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STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCES AT THE UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-AFRICA

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Abstract

The success of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) is hinged on the quality of graduates they channel into the society. The growing concern about the declining employability of graduates of HEIs places a high threshold on the quality of education and training HEIs offer. Moreover, education regulatory bodies have enshrined quality assurance (QA) as a requirement for HEIs. Consequently, HEIs are increasingly embedding robust quality assurance systems in their processes for continuous institutional improvement. Despite the critical role stakeholders play in enhancing quality in HEIs, several challenges hinder the entrenchment of a culture of involving stakeholders in QA in most of these HEIs. The challenges include recruitment of stakeholders to take part in QA processes, stakeholder disinterest, inadequate QA competences in stakeholders, utilization of stakeholder input, and assessing the value of their involvement for institutional improvement. As a matter of fact, HEIs have a wide array of stakeholders ranging from internal stakeholders - students, employees, managers to external stakeholders - parents, employers regulatory bodies, government and the general public. The aforementioned have a stake in the performance of the HEIs hence their concern about quality. Without gainsaying, students comprise the largest stakeholders and are direct beneficiaries of educational institutions hence their involvement in QA is of paramount importance. Cognizant of this, United States International University-Africa (USIU-Africa) has, over the years, continuously engaged students, both current and alumni, at various levels, in her QA processes. Adopting a mixed methods research design, this study, rooted in the stakeholder theory, describes the engagement of students and alumni in USIU-Africa's QA processes. Precisely, the paper interrogates six key issues: What QA processes are students involved in? What role(s) do students play in these QA processes? How are they involved in these QA processes? To what extent is students' input utilized in improving quality? How adequately are students prepared to take part in QA processes? To what extent has student involvement in QA processes been effective? What challenges, if any, impede student involvement in QA? Document analyses and interviews with key informants are used to collect data for the study. Data is analysed and thematically interpreted in line with the research questions. Based on the findings, the study concludes that students are involved in QA processes, and students themselves nominate their representatives QA teams who are trained in a number of QA related topics. Although student involvement is viewed as valuable to HEIs, it is yet to be effective due to a myriad of challenges. Hence HEIs should enhance awareness creation by wide dissemination of QA activities, build the capacity of internal stakeholders, motivate students to embrace QA, and mainstream QA content in the common courses.

Keywords: *Higher educational institutions, quality assurance, QA processes, stakeholders, student involvement.*

Background to the Study

Quality assurance (QA) has become an increasingly dominant theme in higher education across the globe. This demand for quality assurance is even higher for international universities (Varonism, 2014). Indeed, the QA mantra has dominated education systems especially the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) over the last decade. As the demand for quality higher education continues to rise, HEIs are increasingly becoming eager to engage in continual dialogue with relevant groups, while providing accountability, quality, effectiveness and efficiency in order to establish comprehensive, relevant and credible QA systems that trigger continuous improvement (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008).

In higher education, a stakeholder is any person or entity with a legitimate interest in higher education and who, as such, acquires the right to intervene (Amaral & Magalhaes, 2002). This includes a wide range of individuals, organizations and institutions as well as representatives of government, commerce and the wider community (Matlay, 2009). Matlay further describes stakeholders of a learning institution as either being internal (such as students, teaching and research staff, faculty administrators and managers) or external (like parents, family

members, alumni, employers and entrepreneurs, representatives of industry, professional bodies, government agencies and the wider community).

Unarguably, students are the most valuable stakeholders of higher education, especially in matters of internal QA and the development of a quality culture within HEIs (Sursock, 2011; Jongbloed et al. 2008; McDowell & Sambell, 1999; Hill, 1995). Students, being the largest stakeholder in higher education, have a special interest in factors that are relevant in making education a good investment (Alaniska et. al., 2006). As such, they are supposed to be involved in evaluation of courses and participate in internal QA via decision-making and quality management processes at higher education institutions as equal partners (Leisyte, Westerheijden, Epping, Faber, & de Weert, 2013). Moreover, students play various roles in QA ranging from providing information in QA surveys, participating in the preparation of self-assessment reports, and serving as members of the bodies responsible for internal QA processes (Dearlove, 2006).

The benefits of stakeholder involvement in QA in HEIs cannot be gainsaid. HEIs are likely to enjoy cost savings and industries are more likely to employ graduates from institutions that value quality (Kigwilu & Bwanali, 2016). Furthermore, stakeholder involvement exposes the needs of the market more precisely thereby enabling HEIs to appropriately respond to changing demands and skill expectations (Werum, 2003; Lauder, 2001). Moreover, when quality is enhanced in educational processes, HEIs enjoy student and staff loyalty, lower vulnerability to economic changes, ability to command higher funding and more autonomy from the state in policy development. Benefits accruing to students who participate in QA processes include development of communication, analytical reasoning, leadership skills and a sense of ownership of degree programmes (Elassy, 2013; QAA, 2009). Consequently, HEIs are increasingly embedding student involvement in their robust QA systems. Tellingly, some HEIs are increasingly working in partnership with students and the student body both before and after student surveys, with increased dialogue about the survey findings and implementation of improvements arising from the survey findings (Shah & Nair, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The success of HEIs is hinged on the quality of graduates they channel into the society (African Union, 2007). Current discourses centre around the perceived ineptitude of fresh graduates to measure to the expectations of employers in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values desired in the job market (Knight & Yorke, 2002; Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Lafer, 2004). Education regulatory bodies have also enshrined QA as a requirement for HEIs. This places a high demand on HEIs to offer quality education as desired by the stakeholders.

Without a doubt, students comprise the largest stakeholders of HEIs hence their pivotal role in matters of QA. One of the features that define successful institutions is the significant participation by students in QA processes (Wison, 2008). UNESCO (2006) reiterates that students should be involved as active partners in the development, monitoring and maintenance of the quality provision of higher education. Nonetheless, student involvement in QA in higher education tends to be limited (European Commission, 2009).

However, in Kenya, USIU-Africa has, over the years, continuously engaged students at various levels in her QA processes. USIU-Africa is dual accredited: locally it is accredited by the Commission for University Education (CUE) and internationally it is accredited by the WASC Senior Colleges and University Commission (WSCUC), a regional accreditation body in the USA. The dual accreditation of USIU-Africa places a higher threshold on the university to uphold highest quality standards in her programmes and operations. This study sought, therefore, to examine the nature and effects of student involvement in QA processes at USIU-Africa. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:
1. What QA processes are students involved in?
2. What role(s) do students play in these QA processes?
3. How adequately are students prepared to take part in QA processes?
4. To what extent has student involvement in QA processes been effective?
5. What challenges, if any, affect student involvement in QA?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study is grounded in the stakeholder theory by Freeman (1984). Freeman posits that managers must formulate and implement processes which satisfy all and only those groups which have a stake in the business. As such, the task of the manager is to manage and integrate the relationships and interests of shareholders in a way that

guarantees the long-term success of the firm. The stakeholder theory literature can be viewed under three theories: normative theory, descriptive theory and instrumental theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The normative stakeholder theory is concerned with how managers or stakeholders should act and view the purpose of organization, based on some ethical principles. The descriptive stakeholder theory is concerned with how managers and stakeholders actually behave and view their actions and roles (Brenner & Cochran, 1991). Finally, the instrumental stakeholder theory deals with how managers should act if they want to flavour and work for their own interests (Friedman & Miles, 2006; Fontaine, Haarman & Schmid, 2006; Freeman, 1984).

One pillar of the normative stakeholder theory is that the institutional decisions affect stakeholder outcomes and should therefore be ethically determined. Thus, any decisions made without any consideration of their impact are usually termed unethical. In their urge for a redefinition of the purposes of an institution to enable it to act as a vehicle for coordinating stakeholders' interests, Evan and Freeman (1988) propose two principles: (i) principle of corporate legitimacy which requires that companies (institutions) should be managed for the benefit of stakeholders to enable stakeholders participate in decisions that substantially affect their welfare, and (ii) fiduciary principle which argues that managers should act in the interests of the stakeholders as their agent in the interests of the corporation to ensure the survival of the firm. Finally, the authors propose the establishment of a stakeholder board of directors for effective stakeholder management. They suggest that the board of directors may be appointed from the identified stakeholder groups, including one who would be elected unanimously by the others and be vested with the duty of caring for all stakeholders. According to Donald and Preston (1995), the normative view argues that organizations should accommodate stakeholder concerns, not because of the benefits it may give the organization but because it serves a moral duty to each stakeholder. This view sees stakeholders as ends in themselves and not as merely instrumental to achievement of other ends.

Stakeholder theory is not without criticism. First, the theory has been said to be inadequate in explaining the relationships between businesses and institutions in the modern capitalistic society, especially as far as the institutional structures are concerned (Phillips, 2003; Stoney & Winstanely, 2001). Secondly, the theory fails to explain how managers can treat each stakeholder in an equitable manner, without subjecting some to undue advantage over others, especially where critical decisions should be made (Sternberg, 1997). Thirdly, the theory does not articulate how a balance in various stakeholder benefits can be achieved, given the infinite number of stakeholders of an institution and the difficulty that may be faced by managers in knowing what stakeholders consider to be benefits.

Despite the criticisms levelled against the theory, it is still widely used in many disciplines. When applied in tertiary education, stakeholder analysis focuses on how to define quality in education and serve the needs of its constituents (Hill & Jones, 1992). However, this can be achieved if consensus is established among stakeholders in the educational process. Another strength of the theory lies in the fact that it serves as a convenient label for the various groups and individuals that institutions need to take into account when pursuing their objectives. Garrison and Borgia (1999) contend that inclusion of stakeholders in defining quality may yield more useful benchmarks including dropout rates, response rates on assignments, student evaluations, the quality of the teaching package, the degree of freedom in pace and content, and the level of independence of the students. These elements are at the core of QA processes hence the adoption of the theory in this study.

Literature Review

Kopaleishyili and Lortkipanidze (2013) in their stakeholder survey analysis on QA process in Georgia noted that staff and faculty were most optimistic about the impact of QA. About 33.8 per cent and 44.6 per cent of them said they found accreditation standards very efficient and effective respectively. In addition, 95.3 per cent considered internal QA mechanisms effective at their institution. In the same survey, 84.7 per cent of students indicated that they are well aware of programme accreditation and see the advantages of studying on an accredited programme. In addition, 74.3 per cent of students were aware of bodies that authorize educational institutions to offer degree programmes.

According to Liesyte et al. (2013), in Europe, students are represented at all levels of the institution; from the overall representative body such as the university senate or board, trickling down to faculty boards, examination committees and programme committees, academic ethics committees or disciplinary commissions. The students have voting rights (Netherlands), have membership in decision-making bodies (Central and Eastern European countries), membership in governing bodies and advisory committees related to internal QA (Poland) and participate in evaluation processes (UK). However, student representation seems to be least used in Portugal and the Czech Republic.

In terms of providing information, students provide feedback on QA processes by completing survey instruments such as course instruction evaluations. In other instances, like in Finland, students collect and analyse feedback using questionnaires designed by themselves or in close cooperation with the academic staff. They further organize staff and student development workshops, where innovative and problem-solving oriented discussions are encouraged in a comfortable atmosphere. In Finland, the students are generally regarded as experts in learning. As such, this student expertise is harnessed using methods like inviting them into working groups and meetings, asking widely for their opinions, and for written statements. For instance, at the University of Oulu, half of the teaching development team members are students. Elassy (2013) reports that student involvement in QA processes includes students responding to focus group interviews and questionnaires, participating in QA-related working groups, and involving themselves in QA processes.

At AQU Catalunya, the official QA body in the Catalan university system, students participate in the training courses dealing with quality assessment. Upon completion, they become qualified to take part in external assessment committees. In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, students are involved in institutional audits and institutional reviews. In both instances, auditors/reviewers meet with student groups and student representative bodies and the audit team applaud the value of student involvement in the audit processes (QAA, 2006).

In the Annual QAA report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (QAA, 2006), a majority of respondents indicated that they provide some form of training for the students involved in their QA processes. The training time provided showed wide variation between respondents - ranging from one hour to five days - although the most common length was one day. Some of the topics covered in the training included: Legislation/standards for QA processes; procedures for QA; objectives of QA processes; and overview of national higher education, QA framework and international developments in QA. Other topics included: Case studies; panel members' roles and responsibilities; ethics; specific issues and information relating to the object of the review (institution, programme of study, course, etc.); and practical skills such as report writing, research skills and time management.

A number of challenges seem to impede student involvement in QA processes in higher education. These challenges include: lack of information about QA among the student body, scepticism towards QA processes, failure to view students as full members of the academic community, inadequate transparency of QA processes, lack of transparency in student selection and nomination procedures, reluctance to attend meetings, and the slow pace of QA mechanisms either at institutional or national level (Altman, Schwegler & Bunkowski, 2014; Gavra, Stråhlman & Palomares, 2012). Other challenges identified by Alaniska et al. (2006) and Dearlove (2006) include difficulties in finding qualified students, little interest among students to participate, lack of relevant competences in students despite a satisfactory recruiting process, legitimacy of student experts in the eyes of the professors under evaluation, students' personal integrity especially in politically-oriented student unions, and cultural issues and knowledge of the educational system in foreign countries.

Methodology

The survey sought to solicit information about student involvement in QA in higher education at the United States International University (USIU). Adopting a mixed methods research design, the survey sought to determine the practices and experiences of participants relating to how students are involved in QA practices at the university. The target group consisted of 7533 participants; 7005 students and 528 employees. In each of the strata (students and employees), proportionate random sampling was used to select a total of 364 participants (338 students and 26 employees) as recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The employees ranged from management to faculty and staff.

Questionnaires, document analysis and interview guides were used to collect data. The questionnaires included open and close-ended questions. Questionnaires were administered to students, faculty and staff whereas interviews were conducted for key informants such as the Vice Chancellor, Director of QA and Deans. Documents analysed included graduate exit surveys, alumni reports, tracer study reports and current student survey reports. The survey instruments were piloted and revised prior to data collection. Descriptive statistics namely percentages, means and standard deviations were used to analyse quantitative data. Qualitative data were coded thematically, analysed and interpreted in line with the research questions. Ethical considerations such as ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, privacy and safety of participants were adhered to while collecting data and reporting the findings.

Findings and Discussion

Participants Demographics

At the time of collecting data, students were on recess hence only 200 out of the targeted 338 students were reached. Out of this number, only 168 students and 21 employees returned the questionnaires. During data cleaning process, only 122 questionnaires (105 for students and 17 for employees) were found valid for analysis. The survey captured participants' gender, age, educational qualifications and section the employees are deployed in the university. The findings are subsequently discussed.

Gender of Participants

The gender distribution for students and employees are as shown in table 8.1. In the table, 57.4 per cent of the participants were female and males constituted 42.6 per cent of the participants. Overall, 86.1 per cent of participants were students with 50.8 per cent of them being female. On the contrary, almost the same number of male employees and female employees participated in the study.

Table 8.1: Gender of Participants

Participant type	Gender					
	Male		Female		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Students	43	35.2	62	50.8	105	86.1
Employees	9	7.4	8	6.5	17	13.9
Total	**52**	**42.6**	**70**	**57.4**	**122**	**100.0**

Age of Participants

The age distribution of participants is presented in Table 8.2. The lowest age group used was 16-20 years in order to accommodate students. According to Table 8.2, 58.1 per cent of the students were in the 21-25 age group and the mean age was 23. For the employees, their ages ranged from the 26-30 age group to 46-50 age group with an outlier for both students and employees in the 60 and above age group. The mean age of employees was 43. This finding shows that on average, the employees are in the most productive stage of their careers.

Table 8.2: Age of participants

Age range	Participant type	
	No. of students	No. of employees
16-20	33	0
21-25	61	0
26-30	4	1
31-35	2	3
36-40	1	4
41-45	1	4
46-50	2	2
56-60	0	1
60 and above	1	2
Total	**105**	**17**

Educational Qualifications of Participants

As regards educational qualifications, students stated the degree level they were pursuing at the university while employees mentioned the highest academic qualifications they had attained. The findings are presented in table 8.3.

Table 8.3: Educational Qualifications of Participants

Educational Qualification	Students		Employees		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Undergraduate student	91	74.6	0	0	91	74.6
Graduate student	14	11.5	4	3.3	18	14.8
Diploma	0	0	1	0.8	1	0.8
Undergraduate	0	0	3	2.4	3	2.4
Graduate	0	0	9	7.4	9	7.4
Total	**105**	**86.1**	**17**	**13.9**	**122**	**100.0**

Undergraduate students comprised 74.6 per cent of total participants while 11.5 per cent were graduate students. For the employees, 7.4 per cent had graduate qualification followed by 2.4 per cent with undergraduate qualifications. Only one employee had diploma qualification. Of the 17 employees, seven were staff and ten were faculty. In terms of work stations, three worked in student affairs section while 14 worked in academic affairs section. This finding shows that the university employees were generally qualified and therefore likely to be knowledgeable enough to comprehend the processes and activities within the university.

Findings

Students' Involvement in QA processes

From their experience at the university, participants stated whether or not students were involved in QA processes. A majority of the participants (94.3%) affirmed that students were involved in QA processes in the university. This large proportion that affirmed students' involvement in QA processes comprised 99 students (81.1%) and 16 employees (13.2%). This shows that students are involved in QA processes in the university.

Ways in Which Students are involved in QA Processes

Participants explained how students are involved in QA processes in the university. The findings are presented in table 8.4. According to students, student involvement was mainly through membership to programme assessment and review teams (58.2%) followed by membership to the University Academic Disciplinary Committee (27.0%).

Table 8.4: Ways in Which Students are involved in QA Processes

Way of involvement	Students		Employees		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Members to Assessment/Review teams	72	58.2	11	9.0	83	68.0
Members to University Accreditation/Audit Teams	16	13.1	5	4.1	21	17.2
Members to University QA Committee	15	12.3	6	4.9	21	17.2
Members to University Employee Recruitment Committee	18	14.8	5	4.1	23	18.9
Members to University Academic Disciplinary Committee	33	27.0	13	10.7	46	37.7
Members to Student Academic	5	4.1	0	0	5	4.1

Council

Similarly, employees identified the same two ways in which students are involved in QA processes at the university with 10.7 per cent choosing membership to the University Academic Disciplinary Committee and 9 per cent choosing membership to programme review and assessment teams. Overall, this finding revealed that students were aware of a variety of ways through which they participate in QA processes in the university; only a few students believed that the student Academic Council played a significant role in QA. This corroborates the findings of Liesyte et al. (2013) which showed that students are represented at all levels of the institution, from the overall representative body such as the university senate or board, trickling down to faculty boards, examination committees and programme committees, academic ethics committees or disciplinary commissions.

Documents analysed revealed that student involvement is entrenched in the QA processes. The most common roles students play in these processes is provision of information in the surveys. For instance, in graduate exit surveys, students provided information about their satisfaction on the existing academic programmes, their employment prospects and future education plans (USIU-Africa, 2016a). In the doctoral culture survey, students provided information on whether they had either done a research methodology class or presented a conference paper to help entrench the doctorate culture. Moreover, students are selected to provide assessment information through focus group discussions (USIU-Africa, 2014). Programme assessment reports make use of student portfolios, artefacts, and examinations (for example, USIU-Africa, 2013, 2015, 2016b, 2016c). The Student Affairs Council (SAC) nominates two representatives that serve in the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)/ Educational Effectiveness Committee (EEC) that spearheads the assessment/review process and evaluation of the compiled reports. The available QAC minutes provide evidence that these student representatives participate in discussing the progress and actions undertaken by assessment teams in both programme assessment and programme review processes. Reviewed literature (such as Elassy, 2013) had reported that student involvement in QA processes includes students responding to focus group interviews and questionnaires, participating in QA-related working groups, and involving themselves in QA processes.

In addition, the SAC officials attend university wide meetings for institutional accreditation and audit. They also form part of the self-study teams and task force that are charged with preparing the accreditation and audit reports. As a university practice, students are in a timely manner informed of institutional audit visits and their role in the process. During the visits, they independently verify to the accrediting/audit team, through a series of questions and deliberations, whether the university is adhering to the set standards and guidelines. Without gainsaying, evidence of student involvement in QA processes is a key principle advocated for by WSCUC. In light of this, students at USIU-Africa form an integral part of the process by having their elected student representative be part of the team tasked to write the institutional reports. The findings confirm findings by Kopaleishyili and Lortkipanidze (2013) that students were aware of programme accreditation and the bodies that authorize educational institutions to offer degree programmes.

University Organs Responsible for Selecting Students to Participate in QA Processes

When asked who the university organs charged with selection of students who participate in QA processes were, both students and employees gave responses as shown in Figure 8.1.
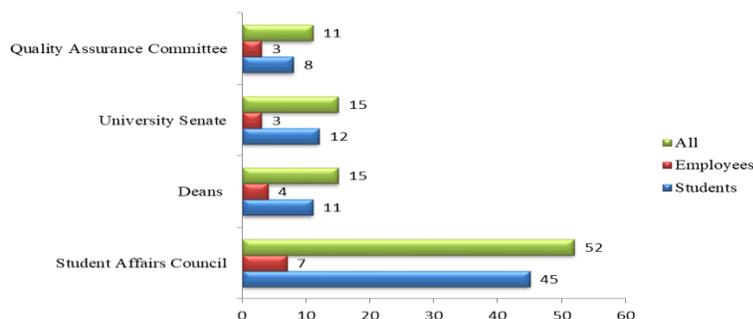
Fig. 8.1: Organs Responsible for Student Selection for QA Processes

From the students' experience, the SAC was singled out as the main organ that selects students who participate in QA processes. Other students mentioned the University Senate while others mentioned the QA Committee (QAC) and Deans of Schools and Dean of Student Affairs. Similar observations were made by employees with majority mentioning SAC followed closely by deans. This finding revealed that SAC was instrumental in selecting students to represent the student body in the various QA processes in the university. It was however unclear to participants if the other university organs would select students without consultation with SAC.

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Profile/Competences Required of Students to Participate in QA Processes

The survey sought the profile of students who are selected to participate in QA processes. The findings are presented in table 8.5.

Table 8.5: Profile of Students Involved in QA Processes

Profile/Competences required	Students		Employees		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Registered for courses/currently in session	18	14.6	3	2.5	21	17.1
Demonstrate leadership skills/ served as a leader	18	14.6	3	2.5	21	17.1
Demonstrate honesty and integrity	6	4.9	0	0	6	4.9
Good academic performance/ higher GPA	26	21.3	4	3.3	30	24.6
Demonstrate fairness/ unbiased in serving others	2	1.6	0	0	2	1.6
Active participation in student organizations and clubs	8	6.6	0	0	8	6.6
Have a good discipline record	3	2.5	0	0	3	2.5

From both students' and employees' points of view, those selected to represent the student body in QA processes must have good academic performance as reflected in a high GPA (21.3%), be registered for courses (14.6%) and possess strong leadership skills (14.6%). Other key competences mentioned were possession of honesty and integrity (4.9%) and active participation of the student in student organizations and clubs (6.6%). The findings revealed that the university has set criteria for the competences of students who form part of QA teams and lays emphasis on good academic record, leadership, active participation and integrity.

When asked if the same selection criteria applied to other parties involved in QA processes, 83 (68.0%) participants, 74 students and 9 employees, explained that the competences required of both parties were similar where applicable. Only 32 per cent explained that the competences required of students were different from those required of other parties taking part in QA processes. This finding shows that except for academic performance, students were subjected to similar eligibility criteria like other members of QA teams.

Training of Students in QA Processes

The survey further sought to establish if students participating in QA processes received any training on the same. A large proportion of the participants (70.5%) affirmed that students are trained in QA processes. The duration of such training as presented in Figure 8.2 shows that most of the QA training for students last for 1-3 hours (34.4%) or less than one hour (11.5%). Only in exceptional circumstances do such training go beyond a day. Document analyses further established that in some QA processes, students are adequately prepared to participate in the process.
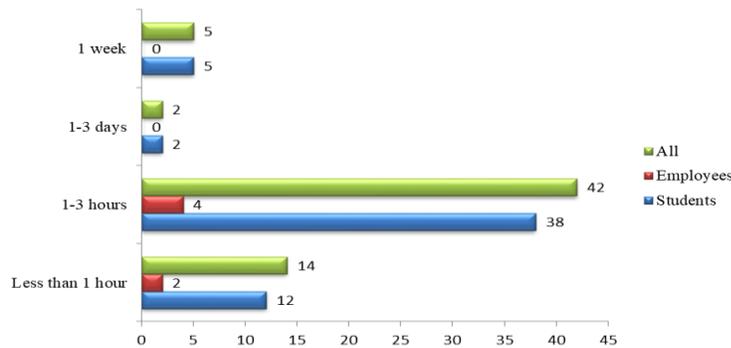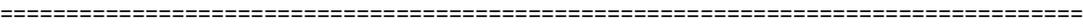
Fig. 8.2: Duration of Training

The processes for which students are adequately prepared include the institutional accreditation and audit processes where a series of briefing meetings are conducted with various stakeholders, key among them students, in what is widely known as *baraza.* In these *barazas*, students are afforded opportunity to ask questions on the value of the process. The role they play in the process is also clarified. The *baraza*, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, often lasts an hour. In programme assessment and review processes, student representatives are trained to serve in the EEC which enables them to effectively participate in the process. The practice at USIU-Africa is no different from that in England that had varied training durations, ranging from one hour to five days (QAA, 2006). The topics covered during such training are as shown in Figure 8.3.
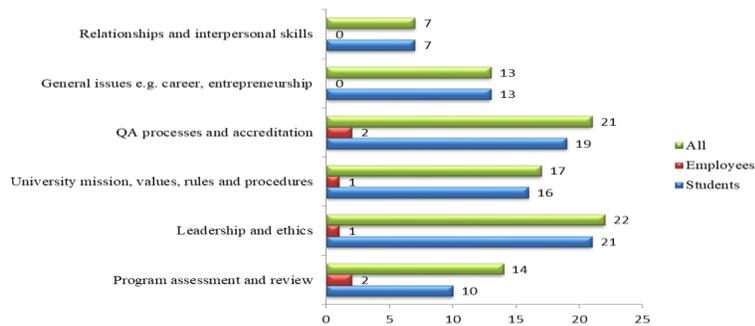
Fig. 8.3: QA Training Topics

According to students, the common topics covered during QA training are leadership and ethics (17.2%), QA processes and accreditation (15.6%), and University mission, values, rules and procedures (13.1%). Employees identified major topics covered as QA processes and accreditation (1.6%) and programme assessment and review (1.6%). Essentially the main topics as identified by both students and employees form the core of QA processes in HEIs. With regard to how the training is conducted, participants who explained that students are trained separately from university employees were more (65.9%) than those who explained that students are trained together with university employees (34.1%). On further interrogation, participants revealed that when students were trained separately, the training was facilitated by the QA experts in the university. This shows that the university has put in place mechanisms that support students' understanding of the QA processes.

The finding that the university has put in place mechanisms that support students' understanding of the QA processes resonates with the practice in other international universities. For instance, QAA (2006) report shows that students participate in the training courses dealing with quality assessment and are involved in institutional audits and institutional reviews. The QAA (2006) report further showed that topics covered when training students ranged from standards for QA processes; procedures for QA; objectives of QA processes, panel members' roles and responsibilities; ethics; specific issues and information relating to the object of the review; and practical skills such as report writing, research skills and time management. These are similar to the topics identified by participants in this study.

Value of Student Involvement in QA Processes

Participants explained a number of value additions of student involvement in QA process as shown in Table 8.6.

Table 8.6: Value of Student Involvement in QA Processes

Value added	Students		Employees		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Student feedback is used to improve quality of services and programmes	15	12.3	4	3.3	19	15.6
Students' views are incorporated when making decisions. This creates a sense of ownership	12	9.8	4	3.3	16	13.1
Students become familiar with QA processes	14	11.5	2	1.6	16	13.1
Students acquire valuable leadership skills	7	5.7	0	0	7	5.7

The value most identified by both students and employees, focused on the use of student feedback to improve the quality of programmes offered and services rendered to the university community and the wider stakeholder community (15.6%). Moreover, student involvement in QA processes cemented student ownership and embracement of decisions arising out of the QA processes (13.1%), familiarized students with QA processes (13.1%) and helped them acquire valuable leadership skills (5.7%). This finding shows that participants found student involvement in QA processes a valuable activity.

Indicators of Student Involvement in QA Processes

The survey further sought to identify the indicators of student involvement in QA processes in the university. The findings are presented in Figure 8.4.
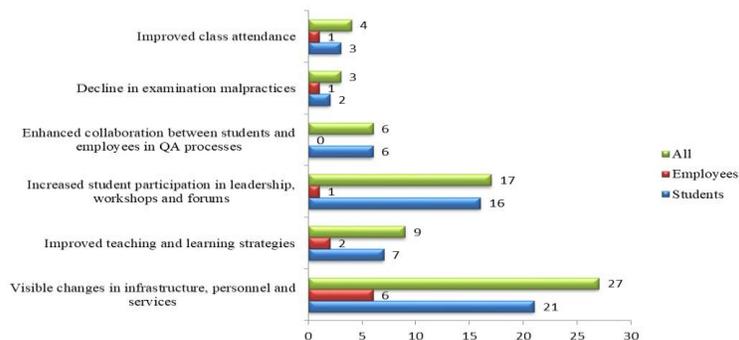
Fig. 8.4: Indicators of Student Involvement in QA Processes

The main indicators as pointed out by students were: visible changes in infrastructure, personnel and services rendered (17.2%), and increased student participation in leadership activities, workshops and other forums (13.1%). For employees, the main indicator was visible changes in infrastructure, personnel and services rendered (4.9%), followed by improved teaching and learning strategies (1.6%). Other indicators mentioned by all participants were enhanced collaboration in QA processes between students and employees (4.9%), improved class attendance (3.3%), and a decline in examination malpractices (2.5%).

Effectiveness of Student Involvement in QA Processes

In order to determine the effectiveness of student involvement in QA processes in the university, participants were asked to rate the involvement with "none" for least effective and "very large extent" for most effective. Ratings of

"Very large extent" and "Large extent" were interpreted as being effective. Otherwise the involvement was termed ineffective. The findings are presented in table 8.7.

Table 8.7: Rating of Effectiveness of Student Involvement in QA Processes

Extent of effectiveness	Students		Employees		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Very large extent	16	13.1	2	1.6	18	14.7
Large extent	27	22.1	4	3.3	31	25.4
Small extent	36	29.5	6	4.9	42	34.4
None	11	9.0	0	0	11	9.0

A majority of the students rated the effectiveness as being to a "large extent" (29.5%) or "small extent" (22.1%). Similar ratings were made by employees. Since the aggregate rating for "Very large extent" and "Large extent" (40.1%) exceeded that of "Small extent" and "None" (43.1%), the findings showed that students and employees did not find student involvement in QA processes to be effective. A key informant from the alumni office explained that student involvement in alumni surveys and tracer studies was effective in the past but the response rate has been on a decline.

Challenges Affecting Student Involvement in QA Processes

Students and employees further enumerated the challenges that hinder student involvement in QA processes in the university. The challenges identified are presented in table 8.8.

Table 8.8: Challenges Affecting Student Involvement in QA Processes

Challenge	Students		Employees		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Inadequate information / awareness about QA processes	17	13.9	6	4.9	23	18.8
Inadequate time	15	12.3	2	1.6	17	13.9
Feelings of neglect among other students when only student leaders are selected to take part in QA processes	8	6.6	1	0.8	9	7.4
Apathy/lack of cooperation from students	5	4.1	2	1.6	7	5.7
Low student representation in QA teams	5	4.1	1	0.8	6	4.9
Lack of transparency and accountability in QA processes	3	2.5	1	0.8	4	3.3
Low uptake of student opinions	4	3.3	0	0	4	3.3
Lengthy procedures/bureaucracy	3	2.5	0	0	3	2.5
Inadequate training of students in QA processes	1	0.8	1		2	1.6
Top management minimally consults students on QA processes	1	0.8	0	0	1	0.8
Student leaders water down student concerns	1	0.8	0	0	1	0.8
Poor role models among employees	1	0.8	0	0	1	0.8

The main challenges hindering student involvement in QA processes in the university include inadequate information about QA processes (18.8%) and inadequate time for participating in QA processes (13.9%). Other mentioned challenges include feelings of neglect among non-participating students, student apathy and low student representation in QA teams, lack of transparency in QA processes and low uptake of student opinions. A parallel to the issue of student apathy was raised by a key informant in student affairs that whereas a majority of the students are keen to attend *barazas,* a portion of them show no interest in attending the *barazas* at all. Another key informant opined:

> *Given the fact that the students have graduated there are those that feel the changes would not significantly impact on them and thus they fill out the questionnaire just for the sake. Without any mechanism to obligate our alumni to respond in a timely manner, delayed response has been a key challenge.*

The aforesaid challenges were also echoed in the documents that were analysed. From the documents, it was highlighted that only a few students, normally the student representatives, were involved in programme assessment and review. Lack of student interest is also singled out as an impediment to student involvement in QA processes. Other challenges voiced by key informants included: inadequate dissemination of the on goings of assessment and the recommendations emanating from the process by student representatives to their constituents; inability of students enrolled for evening classes to fully participate in QA processes especially voicing their concerns to visiting accreditation/audit teams; interrupted student involvement chain since the student representatives only serve in the EEC for the period they have been elected. This distorts the "QA process memory" from the students' perspective and places demand on the university to periodically train new student representatives in the specifics of the QA process. The identified challenges are echoed in reviewed literature (such as Altman, Schwegler & Bunkowski, 2014; European Students' Union (ESU), 2012; QAA, 2005; Alaniska et al., 2006; Dearlove, 2006).

Promoting Student Involvement in QA Processes

Based on the aforesaid challenges, the participants further suggested measures that can enhance student involvement in QA processes as presented in table 8.9.

Table 8.9: How to Promote Student Involvement in QA Processes

How to promote student involvement in QA processes	Students		Employees		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Educate students about the importance of QA processes in the university	26	21.3	5	4.1	31	25.4
Widely publicize QA activities in the university	23	18.9	2	1.6	25	20.5
Capacity building for all/regular meetings and workshops	13	10.7	5	4.1	18	14.8
Expand slots for students for inclusivity of all students	14	11.5	2	1.6	16	13.1
Motivate/incentivize students to get more involved in QA processes	14	11.5	1	0.8	15	12.3
Minimize rhetoric and be more accountable especially in sports	3	2.5	2	1.6	5	4.1
Make surveys fun and easily accessible	5	4.1	0	0	5	4.1

Mainstream QA into the common courses/General Education courses	3	2.5	1	0.8	4	3.3
Disseminate assessment reports/provide feedback on QA processes	1	0.8	3	2.5	4	3.3
Recruit peer review/assessment teams from among students	1	0.8	2	1.6	3	2.5
Provide mentorship on students to effectively participate in QA processes	2	1.6	1	0.8	3	2.5
Remove requirement of higher GPA to open participation to all students	1	0.8	0	0	1	0.8

Major suggestions included: awareness creation on the importance of QA processes among students (25.4%), wide publicizing of QA activities in the university (20.5%), capacity building and holding regular workshops (14.8%), increasing student representation in QA processes (13.1%), and motivating/incentivizing students to get more involved in QA processes (12.3%). A rather unique suggestion raised was the mainstreaming of content on QA in the common courses (General Education courses) offered in the university. This would ensure that all students are exposed to QA processes and hence be familiar with these processes in the university through a common course. A similar suggestion was made in the words of one participant, thus:

> *There is need to widen the scope of students who are involved in assessment beyond the grade to include more students than their representatives only. Currently, doctorate students are given assignments that entail programme assessment of undergraduate programme learning outcomes (PLOs).*

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study revealed that students were involved in QA processes in the university. The students were aware of a variety of ways in which they get involved in QA processes in the university. The Student Academic Council (SAC) selected students to represent the student body in the various QA processes in the university. Furthermore, the university, in setting the criteria for the competences expected of students nominated to QA teams laid emphasis on good academic record, leadership, active participation and integrity. Besides these criteria, students were subjected to similar eligibility criteria like other members of QA teams. Those nominated to serve in QA teams were trained for them to effectively participate in QA processes. The trainings covered a variety of topics that focused on university mission outcomes, policies and rules, and QA processes including accreditation standards and regulations. In most cases, students would be trained together with university employees and if trained separately, the training was facilitated by the QA experts in the university. This shows the university has put in place mechanism that support students' understanding of the QA processes. Participants termed student involvement in QA processes as a valuable activity. They cited the visible infrastructural, personnel and service changes as some of the indicators of student involvement in QA processes. Other indicators were increased student participation in leadership, workshops and other forums and improvement in teaching and learning strategies. They however felt that student involvement in QA processes was not effective. The main challenges identified were: inadequate information about QA processes, inadequate time for participating in QA processes, low student representation in QA teams, and student disinterest in activities relating to QA processes.

Thus, the study concludes that students are involved in QA processes in a number of ways. However, students themselves nominate their representatives QA teams through the Student Academic Council. Students involved in QA processes are trained in a number of QA related topics. Although student involvement is viewed as valuable to the university, it is yet to be effective due to a number of challenges. The main hindrances to student involvement in QA processes are low awareness of QA processes among students, time constraints, low student representation and apathy towards QA processes.

Going forward, HEIs should enhance awareness creation of QA processes among students by widely publicizing QA activities within the institution. Furthermore, HEIs should strive to build the capacity of their internal stakeholders by holding regular workshops on trends and changes in the QA and higher education arenas. Motivating students by giving non-material incentives could just turn around their apathy against QA, to passion for

it. Nonetheless, HEIs should consider mainstreaming QA content in the common courses they offer so that all students understand and embrace QA processes.

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