

Quality Assurance in Teacher Education for Africa



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Transcript

I am delighted to be at my first DETA conference and am very grateful to Dr Johan Hendrikz and the organisers for the invitation. The Commonwealth of Learning has been a consistent supporter of DETA conferences and we are proud to be associated with you as you undertake to reflect on Teacher Education & Development in Africa.

As you know, the Commonwealth of Learning is an intergovernmental organization established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government to serve the 54 Member States that span all regions of the globe.

COL's mission is to help Commonwealth Member States to harness the potential of distance education and technology to enhance access to quality learning that leads to development.

My topic today is 'Quality Assurance in Teacher Education for Africa' and I have prepared this presentation with our Education Specialist: Teacher Education, Dr Abdurrahman Umar. I will first look at the context of Teacher Education and then trace the trends in QA in tertiary education over the past decade. and examine some ways in which a culture of quality can be promoted within teacher education institutions. This will then lead to a discussion of one emerging area, OER and the implications that this has for QA. Finally, I will share with you some of the ways in which COL has responded to the challenges of QA and provided support to Member States.

But first the context.

If UPE has to be achieved by 2015, 1.7 million additional teachers will be required globally, with nearly a million additional teachers needed in Africa alone

You will note that the MDG on UPE says that children should complete a basic cycle of education but it does not make any reference to learning. Similarly, with the EFA Goals, the matter of improving the

quality of education is only mentioned as the sixth goal. The emphasis has been more on the numbers rather than on the outcomes.

That is understandable given the shortage of schools and teachers. In Uganda, The Gambia, Ghana Nigeria Angola and Malawi the percentage of trained teachers is well below 60%.

Similarly, a July issue of Time magazine estimates that 57 million children still lack access to a classroom. There is a suggestion that an additional 190,000 schools are needed to accommodate this number at a cost of approx. 19 billion USD. In addition, governments will have to train 1.9 million new teachers at a cost of another 10 billion USD. As it is governments are already spending approx. 2 trillion USD annually on education.

The general assumption seems to be that if we have enough teachers, more schools and somehow manage to get the children to school, learning will take place. But does this happen?

As the Annual State of Education Report (ASER) which tested 700,000 children of the 7-14 year age group, in 600 districts in India found that, about 35% could not read a simple para at first grade level, and only 30% could do basic division.

The results of the Uwezo survey in Kenya, modeled on ASER, were no different. 27% children of fifth grade could not read a simple para in English; 23% could not read in Kiswahili and 30% could not do basic division.

What can be done to improve the quality of teaching and learning? Does quality assurance help? What QA systems do we have to support tertiary education in the Commonwealth?

Most Commonwealth countries have QA and accreditation bodies—44 countries have councils, commissions and authorities which cater to the QA needs of both higher education and teacher education institutions.

Let me take two major UNESCO events—the World Conferences on Higher Education in which the global community adopted key declarations. If we go back to the World Conference on HE organized by UNESCO in 1998 and look at the Declaration, we note that there are some references to the ‘enhancement and preservation of quality in teaching’ but there is no reference to quality assurance.

However, when we look at the Communique that was adopted by the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, ten years later, we find frequent references to quality assurance throughout the text. The members note that ‘quality requires both establishing quality assurance systems as well as promoting a quality culture within institutions.’ We seem to have moved from quality to ‘quality assurance’ and ‘cultures of quality’.

National QA systems flourished during this decade across the world—spreading to 117 countries in the 2010’s as compared to the 65 in the 1990’s (Eaton, 2012).

Judith Eaton, the President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the US, notes two influences on QA during this period—one, that the QA systems were developed in the Western world and

these were adapted by the developing world; and two, the QA systems were based on traditional HE which was primarily classroom based and faculty dominated.

Let us take the example of the AVU QA Framework for Teacher Education. It has the standard features of any QA framework in that it is structured around input-process and output measures and the purpose is to not only maintain standards but also to contribute to continuous improvement. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive and can be adapted to the needs of the different African countries for which it is intended.

To sum up, in the last decade, we have seen a move towards greater accountability and regulation. There is an increasing trend towards the regionalization and internationalization of QA; a focus on outcomes—for institutions as well as for students. There are more tools available now than ever before, to measure quality.

The past decade has witnessed the increased emphasis on outcomes. The OECD's Assessment of Higher Learning Outcomes (AHELO) can be used by countries to test generic and discipline based skills. Similarly the African Union's African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM), which is a tool for benchmarking quality and promoting a culture of ongoing quality improvement can be contextualized and used for Teacher Education institutions.

As the 2009 UNESCO Communique indicates, the emphasis is now on integrating external and internal QA measures so that institutions develop 'cultures of quality'. The Open University, UK has an internal Validation Unit and is also responsible to the national QA Agency for external QA.

How do institutions in resource-poor contexts develop a culture of quality? If we look at the teacher training programme at Kyambogo University in Uganda, we find that they have developed their own strategy for quality. The tutors would visit students who had been absent from the bi-monthly tutorials. This often meant undertaking long journeys by bicycle or even on foot. This culture of care goes a long way to provide effective learner support services and to create a culture of quality that reflects the traditional ethos of a society.

Prof Koul and I edited a book in which we described the culture of quality as an institutional culture that promotes the introduction of an internal QA system where everyone takes ownership; values capacity building for implementing QA; stresses accountability to stakeholders and focuses more on learning rather than on instruction alone.

How can we create cultures of quality in teacher education? Can training teachers be one way forward?

The teacher is a primary stakeholder. As one study from the US demonstrates that the states that have the best learning outcomes are the ones with teachers who are highly qualified and receive continuous professional development. Focus on teacher development is a key element of achieving a culture of quality. It will not be possible to train the large numbers that we need in many countries through conventional means alone. Innovative and alternative approaches will be required.

Distance education has been one method of providing both pre-service and in-service teacher training to large numbers in Africa. Let us look at two teacher training programmes in Tanzania and Uganda. In Tanzania 45000 primary school teachers enrolled between 1976 and 1984, 88% completed the

programme which cost half of what face to face training would have cost. In Uganda, over 3000 primary school teachers enrolled of which 57% passed the course, which cost 20% less than a conventional programme.

This training had a positive impact on classroom performance in Tanzania and female teachers reported enhanced confidence. In Uganda there was some evidence of improved teaching skills. You will note that all these initiatives achieved positive results, reached out to large numbers with reduced costs. Yet they remained at the level of projects, often dependent on external funding.

On the other hand, Nigeria established the only dedicated single-mode teacher training institute in the Commonwealth, the National Teachers Institute or NTI, which has trained nearly a million teachers since its inception in 1976. With annual enrolments of over 150,000, the NTI is an example of how distance education can expand access, improve quality and cut the costs of training teachers.

Over the years NTI has harnessed the potential of various technologies to reach the unreached.

As more governments introduce tablets and computers in the classroom, more teachers will require training in the use of ICT. In order to address the challenges related to teacher development and retention, the government of Guyana elaborated an ICT Professional Development Strategy for Teachers in 2011. The UNESCO Competency Framework for Teachers (UNESCO-CFT) became the guiding document to develop core competencies among teachers. These relate to three areas: technology literacy, knowledge deepening and knowledge creation.

COL developed the Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration or CCTI to complement the UNESCO ICT competency framework. Developed in collaboration with SchoolNet South Africa, this is an advanced course for teachers and school leaders in integrating ICT into school management and teaching and learning. This was localized for Guyana and consists of in-service and pre-service courses.

What did the CCTI/CFT implementation achieve? There are more trained teachers in ICT within the Guyanese system. The teachers are using OER. Participation in the project led two institutions to review and align their teacher education curricula. Finally, it encouraged collaboration externally and within the country, resulting in innovative pedagogic practices.

We can also learn from global best practice to create cultures of quality in TEI's. The Finnish Teacher Programme is considered one of the best in the world. What constitutes its success? One, the programme is based on the principles of inclusiveness and creativity, under which no child is left behind; two it relies on well-trained teachers, as we have also noted from the American example; three, it trusts the teachers and makes them entirely responsible for developing the curriculum and assessment

China has adopted similar practices of decentralizing curriculum and assessment and increasing local autonomy. Singapore, another successful system, believes in less teaching and more learning. And the outcome is their students are top performers in the PISA tests.

In addition to learning from best practice, we can learn from research on what constitutes powerful teacher education. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2006), the elements include a clear vision of what is good teacher education; a strong curriculum and well-defined standards.

She believes that powerful teacher education includes effective practicums; strong links between university departments and schools; and strategies to apply learning to real problems of practice.

In addition we need to be open to new developments. I have picked one emerging development: OER—that has implications for QA agencies and TE institutions. Let us see how.

As we know, there has been a global movement towards collaboration in the development and sharing of content. At a meeting in 2002 at UNESCO, Paris, the term Open Education Resources or OER was coined to promote the development and use of free materials for education. The fundamental principle is that any materials developed with public funds should be made available free to others to use as required.

The Teacher Education in Sub Saharan Africa or TESSA, a partnership between the Open University UK and institutions in 13 African countries has developed OER for teacher training in four languages: English, Kiswahili, Arabic and French. These materials were used by 320,000 teachers in one year alone, and the free materials as well as the sheer numbers of users have radically reduced the costs of providing quality school-based training to teachers and teacher educators.

The preliminary research on the impact of TESSA shows that for teachers this has resulted in a diverse set of teaching practices and increased teacher preparation.

Teacher educators have reported an increased awareness of the potential of OER; the changing role of teachers and improvement in skills and personal learning

But since anyone can adapt the content, who is responsible for the quality of repurposed content? How do institutions ensure the integrity of their credentials? And what is the role of TEI's and QA agencies?

In the case of OER, quality dimensions of content such as accuracy, relevance, currency, pedagogic effectiveness in terms of learning design would apply just as they would to any content. However, areas in which OER quality measures will be different would relate to reusability and openness. Is the content accessible, even to learners with special needs; can it be localized to suit other linguistic and cultural contexts: are there any barriers related to technology such as bandwidth or software requirements? In addition, the quality aspects would include the issue of discoverability relating to interoperability, or the ease of reuse in different software environments.

Let us now briefly review some of the initiatives that COL has undertaken.

The COL approach has been threefold: to influence policy at national and institutional levels through advocacy, to develop and share resources as OER and to build the capacity of institutions and individuals to offer better quality education.

COL continues its advocacy efforts to establish that distance learning and campus providers have the same purpose that all teacher education institutions serve. And if the judgements on quality are based on fitness for purpose, quality of courses, effective learner support, and student achievement, there is no need for separate QA regulations only for distance learning provision.

Today, there is no dearth of free models and guidelines that can be adopted or adapted. COL has developed several QA Toolkits including one for Teacher Education , as well as a QA micro-site with free resources.

Even before the term OER became current, COL had developed free teacher training materials. These are 46 free modules for teacher training known as the STAMP 2000 + materials developed by 140 course writers from 8 countries in Southern Africa and are available as OER for you to adopt and adapt, as required. These relate to Science Technology, Maths, and General Education.

More recently, COL developed OER for English Language Teaching, that is a free resource to improve the quality of English teaching.

As I said before, the emphasis has shifted to the integration of both external and internal QA measures so that institutions develop ‘cultures of quality’. COL has developed a Review and Improvement Model (COLRIM), which helps institutions to assess their respective practices as a step towards external accreditation or as an ongoing process of continuous self-improvement.

It is a low-cost ‘do-it-yourself’ model which does not require a panel of external experts but engages internal staff. It involves developing systemic thinking and organizational learning; and focuses on capacity building.

It is meant for both ODL and campus institutions and is available as a free resource or OER.

As we move forward, will we see QA in the future provide more facilitation rather than regulation? Will QA in the future seek less compliance and encourage more creativity? Do we see the focus of QA agencies shifting from tertiary education to lifelong learning?

But for the time being, how can teacher education institutions be flexible enough to embrace new provision, such as OER? How can TEIs assess the degree to which the new developments can facilitate student learning? And finally how can TEIs make learning relevant to the needs of the 21st century?

Thank you for your kind attention