by the PHEIs.

The Octet of Quality Theory

All over the world, the concept "quality education" has become of great significance for the higher education system in general and academics in particular (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). Arguably, numerous aspects should come into play when dealing with quality assurance in education, both internally and externally to a specific institution (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). These authors posit that "*quality assurance remains the basic component in policies and practices of the institutions that assume roles in the society."* According to Vroeijenstijn (1995), the concept quality assurance can be understood as a "s*ystematic, structural and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement*." Moreover, it is submitted that quality encompasses a customer driven approach with a continuous improvement of the product and services as well as the processes resulting from the planning, implementing, evaluating and decision making methods (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013; Navaratnam,1997). The researchers are of the opinion that quality in education is upheld when the educational output aligns with the institutional planned goals, qualifications and requirements. In reality, when graduates are struggling in the workplace, it is a poor reflection on the quality of education received.

The essence of the above discussion is that quality assurance is a relevant tool that is of great concern in a number of institutions, regulatory bodies and DHET precisely. Having said that, this paper relies on the theoretical framework developed by Zaki & Zaki Rashidi (2013) who highlighted contributors' factors that enhance quality in higher education. They argue that these factors drastically contribute to the quality assurance in academia (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). This theoretical framework is named the Octet of Quality. According to the Octet quality framework, there are eight key components that impact the quality assurance of an academic institution. These components are: *policies and practices, resources, learner's profile, curriculum, faculty knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA), institutional design and strategy, institutional leadership, open system thinking and change.* I discuss them below.

Policies and Practices

It is submitted that policies and practises should be aligned with the national and international standards and must be considered as a "framework and benchmark" to all institutions; be it private or public. Individuals working in the Higher Education System are included. (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013).

Availability of Resources

When considering quality in education, the availability of resources is seldom neglected. However, it plays a huge role. Financial, physical and human resources are the key. Financial resources may be in the form of subsidy received from government for the betterment of the institution. This mostly happens in public institutions and remains a challenge in PHEIs. This discussion is carried over to the next section. Physical resources include infrastructure, buildings, laboratories, libraries and furniture. Human resources concern the faculty members, administrative and support staff ((Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). Arguably, in respect of quality, institutions need to plan to have new resources, and put policies in place to protect and audit existing resources. (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013).

Reflection on the learner's profile

Education should empower students with professional and competence skills in order to take part in growing the national economy. Higher education systems need to organise methods, modalities and means for the acquisition of relevant competence. Institutions should provide equal opportunities and "fair encouragement of excellence" (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013).

Curriculum

The curriculum also plays a significant role in the quality of education. It entails the objectives and outcomes, contents and credits, materials, assessments methods and audio-visual aids that are used to achieve institutional objectives. (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). Olivia (1997) as cited by Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, (2013) opines that curriculum development should use standard curriculum development models and approaches. It is a requirement that each discipline in the curriculum should fulfil the national objectives, while addressing the local and international needs.

Faculty Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

As mentioned above, quality in education relates to students' profile. This implies that academics within each faculty should be empowered with knowledge, skills and abilities. It is argued that "*what students learn is directly related to what and how teachers teach; and what and how teachers teach depend on the knowledge, skills and commitment they bring to their teaching"* (Nemser, 2003; Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). This implies that teachers need to stay alert to the influence and role that technology brings to their different roles within the institution. They are required to upgrade continuously.

Institutional Design and Strategy

In order to achieve quality, higher educational institutions need to implement credible policies and design potent and efficient strategies. It is argued that the institutions should focus on two broad domains, namely structural domains and contextual domains. Firstly, the structural domain encompasses internal characteristics and form the basis of comparing and measuring institutions. (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). This means that the structural domains relate to formalisation, specialisation, hierarchy of authority, centralisation and professionalism within the institution. (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). On the other hand, the contextual domains concern the size, the environment, the technology and goals of an institution (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). These authors accentuate that "*an effective design enhances the quality and help achieving the desired results*".

Institutional leadership

It is submitted that the quality in education will be attained, if the leadership of an academic institution provide clear guidance and direction pertaining to policies that are put in place. Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). The leader can maximise resources and motivate staff members within the faculty to give the best of them (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). Moreover, the leader could perceive challenges and opportunities and have an idea on how to tackle them. In most cases, the challenges pertaining to change of curriculum, staff development, faculty training and retaining, performance management are better handled by a pragmatic leader. It highlighted that the leader should even prepare his or her successor for the survival of the institution and promotion of work environment that is conducive for teaching and learning. (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013).

Open-system Thinking and change.

In order to achieve quality in education, an institution should aim for continuous growth and development. (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013). These authors highlighted that "*an academic must exhibit the norms of a learning organization which will replace the existing culture of stagnation due to conventional pedagogical approach and log-established system and procedures".*

What we can glean from the above discussion is that quality in education should be of paramount consideration on each institution, be it public or private. The said institution should ensure that it fulfils all the requirements. As Lemaitre & Karakhanyan (2018) clearly put it,

"*Quality Assurance in Higher education is a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, processes, outcomes) fulfils expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements".* This paper still supports the Octet framework as discussed above. However, the researchers are of the opinion that these contributory factors are not all directed to all higher institutions of learning. Thus, the adaptation of the octet theoretical framework in this study is as presented table 1 below. This paper argues that, an institution that has a huge role to play in terms of quality in higher education must structurally resemble the chart below.

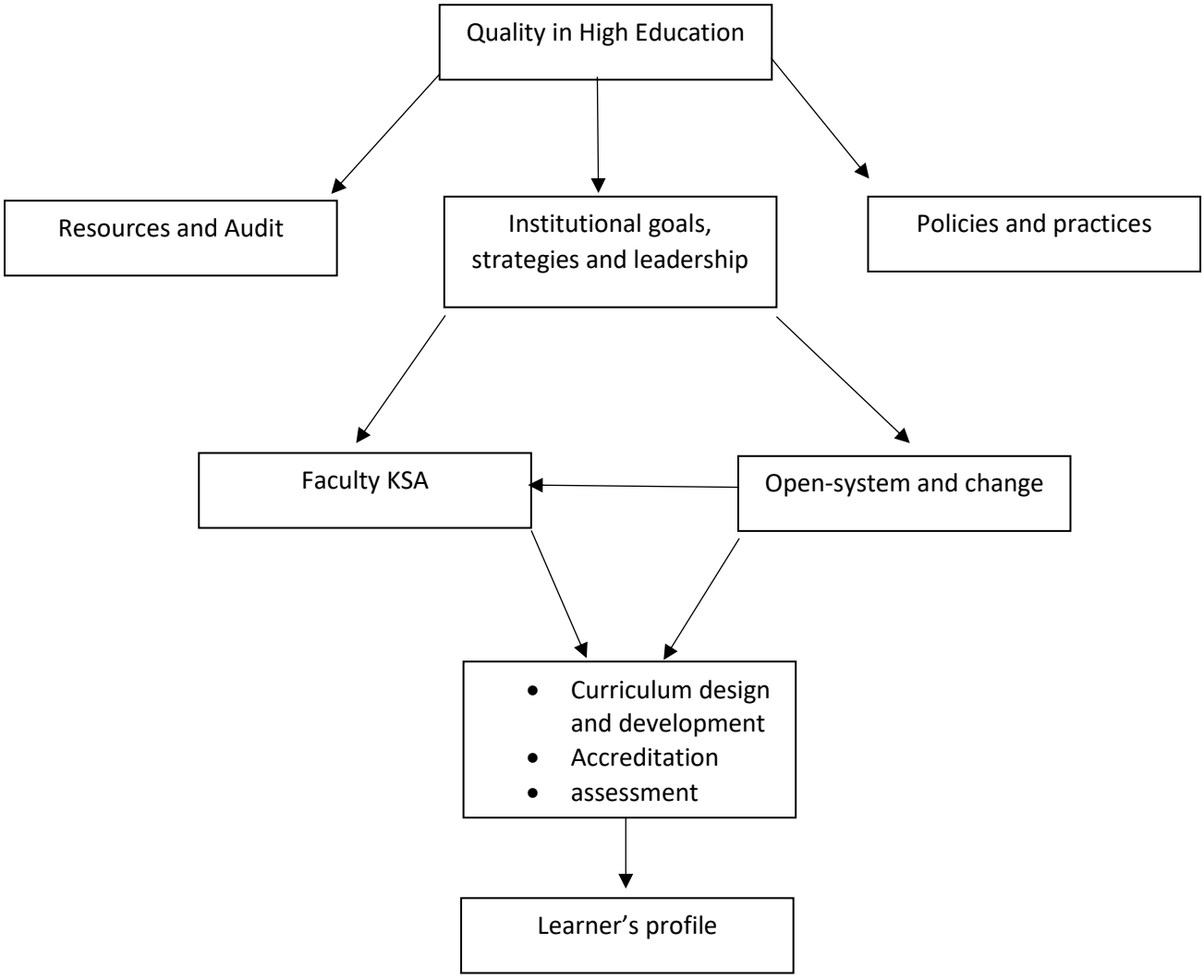

Table 1. Factors that determine quality assurance in academia, adapted from the Octet of Quality (Zaki & Zaki Rashidi, 2013).

The table correspond with the contributory factors raised by Zaki & Zaki Rashidi (2013).

The issues of quality assurance in PHEIs: Prospects and challenges

There are diverse PHEIs as there are various public higher institutions of learning (Dittrich & Weck-Hannerman, 2010). PHEIs can be distinguish by their size, focus, ownership, prestige

and specialisation. Dittrich & Weck-Hannerman (2010) identified 7 types of PHEIs that are briefly discussed below:

1 PHEIs with financial dimension

These institutions are characterised by the revenue as well as the expenditure side of the budget. Obviously, PHEIs are not funded by the government. This implies that tuition fees and their proportion of total revenue are sensitive. Although they call themselves "not for profit" it is evident that PHEIs operate for financial gain (Levi,2002).

2 *PHEIs with ownership dimension.*

With regard to this type of institution, the owner might be non-profit organisation, private companies or foundations. In some instances, churches or any other associations with religious motives own these PHEIs. (Dittrich & Weck-Hannerman, 2010).

3 *PHEIs predominantly similar to public institutions*

There are PHEIs that are offering programmes similar to public universities. However, they are restricted by legal framework of a specific country. For instance, if the PHEI would like to be called a university, it should conduct research and deliver more postgraduate candidates. Evidently, there should be a link between teaching and learning and research (Deacon &al. 2014).

4. *PHEIs with level of programmes*

Several private institutions offer undergraduate programmes. Other private institutions specialise only in the domain of masters programmes, emphasising on professional and executive mastery of skills and knowledge. (Dittrich & Weck-Hannerman, 2010).

5. PHEIs focusing on orientation and scope of activities

In this case, PHEIs target the international market. A good example is 'Business school'. They direct themselves to the international market, therefore their learning outcomes should align with the international needs.

6. *PHEIs focusing on specific type of students*

In this case, private sector wants to attract specific students. As a result, some institutions only focus on enrolling foreign students. These institutions could have several motives such as

"*financial-economic, socio-cultural or – very simple – noble opinions on "solidarity" or "humanity"* (Dittrich & Weck-Hannerman, 2010).

7 PHEIs in respect of size and width of the Programmes offered.

In this case, some institutions strive for a larger programme. Others limit themselves to one programme. It should be noted that *"the difference in strategies makes the size of the PHEIs quite different."* (Dittrich & Weck-Hannerman, 2010).

Against this backdrop, it is argued that there are several types of PHEIs. This should be one of the reasons that there is a challenge in respect of quality assurance. That is to say, one institutional goal differs from one another. It was mentioned above that in terms of quality assurance; this paper will only discuss the resources as well as the accreditation issues. The PHEIs experience an increase in respect of their enrolment compared to the public sector (Tankou &al, 2019). The lack of space in many public institutions has led many parents to opt for private institutions (Tankou &al, 2019. However, there are conditions for private institutions to be eligible in South Africa. The regulations (2016) provide that private higher education providers should be registered as a company in terms of the Companies Act. Further, it is required to ensure that their programmes are similar to public higher education providers (NQF level 5-10). These regulations insist that the private higher education provider must offer quality programmes as well as fulfil the transformational goals.

It is argued that despite the PHEIs significant role in the South African higher education system, they still face several challenges. Below is a discussion on the issue of quality assurance in respect of resources as well as accreditation.

Resources

Research done by Stander & Herman (2017) reveals that *"sufficient, adequate and relevant financial and physical resources are major barriers and /or challenges within the private higher education sector and have a significant impact on the quality of higher education offerings."* As stated above, the different types of PHEIs also have an impact on the ability to manage quality assurance processes. Therefore, the availability of resources plays a huge role. In respect of physical resources, the size and infrastructure also have an impact with regards to compliance with higher education and quality assurance legislative framework demands. (Stander & Herman ,2017). It was revealed that lager "university-types" also experienced financial constraints. (CHE,2015). In South Africa, the majority of PHEIs are usually small to

medium since they are relying on student fees to finance their operations and infrastructural projects. (Stander & Herman ,2017). These authors pinpoint that *"If PHEIs cannot get their programmes accredited, they cannot register the programme with the DHET and obtain a registration certificate, or register their programmes with SAQA on the NQFL, and therefore may not market or enrol students in these programmes".* Ellis and Steyn (2014) opine that that has put into place an overregulated framework. Furthermore, the issue of accreditation process also poses a challenge in PHEIs. Moreover, it submitted that the excellence of PHEIs in the HE system depends on the financial stability of these institutions (Chernosthan& Verovska, 2016).

Accreditation

Kis (2005) defines accreditation as "an *evaluation of whether an institution and or programme meets the threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status*" It is worth noting that obtaining the accreditation may have an impact on the PHEI as well as the registered students. In fact, the South African higher education system compels all tertiary institutions to have their programmes accredited with the Council on Higher Education (CHE). Thereafter, they may register each qualification with South African Qualification authority (SAQA). SAQA registers and records the qualification in the National Learner Records Database (NLRD). It is submitted that a PHEI, before enrolling its students, must first register with the DHET. It must register every single programme that it plans to enrol students in (Stander & Herman ,2017).

In essence, CHE controls the quality in higher education. It therefore follows that CHE comprises of a subcommittee that is responsible for programmes accreditation (CHE,2001). The said committee is named Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). During the process of accreditation, HE programmes are evaluated against HEQC's 19 criteria of accreditation. (CHE,2001). Stander and Herman (2017) clearly explains the procedure followed by PHEIs below:

> PHEIs therefore submit their application for programme accreditation to the CHE, where it goes through a lengthy process. This is mainly because of the CHE's peer-review model, in terms of which each programme is subject to various checks before it is sent to a subject evaluator for assessment. A detailed report is subsequently tabled with the Accreditation Committee and then submitted for approval at the HEQC meeting. A programme may accordingly receive any one of the following three outcomes from the HEQC: 'accredited without conditions', 'accredited with conditions' or 'not accredited'. A fourth outcome may be

> 'deferred' (by the Accreditation Committee), in which case more specific information is required before a decision can be made. If a programme is 'deferred' or 'accredited with conditions', a site visit may be a recommendation. While SAQA's submission for the registration of its qualification forms part of this process, a PHEI has to submit evidence via another process at the DHET as well in order to register with the DHET as a PHEI...
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> The programmes submitted for accreditation are evaluated against the first nine programme accreditation criteria. However, PHEIs are required to re-accredit their programmes every three to five years (a cycle), whereupon the PHEI are required to re-accredit their programmes to meet the minimum requirements for the remainder of the nineteen criteria... the process for programme accreditation (and re-accreditation) requires PHEIs to develop and submit over thirty different policies linked to the various criteria for the programme accreditation process in South Africa.

What could be learned from the above is that the accreditation of PHEIs is a lengthy process. It is not without its challenges Ellis and Steyn (2016) as well as Fuller & Govender (2020). The latter raised the concern of cumulative financial impact during the accreditation process given that it is payable. Furthermore, Fuller & Govender (2020) allude to the issue of the regulations misalignment and that they clearly favour the public institutions of higher learning.

To sum up, it is argued that PHEIs are facing several barriers and challenges in respect of their development. Several challenges such as financial instability, overregulation, lengthy approval processes, victimisation and distrust frustrate the growth of these PHEIs. Arguably, policies in higher education system appear to favour of public providers.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper analysed the issues of quality assurance of PHEIs in the South African education system. In respect of quality assurance, the paper focused on resources and accreditation as the two main challenges that are experienced by PHEIs. Initially, the article provided the historical background and the role of PHEIs. It discussed the theoretical framework underpinning quality assurance in this study. The theory used was the octet quality. The paper finally exposed the challenges that quality assurance procedures put on the growth and the development of PHEIs in South Africa. Sequel to the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- There is a need to close the skills gap between secondary and tertiary education. Both private and public sectors need to be open for a fruitful partnership. Therefore, public-private partnership is strongly supported.
- Should South Africa wish to achieve the development goals of enrolling 500,000 students by 2030 (Coan, 2017), it needs to unify both sectors by acknowledging that the number of demand is larger than space availability (Ramlachan,2019). The role of PHEIs in HE cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, this paper supports a more collaborative approach. Both institutions are not competing; they are rather complementary.
- It is submitted that the regulations and regulatory bodies are more in favour of the public sector. This gap needs to be filled by revising the laws that regulate the industry. This is envisaged to help provide an opportunity for PHEIs which meet the required university criteria/standard.

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