

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL (UKZN)

**STAKEHOLDERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION IN NAMIBIA**

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University of KwaZulu-Natal

2021

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES: DECLARATION – PLAGIARISM

I, Rebekka Nangula lipumbu, declare that:

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2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. The thesis does not contain any other person's data, pictures, graphs, or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Rebekka Nangula lipumbu

ABSTRACT

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are known as the custodians of the quality of Higher Education (HE), and to be primarily responsible for their Internal Quality Assurance (IQA). External Quality Assurance (EQA) is promoted through Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs); as well as Professional Bodies (PBs). This study focuses on the implementation of EQA system for HE in Namibia.

This is a phenomenological study that hones in the concept of lifeworld, as it explores the stakeholders' lived experiences in the implementation of external quality assurance for higher education in Namibia. The study explores the following: how the QAAs and PBs implement the EQA, considering the respective legislation that establish them; stakeholders' understanding of quality assurance in Namibia; how the stakeholders experience the EQA system; the reasons why they experience the system the way that they do; as well as possible suggestions for improvement of the EQA system in Namibia. The study made use of unstructured interviews, focus group discussions, as well as documentation analysis to tap into the experiences of the stakeholders, selected through purposive sampling and following phenomenological principles.

Namibia's EQA system is characterised by multiple QA agencies; with overlapping mandates, functions, activities and non-aligned policies, statutes and ordinances. The overlaps are featured in the establishing Acts, creating a fragmented system. There is therefore, need for the amendment of the same Acts, if the system is to improve. The study also revealed that the EQA system in Namibia is dominated by negative power relations, inadequate communication amongst stakeholders, as well as a lack of staff capacity to implement the EQA system effectively. As a practical implication, the study proposed an integrated model for EQA system in Namibia, aimed at mitigating the challenges of fragmentation and non-alignment of QA functions and activities.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the higher education quality assurance practitioners in Namibia.

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To Mewiliko Tjinouhona Mutrifa, you came into my life in the middle of this journey and the joy you brought has been the rainbow amidst it all. I love you, son!

Saving the best for last. Thank you gracious God for your amazing grace. The joy of the Lord is my strength, always.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS/ACRONYMS

AAU – Association of African Universities

ASG-QA – African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CEQUAM – Centre for Quality Assurance and Management

CHE – Council for Higher Education (South Africa)

COST – College for Out of School Training

DQAM – Directorate of Quality Assurance and Management

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQA – External Quality Assurance

ETQA – Education and Training Quality Assurance

EU – European Union

EUA – European University Association

HAQAA – Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation

HE – Higher Education

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HEQC – Higher Education Quality Committee

HPCNA – Health Professions Council of Namibia

ICAN – Institute of Chartered Accountants in Namibia

INQAAHE – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

IQA – Internal Quality Assurance

IUM – International University of Management

MoHETI – Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation (Namibia)

NCHE – National Council for Higher Education (Namibia)

NQA – Namibia Qualifications Authority

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

NTA – Namibia Training Authority

NUST – Namibia University of Science and Technology

PB – Professional Body

PhD – Doctor of Philosophy

QA – Quality Assurance

QAA – Quality Assurance Agency

QAU – Quality Assurance Unit

SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority

UKZN – University of KwaZulu -Natal

UNAM – University of Namibia

VET – Vocational Education and Training

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CHAPTER 1

SITUATING THE NEED FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Introduction

Throughout the world, it is widely acknowledged that higher education plays a critical role in the social, political and economic development of any nation (Peercy & Svenson, 2016). In Namibia, as in other parts of the world, higher education has been acknowledged as the most powerful tool for enhancing economic development, promoting social emancipation and redressing social inequality and injustice. In the country, higher education has been recognised as a driving force towards the realisation of Vision 2030, a national development agenda by which the country aspires to become an industrialised nation by 2030. There is a large number of published studies (HAQAA, 2017; Netshiflefhe, Nobongoza & Maphosa, 2016; Luckett, 2007) suggesting that the quality of the higher education system of any given country is critical for the achievement of national development goals, for the transformation of society, and for producing well-rounded graduates with attributes and competencies that are personally, professionally and socially valuable. Graduates of the higher education system should be well positioned to play a central role in the socio-economic development of the country, to participate meaningfully in a robust civil society, to further innovative scientific and technological development, to become highly skilled professionals, and to contribute to the solution of the many challenges their nations face (EUA, 2008).

This study explored how stakeholders in higher education quality assurance sector in Namibia experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system. Tapping into participants' experiences, the study drew on a phenomenological perspective and knowledge on quality assurance discourses, particularly its implementation. Phenomenology of the lifeworld was the epistemological base for this thesis. Villanen (2014) describes phenomenology of the lifeworld as a philosophy in which the world is considered already in existence before the reflections (of what happens in the world) begin. The main aim for the use of phenomenology in this study was to explore the lived experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation of Higher Education EQA in Namibia. The focus on lifeworld is meant to understand the lifeworld of the stakeholders as shaped by the phenomenon; in other

words, to record the experiences of the stakeholders as they have lived them (in implementing the EQA system for HE in Namibia), rather than as we conceptualise them (Van Manen, 2016). This chapter puts the study into perspective by providing the study's background, statement of the problem, purpose, objectives, research questions, significance, delimitations, and limitations.

Background to the study

All over the world, quality assurance in higher education is so important to the extent that it is no longer optional but rather a requirement. Increased importance of EQA stems from the recognition that higher education plays a significant role in socio-economic development of any nation as it provides the country with a critical mass of highly-qualified specialists for economic development and progress (Peercy & Svenson, 2016). Higher education institutions, for example, train people to become teachers, engineers, doctors and other professionals (Hartley & Whitehead, 2006). In different countries, the standard of living is steadily changing for the better; implying that the kind of education which was good enough in the past, is not necessarily good enough to meet current developmental needs. This has therefore, resulted in the need to ensure continuous improvement and adaptation of higher education to contemporary needs within a rapidly changing world. The styles of teaching, quality of learning materials, and the organisation of the university itself have to be continuously brought up to date and improved. Understanding how quality is implemented becomes paramount (Kruss, McGrath, Petersen & Gastrow, 2015). Against this background, different countries have put in place quality assurance measures in their higher education systems at both national and institutional levels.

In well-established systems, quality assurance involves external quality assurance as well as internal quality assurance arrangements. External quality assurance systems are handled by national Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs), as well as Professional Bodies (PBs), while internal quality assurance systems are established and implemented by higher education institutions themselves. There is need for QAAs and PBs to work together for the common good of students, graduates and the nation at large. This would prevent common challenges that graduates face when it is time to be licensed by these Professional Bodies. Furthermore,

including stakeholders in the planning of HE like in curriculum development, can bring about improvement in the HE system, and improve graduates' employability. Literature acknowledges that, although national regulatory authorities put systems in place and set quality standards at national level, the primary responsibility for quality lies with higher education institutions themselves (Kis, 2005).

The European University Association (EUA) notes that, although different countries are at different phases in terms of quality assurance development, and although different systems may take different models and methodologies; approaches followed in many cases are similar (EUA, 2008). For example, almost every system has in place, accreditation and/or quality audit arrangements approached from self-reviews, followed by site visits by panels of peers to validate the self-review report and to make recommendations (Harvey & Williams, 2010).

In the Namibian context, the Government of the Republic of Namibia has at different stages established and entrusted three national quality agencies with the promotion of quality assurance, namely; the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) (NQA Act, Act No. 29 of 1996); the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) (Higher Education Act, Act No. 26 of 2003); and the Namibia Training Authority (NTA) Vocational Education and Training (VET) Act, Act No. 1 of 2008). The NQA's mandate is, among others, to set up and administer a national qualifications framework; and accredit persons, institutions and organisations providing education and courses of instruction or training as regards meeting accreditation requirements (Act No. 29 of 1996). In the same line, the NCHE is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the higher education system, ensuring students' access to HEIs, and conducting programme accreditation and institutional audits (Act No. 26 of 2003). With regards to NTA, apart from other functions such as development of occupational standards, curriculum and qualifications for vocational education and training; it is also charged with accrediting education and training providers and programmes (Act No. 1 of 2008). Additional to the three quality assurance agencies mentioned above, are Professional/Statutory Bodies, entrusted with licensing graduates in the respective fields. In order for professional bodies to register graduates, they must be part of the universities' Advisory Board members for different faculties and departments, so that they make input and give direction as well as

continuously inform and advise on the changes in the industry, so that universities can review curricula to suit current training needs in the particular professions.

At institutional level, in response to their own needs as well as demands for external quality assurance, most higher education institutions have formal working mechanisms for quality assurance, aligned to the national quality assurance requirements.

Statement of the problem

The Namibian government recognised the need for a coordinated higher education system and established three QAAs, namely: the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) - NQA Act, Act No. 29 of 1996; the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) - Higher Education Act, Act No. 26 of 2003; as well as the Namibia Training Authority (NTA) - VET Act, Act No. 1 of 2008, to develop and implement the national quality assurance system. As in many countries, Namibia adopted a national quality assurance system modeled on European and American systems, predominantly characterised by accreditation and audits. However, the introduction of the external quality assurance system in the Namibian higher education system seems to attract public outcry and criticism from various stakeholders in higher education, particularly higher education institutions, who are most affected by the system. Looking at the legislation or Acts which establish the quality assurance agencies, it seems that there are perceived overlaps and fragmentation between the functions of the three national quality assurance agencies, in addition to the functions of the professional bodies. The same Acts and regulatory frameworks seem to indicate lack of conceptual and operational rigour in supporting a sustainable, efficient and effective quality assurance system in Namibia. This state of affairs may result in many frustrations among the users of such a system. Although that is the state, not much interest has been shown in studying the experiences of the stakeholders as far as implementation of the QA system is concerned. While implementation of national quality assurance systems has been intensively researched elsewhere as evident in the literature, similar studies in the Namibian context are limited (Kadhila & Lipumbu, 2019). Within the few available research, studies that explore the lived experiences of stakeholders in the implementation of a quality assurance system using a phenomenological approach are even rare. Thus far, not much rigorous research has been conducted exploring the experiences of

the stakeholders with regards to the implementation of a quality assurance system or in a similar phenomenon. The dearth of studies in the area renders this study pertinent. Furthermore, this study is topical and relevant for both the Namibian higher education sector as well as the globe.

The study focuses on understanding how implementation is experienced in the Namibian higher education system. This study adds knowledge to the quality assurance discourse in Namibia and globally.

Purpose of the study

Drawing on phenomenology, and given the challenges enunciated in the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study was to explore stakeholders' lived experiences of the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia. This was in order to understand the implementation of the system, and generate knowledge aimed at influencing quality assurance discourse and related policy decisions that may further contribute towards the improvement of the system.

Objectives of the study

To achieve the purpose of the study, the interrelated objectives of the study were:

1. To examine how the 3 national QAAs and Professional Bodies interpret and implement the Acts of Parliament that established them.
2. To assess stakeholders' experience and understanding of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia.
3. To explore how stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia.
4. To analyse why stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia the way they do.
5. To find lasting solutions to challenges experienced by stakeholders in the Namibian Higher Education Quality Assurance system.

Questions of the study

To achieve the objectives of the study, the study responded to the following critical question:

How do stakeholders in higher education quality assurance in Namibia experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system?

To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied, the critical question was supported by three sub-questions as follows:

1. How do the 3 national QAAs and Professional Bodies interpret and implement the Acts of Parliament that established them.
2. What are the stakeholders' experiences and understanding of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia?
3. How do stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia?

4. Why do stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia the way they do?
5. What are the lasting solutions to challenges experienced by stakeholders in the Namibian Higher Education Quality Assurance system?

Significance of the study

This study provided a deeper understanding of HE QA to improve EQA practice and contribute knowledge to the EQA discourse. Specifically, the study analysed the EQA system of Namibia from a stakeholder perspective. At the same time, the study generated knowledge that was relevant and useful globally. Generally, such knowledge helped in identifying elements and attributes of effective quality assurance systems that can be adapted to improve the practice. Furthermore, the outcome of the study may inform decision-makers and policymakers involved in the development of quality assurance systems to amend regulatory and legislative frameworks governing quality assurance in Namibia. As noted earlier, the dearth of studies on quality assurance is evident in the literature. Therefore, this study makes a substantial contribution to the body of existing knowledge with a view to improving quality assurance implementation and stimulate further academic debate and research in Namibia and beyond.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited by the following factors:

Firstly, the field of higher education in general and quality assurance in higher education in particular is relatively new in Namibia. Therefore, apart from the national documents, empirical literature on the subject relevant to the Namibian context was limited. This limitation was mitigated by doing a thorough literature review and systematic research on the phenomenon on the current study of the Namibia external quality assurance system – through the experiences of stakeholders. Similar studies which address the implementation of quality assurance in higher education in a holistic manner are scarce (Waheed, 2013).

Secondly, since QA covers almost, if not all aspects of HE, the study was constrained by both time and a lack of funds, making it difficult to expand the scope of different HE aspects and key stakeholders in HE in Namibia, such as industry. These limitations were mitigated by carefully selecting participants in the study through a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the primary stakeholders from the national quality assurance agencies, professional bodies and higher education institutions were included.

Delimitation of the study

There are three main categories of stakeholders in external quality assurance system in Namibia, namely; law makers, users and beneficiaries. Law makers are the national quality assurance agencies and professional bodies who are responsible for the development of external quality assurance system and monitor, enforce, and promote the implementation thereof. This study included all three national quality assurance agencies, that is, NQA, NTA and NCHE; and two selected professional bodies.

External quality assurance system is used by the QAAs to ensure that higher education institutions comply with the regulations. When it comes to higher education institutions, there are only three institutions in Namibia with a university status, namely; the University of Namibia (UNAM), the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), and the International University of Management (IUM). The first two are public universities and the last one is a private university. All the three institutions participated in the study.

Beneficiaries of the external quality assurance system are students and staff who benefit from quality assurance higher education services. A selected number of students and staff from the three participating higher education institutions also participated in the study.

Although employers are critical stakeholders of EQA, the scope of the study in terms of resources (time in particular) could not allow this group of stakeholders to be included. The lack of employer perspective was mitigated by engaging the selected stakeholders on their respective relationships with the employers, particularly how they included employers in the

HE developments, including employer feedback on the HE system. Similarly, the scope of QA in HE is big and it was not possible to cover all aspects, i.e. curriculum related aspects.

Definition of terms

In this study, the following concepts are defined operationally.

External quality assurance system: external quality assurance denotes a range of quality monitoring procedures that are undertaken by bodies outside of a higher education institution (professional bodies or quality assurance agencies) in order to determine whether the institution meets agreed upon or predetermined quality standards (Matei & Iwinska, 2016: 26). EQA also means an critical external eye that quality assure and inform the institutional stakeholders of their quality status.

Internal quality assurance system: the aspect of internal quality assurance includes all the activities that HEIs must carry out internally in order to maintain and improve their quality (Matei & Iwinska, 2016: 27). This also means self-reflection of one's services to ensure improvement in one's own work. IQA is also a commendable way to cultivate a desired culture of quality.

Institutional audits: A quality audit checks the extent to which an institution is achieving both its explicit and/or implicit objectives (NCHE, 2009: 38). It is a way of assessing systems, processes, and procedures by which an institution operates.

Programme accreditation: In the Namibian context, an achieved status awarded to a programme by an authorised body on the basis of the summative evaluation conducted by external stakeholders to check whether the programme meets pre-determined threshold quality criteria, thus; enabling the public certification of the attainment of minimum educational standards (NCHE, 2009: 6). This type of quality assurance normally leads to a pass or fail of an academic programme measured against the set criteria.

Quality: A subjective, value-laden and elusive concept, associated in everyday usage with what is good, excellent or worthwhile (see the literature review chapter on the contesting meanings of quality by the various stakeholders in higher education) (Matei & Iwinska, 2016: 26).

Quality assurance: It is described as the systematic internal and external management procedures and mechanisms by which an institution of higher education assures its stakeholders of the quality of its systems, processes, products and outcomes and of its ability to manage the maintenance and enhancement of quality (Matei & Iwinska, 2016: 19).

Quality enhancement: A commitment to improvement and development, usually intrinsically motivated in response to personal or professional drivers (Matei & Iwinska, 2016: 28). This process is preceded by quality assurance, whereby an institution establishes the improvement areas, and focuses on those (improvement areas) to enhance quality.

Quality management: The overall functions, structures and personnel that determine and implement the quality assurance policy of an institution, which in turn aims to safeguard the quality of the institution's services and products (Rosa; Sarrico and Amaral, 2012: 135).

Quality management system: This refers to procedures established by an institution to quality assure its services and products. This usually includes management information systems (Rosa, Sarrico and Amaral, 2012: 135). This definition could also be simplified to mean ensuring continuous institutional systems, including efficiency and effectiveness.

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis has been organised as follows:

Chapter 1: Situating the need for quality assurance – This chapter has provided justification of this study, by outlining the importance of higher education, quality and quality assurance,

and highlighting the gap that exists within the Namibian context. This chapter also provides an orientation to this study by way of giving introduction to the study, research problem, objectives of the study, questions of the study, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study, significance of the study, and definition of concepts related to this study. The next two chapters provide relevant literature for this study.

Chapter 2: international perspective on the implementation of quality assurance higher education – While chapter one has put the study phenomenon into context, chapter two gives a detailed analysis of the literature related to quality assurance in higher education at international level. The chapter also highlights aspects of EQA and best practices as practiced by different countries. This chapter focuses on international perspectives of the implementation of quality assurance in higher education, discussing the literature review, establishment of various QA initiatives globally; ranging from sub-regional networks, continental networks, as well as international networks, and including the different agreements at international and continental levels. The chapter also examines the implementation of the different quality assurance systems, including the possible challenges to EQA implementation.

Chapter 3: Adoption and practice of quality assurance in the Namibian higher education context – looks at the literature related to the implementation of quality assurance in higher education in the Namibian context. The chapter also explains different institutions and their respective QA frameworks, in order to paint a more comprehensive picture of the QA system in Namibia. Overall, this chapter generally shows the disconnection within the QA system.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology – This chapter focuses on the study's research methodology, the theoretical framework, as well as the research design. The chapter justifies the choice of the research methodology aspects, of the choice of the qualitative research approach, and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 5: Data presentation – The study data is as narrated by participants in order to understand their experiences and how they have lived it.

Chapter 6: Discussion of findings – In this chapter, data is discussed and interpreted to give meaning to the research findings.

Chapter 7: An Integrated Model: Namibia's External Quality Assurance System for Higher Education – This chapter summarises the entire study, highlighting the research findings. In this chapter, a model for the implementation of external quality assurance in higher education in Namibia is proposed. Based on the findings of the study and proposed model, recommendations and practical implications for implementation are proffered.

Chapter summary

This chapter focused on providing justification for this study, by having outlined the importance of higher education, quality and quality assurance, also highlighting the gap that exists, in the Namibian context. The role of higher education in social and economic development of any country, including Namibia, was also discussed. The chapter also emphasised that higher education can only play its significant role of national development if quality is prioritised. Overall, this chapter provided orientation to this study by way of giving introduction to the study, research problem, objectives, questions, limitations, delimitations, significance of the study, definition of concepts related to this study.

CHAPTER 2

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE HIGHER EDUCATION

Introduction

Studies over the past two decades have provided important insights on implementation of quality assurance in higher education as a core component of the global higher education reform agenda (Brits, 2010). Many governments have invested in promoting quality in higher education through national QAAs that facilitate the implementation of external quality assurance systems in higher education. Additional to external quality assurance system, higher education institutions are (through QAAs) required to put in place mechanisms for internal quality assurance. Assuring and enhancing quality in teaching and learning is important as a means to achieving the purposes of higher education. Therefore, the quality concept has become critical to modernisation and transformation of higher education (Kadhila & lipumbu, 2019).

In this study, it is important to review literature at a broader level first to get the international perspective before zooming onto the national context. Given that there are common aspects of higher education experienced by different countries (although differently experienced due to different contexts), this chapter highlights how those aspects are practiced and applied by different countries in their contexts. This chapter aims to highlight the implementation of EQA from an international perspective. It looks at how concepts of quality and quality assurance are understood in the context of higher education, implementation of internal and external quality assurance at national and institutional levels, and models for quality assurance, among other aspects. According to Lyytinen, Kohtamaki, Kivisto, Pekkola, and Holtta (2017: 36) “previous research on the quality assurance of higher education institutions’ stakeholder relationship is scarce.”

The quality concept in higher education

In order to understand the concept of quality assurance in higher education, it is very important to define the term quality. A working definition of quality is integral to any quality assurance system in higher education (Netshifhefhe, Nobongoza & Maphosa, 2016). Naturally, the understanding of certain concepts influences people's actions. Therefore, worldviews and understandings of the notion of quality in higher education held by stakeholders have practical implications on the way quality assurance is implemented in a given context. In every organisation, the importance of quality (whether it is of goods or service delivery), can never be over emphasised (Van der Bank & Popoola, 2014). In higher education globally, quality assurance has become a topical issue on agendas for higher education in recent years, to an extent that it is no longer viewed as an option but rather a requirement.

While quality assurance has become a requirement in higher education, it is important to understand how the stakeholders experience the implementation of the system, particularly in the Namibian context. Most of the literature on quality assurance posits that quality is a much debatable concept. Harvey and Green (1993) point out that stakeholders view quality in five different notions, namely:

- quality as exceptional or excellence;
- perfection, consistency or zero defect;
- transformation;
- value for money;
- fitness for purpose (Harvey & Green, 1993); and
- the sixth one, fitness of purpose, has been added later by other scholars.

The different notions of quality are discussed in detail as follows:

Quality as exceptionality or excellence: The exceptionality or excellence view perceives quality as something special. The definition of exception is in relation to exceeded standards (Marshall, 2016). This view can be seen as the transcendent approach, a distinction between fine and poor quality (Brits, 2010). According to Harvey and Green (1993), this is a

traditional view of quality and is associated with the notion of providing a product or service that is distinctive and special, and which confers status on the owner or user. In this notion, quality as excellence refers to the traditional view of higher education institutions of referring to the goal of being “the best and special”, or of achieving and maintaining exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. However, this view may not be appropriate for mass higher education systems such as in Namibia and South Africa, where access to higher education is being promoted as a means to equity and socio-economic justice. The definition may lead to exclusivity and elitism as excellence, by definition, is attained by only a few (Parri, 2006).

Quality as perfection, consistency or zero defects: The notion of quality as perfection refers to the state of flawlessness (Marshall, 2016), or consistency/conformance to a specification or standard, perceives quality in terms of a consistent or flawless outcome (Harvey & Green, 1993). This approach has its origin in the notion of quality control in the manufacturing industry, in terms of which quality refers to “zero errors or defects”. It is, thus, a basis measurement, a neutral term used to describe a required characteristic of a product or service (Green, 1994). Perfection focuses on zero defects, on getting things right the first time. The limitations, however, lie in achieving consistent standards and in conformity to those standards (Ali & Shastri, 2010). Therefore, this notion can be questioned within the context of higher education because, unlike in business and manufacturing industry, there is no real conformity to standards in education. The reality of the matter is that, education is a social setting which deals with students with diverse abilities and needs, and can never be the same.

Quality as transformation: Quality as transformation perceives quality as a “qualitative change”, a fundamental change of form. Transformation means change from one state to another with added value. Marshall (2016) describes quality in terms of transformation as a mechanism that supports qualitative change and continuous improvement. Transformation in this context is not restricted to apparent or physical transformation but includes cognitive transcendence (Harvey & Green, 1993). Thus, in educational terms, transformation refers to the enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of knowledge and skills, with education being about doing something to the student as opposed to something for the consumer (Harvey & Green, 1993). Accordingly,

education is an on-going process of transformation that includes the empowerment and enhancement of the student; adding value to the student as a lifelong learner (Ali & Shastri, 2010). The better the quality of an institution, the better it will achieve its goal of empowering the students with knowledge and skills which they will need in a knowledge-driven society (Harvey & Green, 1993). According to Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002), transformation is assessed with regard to the goal of empowering students through giving them knowledge and skills. Quality as transformation includes the concepts of enhancing and empowering the democratisation of the process, and not merely the outcomes. This implies that students are active participants in determining their learning experiences and their voice is considered in decision-making about their learning.

Quality as value for money: In my own words, this concept could mean stakeholders regarding the service they receive as worthy of their investment in HE. The provision of adequate return on investment (Marshall, 2016). Quality as value for money has the notion of accountability of higher education institutions for public expenditure; and perceives quality in terms of a return on investment through efficiency and effectiveness (Harvey & Green, 1993). This notion focuses on efficiency and effectiveness, measuring outputs against inputs. In other words, if it is possible to achieve the same outcome at the same cost, then the “customer” has a quality product or service. The growing tendency for governments to require accountability from higher education reflects a value for money approach while students, parents and higher education funders consider “value for money” as regards their own investments as quality (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002). Thus, the notion of quality as value for money is evident where the outcome of the higher education process is seen as being achieved at the lowest possible cost. This notion is more pronounced in government systems where they call for return on investment or expenditure and public accountability. However, the challenge is that return on investment does not automatically translate to actual quality. For example, graduating many students with little possible resources does not necessarily mean graduates are fully empowered and well-grounded to participate fully in economic, social, as well as the cultural advancement of the country, and to engage competitively in diverse activities locally, nationally, as well as globally.

Quality as fitness for purpose: Marshall (2016) describes fitness for purpose simply as the degree of utility or impact. The definition of quality which is adopted by most

analysts and policy makers in higher education, such as governments and national quality assurance agencies, is that of fitness for purpose (Redder, 2010). This is because it is argued that quality has no meaning except in relation to the purpose of the product or service. In the context of higher education, the ability of a higher education institution to fulfil its mission or a programme of study to fulfil its purpose may render that institution or programme to be perceived as of high quality (Harvey & Green, 1993). Thus, the quality of an institution is judged against its own stated mission and objectives and by assessing to what extent the intended outcomes are being achieved with the main outcomes and the achievements of graduates, research outputs, and community engagement activities. In addition, this definition takes into account the diversity of higher education missions and provisions in terms of institutional differences (Parri, 2006). According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) South Africa, the understanding of fitness for purpose calls for higher education institutions to make explicit what their vision, mission, goals and strategies are (CHE, 2016). The problem with the fitness for purpose approach is that it is not easy to define what the purposes of higher education should be (Green, 1994), as their purposes differ greatly depending on who defines those purposes. Also, this definition focuses on “a threshold judgment” (Perry, 1991), which refers to the minimum requirements to fit standards. If the purposes are met by an institution, this means it has quality, which arguably, is not always the case. In my own words and in the context of this study, this concept can be defined as a QA system fit for the National (Namibian) context, including the challenges facing the HE system. This leads to the next notion of quality as fitness of purpose.

Quality as fitness of purpose: There is a difference between the notion of fitness “for purpose” and fitness “of purpose”. As alluded to earlier, fitness for purpose refers to ability of a higher education institution to meet its vision, mission and the purpose why it was established. However, fitness of purpose refers to the ability of a higher education institution or programme of study to respond to the country’s national imperatives such as transformation, equity, access, social justice, emancipation, etc. The understanding of both fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose has been adopted by both the Namibian and South African higher education systems as criteria for institutional audits and programme

accreditation. It is worth noting that the notions of fitness ‘for’ and ‘of’ purpose interplay. For example, as has been said, higher education institutions are required to make explicit their missions and goals (fitness for purpose); which must be appropriate for their context and responsive to the national transformation and development agenda (fitness of purpose). In addition, internal processes and structures should enable higher education institutions to fulfil these goals and strategies (fitness for purpose) (CHE, 2016). In my own words and in the context of this study, this concept could mean a collective fulfilment of the QA mandates by all stakeholders.

The diagram below by Green (1994) illustrates the interests of the different categories of stakeholders, and how they respectively and contextually perceive quality. The diagram further affirms that stakeholders, depending on who they are, have certain interests in the service of higher education, which determine how they define quality. The notion of quality in higher education can be summarised in a visually representation as follows:



Figure 2.1: The notions of quality in higher education (Green, 1994)

Figure 2.1 summarises the conceptions of quality in higher education. It is clear that, as a relative, multidimensional concept; quality means different things to different people. Determining the criteria for assessing quality requires that the context and needs of various stakeholders be taken into account (Harvey & Green, 1993). Furthermore, it also requires the careful interrogation of national QA agencies and HEIs around the purposes of higher education. D’Andrea and Gosling (2005) caution that it is futile to try to formulate a definitive

definition for quality. Thus, quality in higher education needs to be approached in dynamic rather than in static or absolute terms.

The meaning of quality assurance in higher education

Having discussed the concept of quality in higher education, it is imperative to look at how quality assurance (QA) is understood in the higher education context. This is because the understanding of quality assurance influences the way higher education systems set up their quality assurance practices at both national and institutional levels. Literature contains many definitions of QA in higher education. The term is generally used to describe the processes that seek to ensure that the learning environment (including teaching and research) reaches an acceptable required threshold of quality. According to Netshifhefhe et al. (2016), quality assurance in higher education can be referred to as a collective process by which the higher education institution ensures that the quality of educational process is maintained to the standards it has set itself. Through its quality assurance system, a higher education institution has the capacity to satisfy itself, its students and other stakeholders that its educational provision meets quality standards.

According to Vlăsceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea (2007: 20), “quality assurance system typically is an all-embracing term referring to an on-going, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes.” It refers to all the planned and systematic actions that are put in place (policies, procedures, processes, mechanisms and approaches) to provide adequate confidence that there is maintenance and enhancement of quality (D’Andrea & Gosling, 2005). These definitions are in line with Lockett’s (2006) who defines QA as the systematic internal and external management procedures and mechanisms adopted by a higher education institution to assure its stakeholders of its quality and its ability to manage both the maintenance and enhancement of such quality (Lockett, 2006).

From these definitions, one can deduce that QA is all about putting policies, procedures and processes in place; whether it is at national or institutional level, to guarantee stakeholders that higher education provision is of higher quality. Employers and society would then have

trust and have confidence in the quality of graduates from such a system. However, guaranteeing stakeholders' confidence through the establishment of QA mechanisms is not enough in itself. What is important is putting mechanisms in place to ensure effective implementation of robust QA systems.

Contextual factors influencing implementation of quality assurance in the higher education

The historical trends informing implementation of quality assurance in higher education provides insight on how quality assurance is currently understood and how this understanding influences its implementation in the Namibian higher education system. All over the world, quality assurance is one of the key issues on the agenda of higher education reform process. Quality assurance is well established in manufacturing industry, business and corporate sector, but its history in higher education is relatively new as its emergence only dates back to the 1980s. Since then, the last two decades have seen a remarkable increase in the adoption of quality assurance in higher education. The new agenda stems from the recognition of the role that higher education plays in social, political and economic development of any given nation.

The global context that impacts higher education in general, and implementation of quality assurance in particular, needs to be considered before looking at the local context. As alluded to in the background of the study, higher education is essential to build capabilities for all, including for policy makers (Messerli, Murniningtyas, Eloundou-Enyegue, Foli, Furman, Glassman, & Richardson, 2019). This is in line with the view that higher education the world over has been acknowledged as the engine of human advancement in terms of national, social, economic, and political development for the improvement of quality of life and, by extension, for meeting global demands (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). This is made possible through the production of skilled and knowledgeable human resource capacity (in terms of quality and quantity), able to contribute to the national development agenda. For higher education to be effective, quality higher education is paramount. It is against this background that quality assurance implementation has proceeded the world over. Bernhard (2011)

observes that quality assurance is top priority on the agendas of higher education policies and for making judgments on higher education institutions and their programmes.

It is important to understand what quality assurance means in the Namibian higher education context as this understanding may have practical implications of the purpose, focus and implementation of quality assurance. Since this phenomenological study attempts to fill the existing knowledge gap by exploring the experiences of the stakeholders, it would be further interesting to establish what each of these notions of quality assurance would mean given the case of this particular study.

Internationally, there are contextual factors that necessitate the implementation of quality assurance in higher education. Global changes in higher education such as massification, internationalisation, accountability, and marketisation of higher education versus public good, are some of the forces that prompted the implementation of quality assurance in higher education (Waheed, 2013; Materu, 2007).

Massification characterised the African higher education sector in the twentieth century, and many countries were concerned with providing higher education that is of quality and to effectively cater for the majority of citizens demanding quality higher education. According to Waheed (2013: 31), “Over the last 60 years, proportionate increases in higher education enrolments have been greater than that of population increases. While the population of the world in 1950 was 2.557 billion, today, it is more than 7 billion, which is almost a two-and-a-half-fold increase. On the other hand, student enrolment in higher education institutions worldwide increased from only 6 million to 132 million in the same period, which corresponds to a twenty-fold increase.” The further challenge within the aspect of massification has been the provision of required resources. Access versus quality is a challenge that continues to face higher education, particularly the aspects of high faculty – student ratios; and un-matching facilities, among others. Massification has further called for better planning of higher education, especially in terms of funding. It is worth mentioning that, while massification of higher education is interpreted to mean increased total numbers of student enrolments, the aspect of expanded learning also has a similar impact. Expanded learning refers to lifelong learning which is a fundamental principle that should cover each

and every kind of learning – formal, non-formal or informal – at all levels, from education in early childhood and school education to higher education and vocational training through to adult education (Bengoetxea, Kallioinen, Schmidt-Jortzig & Thorn, 2011). This (lifelong learning) also calls for emphasis on quality assurance in higher education. Lifelong too has the same impact in terms of the economy, human capital, as well as effective and efficient quality assurance systems to sustain quality higher education.

Internationalisation has proven beneficial to higher education systems. This aspect demands quality standards comparable to other higher education institutions beyond one's borders, but at a global level. Quality assurance in higher education is a critical practice in every country's strategic plans, meant to enhance competitiveness and to meet international expectations and standards (Garwe, 2018). Higher education institutions feel the pressure of being competitive at a global level in order to enjoy the advantages of internationalisation. This means remaining relevant and responsive in order to attract skilled professionals and graduates. It is internationalisation of higher education, inclusive of the growth in cross boarder (HE) providers, the need for mutual recognition of qualifications and credits, as well as the need for workforce mobility; that has forced the governments to do critical reviews of their respective quality assurance systems (Waheed, 2013).

Accountability is prevalent in higher education, as stakeholders such as government, parents, students and funders demand Return-on-Investment. Higher education has to provide effective service to give stakeholders value for money.

Marketisation - the quality sticker has become the new effective way of marketing higher education around the globe. Academic, research, faculty and students exchange collaborations are marketed via the evidence of quality in HEIs arrangements. If marketisation of higher education is not done with the caution it deserves, it has the potential to change the higher education agenda towards an undesirable state. In the case of Namibia, there are two contradictory ideas about the purpose of higher education currently, as also alluded to by Lynch (2006). On the one hand, universities are understood as serving the private good of individuals, and on the other hand, there is a view of the university as a public good, hence the need to achieve equity of access and success. These two views and purposes of the

university co-exist, and the dilemma is how to make them work together in contemporary state-funded higher education (Lynch, 2006).

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the global changes also affect the implementation of quality assurance in the Namibian higher education system. The implementation of quality assurance in higher education is here to stay. However, literature has it that the history of quality assurance, its origin and application in higher education is rooted in business and industry (Doherty, 2012). The effectiveness of the implementation of the managerialism-based business models of quality assurance in higher education has been on the spotlight and are hotly contested due to its bias towards accountability at the expense of improvement. In the next section, I discuss the above mentioned challenges in relation to implementation of quality assurance in the Namibian context.

Purpose of implementation of quality assurance in higher education

It is clear from the literature reviewed that quality assurance has become part and parcel of higher education systems all over the world. However, there are many critical issues which seem to have been overlooked in the implementation process of quality assurance systems in higher education; external quality assurance, in particular. Quality assurance should be purpose driven. The rationale behind the implementation of a quality assurance system would influence both its characteristics and its practice. The literature review revealed that when planning and designing a quality assurance system, whether it is external or internal, it is important to identify the function and purpose of such a system (Kadhila & lipumbu, 2019). Literature identifies various purposes of quality assurance such as:

- Institutional performance assessment
- Institutional learning
- Improvement of academic activities
- Improvement of management
- Equitable resource allocation
- Compliance with external standards

- Accountability to government and society (Kadhila & lipumbu, 2019).

Although there are purposes of internal quality assurance, accountability and improvement stand out to be the two main ones (Harvey & Williams, 2010; D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). In implementing quality assurance, there is often tension between these two contrasting purposes. According to Lockett (2007), external quality assurance agencies always find it difficult to balance the two. Although they may claim to be fulfilling both purposes, many quality assurance agencies fail to develop an appropriate balance between improvement and accountability as they tend to put more weight on accountability at the expense of improvement (Lockett, 2007). As much as quality assurance systems have tried to combine the two functions, many agencies have failed to develop an appropriate balance between the two aspects of accountability and improvement (Harvey & Williams, 2010). This is despite suggestions for the need to strike a balance between improvement and accountability (Harvey & Williams, 2010). For example, if quality assurance is understood as the means to ensure compliance and accountability to external forces, quality assurance systems are likely to take a managerial approach. If it is understood as a tool for enhancement and continuous improvement, those systems are more likely to take a collegial and facilitative approach. External quality assurance system in Namibia follows a similar trend.

Quality assurance for accountability is linked to the need to provide the public with assurance that the expectations, required minimum thresholds/standards or goals in higher education have been sufficiently met. It focuses on criteria situated outside powers and organisations, for example, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in Namibia. In the case of public institutions, for example, the state, through NCHE or professional bodies, may use quality assurance mechanisms to evaluate the quality of education and to assess and evaluate the efficiency in public spending. A quality assurance system may also serve to reassure the internal and external stakeholders of maintaining predetermined minimum standards of quality.

However, quality assurance for improvement or enhancement purpose focuses more on higher education enhancement through internal QA based on individual institutions. For

example, instead of relying on the once-off certificate confirming that the quality standards have been met through accreditation, the quality assurance process serves as a more forward thinking cycle for continuous improvement (Haris, 2013). In this view, the quality assurance system acknowledges both strengths and weaknesses and recommends paths leading to quality improvement. Internal and external evaluations in this quality assurance approach are often in the form of recommendations rather than a pass or fail result (Haris, 2013).

In many instances, these approaches, specifically external quality assurance, are generally referred to as tools for a process of improvement. However, emphasis tends to be on accountability, compliance and control; which are part of a political agenda (Haris, 2013; Castells, 2009). While these approaches claim to strike a balance between improvement and accountability, external quality assurance mechanisms are critiqued in terms of their effectiveness in enhancing the quality of student learning experiences since attention remains on accountability and compliance (Kadhila & lipumbu, 2019). EQA ought to focus on improving and transforming the experiences of stakeholders, especially those of the students, to demonstrate the impact of the QA system in HE.

The debate has been on which serves higher education better between improvement and accountability? Some scholars have argued that the two are inseparable and can be combined, while others have argued that the two are separate matters which cannot be combined to achieve the purpose of quality assurance. The European University Association (EUA) suggests that EQA systems needs to focus more on improvement (EUA, 2008). An improvement-oriented quality assurance system has to guard itself against the negative connotation associated with quality control; characterised by managerialism and bureaucratic rationality, as opposed to collegial and facilitative rationality (Luckett, 2006). This is particularly so in avoiding potential duplication whereby the number of quality assurance processes which a higher education institution has to undergo should be reduced. Where you have more than one national quality assurance agency, synergy between different types of quality assurance processes should be developed to reduce administrative burden on higher education institutions, as well as quality assurance fatigue and apathy (EUA, 2008). This is because meaningful contribution of an external quality assurance system to an individual higher education institution in terms of improvement depends on the willingness

of individuals to improve – adopting a quality culture. Traditional quality assurance approaches by national quality assurance agencies pose a risk of being understood as being imposed on academics in higher education institutions to keep them away from their teaching and research activities.

It is considered that university approaches to IQA are more improvement oriented, and have a greater focus on the quality of teaching and learning aspects and the concept of organisational quality culture (Matai & Iwinska, 2016). Among the views of experts, it is the IQA systems that are considered key to effective and successful quality assurance processes (Matai & Iwinska, 2016). Kis (2005) further states that EQA is responsible for the integrity of higher education, while IQA is responsible for sustainable improvement which relies on internal engagements. It is further argued that external evaluation or accountability is essential to higher education as it includes international integrity (Kis, 2005), which is fundamental to the quality of higher education, especially in this era that is demanding of internationalisation. The role of encouraging and strengthening IQA is also ensured through accountability. Thus, accountability on its own cannot be labelled as 'bad'.

It is possible to reconcile aims of EQA with those of HEIs (Kis, 2005). The two purposes have often been claimed to be incompatible, as the openness essential for improvement is said to be absent if accountability is the purpose of the quality procedure (Woodhouse, 1999). Separate agencies allow each agency to have a structure and processes appropriate to its particular functions (Woodhouse, 1999).

Some scholars have argued that accountability and improvement are inseparable. Kis (2005) posits that people who work in higher education have, for a long time, been accountable to students, to disciplines as well as to their professions. In other words, accountability can be handled internally. What is taken on as very useful processes for higher education institutions are the institutional self-evaluation processes (Brennan & Shah, 2001; Smeby & Stensaker, 1999; Thune, 1996; Saarinen, 1995). Thus, quality improvement can indeed have an external origin (Kis, 2005). From the same processes and approaches of quality assurance, be it EQA or IQA, one can derive improvement, as well as, accountability measures. There is consensus that both comprise a set of structures, policies, processes, procedures and actions designed to assess, maintain and improve the quality of HE (Zavale, Santos & Dias, 2016). Woodhouse

(2004: 4) has a similar point from EQA point of view that “EQA mainly fulfils accountability, and to some extent improvement. Most EQAs are expected to both hold institutions accountable and to enable them to improve. The former is feasible, and EQAs can reasonably be judged on their success in this. The latter is only partially feasible: EQAs can set the context for institutional improvement and can ensure that their processes are not counterproductive, but ultimately it is the institution itself that must improve.”

Despite contributions suggesting how a balance could be achieved, the overall tenor of the contributions was that external quality evaluations of whatever type were not particularly good at encouraging improvement, especially when they had a strong accountability brief (Harvey & Williams, 2010). Harvey (1997) argues that accountability can cause damage by diverting academic staff’s attention away from improvement of learning to compliance with the bureaucratic imperative, and attempts to improve performance on indicators that are poor operationalisations of learning quality. However, Harvey (1997) also argues that accountability can lead to improvement in teaching and learning. Another argument is that accountability is dominantly about value for money and fitness for purpose, while continuous improvement in teaching and learning is about improvement of the student experiences, and inculcating lifelong learning among students (Harvey and Newton, 2007: 232). A failure to accommodate different purposes could damage the quality and integrity of higher education through serious imbalances of power (Harvey & Williams, 2010). According to Lockett (2007), there are power and control relations entrenched in the quality assurance system. The power and control relations distinguish between quality assurance systems that are owned and controlled by actors internal to the academic community, and those that are owned and controlled by external agents (Lockett, 2007).

The power relations embedded in quality assurance cannot be overlooked. It is important to analyse how power relations have possibly emerged, where in the systems are the power relations embedded, and how these power relations may influence implementation of quality assurance. This is especially so with reference to the purposes of accountability and improvement, which to a large extent influence the activities of quality assurance, both in QAAs, as well as in institutions. It is important to know where the powers are derived from. The contradiction between external (accountability-oriented) and internal (improvement-

oriented) quality assurance exercises is a matter of how the exercise is initiated, who owns the practice and the resulting effect on higher education institutions (Kahsay, 2012).

Similarly, according to Barnett (1999), it is not who conducts the evaluation, but rather 'to whom are they accountable, and in whose interest are they acting' that is important. The quality assurance agenda in HE should respond to the following questions: whose decision is it on what counts as quality? Who makes a decision on what the quality criteria or measures should be? Who owns the quality system? For whom is the evaluation? (Luckett, 2007). From Luckett's point, where power lies in a QA system is also where the purpose of QA is derived from. For example, if it is government that decides what counts as quality, what the criteria for quality should be, and if it is the government that owns the system (most probably because the government established the QAA - that is therefore accountable to government) then the main orientation purpose for quality assurance is likely to be accountability.

Habermas (1987) has pointed the dichotomy of accountability and improvement based on his theory of communicative rationality. Habermas argues that amidst pluralism and disenchantment, communicative rationality seems to diminish. According to Habermas (1987), the theorisation of the law gives endorsement for those who argue that if QA is to result in the enlightenment of the HEIs' evaluatees, it must be primarily based on communicative action that is anchored in the lifeworlds of the academic community (Harvey & Knight, 1996; Barnett, 1999; Trow, 1999 in Luckett, 2007). Habermas is not asserting either one (between accountability and improvement) as the main orientation purpose, but is rather placing importance on the means through which different stakeholders arrive at their respective purposes. In line with the context of this study,

Improvement must make sense from within the understandings and lifeworlds of those who must carry it out. EQA policy regulations that work at the level of structure can lay the conditions for improvement, but cannot of themselves effect improvement, they can only enforce compliance. Quality assurance system should be designed to ensure that instrumental action (necessary accountability requirements) enforced by bureaucratic power of the state does not unduly colonise the lifeworld systems of academic institutions. Otherwise the system implementers become cynical in compliance or subvert the intentions of the system (Luckett, 2007: 45).

The point is to have the purpose of quality assurance born from within the custodians of quality – the HEIs. The purpose of QA should be to ultimately serve the custodians – HEIs. This is to avoid mere compliance towards the system, and encourage genuine improvement measures and instill ownership – thereby shaping the experiences of stakeholders accordingly. The ongoing debate about whether accountability or improvement should be the main orientation of quality assurance does not seem to have a solution. The unresolved concern has potential to influence implementation of the system, most probably, in a negative manner. National authorities (as opposed to HEIs, who are the custodians) are often far away and not able to fully judge the quality of academic programmes and institutions based on accountability and improvement, when it is expected that they (authorities) should prove to the public that institutions are achieving their respective goals and purposes, and improving (Machumu & Kisanga, 2015). Machumu and Kisanga (2015) agree with van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) who contend that quality assurance systems should ensure an appropriate balance between the accountability and improvement in higher education.

In concluding this section, accountability as a purpose, is associated with EQA, as improvement is associated with IQA. In my view, accountability as a dominant orientation of EQA tends to focus on demonstrating how quality is monitored externally (in higher education institutions). The external accountability is done by demonstrating compliance to the expectations and demands of external stakeholders, holding HEIs accountable in terms of resources spent (value for money)...amongst other related aspects. The question is, how does accountability shape the implementation of EQA system? How (then) does this shape the experiences of the stakeholders? The overall purpose of government, which is accountability, is most likely to cultivate a compliance culture amongst the higher education institutions. Given the demanding nature of implementing EQA, HEIs are left with little time to implement quality assurance in a way or manner that would improve the education itself. It is therefore, advisable that HEIs adopt a quality culture where record-keeping of updated and relevant information becomes a norm/culture.

In the context of this study, it is clear that “quality assurance can also be a tool for accountability and or/improvement” (Alzafari & Ursini, 2019). The how part in the implementation process can play an influential role in terms of the direction QA takes – whether accountability or improvement. Additional to how quality is implemented, is who is

involved in the process and in what position as factors that ultimately influence the purpose of implementation. This study is premised on the view that stakeholders should aim to influence the ideal change in implementing QA. What motivates stakeholders to engage QA? Is it accountability or improvement?

The relationship between external and internal quality assurance in higher education

In the higher education context, quality assurance system is characterised by external and internal quality assurance systems. External quality assurance is about regulations, policies and practices that take place at the national higher education system level to assure quality of higher education programmes and institutions. In the Namibian context, there are dedicated regulatory agencies like NCHE, NQA and NTA responsible for assuring quality of higher education institutions and/or programmes. There are also professional bodies responsible for regulated professions.

Internal quality assurance concerns all the activities that higher education institutions carry out internally for maintenance and improvement of their institutional quality. In other words, internal quality assurance refers to the internal policies and mechanisms that a higher education institution put in place to ensure that it is fulfilling its purposes as well as meeting the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular. Internal quality assurance is based on the principle that higher education institutions are primarily responsible for quality provision and assurance of their institutions. Internal quality assurance is in other words built on the philosophy that:

- **Internal:** Full responsibility to the institutions
- **Institutional:** Related to strategy and capacity for change
- For **enhancement** purposes (and not for judgement or ranking)
- Emphasis on building a **quality culture** within the institution community (author's own).

Despite the fact that the internal quality assurance and external quality assurance seem to be separate, the relationship between the two is a symbiotic one as there is a thin line between the activities that pertain to internal quality assurance only and those pertaining to external quality assurance only. Therefore, the two systems interplay. Several elements of internal quality assurance are intertwined with elements of external quality assurance; and internal quality assurance may be considered as one of the elements within the external quality assurance framework and vice versa. However, while many studies have engaged the issue of the relationship between EQA and IQA, some studies have viewed this relationship as free of the people involved, i.e. stakeholders; as if the relationship has no influence on, or is not influenced by those involved. In my view, it is a relationship that can shape the experiences of the stakeholders, depending on how EQA and IQA are implemented; dependently and/or independently.

Within a HE system, the integration (or not) of the two frameworks determine the relationship between HEIs and QAAs and Professional Bodies. Having looked at the EQA, as well as internal quality assurance, it is logical to look at the relationship between the two in terms of their respective nature and purposes. The relationship between internal and EQA can be shown by means of the different structures and approaches of quality assurance as discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter. The EQA is mainly promoted by and through, national QAAs. These agencies are tasked with the responsibility to promote quality assurance of higher education institutions (Abebe, 2019). From an EQA point, different approaches such as accreditation, assessment, and audit can only take place when involving both external and internal quality assurance. Put simply, QAAs do accreditation, audit and other EQA approaches in HEIs. From this, it is clear that a closely linked and interdependent relationship ought to exist for effective implementation of quality assurance. According to Friend-Pereira, Lutz and Heerens (2002), there is a close relationship between the internal and external QA. The external QA can stimulate the IQA, while the IQA is essential for the EQA, in the sense that IQA gives EQA purpose to serve. In this perspective, both QA are to be regarded as complementary and integrated (Friend-Pereira; Lutz; &Heerens, 2002).

Matei and Iwinska (2016) tell of the relationship by arguing that an EQA system is mostly effective and stimulates quality improvement when the IQA mechanisms are developed

(often stimulated by the EQA process) and systematically carried out by the universities, primarily for EQA purposes of their internal institutional learning process, else, there is a risk of the EQA leading to compliance rather than improvement (Martin, 2016). The EQA and IQA relationship ought to be 'healthy'. While EQA aims to promote QA in HEIs, IQA should be designed in such a way that it is responsive to EQA, but ultimately effective for HEIs' internal systems. The point is to encourage IQA from targeting mere compliance.

While the relationship between EQA and IQA exists and is critical, it is important that higher education institutions remain cognisant of the fact that they are the custodians of their own quality, and they (HEIs) should not solely focus on implementing and fulfilling the requirements of EQA, especially not at the expense of implementing IQA. It is equally critical that the relationship between the two QA should be enhanced towards a more collegial type of relationship. This is where EQA should play a leading role in strengthening IQA; performing processes in a less managerial manner and exercising respect of institutional autonomy. Reciprocity in a relationship such as this is essential. I borrow from Leeuw's (2002) idea of reciprocity, to emphasise that the relationship between EQA and IQA ought to embrace a reciprocal relationship. Leeuw (2002) has contended that reciprocity between the EQA and institutions is essential and inclusive of both what institutions give and what they get back (exchange of information), and transparency of operations. Reciprocity prioritises trust and without it evaluators run the risk of becoming 'trust killers', particularly if they focus too much on their own norms and criteria without discussing them in depth with the evaluatees. Leeuw (2002) asserts that although reciprocity can be good for practice, too much reciprocity can harm the independence of evaluators, and may even lead to 'negotiating the truth'. To interpret Leeuw, there ought to exist a two-way relationship between EQA and IQA, where both frameworks' processes are linked and interdependent. Where autonomy of IQA is respected by not imposing too much EQA in IQA, but also respecting IQA norms and criteria. At the same time, EQA should be expected to practice without compromising standards. The relationship between EQA and IQA can be summarised as follows:

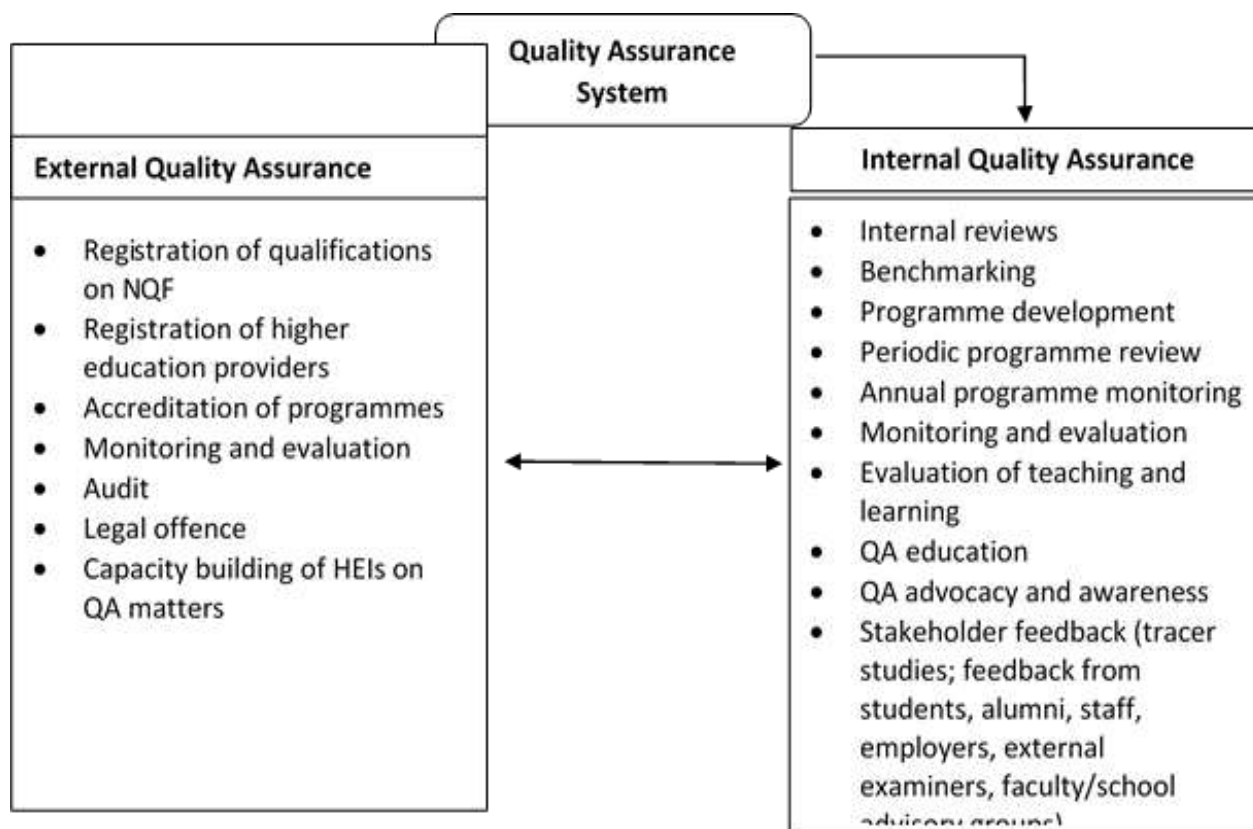


Figure 2.2: Quality assurance mechanisms (Source, *author's own design*)

It is apparent from Figure 2.2 that EQA and IQA co-exist and interplay. Kadhila and Lipumbu (2019) argue that internal and external quality assurance should be complementary and not be seen as opposite or conflicting approaches. Therefore, to ensure seamless and harmonised systems, higher education institutions need to assure and enhance their core activities of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement through effective alignment of internal and external quality assurance. The rationale for alignment of internal and external quality assurance is to increase the overall effectiveness of the quality assurance and to provide a clearer focus and purpose to the constituent parts.

Implications for implementation of quality assurance in higher education

The purpose and establishment of QA, including functions and activities, have implications on how quality assurance is implemented. How the purpose of quality assurance is arrived at also determines its acceptance and sense of ownership amongst the stakeholders, hence Habermas' proposal of communicative rationality as a tool. A reciprocal system as Leeuw

(2002) posits is critical. The balance between the internal and external mechanisms, mediated by the institutional quality culture, is a necessity and is important for the effective facilitation and implementation of quality assurance in higher education institutions (Harvey & Newton, 2007).

If the purpose of quality assurance is not clear to the implementers, the implementation, be it of EQA or IQA, is most likely to be negatively affected. It is essential to have a purpose that is understood by the implementers and stakeholders at large. Implementation from an uncertain point of purpose is less-likely to achieve objectives, less-likely to improve the systems, less-likely to contribute to the cultivation of a quality culture. The extent to which the implementers are involved in the introduction of the quality assurance system contributes to how much they understand the rationale of the system, and impacts the implementation of the system accordingly.

At both national and institutional levels, the implementation of QA in Africa entails many challenges according to Zavale et al. (2016).

- The first is the high cost of QA vs insufficiency of funds. The financial concern is challenging for national and institutional QA systems. At the institutional level, HEIs budgets hardly include QA activities.
- Second, is the lack of qualified staff in QA issues.
- The third challenge concerns the participation of different stakeholders in the process, particularly external constituencies, such as professional bodies and employers. In some circumstances, the involvement of internal stakeholders, particularly students, is ineffective.
- The fourth challenge is the lack of autonomy. The financial dependency of national QA agencies on governments makes them susceptible to political interference (Materu, 2007). Likewise, the dependency of IQA units on the senior leadership may undermine their improvement and accountability missions.
- The fifth challenge is the definition of quality standards and criteria that, while not overlooking the global trends in HE benchmarking and rankings, should be grounded in African context. The standards and criteria devised at international level, are mostly

heavily based on research, and need to be adjusted to the African context (Okebukol, 2015).

- The sixth challenge is the need for continental and regional harmonisation of the diverse national QA systems and practices.
- The seventh challenge concerns decision-making based on the results of quality assessment. For accountability, the results from assessment may lead decision-makers to accredit, institutions or programmes and, in some circumstances, to close them. For improvement, some countries have begun using QA systems as steering mechanisms. In other countries, decision-makers still overlook or lack the know-how on what to do with the information gathered through QA.

In Europe, the implementation challenges are similar to those of Africa. The legal frameworks constitute the most significant challenge for implementation at all levels: national, agency, HEIs, and consortium level (Kelo, Fernandez de Labastida, Fredriks, Heinze, & Markwoski, 2018). Additional aspects which have contributed to the challenges of implementation were: definition of terminology, eligibility to use the European approach, adequate information and relevant information sources (Kelo et al., 2018). These aspects were cited by stakeholders who also proposed a possible way to address the challenges, such as: increasing the level of awareness of addressing the challenges.

Literature indicates that there is little evidence that the majority of academics are embracing quality-change initiatives. There is continuous skepticism among academic staff in many institutions regarding quality systems, both external and internal, and it raises issues about the efficacy of systems that generate reports but do not engage with the heart of the academic endeavor (Harvey, 2009). One explanation may be that conceptions of quality can differ between academics and other stakeholders in higher education, which generates a potential for conflict (Kis, 2005). There is also perpetual resistance of quality assurance processes amongst academics within their universities, reason being that quality is a contested concept and, until a mutually-agreed understanding between external monitors, senior managers and academics emerges; academics will continue to resist quality processes, handling them as games to be played and systems to be fed (Harvey, 2018). Fostering a common understanding amongst academics could be helpful in the implementation process.

Academics need to speak a similar or common language if quality is going to be a culture amongst them – which is critical for implementation. A mutual understanding of quality assurance and its purpose amongst the different stakeholders, including academics, could also yield better implementation measures of the system. Lack of mutual understanding affects effective implementation. According to Harvey (2009), it is still a long way before HEIs achieve a quality culture that provokes resistance due to an ideological friction between the imposers of a 'culture of quality' including recipients who do not live the quality culture but see it as a managerialist fad, or see it as a mechanism designed to undermine their autonomy and academic freedom, or otherwise be perceived as disempowering.

Context plays a critical role in different circumstances. While policy borrowing is not bad, contextualisation should be encouraged at all times. Eurocentric and American quality assurance systems are less likely to be compatible with contexts of other continents or countries, if adopted as is. The reverse is true as well. Policy borrowing that is not contextualised tends to lack ownership, and this can frustrate the implementation process. It can be hard for locals to understand non-contextualised borrowed systems.

The standards and guidelines for quality assurance as popularly developed in many continents were done to ease implementation. It can be somehow tricky given that the standards and guidelines came after QA frameworks have been developed, particularly in Africa. Agencies and HEIs have to adjust and infuse the standards within their existing frameworks. This is also good for harmonisation of systems at continental level, and eventually, internationally.

EQA Agencies for HE are still upcoming, and HE is also continuously changing, and the agencies must change harmoniously (Woodhouse, 2013). Woodhouse (1999) suggests that rapid changes in HE means that quality agencies should be highly flexible, cost-effective but not intrusive. Issues that need to be responded to include, among others, new approaches to panel visits, assessing virtual universities, benchmarking, mutual recognition of national agencies, and the possibility of introducing an international quality assurance agency.

The capacity of EQA to promote QA within HEIs is critical for implementation, both external and internal QA. More than 60% of the QA agencies have been created during the last decade and many of them still lack the capacity needed to implement their mandates effectively (Shabani, 2015). This is why human capacity building is a high priority for all quality assurance

stakeholders in Africa (Shabani, 2015). This challenge is common in Africa, as well as in Europe. Woodhouse (2004) traced the growth in the number of quality agencies in higher education over 20 years. Initially, staff of these agencies were largely amateurs in the field and little theory or experience existed for the agencies to draw upon (Woodhouse, 2004).

In chapter one, the study indicated the intention of proposing a model, particularly for the Namibian context. It is thus logical, to look at other country models from literature. A suitable model for Namibia would be one that is context based, caters for the current practical challenges, namely; the perceived overlaps, fragmented and non-aligned system. The Council for Higher Education, South Africa, has reviewed its operating frameworks and has developed a revised overarching, integrated approach to quality assurance which extends and adapts existing concepts and practices for a changing context (CHE, 2017).

CHE has developed the diagram below of an overall conceptual QA framework model. The model depicts an integrated approach, whereby it is inclusive of aspects of IQA and EQA, in the form of the investigative, as well as the developmental approaches. While both external and internal quality assurance are important, it is further critical to note the useful distinction between the two. Internal QA has a more direct and positive effect on quality improvement, and international experience shows that this is mostly the case in developed systems (Matwei & Iwinska, 2016). This means that IQA needs EQA for strengthening. CHE has described the different approaches and the overall concept *as seen below*.

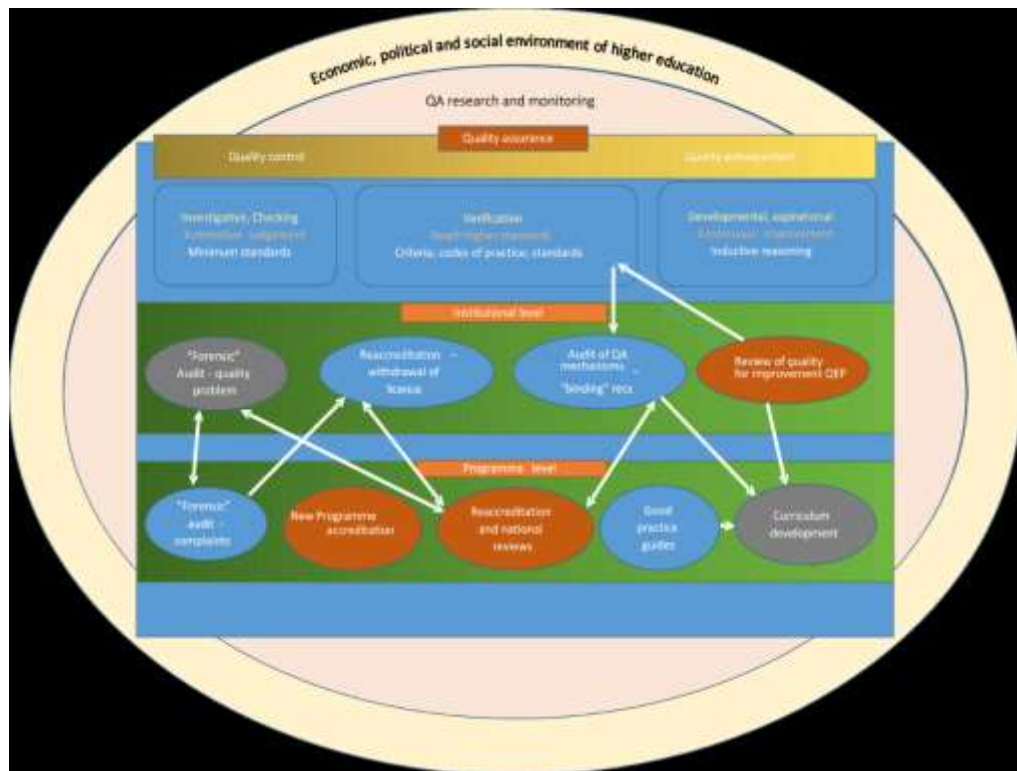


Figure 2.3 The CHE QA overall conceptual framework (CHE, 2007).

“At the quality control end of the continuum, the overall orientation of quality assurance activities is one characterised by an investigative approach, or one that involves checking whether whatever is assessed meets minimum standards. The tools of such approaches include regulatory frameworks, checklists and minimum standards, and the purpose is generally to establish whether an entity or programme is complying with the minimum regulations or criteria laid down in order to make a summative judgment that can lead to a decision about whether an institution may continue to operate or not, or be put on terms for continued operation, or whether and under what conditions a programme may continue to be offered or not” (CHE, 2007).

“In the middle of the spectrum are those activities that combine both verification and improvement purposes. These are generally characterised by a level of self-evaluation of current provision that is verified by external evaluation, both for the purposes of ensuring that certain standards have been met, and to offer recommendations for improvement. The tools for such an approach include sets of predetermined criteria, codes of practice that have been developed in a consultative way, or standards that are aspirational rather than prescriptive of minimum requirements. The assessment is generally of what currently exists, and in that sense is backward-looking (CHE, 2007)”.

“At the quality enhancement end of the continuum, the overall orientation is towards the improvement of the actual quality of whatever is being assessed, rather than on the mechanisms used by the entity or programme to assure it.

The purpose is to raise the level of whatever is being offered, not merely to verify conformity with standards. The tools of such an approach are generally self-evaluation and external assessment of current levels of quality, with recommendations to improve, and a reassessment after a period of time to assess the extent to which improvement has taken place. Such approaches are more forward-looking (CHE, 2007)”.

The CHE overall conceptual framework is a commendable model, and perhaps adoptable to Namibia, especially that it integrates IQA and EQA. The adoption would prioritise context. A national system should be designed considering local circumstances, corresponding to clearly defined national objectives (Matei & Iwinska, 2016). The model should aim to attain objectives defined and understood at the local level (Matei & Iwinska, 2016). In the Namibian context, the model could work depending on the specific aspects that are targeted for investigation and enhancement. In other words, the success of the framework would depend on many aspects, such as the criteria used, the QA aspects investigated or enhanced, and importantly, the quality assurance culture of both IQA, as well as EQA. The economic, political and social environment is another critical area that is characterised by many variant stakeholders, with different needs - depending on the context they are operating in. The conceptual framework ought to ensure that it is inclusive of, and responsive to, all stakeholders' needs. It is further critical for any model to develop mechanisms that would evaluate the success of the model. Only then, can success be known, and improvement implemented, or model review done. According to Matei and Iwinska (2016), QA is an area in which multiple stakeholders interact. The different purposes and functions should be reflected in a comprehensive and coherent national framework with a buy-in and engagement from all relevant stakeholders (Matei & Iwinska, 2016).

Zavale et al. (2016) have developed a model for examining the features and challenges of newly implemented internal quality assurance at Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM). Although it is specifically for IQA systems, I see the model fitting the EQA system, as well.

The Model comprises four components:

- **Policies:** used to examine the objectives, strategies and policies prescribed to UEM's IQA system, and the challenges faced when implementing these strategies.
- **Structure and Resources:** applied to analyse the position of the IQA unit within UEM's organisational structure, as well as the human and financial resources allocated for

the functioning of the system. This component is also used to examine the challenges underlying the IQA unit's position, and the challenges faced as a result of the resources provided.

- **Procedures and Processes:** procedures are used to examine the nature of and the challenges implied by the tools used for quality assessment, including the standards and tools used for data collection and analysis, and areas targeted by the evaluation. Processes are used to examine the steps followed throughout the implementation and the participation of different stakeholders.
- **Results:** used to examine the results depicted by reports concerning the stage of quality of UEM academic programmes. The challenges concerning the use of results for decision-making are also examined.

The difference between the Zavale and the CHE model is that, the Zavale model seems to lack or does not show the essential components it tends to assess. The model could also include aspects of external influence to indicate that IQA does not exist in isolation.

Case studies on external quality assurance in higher education

As has been alluded to earlier, external quality assurance (EQA) concerns regulations, policies and practices that take place at the national higher education system level to assure quality of HE programmes and institutions (Matei & Iwinska, 2016). The international theory and practice of external quality assurance can assist in putting the Namibian system into perspective. It is not clear how the Namibian system is aligned (or not) to the international system. The suitability of the practices and choices will be determined by fundamentals and rationale on which QA and EQA is based. This will assist in seeing how the Namibian practices can best be rationalised for a more efficient and effective higher education system that is context driven.

While most studies in literature reviewed focused on QA and EQA of HE, few have examined the experiences of the stakeholders themselves, who are the primary implementers of the QA systems. The ultimate aim of this study is to produce knowledge that is relevant globally, and that is drawn from the perspective of implementing EQA system (for HE in Namibia) – which is the focus of the study. To attain global relevance, international literature is essential.

International literature is also needed to have a broader perspective of the phenomenon, and therefore to use as best practice to the Namibian context.

The present study looks at the broader picture of how quality assurance (QA) is implemented internationally, not primarily for comparison purposes, but to achieve a more comprehensive picture, given the importance of nations having to be on par and competitive at a global level; an aspect of the internationalisation agenda. Internationalisation is a common theme, both in the European community and in nations with developing systems of higher education, and the intention is to demonstrate comparable standards (Petersen, 1999). Internationalisation in the context of HE, according to Hudzik (2015), is a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research and service missions of higher education.

Furthermore, quality assurance at an international level is characterised by different networks that are established to promote quality and exchange good practices, starting at sub-regional, continental, and international levels. There has been external and internal pressure from international agreements, such as the Bologna Process, the Arusha Convention, and the African Union – for countries to establish quality assurance frameworks and QAAs. These are some of the implications of the internationalisation agenda in the context of HE.

Europe started an initiative of quality assurance frameworks in higher education and the rest of the world followed. To date, other continents have emulated, with some progressing faster. Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and Arabophone -Africa are still at different levels in establishing Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs). According to Shabani (2015), by 2012, about 21 African countries had governmental-established QAAs and others were moving in this direction. By 2013, Francophone Africa was still lagging behind (Zavale et al., 2016).

The International Network of QAAs in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was established in 1991. It is an example of an international membership agency for quality assurance units across countries. Its core membership are the regional and national quality assurance and accreditation agencies. According to Woodhouse (2004), national agencies continue to be established, however, the current membership of the global network of QA agencies (INQAAHE) stands at about 280 organisations from 80 countries. The main purpose of

INQAAHE is to collect and disseminate good practices on current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality higher education (INQAAHE, 2019). INQAAHE has member agencies all over the world and some form of external quality evaluation or monitoring occurs in at least 100 countries (Harvey, 2009). With the large membership, INQAAHE encourages and supports sharing information about QA policies and practices for higher education amongst countries globally (Petersen, 1999). The support extended by INQAAHE has potential of influencing implementation of EQA in the member countries. The only hope for such international influence is that different countries eventually implement EQA systems that are most appropriate in their respective contexts. Otherwise, internationally influenced and not-so-well contextualised systems have a potential of impacting implementation negatively.

A comprehensive framework for quality assurance or enhancement of higher education at the system level (national or regional) typically comprises Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) processes, based and managed by the higher education institutions themselves, and the EQA mechanisms and procedures, coordinated and carried out by a responsible entity outside the university (Matei & Iwinska, 2016).

With regards to quality assurance in higher education on the African continent, Hayward (2006) points out that the history of quality assurance in African higher education is largely influenced by Europe and Western countries. The history goes back to the founding of the first universities in Africa: Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone in 1827, which was affiliated to Durham University in England from 1876; Liberia College, 1852, the University of Cape Town in South Africa, established in 1829, Makerere University in 1922, and University of Ghana, Legon in 1948, affiliated with the University of London; the University College of Addis Ababa in 1951 (unaffiliated); the University of Dakar, established in 1957 and affiliated with the University of Bordeaux. The University of Dakar, now Cheikh Anta Diop University, was regarded as part of the French higher education system as late as the 1960s.

Changes in quality assurance in Africa over the years were driven by a number of factors including; the end of mentoring relationships with European universities, weakening (and in some cases the demise) of the external examiner system, tremendous enrollment growth, significantly decreased expenditures on higher education per capita over the years, effects of the brain drain, the rapid expansion of private higher education (much of

it of questionable quality), growing unemployment of graduates, recognition that Africa was falling further behind the rest of the world in creating knowledge societies, and increased pressure from competition and globalisation (Hayward, 2006).

All these increased pressure on higher education to institute changes that would improve quality. Higher education could no longer continue with business as usual. The old and collegial model of quality assurance could no longer be relied upon solely to ensure that the public was being well served, or that the tax payer was getting value for money (Hayward, 2006:7).

Although the relationship of international affiliation or mentoring of African universities came to an end, the international relationship in HE continued, perhaps differently. Due to global and international influence, today higher education students, graduates, and their employers, cross borders as never before. In line with this, borderless higher education appears to be infused into the purpose of HE, perhaps more now than ever. This too describes an internationalisation trend. Quality is the qualifying mechanism for higher education to participate and benefit from the internationalisation trend. This could mean that, to ensure this kind of mobility, each country has the challenge of keeping the quality flag high, and most countries opted to do this through the implementation of EQA.

As part of strengthening the implementation plan for QA in Africa, the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG – QA) were developed and published in 2017. The ASG-QA were developed under the auspices of the African Union Commission (AUC), supported by partnership from European Union and European Union institutions. The Association of African Universities is the leading implementation agency in higher education in Africa (HAQAA, 2017).

The purpose of the guidelines is to harmonise and strengthen quality assurance in higher education in Africa in order to increase local relevance and global competitiveness – in line with AU's agenda 2063 (AU, 2017). The ASG-QA are also meant to guide the implementation of quality assurance in all areas¹ of quality assurance.

¹ The ASG-QA are categorised in three, namely External Quality Assurance (EQA); Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs); and Internal Quality Assurance (IQA).

African Standards and Guidelines for EQA HAQAA (2017) are as follows:

1. **Objectives of EQA and consideration for internal quality assurance.** EQA shall ensure that the higher education institution has clearly articulated vision and mission statements, and it shall help the institution ensure the effectiveness of its internal QA mechanisms, providing an additional instrument for assessing institutional quality.
2. **Designing EQA mechanisms fit for purpose.** Standards, guidelines and processes for EQA shall be designed to be fit for purpose, designed to achieve the intended aims and objectives of EQA, and to strengthen IQA systems at institutions.
3. **Implementation processes of EQA.** The standards, processes, and procedures for EQA shall be predefined, reliable, published, and consistently implemented for purposes of accountability.
4. **Independence of evaluation.** EQA shall be carried out by panels of external experts drawn from a wide range of expertise and experiences.
5. **Decisions and reporting of EQA outcomes.** Reports and decisions made as a result of EQA shall be clear, based on published standards, processes and procedures, and made accessible for purposes of accountability.
6. **Periodic review of institutions and programmes.** EQA of institutions and programmes shall be undertaken on cyclical basis.
7. **Complaints and appeals.** The procedure for lodging complaints and appeals shall be clearly defined and communicated to the institution concerned.

The above guidelines for EQA could assist well with the implementation of EQA in Africa generally and in Namibia in particular. It is critical to have a comprehensive picture of EQA through an understanding of other aspects i.e. QAAs. For the discussion on the guidelines, see section 2.7.2.

Establishment of quality assurance agencies for higher education

According to Van Damme (2011), quality is not a new concept in academia. It has been part and parcel of the academic community from the first days of modern higher education institutions. Traditionally, quality was supported and controlled by an informal process of self-regulation and peer-review. However, from the 1980s, several factors such as

internationalisation of higher education, massification of higher education and fear for decline of quality, the role of the state in higher education, increasing public demand for transparency, marketisation of higher education – public- vs. private good debate, the impact of information communication technology, and the focus on knowledge-based economy contributed to erosion of academic self-regulation and ‘externalisation’ of quality. The consequence was a loss of public trust in academic self-regulation, and the emergence of external quality assurance (EQA) systems, in most cases, based on explicit mechanisms of peer review.

External quality assurance is characterised by establishment of quality assurance agencies. Although at different stages of development, several countries have by now set up accreditation bodies, initially, mainly for accrediting private higher education institutions and later for accrediting public higher education programmes and institutions (Hoosen, Chetty & Butcher, 2017). There is need to ensure that the QAAs are playing the role that they are expected to play in pursuit of better QA systems.

There are two complementary but different approaches to quality assurance that were introduced in higher education, namely; accreditation and academic evaluation/assessment/audit. Accreditation refers to the process of determining the extent of meeting standards set by governments, national agencies or professional bodies. It is mainly externally driven, and can be applied to programmes, academic units or the whole institution. Academic Evaluation/Assessment/Audit is undertaken by governments or national agencies. This may be applied to whole or part of the institution, and uses the fitness for purpose approach i.e. is the institution achieving its own set objectives and standards? It involves preparing an institutional self-assessment report which is reviewed by a panel of external assessors who undertake a site visit and submit their report. The objective is development and enhancement. However, in some countries, it is linked to accountability and public funding. The evaluation process is now widely used internationally. Both accreditation and evaluation processes are important for improving quality in African higher education institutions (Machumu & Kisanga, 2015; Shabani, Okebukola & Oyewole, 2014).

The implementation of EQA depends, to a large extent, on the type of QAAs. The agencies differ in many ways depending on the countries. Where multiple agencies are found or established in a single country as in Namibia, the agencies may differ in terms of how they are

established and how they function. According to Abebe (2019), the functions of the agencies also vary, and include accreditation, audit, quality assessment, set and check standards, as well as disseminating of information and good practices.

Furthermore, the rationale behind setting up a national EQA system in a specific way often depends on the national context. There are many factors that have an impact on what is considered the most appropriate and/or most suitable purpose and structure of a QA system for the local context (Matai & Iwinska, 2016). These factors can be internal and linked to the history, cultural and political contexts and traditions (Matai & Iwinska, 2016).

The national QAAs differ from country to country in their legal status and ownership, their functions, their composition and their sources of funding (Brennan & Shah, 2001). Some agencies are established within government ministries; others may be established as autonomous structures. In Africa, QAAs are normally established by Acts of Parliament. In other words, QAAs are normally established as legal entities. In other parts of the world, QAAs are private entities, with legal status too. “In different countries, QAAs are established by governments, by HEIs, or by private groups. Most agencies are established by government initiatives. In setting up the QAAs, it is found to be important to consider the national context, in terms of size of the system to be covered, the scope of the quality assurance, and level of its involvement” (Marin & Stella, 2011).

“EQA is most commonly organised through the creation of independent administrative structures, i.e. agencies that commonly function as professional buffer organisations between public authorities and higher education institutions” (Martin & Stella, 2007). The buffer organisations tend to be statutory in terms of establishment – enacted by legislation, delegated by, funded by, and accountable to, government units (Abebe, 2019). These professional buffer organisations work as agencies of governments, holding the higher education institutions accountable and keeping the state informed of the status of the institutions (HEIs) and their academic programmes (Abebe, 2019). There are however, other forms of establishments when it comes to external agencies of quality assurance. Martin & Stella (2007) observe that “professional buffer organisations are the most dominant type of establishments internationally”. “Governments tend to delegate more autonomy to Professional buffer organisations, and request accountability” (Martin & Stella, 2007). Through the establishment of QAAs, Governments would like to hold HEIs accountable for

the quality of their (HEIs) services. EQAAs respond to government demand by designing quality assurance mechanisms accordingly. In return, HEIs or internal quality assurance respond to EQA by designing implementation measures that are aligned to EQA and are suitable for the purpose (Martin & Stella, 2007). With this arrangement as found in some countries, the level of influence in terms of how EQA is implemented is implicated. The governments, in other words, own the systems and government is the ultimate authority and the aspect of accountability tends to be more pronounced. Therefore, implementation is likely to be done from that perspective too.

In some countries, the agencies are established as non-statutory – without legislation. Where the agencies are non-statutory, they tend to operate independently, be self-financing, and owned by universities or affiliated to professional bodies, industries or consultancy organisations (Abebe, 2019). This kind of establishment is expected to have different implications for implementation compared to the agencies established by governments. Despite the different establishments, most QAAs implement QA by following common EQA methodologies.

Methodologies for external quality assurance

Hoosen, Chetty and Butcher (2017) point out that, although the objectives of national quality assurance agencies and practices are similar, there is diversity in the way they operate within the different national contexts (Garwe & Gwati, 2018). For example, in some systems, all accreditation and/or institutional audit/assessment/evaluation systems follow a similar process of self-review, site visit by external peer reviewers and report. In some systems, accreditation only applies to private higher education institutions. In other systems, it applies to both public and private institutions. In some instances, both institutional and programme accreditation apply; while in others, only programme accreditation or institutional accreditation applies. In some countries, there is more than one quality assurance agency; one may focus on assessments and audits, while the other may focus on accreditation. Some of the most common methods used by QAAs as part of EQA implementation are discussed next.

Self-evaluation or self-analysis

Brennan and Shah (2001) call self-evaluation or self-analysis the cornerstone of the system. In this first step, an institution does a self-evaluation of the unit of assessment, be it a programme or department.

According to Kahsay (2012), effective self-evaluation demands addressing four fundamental questions: ***What is the organisation trying to do*** (Focus on leadership and policies)? ***How is it trying to do it*** (Focus on strategies and resources for action)? ***How does it know this works*** (Focus on indicators and measures of success)? ***How does the organisation change in order to improve?*** Focus on feedback and learning)?

Self-evaluation forms the basis of assessment for the peer reviewers. The main purpose of this step is to enable the institution (or sub-unit) to provide appropriate, relevant and up to date information about itself (Brennan & Shah, 2001). Self-evaluation should promote processes of internal quality assurance, serve as internal preparation for a visit of the review committee, and provide background information for the review committee (Brennan & Shah, 2001).

External Peer Review

In this step, the appointed team reviews the programme and makes judgements based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). They (appointed team) possibly also visit the institution to verify the self-evaluation report, by having interviews with relevant stakeholders (internal and external). From an international perspective, the aspect of external peer review differs amongst agencies or countries. According to Brennan and Shah (2001), the differences concern who the external peers are, what is expected of them, how they are selected, how visits are organised, the length of visits and who is seen, as well as the authority given to the external peers. What may also differ is the kind of training they may receive, as well as the authority given to the team.

Publication of the (assessment) Report

After the external review by peers, a report is normally expected within an agreed period between the agency and the reviewers. Normally the report should contain

recommendations and commendations. This report could be for public consumption or only for the particular institution, depending on the agency or country. A linked issue on published reports is who follows up the recommendations made in the evaluation reports (Brennan & Shah, 2001). The purpose of the publication is to inform the public of the performance of higher education institutions.

The degree of autonomy also has an influence on the legitimacy and impact of the agency's work (Abebe, 2019). The independent nature of the quality assurance agency with respect to quality assurance decisions is seen as desirable. To a large extent, autonomy of QAAs determine their (QAAs') operations and strategic decisions. The autonomy would also differ depending on the type of establishment. Some QAAs have full-autonomy, with some being semi-autonomous. Most government based agencies have operational autonomy. The level of autonomy of an agency is implicated by its affiliation. According to Martin and Stella (2007), agencies established by government claim a level of autonomy from government, the non-governmental bodies tend to claim the greatest independence or autonomy in decision making. When owned by HEIs, quality assurance depends on the voluntary acceptance of the procedures by the member institutions, the HEIs would also shape the nature and framework of the quality assurance process.

Global and continental initiatives for external quality assurance in higher education

Concerns for quality and challenges facing higher education have brought about quality assurance initiatives at continental and global levels. For example, in Europe, the Bologna Declaration of 1999 by Ministers of Education was the main thrust to create European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and encourage mobility. Bologna Process was main catalyst for promoting quality assurance in Europe. Furthermore, the Berlin Declaration of Ministers of Bologna Process in 2003 emphasises need for institutional autonomy, and mentions primary responsibility for quality assurance and accountability to be with the higher education institution itself. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as established in 2000 is an umbrella organisation which represents quality assurance organisations from the (EHEA) member states. ENQA operates as a 'quality seal' of the European quality assurance agencies. It disseminates information and expertise among its members and towards stakeholders in order to develop and share good practice and to foster

the European dimension of quality assurance. With the establishment of quality assurance and the relevant bodies, as well as the Bologna process, the stakeholders' experiences in this regard are worth noting. According to Smidt (2015), stakeholder's experiences have been influenced in that stakeholders in Europe are said to apply QA differently, given how it is reflected in the policies and practices in the European countries. European higher education institutions increasingly had to respond to a growing demand for accountability and transparency. However, these pressures led the European HE stakeholders to develop a quality culture, while addressing the challenges of globalised higher education. Furthermore, some stakeholders viewed the newly introduced QA in terms of institutional context to be inward looking, and not all stakeholders perceived the difference between external and internal quality assurance. The quality assurance agenda has been driven by the collaboration and continuous engagement of the four European stakeholder organisations: the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Student Union (ESU—formerly ESIB) and the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA). These four organisations established almost from the beginning of the Bologna Process have a working relationship through the E4 group. The quality assurance initiatives within the Bologna process have left the stakeholders in Europe more united. For example, the combination of these initiatives created a pan-European stage for continuous discussion and exchange of good practice between European, national and institutional policy makers and stakeholders. The four stakeholder organisations also have “walked the talk” by developing projects that have tracked and promoted the development and implementation of both external and internal quality assurance practices. The European stakeholder organisations have created fora where members have been able to discuss and develop recommendations with peers via individual or joint QA projects. The discussions and exchange of experience in these projects and their reports have helped to promote and inform the development of a quality culture in European HEIs, and simultaneously helped to track the development (of a quality culture) and helped to engage in communication with and between stakeholders at European, national and institutional level on the progress. EQA provides a platform and an opportunity for the higher education and QA communities to follow, discuss, shape and anticipate developments in the area (Smidt, 2015).

One sees that the Bologna process, and the EHEA initiative have encouraged and fostered stakeholder relationships, which arguably render a better experience of EQA. Important as part of the stakeholder experience from these initiative is the space that was created where different stakeholders within the HE fraternity could hold dialogue and enhance communication among themselves. This kind of harmonisation, particularly the communication aspect, has potential to improve systems. If one looks at the case of Namibia where the system is fragmented, this kind of approach amongst stakeholders would be ideal.

NQA developed the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESGs) which they use to assess agencies that want to become members (Doutora, Especialista, Mestre & Doutora, 2014). The European Union (EU) has also developed a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with a view to positioning Europe as an international reference point for education and training. The ESGs cover the following areas (ENQA, 2015):

1. **Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance** - Agencies should undertake EQA activities on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholder in their governance and work.
2. **Official status** - agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as QAAs by competent public authorities.
3. **Independence** - agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility of their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.
4. **Thematic analysis** - Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their EQA activities.
5. **Resources** - Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

6. ***Internal quality assurance and professional conduct*** - Agencies should have in place, processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring, and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.
7. ***Cyclical external review agencies*** - agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years, in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG (Matei & Iwinska, 2016).

On the African continent, one of the products from lessons learned from matured systems in Europe is the establishment of Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA). HAQAA is an initiative which was funded by the European Union (EU) in partnership with the African Union Commission (AUC), implemented by a consortium of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the University of Barcelona, Association of African Universities (AAU), European University Association (EUA), and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD); with the purpose to support the development of a harmonised quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional, national, regional and Pan-African continental level. The project aims to:

- develop a common understanding on quality assurance in Africa;
- develop African Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance (ASG) and reinforce institutional internal quality assurance;
- consolidate a quality culture in Africa; and
- sustain and further develop the Pan-African quality assurance and accreditation system (ENQA, 2016).

The HAQAA has developed the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) as part of the project. Participants also have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion and ask questions. The ASG-QA cover the following areas (HAQAA, 2017):

1. **Legal status.** The QAA shall be an autonomous legal entity with clearly defined mandate, scope and powers. It will be recognised as a quality assurance agency at a national/regional level.

2. **Vision and mission statement.** The QAA shall have written and published vision and mission statements or objectives taking the higher education context into account.
3. **The governance and management.** The QAA shall have clearly defined structures that ensure sound and ethical governance and management, including good practices of quality assurance that support its mission and legal mandate.
4. **The independence of QAA.** The QAA shall be independent in its operations, outcomes, judgements and decisions.
5. **Policies, processes and activities.** The QAA shall undertake its quality assurance activities in accordance with the standards and guidelines articulated in part B of the ASG-QA.
6. **Internal Quality Assurance.** The QAA shall have in place, policies and processes for its own internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of its activities.
7. **The financial and human resources.** The QAA shall have adequate and appropriate human, financial and material resources to carry out its QA mandate effectively and efficiently.
8. **Benchmarking.** Networking and collaboration. The QAA shall promote and participate in international initiatives, workshops and conferences, and collaborate with relevant bodies on QA to exchange and share experiences and best practices.
9. **Periodic review of QAAs.** The QAA shall undergo periodic internal and external reviews for continuous improvement.

It is clear that there are many initiatives aimed at promoting quality assurance in higher education at the global and African level. Many countries have either created or are planning a robust quality assurance and accreditation system, addressing the public perception that educational quality is being compromised by (the recent) expanding enrolment. Where they exist, many a times these initiatives are disparate and uncoordinated, with little collaboration among regions and key organisations (Okebukola, 2012). Effective application of quality assurance process requires effective systems to be set up. The present study examined how EQA is coordinated in Namibia to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

Approaches for external quality assurance

The nature and establishment of an EQA agency also determines its approaches and functions. For some countries, the implementation of EQA within higher education institutions is compulsory, while it may be voluntary in some. However, both voluntary and compulsory systems do benefit in such a way that HEIs are eager to obtain quality status for their institutions or programmes, which becomes very critical in the competitive environment, and particularly for funding, and student enrolments amongst others (Martin & Stella, 2007).

The following are the three common approaches to EQA according to Kis (2005).

1. **Accreditation** – an evaluation of whether an institution or programme meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. Accreditation stresses the “gatekeeper” role of an external quality agency, holding higher education institutions (HEIs) to threshold requirements.
2. **Assessment** – an evaluation that makes graded judgements about quality, and goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary judgement.
3. **Audit** – a quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives (Woodhouse, 1999). The process aims to measure the effectiveness of processes. Audits focus on processes implemented by HEIs in order to assure and improve quality teaching and learning.

As has been stated before, although the objectives of EQA and practices are similar, there may be diversity in the way national quality assurance agencies (QAAs) operate within the different national contexts. Examples of different approaches undertaken by national QAAs in different countries are summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 International comparison of QA approaches (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri & Arnal 2008: P. 267)

	Switzerland	Czech Republic	Japan	Australia	UK	Mexico
QA approach	QA for accountability	QA for accountability	QA for accountability	QA for accountability	QA for improvement	QA for improvement

		and improvement	and improvement	and improvement		
QA tools/ mechanism	Accreditation: HEIs and programme level	Accreditation: programme level Audit: HEIs	Accreditation: HEIs and Audit: HEIs, faculties	Accreditation: HEIs and programme level Audit: HEIs	Audit: HEIs	Accreditation : HEIs and programme level Assessment: Programme level
Responsible entity	Government authorities Intermediate agencies	Intermediate agencies	Government authorities Intermediate agencies	Government authorities Intermediate agency	Intermediate agency	Intermediate agency
Stakeholders involved in monitoring panels	Domestic & Foreign academics Students Employers' representative s	Domestic & Foreign academics (sometimes: Employers' representatives , students, regional authorities)	Domestic & Foreign academics Stakeholders from the industry	Domestic & Foreign academics Employers' representative	Domestic academics Scotland: domestic academics and students	Domestic academics

From the above illustration of QA approaches in Czech Republic, Japan and Australia is similar to that of Namibia. The implementation is done through similar approaches, using similar tools and through similar entities, and even the categories of stakeholders involved. The others such as UK have aspects in common, although not in all aspects. This indicates that Namibia's QA practices are similar to the international practices. Overall, it shows that accreditation is the most common approach used in EQA methods internationally, including Namibia. Matei and Iwinska (2016) justified the importance of accreditation in the overall purpose and design of the EQA system on the basis that:

- it can be used for assuring quality of new and existing academic programmes,
- the process can also be used at the level of quality assurance agencies (for meta-evaluations,
- it can be voluntary or mandatory for programmes or institutions (or both),
- it can be a onetime procedure (e.g. certifying new programmes) or a cyclical process (e.g. every 5 or more years),
- it can establish a legal status and basic legitimacy,
- typically relates to accountability, and
- the outcome of the accreditation process is usually a binary format such as yes/no or pass/fail.

The above points of accreditation justify accreditation in a QA system. The absence or presence of accreditation has potential to determine the strength of a QA system (or the success of it) in terms of what a QA system can achieve having (or not). By extension, the approaches which characterise an EQA system can shape the experiences of the stakeholders.

Additional to the three approaches are the Registration of academic programmes on the National Qualifications Framework(s); and Licensing of professionals.

4. **Registration of academic programmes** – deals with registering national qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework(s) normally housed by National Recognition Entities i.e. Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA - Namibia) and South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA - South Africa).
5. **Licensing students** – This involves licensing graduate professionals by the professional bodies or statutory bodies responsible for specific professional programmes. The professional bodies have the responsibility and mandate of licensing professionals as practitioners in their respective fields upon completing.

These approaches are promoted or led by QAA through EQA, but literally implemented in HEIs. External framework/system, to a large extent, influences the internal/ institutional arrangements. At external level alone, the established quality assurance mechanisms ought to be linked and related (whether they are found in one or multiple agencies), not only in order to function better, but to inform the HEIs' systems and processes accordingly. The

alignment or none-alignment at external level is most likely to have an influence on the internal/institutional arrangements as well. This is mainly because, internal/institutional arrangements also aim to respond to the external. Some countries have more than one QAA, each with different QA functions, while other countries run a single entity. Some countries have a single agency responsible for multiple QA functions. This alludes to the issue of single or multiple external QAAs. My view is that, depending on what the arrangement is, the implementation is likely to differ accordingly.

Another important aspect that plays a role in designing EQA is the scope of the processes. Matai and Iwanski (2016) have considered the following questions with regards to scoping of EQA: Where should the IQA focus be? Should IQA focus only on the level of HEIs as or also on the level of academic programmes? Or perhaps the focus should be on both as it is practiced in some countries. Should the process cover both public and private higher education institutions or not? Should the process focus on all programmes or selected ones only, as in some countries where the focus is on teacher education or other vital professions? (Matai & Iwanski, 2016).

In the cases of Namibia and South Africa, EQA focuses on both HEIs broadly, and also on the academic programmes specifically. These are done through institutional audits and programme accreditation respectively. Some functions are particular to specific type of HEIs, e.g. the registration of (private) HEIs is only applicable to private HEIs. Additional to QAAs, some countries have professional bodies or statutory bodies which are discipline or professional based, and only focus on particular professional academic programmes.

Furthermore, according to Kis (2005), the scope of evaluation may be at territorial level or by type of HEI:

- **Territorial level:** External QAAs carry out the evaluations of HEIs in determined regions i.e. Canada, United States, Belgium, Germany, Spain etc. In some countries, national QAAs operate all over the national territory.
- **Type of HEI:** In some countries, QAAs cover a certain type of HEIs, differentiated either by being a University, non-University; or by being either private or public.

In the case of Namibia, it has been indicated before that the EQA system is characterised by multiple agencies (QAAs). The different agencies have different mandates, although with

some mandates overlapping among the agencies. All agencies are mandated to operate all over the national territory. In terms of the type of institution, one agency is dedicated to a certain type only, and that is the National Training Authority. The Act of the NTA mandates NTA to operate within the Vocational Education and Training sector (VET Act, 2008).

Quality assurance initiatives at institutional level

External Quality Assurance systems were established in nearly every country within the European region (Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017), and later also in other continents such as Asia and Africa. Concomitantly, countries which managed to establish EQA agencies were also expected to have quality assurance frameworks within higher education institutions, and were urged to develop IQA processes (Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017). In response, many higher education institutions in the world established internal quality assurance systems.

Literature shows that IQA approaches, like those of EQA, are similar internationally, although implementation at institutional level may differ. Even with the presence of QA similarities internationally, the experiences of the stakeholders are expected to be unique, as they are shaped by different aspects, such as culture and overall, context.

Internal quality assurance may also follow the same procedures as that of EQA. The self-evaluation report is the cornerstone of the whole QA-system (Friend-Pereira; Lutz; & Heerens, 2002). After all, internal quality assurance reviews also prepare institutions for external reviews. The process starts with a self-review from the specific division or department. Internally, the institutional QA unit organises a committee of peer reviewers, and also produces a report at the end. Unlike in the case of external review, this report might not be for public consumption.

EQA covers a range of evaluative processes, namely institutional and programme accreditation reviews and audits HEIs are required to undergo as part of a national regulatory requirement, or to which they submit themselves on a voluntary basis (Martin & Stella, 2007). National QA system are mostly compulsory, as in the case of Namibia (NCHE, 2009). Institutions, however, may get any kind of QA or accreditation they may wish to. As one can imagine, some institutions may wish to get international accreditation. Regardless of whether a HEI has acquired international accreditation as a compulsory requirement or voluntary

decision, international accreditations have been useful in providing opportunities to increase institutional capacity for IQA, at the levels of individual colleges or Departments and universities (Martin, 2018). It is not surprising that many HEIs may prefer to get international accreditation voluntarily, as international accreditation is likely to carry the same benefits of internationalisation towards an institution, i.e. attraction of international staff and students, which may also trigger HEIs to implement internationally inculcated curriculum for academic programmes. It (International accreditation) appears to be an aspect that is in tandem with the concept of internationalisation. The relevance of international aspects would be determined by the embedded quality.

There are some important internal conditioning factors which contribute to the implementation of IQA across higher education institutions. According to a survey done by International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and International Association of Universities in at least five continents, the internal conditioning factors are such as: leadership support; solid information system; transparency of IQA procedures; and stakeholder participation (Martin, 2018).

Financial incentives and support by students were also considered important (Martin, 2018). While these factors are important for effective implementation of internal quality assurance, one can only hope that they are prioritised in higher education institutions. I find the following questions by Martin (2018: 12) important to ask in the implementation process of IQA:

- i. What is the level of awareness among University (HEI) staff of the quality policy and their involvement in IQA tools?
- ii. How do senior and middle level management, academic and administrative staff, and students perceive the effects of internal quality assurance system?
- iii. In the view of the academic staff, which factors facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of the IQA system? In the context of this study, these questions are critical for the implementation of IQA in any institution.

The questions are also in line with the internal conditional factors identified in a survey by IIEP and IAU (Martin, 2018). By implication, the substance of the questions should feature in implementation strategies, particularly those of HEIs. Otherwise, the same questions should be modelled to fit the designs of the EQA systems.

Additional to internal factors that are critical to IQA, the following two external factors are also important to consider in the implementation of IQA; the role of EQA and the level of autonomy of universities (Martin, 2018). The role of EQA cannot be over emphasised in the effective implementation of internal quality assurance, given the fact that IQA implies the actual implementation, while EQA promotes implementation. External agencies ought to play an engaging and more supportive collegial role in facilitating EQA. Capacity building for HEIs/IQA (from EQA) is one critical aspect and contribution to institutional quality culture (Martin, 2018). Institutional autonomy has considerable effects on IQA; particularly the autonomy granted to Universities by their respective governments to design and implement their IQA system, as well as the autonomy that the university's central management leaves to basic units (e.g. faculties and departments) to also design and implement their IQA system (Martin, 2018). The autonomy practiced as part of EQA is critical to the attitude of the EQA stakeholders. There are countries and QAAs who give autonomy to their stakeholders i.e. HEIs. However, there are places where autonomy is stifled. African countries are at different levels of development and QA, hence autonomy of IQA and EQA varies from country to country (Atibuni, 2020). In some European countries, such as Finland, autonomy is prioritised. "Along with Higher Education Institutions in Europe, Finnish Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences have acquired more institutional and financial autonomy..." (Lyytinen, Kohtamaki, Kivisto, Pekkola, and Holtta, 2017). Lyytinen et al. (2017) argue that this kind of autonomy has strengthened the capacity of HEIs to operate better in an open environment and to establish relationships with external stakeholders. This goes to show that autonomy has an impact on the attitude of stakeholders towards external quality assurance. In the case of Europe, Finland in particular, the impact is pleasant, and this should serve as 'good practice' for other agencies and countries, as far as EQA is concerned. Ensuring that EQA allows HEIs the autonomy they deserve is a step forward in forging healthy relationships with stakeholders. Furthermore, when stakeholders' attitudes and experiences of the EQA system is pleasant, EQA is most likely to achieve its objectives, mainly continuous improvement of the respective HE systems. The opposite, where QAAs are found not to respect the autonomy of HEIs, resistance of EQA by stakeholders is expected. If the experiences of the stakeholders are negative towards EQA, there is likely to be mere compliance towards EQA, rather than stakeholders embracing and taking ownership of the QA processes. While this practice works in European countries, it is unfortunate that HEIs in the Nording and European countries have

no strong practice of involving external stakeholders in their IQA practices (Lyytinen et al., 2017). HEIs should use the autonomy to incorporate stakeholders in their IQA.

The design of QA itself also determines whether stakeholders are allowed autonomy (or not). Harvey (2018) argues that mainly designing QA processes to focus on accountability rather than on improvement results in quality education being replaced by QA processes. Decrying and excessive politisation of QA equally result in excessive bureaucratisation of procedures, increased administrative workload for academic staff, stifling of creativity and lack of trust and de-professionalisation of academic staff. Decrying and excessive politisation therefore impinges on the legitimacy of the process, as a result of fear and animosity amongst the stakeholders involved in IQA and EQA (Harvey, 2018). This type of practice and stifling of autonomy renders experiences of stakeholders unpleasant, and by extension devalues EQA. When stakeholders give less respect to QA practices, specifically EQA, the impact will largely 'bite' on the QAAs. Atibuni (2020) further argues that QAAs pursue government interests often using policing style and show off, negatively impacting the QA objective of improvement.

Autonomy for EQA stakeholders, in particular the HEIs, could mean that the state affords them (HEIs) freedom to make decisions regarding curriculum content, pedagogy and research to the expertise of individual academics and their disciplines and institutions (Atibuni, 2020). The lack of autonomy in HEIs, particularly the limitation or lack of autonomy in designing the pedagogy, has a negative effect on other stakeholders like students and employers by extension. The graduates lack the love for lifelong learning and they struggle to contribute meaningfully to their personal as well as national wellbeing, and this is attributed to the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the autonomy between QAAs and HEIs, which is supposed to be mutually reinforcing (Atibuni, 2020).

Although the focus of this study was on external quality assurance (EQA), it was important to zoom into internal quality assurance (IQA). As has been stated before, there is a symbiotic relationship between EQA and IQA. Therefore, EQA cannot be discussed in isolation from IQA. Furthermore, to respond and accommodate the external system, it should be clear to any internal stakeholders what their operating system (internally) is, what it requires and how best it should function. It is my view that, all in all, the internal quality assurance should be driven by ownership and therefore culture. How stakeholders experience the IQA system,

may determine how the same stakeholders accept, respond and accommodate EQA in a manner that is constructive to the HE system.

Arguments around the purpose of internal quality assurance

This study posits that the purpose for internal quality assurance (IQA) should be institutional driven, and in line with the higher education institutions' context and objectives. Thus, to promote genuine quality, more energy must be invested in external quality assurance capacitating and strengthening internal quality assurance systems (Kadhila & lipumbu, 2019). However, one would also expect the purpose of accommodating EQA to a reasonable extent, given the interdependence of IQA and EQA. Firstly, the purpose of internal quality assurance has to be driven from the point that higher education institutions are the custodians of their own quality or the quality of their provisions. The second point is to derive the purpose of internal quality assurance from the point that QA is promoted from an external environment – by quality assurance agency/agencies. Thirdly, the purpose ought to be inclusive of the idea that higher education serves a number of stakeholders, to whom quality means different things. Woodhouse (2004) says students want the freedom to choose institutions of their choice, institutions want confirmation of their standing; employers want to be certain that graduates can hit the ground running; governments want financial accountability of their money and that is how sometimes government press QAAs to drive institutions in particular directions. Societies want a prestigious local institution, and all want QA decisions and outputs that are intelligible and useful.

According to Paintsil (2016), the purpose of the IQA system is to achieve and maintain higher academic standards in teaching, learning and research. These (IQA) mechanisms are often set up to comply with the requirements of national EQA agencies or regulatory bodies, but also to generate information that responds to institutions' own requirements for internal quality monitoring and management (Senal; Gonzalez; Fischer; Hansen; & Ponds, 2008). It is critical that all higher education institutions maintain their own internal, rigorous quality assurance systems to achieve purposeful and institutional objectives. In other words, HEIs that entirely depend on EQA may not be purposeful and achieve objectives. This may render QA inadequate, consequently shaping the experiences of the stakeholders.

Also, an ambitious purpose alone may not yield much of the desired results. The entire institutional quality assurance framework ought to work in harmony. Put differently, while it is important for universities or higher education institutions to have internal quality assurance frameworks, it is critical that the institutional frameworks are linked to other university processes, in order to take effect accordingly. The IQA system should be interconnected with many other key management processes, the most important being curriculum design, human resource development, organisational development, institutional planning, and data management (Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017). These processes are an integral part of quality enhancement. For example, the need for institutions to promote their brands has also pushed internal quality assurance higher up the agenda of HEIs (Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017). Just to give a practical example, the promotion of institutional brand can call for a link between the IQA and another institutional system such as Communication & Marketing. In this era of global competitiveness, institutions feel an urge to promote their images/brand in order to attract best students, financial resources, and human capital. However, the importance of these factors and their documentation does not imply implementation. The interdependence will not just happen; an institution has to deliberately plan. Europe, in particular the Ministers of Education, has endorsed an IQA-centered policy approach that emphasises quality HE as primarily a responsibility of universities. The European Universities have taken this aspect with the seriousness it deserves, by placing within the respective universities, legislations and putting it into practice (Elkana, 2016). Authors like Ganseuer and Pistor (2017) associate IQA with mainly academic aspects, others like Elkana (2016) have indicated that IQA has an indirect effect on management culture. Martin (2018) notes that IQA focuses on different HE functional areas, namely: teaching & learning; graduate employability, governance and management, research, community outreach, income generation and community service; as well as international cooperation. Furthermore, IQA is essential in striking a good balance of autonomy within the different units and/or sections of a University, also affecting institutional governance, with an aim of closing the quality loop (Elkana, 2016).

The IQA calls for noting the aspects that are critical to the experience of stakeholders; internal stakeholders in this case. Elkana (2016) emphasises that internal stakeholders should be aware of and involved in the institutional quality policy at all times, and the perception of all internal stakeholders is critical in realising the objectives of IQA.

IQA goes to affect external stakeholders as well. For example, IQA affects students and employers in turn. This renders IQA important in the process of employability of graduates. This further calls for a balanced relationship between IQA and EQA.

According to Martin (2018), universities globally struggle with certain IQA related challenges. These challenges are inclusive of: developing cost-effective IQA, with tools and processes that are well articulated between each other and function together and independently as a system; integrating IQA with planning, management, and resources allocation; striking the right balance between the interests of management, consumer, and academic; finding or setting up appropriate mechanisms to make best use of evidence to enhance programme quality and student employability; finding the right balance between centralised and decentralised structures; and last but not least, designing IQA that supports the development of continuous quality-enhancement processes in a university. These are some of the aspects that available literature highlights as lessons from implementation cases of similar systems. Addressing those factors in the implementation process of QA, such as that of Namibia, can effectively contribute to successful implementation process, and arguably give stakeholders a more pleasant experience. It is important that Africa, and Namibia in particular, does not have to re-invent the wheel when it comes to EQA. While context remains core, learning from experienced countries would give efficiency to the EQA systems, and in turn, the efficiency of the system would give the affected stakeholders a pleasant experience. Apart from principles applicable to many EQA systems, stakeholders may experience frustration during the implementation of EQA, due to challenges that are inevitable within our own respective contexts. According to Mhlanga (2013), HEIs in developing countries face additional struggles in implementing their IQA. Specifically, additional struggles include securing adequate financial and competent human resources for IQA, and operating in an institutional context where information systems are often fragile, data are scarce, and computer-supported solutions are hardly available. These could be contextual factors affecting developing countries, and Namibia could be no exception.

At international level, implementation is challenged by the above factors as discussed in various studies cited earlier. My view is that such challenges must have shaped the experiences of the stakeholders or have the potential to do so. It would be productive to have such lived experiences used to improve practices and processes of QA in HE. Put differently,

HEIs should generate knowledge from their everyday lifeworld. The everyday lifeworld/experiences should be lessons used to enhance quality. This will also require deliberate effort of the whole institution, especially the leadership. Moreover, IQA in a HEI can be a written commitment to quality, set out in a strategic plan or quality policy (Martin, 2018).

A survey was conducted jointly by IIEP and the International Association of Universities in 2017 on the purpose/s of IQA (Martin, 2018). The focus was on both external and internal motivation (for IQA) of respondents from: Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean; Asia and the Pacific; as well as North America. With regards to the purpose of IQA, interesting to note was the response of the administrative staff and that of academic staff (two African Universities of the eight Universities who participated in the survey), administrative staff viewed the purpose of IQA as improvement, with academic staff at these universities commonly describing their IQA as a mechanism for complying with external standards (Martin, 2018). These views of the admin and academic staff most likely stemmed from their implementation experiences, and overall, how they viewed QA/IQA. The most noteworthy purposes for IQA were rated as follows: the improvement of academic activities 94%; Institutional performance assessment 92%, and compliance with external standards 90%. These were followed by accountability to government and society 89%; institutional learning 87%; improvement of management 88% and equitable resources allocation 75%. Considering that the majority of institutions viewed each of the purposes as underlying their IQA system, it was evident that IQA remained driven by both improvement and compliance. One can tell from the above purposes, that they are either improvement oriented or accountability oriented.

Martin (2018) observed from the survey that IQA worldwide has not yet resolved the tension that can rise between internal and external purposes. Harvey (2009) interestingly argues that at best, IQA invokes accountability in an attempt to encourage improvement (Harvey, 2009). Due to the interdependence of IQA and EQA, there is a direct effect on EQA, if IQA is not up to expected standards, depending on the institution. Effects of QA processes and practices have a direct effect on the experiences of stakeholders. If IQA systems (of HEIs or/and QAAs) are not up to standard, one assumes that stakeholders would be affected as objectives of the systems would not be fulfilled. Not addressing the challenges facing IQA in institutions

has the potential to leave out stakeholders' needs unaddressed. With the challenges of inadequate IQA designs and practices, QAAs have a tall responsibility of strengthening capacity building and promoting the importance of QA, IQA. However, QAAs are only able to fulfil this task, provided they themselves (QAAs) have their QA processes and procedures up to standard, in particular their own IQA.

Both European and African standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education cover similar aspects. The guidance is meant to ease the implementation process of IQA. Both guidelines are "in line with the principle that HEIs have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and assurance thereof" (AU, 2017: 13). The European Standard (ESG) for Internal Quality Assurance have identified the following areas for consideration as good practice in IQA (ENQA, 2015: 13):

1. **Policy for quality assurance** – institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.
2. **Designing and approval of programmes** – institutions should have processes for the design and approval of programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and consequently, to the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.
3. **Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment** – institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning processes, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.
4. **Student admission, progression, recognition and certification** – institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle', e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

5. **Teaching staff** – institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of staff.
6. **Learning resources and student support** – institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.
7. **Information management** – institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.
8. **Public information** – institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which are clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.
9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes – institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set, and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.
10. **Cyclical EQA** – institutions should undergo EQA in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

Similarly, The African Standards for Internal Quality Assurance has identified the following areas for consideration as good practice, when setting up an IQA system (HAQAA, 2017: 10):

1. **Vision, mission and strategic objectives.** The institution shall have published vision and mission statements that reflect its commitment to continuous quality enhancement; strategic objectives and clear policies and procedures that are consistent with its vision and mission.
2. **Governance and management.** The institution shall have clearly stated governance and management structures. This will ensure sound and ethical governance and management including robust QA practices that support the achievement of its mission and legal mandate.

3. **Human Resources.** The institution shall have policies on human resources that are inclusive and that ensure recruitment and retention of adequate numbers of qualified and competent staff, to achieve its mission and carry out its legal mandate.
4. **Financial Resources management.** The institution shall have adequate financial resources and prudent financial management that are aligned to its mission, objectives, and mandate to ensure quality education.
5. **Infrastructure and facilities.** The institution shall have adequate and appropriate infrastructure, facilities and resources to support teaching, learning and research.
6. **Student recruitment, admission, certification and support services.** The institution shall have pre-defined, published and consistently applied policies and procedures that ensure fair and equitable recruitment and admission, progression, certification and support services through all phases of the student's lifecycle, and on issues concerning students' future employability. The institution shall have documented policies and strategies that promote student welfare and guidance in curricular, vocational and personnel areas.
7. **Design, approval, monitoring and evaluation of study programmes.** The institution shall have policies and systems that ensure the design and development, monitoring and evaluation of quality, relevant study programmes that are learning outcomes-based and aligned with the needs of stakeholders; and that contribute to the achievement of its mission, and are commensurate with national, regional and international standards. In the case of ODL, the provider shall have in place, mechanisms for pre-testing or piloting the learning materials to ensure that they are at the learners' level and that the learners will be able to use them without difficulty.
8. **Teaching, learning and assessment.** The institution shall put in place, in a way that is consistent with its vision and mission, policies and procedures that promote learning and acquisition of appropriate knowledge, competencies and skills, and assure fair and transparent assessment based on student-centered assessment. The assessment principles, standards and procedures are explicit and made available publicly to both students and staff.
9. **Research and innovation.** The institution shall encourage, promote and engage in innovative research consistent with its policies and strategic plans; and address national, regional, continental and international needs. The institution shall

encourage innovation in its teaching, learning and research. The institution shall ensure that the management of postgraduate studies is conducted within an approved framework of institutional policies and plans to ensure quality ethical research.

10. **Community engagement.** The institution shall encourage engagement in community outreach programmes as part of its social responsibility.
11. **Information management system.** The institution shall ensure that it collects, analyses, and makes use of relevant information for the effective management of its programmes of study and other activities.
12. **Public communication.** The institution shall publish information about its activities, including programmes, in a clear, accurate and objective manner; and ensure that the information is up-to-date and accessible. The institution shall ensure that promotion of its programmes is carried out in a fair and ethical manner, following acceptable best practices, and complying with all relevant legislation.
13. **Collaboration of staff and student mobility.** The institution shall have mechanisms that promote collaboration with other HEIs, professional bodies, research institutions and relevant social actors at national, regional, continental and international levels and to facilitate mobility of students and staff.

Analysis of the African, and European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in relation to implementation of EQA

The two sets of standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance (African and European) basically have similar principles, thus; the analysis is a reflection on both. The standards and guidelines are commendable initiatives aiming at soothing QA implementation processes. Particularly for this study, it is important to reflect on the SG-QA as they have direct implications on the phenomenon, as well as the experiences of the stakeholders. I reflect on some salient points in the SG-QA.

Given that the standards and guidelines were published around 2016/2017, it is not clear how the different countries, specifically African countries, will be implementing these. This is in light of the fact that these have implementation implications for the established frameworks.

Worth noting is the promotion of an integrated system. While this feature is expressed in both African and European standards and guidelines, the European one has been criticised by scholars such as Manatos, Sarrico and Rosa (2017: 345) by expressing that “the ESGs are mainly focused on teaching and learning and not on support processes, neglecting other processes of universities, such as research and scholarship and the third mission” also known as community engagement in Namibia’s context. In case of the African ASG-QA, there is guidance on Research and innovation, as well as community engagement, as captured in standards 9 and 10 respectively in the guidelines for IQA.

Both standards and guidelines emphasise regular practice of QA, both EQA and IQA. This could strengthen quality culture. However, it has implications for resources. Financing could be particularly a challenge in this regard. It is a ‘catch 22 situation’ as HEIs would need to prove the quality of their respective provisions in order to attract funding, yet sponsors might want to judge quality of an institution in order to commit funding. Furthermore, the standards and guidelines should have given more guidance on finances – as a critical enabling resource. Otherwise, individual countries, and institutions are left to sort out the aspect of resources on their own (without guidance), while expected to perform QA practices regularly. The standards and guidelines may be promoting an expensive system for implementation of QA. This may prove counterproductive in the usage of the standards and guidelines, in cases where resources are constrained. Funding for higher education might be challenging. “Adequate financial resources remain the core challenge of HE across the continent (Africa). Governments should do their utmost to increase funds for the growing demands of African higher education. Funding should be secured in the long terms in order to develop stable and resourced higher education systems throughout the whole continent” HAQAA (2017).

The standards are not meant to be prescriptive, but they rather provide a mechanism for quality attainment in African HEIs and QAAs (HAQAA, 2017). Signs of power relations in the guidelines pose danger to the system. It is fundamental that stakeholders take ownership of the guidelines, if the guidelines are to promote effectiveness in the implementation process. Risking the clouding of stakeholders’ experiences by power relations in critical documents such as these, is planning to fail.

The standards and guidelines are designed to fit all HEIs in Africa and Europe respectively. The ASG-QA apply to all types of HEIs in Africa irrespective of the mode of study or place of

delivery, including transitional and cross-border delivery (HAQAA, 2017). This means that there is need for a strong sense of context in the implementation process, both at national and institutional levels. With this one size fits all, things could go wrong in developing and implementing befitting systems at national and institutional levels. HEIs and QAAs can adapt the standards and guidelines to fit their own systems and contexts based on evidence that they produce (HAQAA, 2017). According to Matai and Iwinska (2016), deciding on a suitable design for a national QA framework while catering for different stakeholders' needs can be a challenging task. It will be further challenging given that the standards and guidelines, particularly the African ones, are as recent as 2017. The implementation of ASG-QA, if well carried out, has the potential to render good experiences to the stakeholders. The guidelines contains most aspects of QA processes and procedures that can assist HEIs, QAAs and all stakeholders in improving the HE system at large. The guidelines include QA of all main players as far as reviews are concerned. By comprehensive what is meant is the coverage of the three main aspects: EQA, IQA and QAAs. The review or the process of quality reviewing the QAAs has not been a norm in Africa; hence its introduction in the ASG-QA being a welcome initiative. Experiences of stakeholders as shaped by the service of the QAAs is expected to improve and, in turn, improve the HE system at large.

Ultimately, the standards and guidelines promote an interlink amongst the QA frameworks, aimed at enhancing quality through QA. The ASG-QAs have been divided into 3 parts (IQA; EQA; and QAAs) which should be seen as a whole as they are intrinsically interlinked (HAQAA, 2017; ENQA, 2015). ENQA has elaborated the interlinked matter by stating that, EQA recognises IQA, ensuring that internal work undertaken by institutions is directly relevant to any EQA that they undergo.

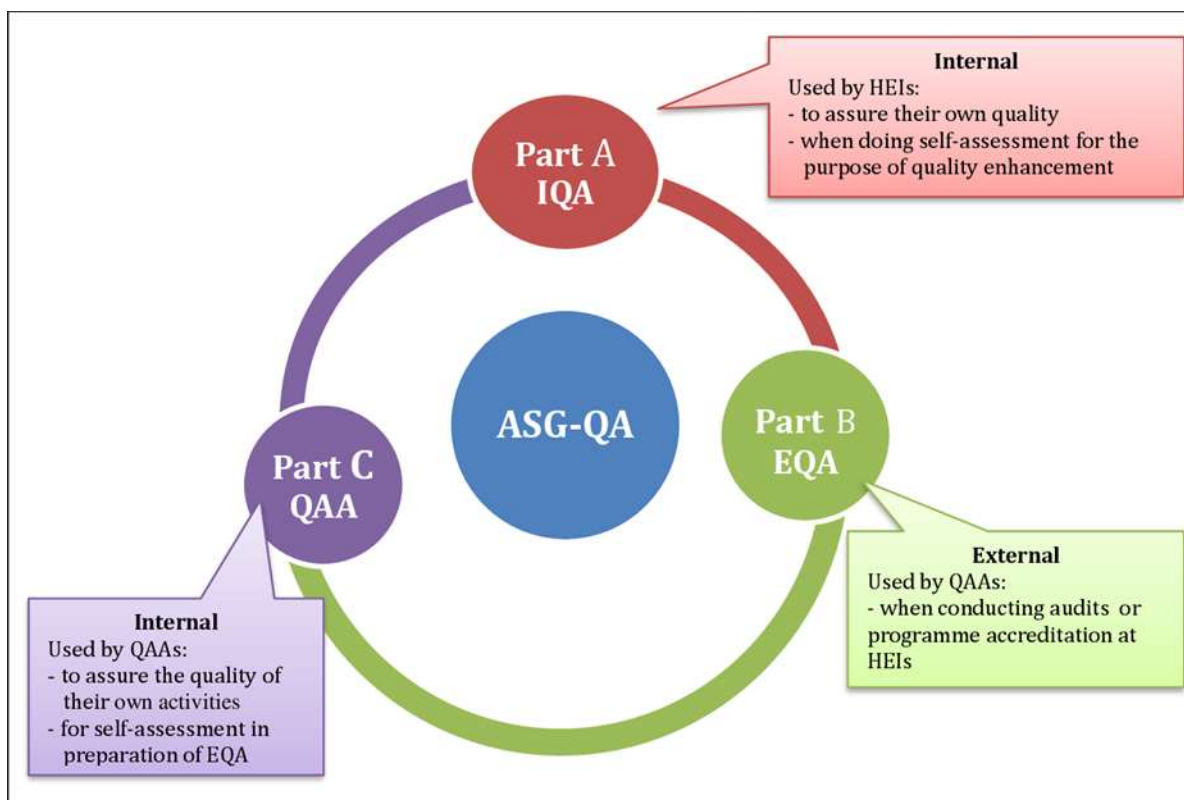


Figure 2.4 Interlinkage between parts of quality assurance in higher education (HAQAA, 2017)

As can be seen in Figure 2.3, EQA and IQA do co-exist and interplay. This strengthens the point that external and internal quality assurance systems should not be seen as conflicting systems, but rather complimentary ones. It is, therefore, important to align and streamline EQA and IQA activities to avoid overlaps, duplication, and waste of effort and resources, and ensure seamless systems.

Embedding the quality culture into an internal quality assurance system

According to Harvey (2009), a positive, quality culture should be embedded in all aspects of institutional operations. For the Quality Assurance culture as a relevant mechanism in terms of IQA, I would like to use Harvey's work. The reason is that Harvey has defined what a quality culture is and importantly what it is not – in a comprehensive manner. Harvey's discussion of a quality culture is also applicable to all HEIs, without a particular country context or type of higher education institution. This implies that the totality of a higher education institution's teaching and learning community must be working in a coherent and cohesive way towards implementing the quality agenda. The higher education institution must be committed to the

active development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, quality assurance, quality improvement and enhancement. To support the development of a quality culture, the higher education institution must develop a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality in all activities, and measurement of the achievement of the objectives set, as in the case of other corporate or organisation planning strategies, plans and goals. Some features of such quality strategies include (EUA, 2008: 8):

- An internal quality assurance system where all of institutional staff and students are actively involved in quality assurance, and in which quality is accepted as a responsibility of all. There is a willingness amongst staff to improve quality and an acceptance that all staff have a part to play in that improvement.
- The assignment of specific quality assurance responsibilities based on the subsidiarity principle. Policy and procedures are designed in consultation with all those involved in their implementation, as well as with key stakeholders.
- Procedures that include illustrations describing and explaining the quality assurance feed-back and feed-forward paths.
- A holistic approach towards quality assurance where continuous improvement is key. Procedures are integrated into the normal activities of the provider, with minimum unnecessary administrative requirements.
- A commitment to the provision of adequate resources to enable and facilitate the implementation of the quality assurance procedures, the consistent application of these and quality improvement plans.
- A balanced, institution-wide approach to the implementation of quality assurance procedures to ensure that:
 - the burden of procedures does not obscure the purpose of establishing a quality culture, and
 - a standardised approach does not obscure the ownership and primary focus on quality improvement.

The literature review revealed that “quality culture” is a poorly understood concept, despite its recent upsurge in prominence, and is often implicitly construed as embodying a system of internal quality monitoring (Harvey, 2009). The commonly adopted definition of quality

culture is by EUA (2008), that quality culture indicates intention to enhance quality permanently and is characterised by two distinct elements: a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts. For IQA, while the rhetoric is improvement, systems are usually rule-bound and insufficiently flexible to do more than pay lip-service to improvement. Because most internal processes do not exhibit the characteristics of a culture, but rather reflect the rules and expectations of an audit culture (Harvey, 2009). They are fundamentally distrustful and responses are constrained by an externally-imposed framework of thinking embodied in backward-looking forms and templates to be completed (Harvey, 2009).

According to Harvey (2009), the following points are critical for recognising assessing quality culture:

- A quality culture cannot be imposed and there is a need to be critical about standardised preconceptions of what it should look like.
- It should be creatively developed and integrated with everyday practices.
- It is an iterative, dialectical process of evolution that does not just focus on internal processes but relates them to a wider appreciation of social and political forces and locates them historically.
- Fourth, the dialectical evolution is compatible with a democratic notion of quality culture as a lived, learned experience that itself generates knowledge; rather than simply processes it.
- Fifth, a quality culture is not just about checking outputs at each stage, but is also a frame of mind.
- A quality culture is an ideological construct, a fact that cannot be glossed by a set of prescriptions or recipes for implementation. A quality culture is not a tool but a socio-political construct.
- Seventh, a quality culture is not likely to be constructed irrespective of the context in which it is located, which not only limits the possibilities for system transfer but demands a critical deconstruction of the purpose and underlying ideology behind the quality assurance requirements.
- Eighth, a quality culture is nothing if it is not owned by the people who live it.

- An effective quality culture is ideologically compatible with the lived experiences; the culture merges with the ideological preconceptions of the protagonists and is rendered invisible.

Further into the study context, Harvey (2009) asserts that a quality culture should be based on a context within a bigger perspective. The development of a quality culture should be through the lifeworld and lived experiences of the institution. Furthermore, the process should be democratic enough to give room to that internal experience and generate their (stakeholders') own knowledge. Developing a quality culture is synonymous with developing a self-critical and reflective community of practitioners (Harvey, 2009). This does not occur by imposing compliance requirements (except in the perverse way of uniting the community against the requirements) (Harvey, 2009). Nor is it possible to provide a simple checklist of actions necessary to develop a quality culture. Prescriptive lists of actions provide, at best, guides to establishing an appropriate context but they do not address the fundamental socio-political and professional-cultural issues (Harvey, 2009). In my view, an example of what should guide a quality culture without imposing are the continental standards and guidelines – QA (Africa and Europe). Cultivation and adoption of a quality culture in HE set-ups cannot be over emphasised, especially because the culture is a profound part of human lifeworld, culture shapes Experiences. It is also worth mentioning at this point that internal quality culture should not only be a HEIs' matter. There is need for quality culture in any establishment such as QAAs.

Kottman, Huisman, Brockerhoff, Cremonini, and Mampaey (2016) has outlined 4 ideal types of quality culture:

- Responsive quality culture – mainly evaluating its own practice in the light of external quality requirements and contributing to an improvement agenda.
- Reactive quality culture – focusing on avoiding external threats, seeing quality as imposed from the outside environment and, thus, focusing on individual aspects of quality.
- Regenerative quality culture – typical of a 'learning organisation' in which quality is systematically embedded in daily operations.

- Reproductive quality culture – emphasising the maintenance of the status quo, as changes may lead to internal resistance.

I would not entirely agree with Kuttoman et al., (2016), that these types of quality cultures are *ideal*. The responsive and regenerative quality cultures are indeed ideal in my view. It is important for an institution or department to evaluate its own practices for improvement purposes. Perpetual evaluation of one's practice can also strengthen the culture of quality. The characteristics of the regenerative culture cannot be over emphasised. Normalising the QA operations and practices is the best way to strengthen a quality culture, further improving systems and operations. A reactive culture should be discouraged. When IQA is strengthened, a reactive culture will not be necessary. When quality takes a developmental approach, continuous improvement is key. Maintaining the status quo would be counter improvement. The internal resistance of internal stakeholders ought to be dealt with in a better way that contributes to strengthening the quality culture. Depending on the type/s of culture practiced in an institution or department, this will accordingly shape the experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation process.

What the internal quality culture of QAAs means for stakeholders' experiences. The quality culture embedded in the QAAs would shape the stakeholders' experience. As per the discussion above, internal quality culture is likely to influence the practices of the QAAs. If the internal culture is strong and up to standard, it is most likely to show in the work and services of the agencies. An agency with a strong quality culture is also most likely to give pleasant experience to stakeholders, and the opposite is equally true. Given that QAAs are tasked mainly with the responsibility of promoting QA in HE and building capacity, the level of the quality culture will be of utmost importance in facilitating the responsibilities of QAAs with ease. The ripple effect of the QAAs' quality culture is likely to birth strong and satisfying experience for the stakeholders.

Chapter summary

This chapter focused on international perspective of the implementation of quality assurance in higher education. The literature reviewed revealed that globally, various QA initiatives are established, ranging from sub-regional networks, continental networks, as well as international network, and there are also different agreements at international and

continental levels. The chapter highlighted the practical implications of the different practices of QA. The international literature was analysed to learn from the good practices that would strengthen the current practice of QA in Namibia, contributing best practices from the international perspective. The international perspective in this chapter was addressed by engaging the notion of QA concept – how QA is differently defined according to different categories of higher education stakeholders; the global influential factors shaping QA to be what it is today; EQA, which is central to the study. This chapter highlighted the different aspects which make up EQA in different countries, and how they are practiced. The chapter also discussed the relationship between EQA and IQA, as well as the dichotomy between accountability and improvement – as competing or complementary purposes of quality assurance; and the implications for implementation of EQA.

The next chapter zooms in on the Namibian context in terms of the implementation of EQA.

CHAPTER 3

ADOPTION AND PRACTICE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE NAMIBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

Introduction

This phenomenological study, which aims to understand the implementation of the EQA system in Namibia, is a critical opportunity for research that places the experiences of the stakeholders at the center. To put the experiences into perspective, literature on the Namibian system is necessary.

Like elsewhere in the world, Higher Education (HE) in Namibia is of high national priority. Universities serve as institutions of scientific pre-professional education, providing graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary to adapt to the requirements of a variety of professionals (Vettori, Ledermuller, Schwarzl, Hoher, & Zeeh, 2017). In other words, it is believed that development is effectively channeled through HE institutions, via knowledge creation in various disciplines, producing various professionals in the end. It is these professionals who serve the nations in different capacities, in different ways in order to bring about development. It is thus, crucial and critical that the professionals be trained through a quality system of education, HE in particular.

One expects that the quality reflected in the work of the different professionals in work places mostly index the quality of HE provided. That is why it is at HE level that most governments channel considerable human and financial resources with a strategic view to developing human capital in the form of entrepreneurs, professionals, academics, political, religious and business leaders; who are further expected to contribute to the attainment of national goals and aspirations (Namibia Vision 2030). Similarly, China, Korea, Brazil and Chile commit plenty of resources to HE, as they perceive it as essential to the continued growth of their economies (Doherty, 2012). The Arab states, despite their political and economic difficulties, prioritise knowledge as a key element in responding to the challenge of poverty, improving people's capabilities, and developing a competitive economy; and therefore, have embarked on a comprehensive Quality Assurance (QA) programme for universities (Doherty, 2012). The idea is that QA would better assist the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to deliver quality

education which, in turn, helps with national development. It therefore, is clear that much importance is attached to HE. Due to this importance attached to HE, quality has become an emphasised attribute. Quality in HE is mostly emphasised because of the global challenges facing HE, which require, not only QA systems, but also systemised and formalised QA systems. This has led to nations, both developed and developing, to implement formalised and systemised QA systems for HE, and Namibia is no exception. Namibia has developed the systemised QA system for HE by putting in place different mechanisms, such as legal frameworks, QA agencies, QA units within HEIs, policies, systems, etc. All these aspects, among others, contribute to the implementation of the QA system in Namibia.

The previous chapter focused on the implementation of QA within the international context, and this chapter focuses on the adoption and practice of QA in the Namibian context. To contextualise how QA is implemented, the chapter discusses the legal framework establishing different aspects of QA for HE in the country, particularly the relevant institutions. The discussion includes the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Act, which establishes the Namibia Training Authority (NTA). The NTA is not necessarily HE (as per the Namibia HE Act, 2003), but it (VET/NTA) is also covered in this study, as it helps paint a comprehensive picture of the implementation of QA in Namibia.

Contextual factors affecting the quality of the Namibian higher education system

It is not clear how the current landscape of higher education in Namibia and contextual factors are shaping the experiences of the stakeholders as far as implementation of the EQA system is concerned. There is currently no study done on the Namibian EQA system that has examined the experiences of the stakeholders in order to improve the system. The HE landscape and the concomitant challenges, could have implementation implications on the experience of the stakeholders. This justifies a study like this, which addresses such a gap in literature in the Namibian context.

As alluded to in the introduction to this study in Chapter 1, implementation of external quality assurance in higher education in Namibia is the focus or unit of analysis of this study. It is worth noting here as well, that as far as Namibia is concerned and apart from official documents, literature on this phenomenon, that is, implementation of quality assurance in higher education, is limited as scant research has been conducted in the Namibian context.

The changes in the higher education space that were discussed in Chapter 2 have caused practical implications for quality assurance of higher education systems the world over, including Namibia. To a large extent, massification, internationalisation, the focus on accountability, and marketisation of higher education are some of the driving forces for implementation of quality assurance in Africa, and particularly in Namibia - where quality assurance is relatively new. These global changes facing higher education have caused Namibia, just like other parts of the world, to implement formalised quality assurance systems.

According to Shabani, Okebukola and Oyewole (2014), the first national quality assurance agency was established in 1962 in Nigeria. By 2012, 21 African countries had governmentally established quality assurance agencies, and a dozen other countries were at relatively advanced stages in achieving this goal. In line with international best practices, Namibia has established national quality assurance agencies with a view to regulate, coordinate and improve quality of the higher education system. The ultimate goal for systematic quality assurance arrangements is to have a higher education system that is responsive to the socio-economic needs of the nation. Materu (2007: 60) emphasises the importance of systematic quality assurance by stating that “quality assurance is the systematic management of procedures in order to monitor performance and to ensure the achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements.” The above indicates that today, there are more organised higher education arrangements and different structures at global, national and institutional levels, to facilitate the quality assurance agenda. Today, there are a number of established quality assurance agencies, global and regional networks; which indicates the importance of quality assurance in higher education.

In the Namibian context, it is not clear how the global challenges confronting higher education, as alluded to in the previous chapter, are systematically being tackled in pursuit of a more efficient and effective higher education system through the implementation of quality assurance. To the researcher’s knowledge, there is currently no study that has aligned these challenges to quality assurance. These challenges definitely have practical implications for implementation of quality assurance in the Namibian higher education system, as is the case elsewhere in the world. There is need for Namibia to implement explicit but simple, efficient and effective quality assurance systems to remain competitive in a fast changing world.

Massification is one of the critical changes that have affected higher education in Namibia. According to Ahmed (2016), massification of higher education is a contemporary phenomenon which comes with the fear for the decline of quality standards. Like many developing countries, Namibia has gone the route of massification - the rapid expansion of higher education enrolments - that is the result of an unstoppable demand by growing segments of the population for access (Ahmed, 2016).

Participation in higher education in Namibia has increased since independence in 1990. The government has implemented a policy on access, which has seen increases in enrolment rates in higher education more than ever before. According to the Namibian National Council for Higher Education's (NCHE) statistics, enrolment in public higher education grew from a mere 4 240 in 1992 to 34 917 in 2015. This represents a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 14.3%. The total GER, including private HE, has grown from 4 240 in 1992 to 49 679 in 2015, which represents a total GER of 21.1%, which is among the highest in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region (NCHE, 2017). However, although it is close to the average GER for low middle-income countries at 37% (as Namibia is classified), this is still far too low compared to the developed countries with a minimum of 60%. As higher education massifies, this has a potential to compromise quality as resources are constrained. This calls for greater need for quality assurance as a guarantee to stakeholders that things are under control (Ahmed, 2016).

There is currently an intense political demand to widen access to higher education under the banner of massification. However, it is ironic that despite widened access, resource allocation to higher education from government has been reducing over the years, and this has serious implications for quality. Because of lack of empirical studies, it is not clear as to how the Namibian national policy on access promotes massification without compromising quality.

Another factor that has been influencing the higher education space in Namibia is internationalisation which may be defined as the process of integrating international components into the higher education system of a country, a result of globalisation (Vardhan, 2015).

Although higher education remains essentially a national phenomenon and most institutions still function within national boundaries and serve local, regional and national interests

(MacGregor, 2009), higher education in Namibia (as in the rest of the world) is increasingly affected by international trends. Therefore, the Namibian higher education system has become more internationally oriented and more mobile but will remain structured according to national circumstances (Namibia V2030, 2004). However, this is not to say that the local context is neglected. Internationalisation of higher education in Namibia has resulted in an observed greater global market for academic mobility of students and staff.

In the implementation process of quality assurance, Namibia should consider how to meet the needs of, not only local stakeholders, but also international ones. Since higher education has become international, there is need to harmonise higher education activities to facilitate cross border mobility for students and academic staff, credit transfer, and recognition of qualifications. Implementation of quality assurance in Namibia may be a useful tool to facilitate harmonisation of higher education through mechanisms such as the national qualifications framework, registration of higher education providers, and accreditation.

In terms of accountability, this is done mainly through the same external quality assurance system that is being explored in this study. However, this seems to be done to an extent that tends to overshadow the aspect of improvement (Hsu, 2019). The implementation of quality assurance is one of the major mechanisms of assuring accountability from the providers of higher education in Namibia. It is through the implementation of quality assurance that higher education institutions account for the services they are offering, especially to their main stakeholders i.e. students, government, industry.

According to Lynch (2006), there is a major global movement to change the nature of the role of higher education in society. Higher education institutions are being pressurised to change from being centres of learning, to being business organisations with productivity targets; to transfer their allegiance from the academic to the operational (Lynch, 2006).

Given the foregoing, it would be interesting to establish how the given challenging factors have influenced and affected the experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation of quality assurance. The study will investigate how quality assurance is understood in Namibia, the purpose of its implementation, scope and focus. Understanding global factors influencing higher education is the first step to dealing constructively with the challenges which have

inevitably affected the implementation of quality assurance in higher education in Namibia, at both national and institutional levels.

The Namibian Higher Education Landscape

Namibia gained independence on 21 March 1990. Prior to independence in 1990, Namibia had an apartheid HE system, where education was offered differently according to the skin colour (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). Even though there has been political reform, the HE system in Namibia is shaped by the past, “as it is also sustained through policy, legislation, and institutional restructuring, to redirect and transform it (HE)” (Council on Higher Education, 2016: 16). The reforms in the entire education system were guided by a document named ‘Education for All’ (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture [MEC] 1993). Education for All outlined four main goals of education, namely; access, equity, quality, and democracy (Namibia. MEC, 1993). It showed that Namibia’s reform in the education sector was necessary to redress inequities.

The Namibian HE landscape consists of two public universities and one private university. There are many other post-secondary institutions, as well. According to the HE Act, Act no. 26 of 2003, post-secondary institutions do not qualify as HE entities, but qualify as tertiary institutions. The two public universities and one private university are the University of Namibia (UNAM); the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), and the International University of Management (IUM) respectively. The study focuses on HE Institutions (HEIs) in the country. The QAAs, which are namely the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA); the National Council for HE (NCHE); the Namibia Training Authority (NTA); and Professional Bodies (PBs). For this study, the focus will be on two PBs, namely; the Institute of Chartered Accountants (ICAN), and the Health Professions Council of Namibia (HPCNA).

Quality assurance agencies in Namibia

Most QAAs have emerged in response to government pressure or legislation for the HE institutions to demonstrate that they are achieving what the government and/or society requires of them (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). The functions of such agencies is usually characterised as providing accountability of the HE sector to sponsors or stakeholders

(Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). Through the establishment of different Acts, i.e. NQA Act and NCHE Act, there is a general indication that QAAs in Namibia are endowed with the same responsibilities of carrying out EQA to promote quality in HE. What makes these QAAs, their strategies and operations affect the experiences of the stakeholders and the EQA system at large, is the thrust of this investigation.

The Namibia Qualifications Authority

According to the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA, 2019), the Government of the Republic of Namibia attempted a redress of inequities and imbalances arising from the colonial and apartheid regimes prior to independence. Government showed commitment to accommodate the emergence of the global economy where services and goods were traded commodities on an enlarged and more open market. Namibia also felt the dire need for a knowledge-based society where the intellectual skills of a nation's people became the most influential factor driving competitive advantage. *"The Government aimed to address the HE apartheid inequities by establishing a central body and entrust it with the responsibility for identifying the competences needed with any occupational area and for establishing policies and procedures that led to the required knowledge and skills being recognised and certified"* (NQA, 2019: 15). Furthermore, *"the desirability of a national body having oversight of certification and linkages between the various education sectors was promulgated during the formulation of government education and training policies in the post-independence years"* (NQA, 2019: 15). Government saw the need for a central body able to mobilise national stakeholders towards: specifying the types and levels of competences needed in qualifications; evaluating training offered by public and private providers; and determining whether required knowledge, understanding and skills were being developed (NQA, 2019).

These are some of the significant events and trends that influenced policy development leading to the establishment of the NQA. This further shows that the government had confidence in introducing QA in order to address inequities and imbalances brought about by apartheid regimes. Moreover, global challenges and benefits of global participation require quality assured HE, hence the establishment of bodies such as NQA and others. Further, government felt it was best to redress inequities starting with the quality assurance of the citizens' qualifications, to ensure that the qualifications were relevant to the Namibian

market, while mindful of the global needs. Post-independence, the government of Namibia also saw a critical need to participate in the global challenge of building Namibia on the basis of a knowledge society. The important question for Namibia in this regard, at this juncture, is whether the implementation of EQA is assisting in realising the initial aspirations of the government which justified the introduction of EQA. The present study sought to establish this by gauging the lived Experiences of the stakeholders.

Due to the reasons above, a body like NQA (Namibia's first QAA for HE) was requisite. NQA was established by an Act of Parliament, Act no. 29 of 1996, as a 'Juristic Person'. The NQA is managed by a Council which also determines the (NQA) policies and procedures. It is run by a secretariat, headed by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) as the accounting officer. The NQA has the following legislative obligations:

- To set up and administer a national qualifications framework (NQA).
- To set occupational standards for any occupation, job, post or positions in any career structure.
- Set the curriculum standards for achieving the occupational standards.
- Promote the development of, or analyse benchmarks of acceptable performance norms for any occupation, job or position.
- Accredite persons, institutions and organisations providing education and courses of instruction or training.
- Evaluate and recognise competencies learnt outside formal education.
- Be a forum on matters pertaining to qualifications.
- Establish facilities for the collection and dissemination of information in connection with matters pertaining to qualifications.
- Enquire into whether any particular qualification meets the national standards.
- Advise any person, body, institution, organisation or interest group on matters pertaining to qualifications and national standards for qualifications (Namibia. NQA Act, 1996).

It is apparent from the legislative obligations of NQA that the dominant mandate is on qualifications. The Act shows that NQA is also entrusted with the mandate to set occupational standards, an aspect of vocational education – in the Namibian context. Furthermore, NQA is mandated to deal with accreditation of persons, institutions and organisations providing education and courses. The legislation does not specify the level/kind of education, i.e. HE, tertiary education or VET. Given the absence of the specificity in the educational level/kind within the mandate of NQA, the implementation of EQA by NQA seems to be done across the entire education sector, including VET. This in itself breeds overlaps.

Furthermore, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is one of the quality assurance measures implemented in recent years. The NQF system aims to establish the structure and management of the NQF classification system. It is the structural dimension of the national qualifications system in Namibia (Namibia. NQA Act, 1996).

The motivation for Government (to establish NQA) underpinned the principles of the National Qualifications Framework which was the primary mechanisms for achieving greater quality in education and training (Namibia Qualifications Authority homepage, 2019). The NQF must be:

- comprehensive in its recognition of all learning and all qualifications attained in the country;
- cognisant of each individual's right and desire for access to lifelong learning through different pathways to achieve success;
- directed towards quality through the development of standards-based qualifications that would recognise outcomes no matter how achieved;
- capable of redressing past injustice, particularly through the recognition of prior learning;
- relevant, with a closer interaction between what was taught and assessed with the competences required in and across career structures;
- democratic, proving for stakeholder engagement and participation in meaningful ways;

- integrated so that learners might progress horizontally and vertically in a freer and efficient manner; so that the prospects of reaching locked into dead-end programmes are minimised (Namibia Qualifications Authority homepage, 2019).

Given the principles of NQF, one gets the impression that the establishment of the NQF (as the umbrella mandate of the NQA) is based on critical principles, whereby, if the system is well implemented, NQF has the potential for transforming HE in the country by means of enhanced quality. The recognition of national qualifications is of utmost importance. For a qualification to be recognised, especially internationally, quality should be embedded. One of the global challenges facing HE (which also triggers implementation of QA) is internationalisation – which inevitably calls for cross-border education and for recognition of qualifications. That is achieved through provision of evidence of quality.

Another important and critical principle in implementing NQF is the engagement of stakeholders – a critical way of enhancing quality. Participation of stakeholders in all aspects of HE which lead to qualifications, is the best way to enhance quality within the qualifications of HE. Important however, is whether this is implemented and how it is implemented?

The National Council for Higher Education

About seven years after the setting up of NQA, the Namibian government established the HE Act, No. 26 of 2003, which established the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). NCHE is governed by a Council, supported by a Secretariat, headed by an Executive Director as the accounting officer.

As per the Act, the objectives of the NCHE are:

- To promote
 - the establishment of a coordinated HE system;
 - access of students to HE institutions; and
 - QA in HE.
- To advise on the allocation of money to public HE institutions (Namibia. HE Act, 2003).

Unlike the NQA Act, No. 26 of 1996, the HE Act is particular about the level of education with regards to the mandate entrusted to the NCHE. The Act specifies that the NCHE functions are to be performed at HE level. The Act, however, does not clarify what HE is in the Namibian

context. The main legislative objectives of the NCHE centers around coordination, access and QA in HE. The Act also gives NCHE advisory function to the line Minister on HE matters, such as HE structure, QA, finance, governance, and other functions related to HE. In other words, the NCHE serves as the QA body entrusted with HE responsibilities. Furthermore, unlike the NQA and the VET Acts which establish NQA and NTA respectively as juristic persons, the HE Act does not say the same.

The functions of the NCHE are to:

- accredit, with the concurrence of the NQA, programmes of HE provided at HE institutions;
- monitor the QA mechanisms of HE institutions;
- take measures to promote access of students to HE institutions;
- undertake such research with regard to its objects as it may think necessary or as the Minister may require;
- advice the Minister of its own accord or at request of the Minister on:
 - the structure of HE in general;
 - quality promotion and QA in HE;
 - the allocation of public money to HE institutions;
 - the governance of HE institutions;
 - any other aspect related to HE; and
- perform such other functions as may be entrusted to the NCHE by or under this Act.

In summary, the functions of the NCHE, particularly with regards to the implementation of EQA, center around accreditation of programmes at HEIs, audit of HEIs, as well as promoting access of students to HEIs. By the Act and through documentation of NCHE i.e. the *QA System for HE Institutions in Namibia*, NCHE has developed actionable steps or manuals for programme accreditation and institutional audit. It is nowhere clarified or explained how NCHE intends to promote access of students to HEIs, except for a policy book by NCHE on access, i.e. *Access to Higher Education (2010)*.

Moreover, NQA serves to *“Accredit persons, institutions and organisations providing education and courses of instruction or training”* (Namibia. NQA Act, 1996: 5). This accreditation by NQA can be seen as overlapping with the accreditation of NCHE, as it does not specify the level of education it accredits. NCHE has the same function, but with specific reference to HE. It seeks to *“Accredit, with the concurrence of the NQA, programmes of HE provided at HE institutions”* (Namibia. HE Act, 2003). In terms of accreditation, this is how the function is implemented within the Namibian QA system. There is an overlap in functions as far as accreditation activities is concerned. It is also not clarified in the documents how the concurrence of accreditation by NCHE with NQA (as stipulated in the HE Act) is supposed to be done. These are some of the grey areas that stem from having multiple agencies. This is consistent with Middlehurst & Woodhouse’s (1995) view on multiple agencies, specifically that there is likely to be duplication.

The NCHE performs the additional function of registration of private HEIs. This function is nowhere in the NCHE legislative documents. It is reported as one of the functions on the website, with supporting documentation. The registration of private HEIs is a function of the NCHE line Ministry, the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation (MHETI), and specifically, the office of the Permanent Secretary (PS) – as the Registrar. The function is delegated to the NCHE, which is entrusted with all other HE matters. While this function is delegated to NCHE for private HEIs, NTA has a similar function applicable to both public and private HEIs. NTA registers any institution providing vocational education or programme. The grey area here is when a HEI offers a programme that is vocational in nature. Such a programme would then fall into the grey area of VET and HE, which is problematic to the implementation of EQA in this specific regard. The lack of defined and differentiated concepts such as HE and VET, also contribute to the overlaps and grey areas. This further indicates the importance of defining fundamental concepts.

The Namibia Training Authority

After the establishment of the NQA and that of the NCHE, government also established a VET Act – which establishes the Namibia Training Authority (NTA), an Act of Parliament, Act no. 1 of 2008. Like NQA, NTA is established as a juristic person, while also tasked as an advisory

body to the line ministry (MHETI) on VET matters. NTA is governed by a Council, also having a secretariat headed by a CEO – as the accounting officer.

Powers and functions of the NTA are as given below.

- It must advise the minister on national policy on vocational education and training.
- It may advise the minister on:
 - any matter arising from or connected with the application of this Act; and
 - any other matter concerning Vocational Education and Training (Namibia. NTA Act, 2008).

Unlike the NQA, but like the NCHE, the VET Act is particular about the responsibility of Vocational Education and Training with regards to the powers and functions of the NTA. However, in the Namibian context, VET is not recognised as HE. This Act, or the functions of the NTA remain relevant to this study seeing that NTA is a QA body which performs functions that tend to overlap with those of QA bodies with HE responsibilities, especially with regards to registration of VET providers.

NTA, in respect of VET, and subject to the policies and procedures determined by the NQA, may:

- develop occupational standards, curriculum standards and qualifications;
- accredit education and training providers and programmes;
- register assessors, conduct assessments, including the recognition of prior learning and conduct quality audits;
- issue awards and certificates; and
- negotiate articulation arrangements between vocational education and training programmes and other education and training programmes (Namibia. NTA Act, 2008).

Again, the accreditation function of the NTA may overlap with that of the NQA – which does not specify the level/kind of education, but gives NQA a broader mandate to accredit courses offered by education and training providers, assumedly at any level of education, as the law may be interpreted.

It is apparent that Namibia has multiple agencies responsible for EQA of HE. The different agencies are established by different legislation, with different mandates, with some mandates seemingly overlapping. The overlap can be clearly seen from the establishing

legislation. The overlap of QAAs' functions and other possible problematic matters associated with multiple agencies is confirmed by Middlehurst & Woodhouse (1995) who observe that, unless multiple agencies have clearly distinct spheres of responsibility, it attracts a negative response for the following reasons:

- two or more agencies may impose an excessive load on the institutions;
- there is likely to be duplication, because of the similar needs of the two roles (improvement and accountability);
- the situation may be unstable, and one agency is likely to capture the other;
- the improvement agency may be 'captured' by the HE institutions, again leaving only one agency; and
- in all fields, accountability agencies tend to be advisory (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995).

Overall, the QAAs show overlapping functions, rendering the system fragmented. Interestingly, the overlapping functions stem from the different legislation establishing the QAAs. These overlaps can have serious implications on the implementation of EQA. It is possible that every QAA may want to fulfil its mandate and continue performing activities as mandated. This has implications on the stakeholders' experiences in such a way the HEIs would be the ones to feel the heavy load and fatigue of these uncoordinated mandates, as they (HEIs) implement QA by responding to the calls of QAAs. This has the potential to discourage stakeholders from participating in the implementation process, unless they continue to do so as mere compliance. The grey areas also have the potential of confusing the implementers. Even the QAAs may face challenges in implementing some of the overlapping functions. All this fragments the system, and QAAs may not succeed at harmonising the system amongst themselves, especially if the overlaps and grey areas are embedded in the establishing legislation. The system should ideally work in an interdependent and interlinked fashion. Changing the legislation seems to be the way out. However, this means the approval is beyond the agencies, especially given the fact that all three agencies are established by Acts of parliament.

It is further interesting to note that, although the agencies are seen as sister organisations, there is a difference in how they are established. The NQA and the NTA are established with

juristic powers, unlike the NCHE. All three agencies are governed by the respective Councils, and run by Secretariats. The NQA and the NTA are headed by CEOs, while the NCHE is headed by an Executive Director. It is not clear whether the difference in establishment (juristic or none juristic), and the difference in the designations of the heads of the respective QAAs has an impact on the implementation process. It will be further interesting to know whether there are power relations influenced by these differences.

I find it rather alarming that, none of the three QAAs in their Acts or other institutional documents have made mention of meta-evaluations. The aspect of meta-evaluation is emphasised in the African Standards and Guidelines for QA, as well as that of Europe. This is the more reason for adjustments and amendments of Namibia's QA frameworks, to place them in line with the continental guidelines. Incorporating the strategies from the continental standards and guidelines will also assist with harmonisation at continental, as well as global levels. Meta-evaluations are critical in the implementation of both internal and EQA, for QAAs and HEIs.

Professional bodies

This study chose two national PBs. These are the ones that had the most encounters at HEIs in Namibia, thus far. The two are the Institute of Chartered Accountants and the Health Professions Council of Namibia (HPCNA).

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Namibia

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Namibia (ICAN) is a body corporate with perpetual succession capable of suing and being sued in its own name (ICAN, 2019). ICAN's Vision is "to be and be seen to be the leading Namibian professional accounting body by reputation, expertise and capacity" (ICAN, 2019). ICAN is a statutory body, headed by a CEO and has a governing Council.

ICAN has divided its mission statements into four parts, namely;

1. Developing and upholding professional competency, standards & integrity.
2. Developing the profession to reflect the demographics of the Namibian society.

3. Informing the general public and stakeholders of the accountancy profession to achieve a proper appreciation of its value and challenges.
4. Enabling the accounting profession to speak with one voice on matters of national importance affecting the profession.

In terms of the constitution, the institute endeavors to:

- promote the common interest of persons carrying on the accounting profession throughout Namibia;
- advance the theory and practice of accountancy in all its aspects;
- preserve at all times the professional independence of members of the accounting profession;
- strive for a high standard of professional conduct and to preserve and maintain the integrity and status of the accounting profession in Namibia; and
- encourage growth in the accounting profession in Namibia (ICAN, 2019).

Some of the objects of the Institute are:

- To pursue a pipeline of trainee accountants who are representative of the country's economically active population, both in terms of race and gender.
- To advance the theory and practice of accountancy in all its aspects.
- To consider and pass comment on actual or impending legislation in Namibia affecting the accountancy profession or otherwise and to apply for, petition for, or promote any Act of Parliament or other legislative enactment desirable for the betterment or enhancement of the profession of accountancy.
- To provide for research into accounting, auditing, financial management and kindred matters and to provide members and trainee accountants with information on developments in professional thought and methods, both inside and outside Namibia.
- To implement steps to enable the accountancy profession, as far as is practicable, to speak with one voice on matters of national or international importance affecting the profession.
- To liaise and co-operate with professional and regulatory bodies impacting the accountancy profession.

- To provide, in support of lifelong learning and continuous professional development, products and services for members, trainee accountants, members of other professions and interested members of the public; and to charge reasonable fees to persons attending such courses.
- To play an active role in promoting a transformed, dynamic and globally competitive CA profession that will reflect the demographics of the Namibian population and contribute to the establishment of an equitable society (ICAN, 2019).

From the vision, mission, constitution and objectives of the institute, it is clear this professional body has QA measures in place that are geared towards upholding the quality of the accounting profession. ICAN monitors the theory and practice of the HEIs as provided to the students. The work of ICAN is, in other words, is to ensure that the students are prepared to be responsive in the work market, specifically the accounting world. It also ensures continuous improvement of quality in knowledge and skills in the work places. Furthermore, the institute ensures international competencies of the accounting professionals. This is good practice in terms of internationalisation (of both students and professionals) and cross border education, among others. Put differently, as a Professional Body, ICAN ensures that the curriculum of chartered accountants in HEIs is inclusive of best practices internationally, a practice so relevant for the production of global professionals. In its documents, ICAN also emphasises the aspect of research as important in educating the professionals on the trends in the accounting profession, emphasising the upkeep of knowledge by Namibians. The development of national capacity remains important because of the jurisdiction-specific nature of many of the activities of the profession (Manuzi, 2012).

The Health Professions Council of Namibia

The HPCNA aims to regulate the training and practice of healthcare practitioners by ensuring that all persons practicing health-related professions in Namibia are suitably qualified and registered to practice the professions concerned (HPCNA, 2019). In accordance with the law, the HPCNA were set up to protect the public through, inter alia, keeping registers for all practicing healthcare practitioners, conducting regular inspections of training institutions and

facilities, enforcing continuing professional development, investigating complaints of unprofessional conduct against healthcare practitioners and, where necessary, taking disciplinary actions (HPCNA homepage, 2019). The Council is headed by a Registrar as the accounting officer, overall (HPCNA, 2019).

The Council's vision is protecting the public through regulated education and practice, while the mission is to determine and maintain minimum educational standards leading to registration of a health professional, as well as to set and maintain ethical standards (HPCNA homepage, 2019).

The Council seeks to: promote the health and well-being of Namibia's population; determine and uphold standards of education and training; protect the public through regulated education and training; set, maintain and promote good standard of professional practice and conduct; and keep the registers of each health profession for which provision is made in terms of relevant Acts (HPCNA homepage, 2019).

The Health Professions Councils of Namibia (HPCNA) consists of five (5) councils established under the following Acts.

- Medical and Dental Council, established by the Medical and Dental Act, 2004 (Act No 10 of 2004).
- Pharmacy Council, established by the Pharmacy Act, 2004 (Act No 9 of 2004).
- Nursing Council, established by the Nursing Act, 2004 (Act No 8 of 2004).
- Allied Health and Professions Council, established by the Allied Health Professions Act, 2004 (Act No 7 of 2004).
- Social Work and Psychology Council, established by the Social Work and Psychology Act, 2004 (Act No 6 of 2004) (HPCNA, 2019).

The Councils are all under the HPCNA as the umbrella body. Thus the Councils too have a common mandate, although there are few differences, especially in technical matters, brought about by the different disciplines/professions. The common aims of these Councils within the HPCNA are: to provide for the establishment and constitution of the respective professions councils to determine their powers, duties, and functions; to regulate the registration of persons practicing such professions; to prohibit the practicing of such

professions without being registered; and to provide for matters incidental thereto (HPCNA, 2019).

The HPCNA has an Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) department that is responsible for the overall QA of the different councils. There is a longstanding consensus among all the health professions that protection of the public is a key objective of self-regulating professions; and that programmes which ensure the competence of practitioners and the quality of their services, are the core responsibilities of the regulatory bodies (HPCNA, 2019). This principle is specifically articulated in the legislation which governs all the health professions in Namibia. It is against this background that there should be effective mechanisms for monitoring practitioner competency which includes the review of standards of practice and codes of ethics of practitioners (HPCNA, 2018).

To achieve the above-mentioned, the ETQA section has been established to focus on the following areas:

- The promotion and control standards of training of persons for the purpose of registration to practice a health profession.
- Generating standards for health-related qualifications.
- Ensuring accreditation of training institutions for health related professions and health facilities (HPCNA, 2018).

The two PBs have a lot in common in terms of their functions. The similarity of mandates has different implications in the case of PBs, compared to the QAAs. There would be no overlap amongst themselves (PBs), as they deal with different professions. Both PBs under analysis tend to implement QA through similar functions, namely; the protection of public interest in terms of their respective disciplines, as well as maintaining and upholding quality of the professions.

In my view, what is contained in the following quote is very important for effectiveness of the operations of PBs. In a workshop of PBs by Manuzi (2012), it was suggested that:

PBs should not remain passive observers of external change, but must both actively adapt to and try to shape change. Further suggesting that there is need for a culture of 'strategic planning' for active change to come from within the PBs. Furthermore, while PBs are not businesses, they must adopt a more 'business-minded' approach to defining and implementing strategies if they are to continue to fulfil their economic and societal roles. Securing and retaining

high quality entrants into the profession it has been suggested that PBs should play a critical role by investing and contributing to academic syllabuses, new technology, and flexibility, interaction with universities and an appreciation of student expectations and the skills required by the market. The development of national capacity remains important because of the jurisdiction-specific nature of many of the activities of the profession.

Looking at the activities of the PBs, one can also see the possible overlaps with QAAs. According to Harvey and Mason (2014), there are some similarities and overlaps between PBs and QA bodies like the HE Quality Council (HEQC). This too seems to be the case in the Namibian context. A number of the PBs' activities overlap with those of QAAs. At times, different terminology is used for similar exercises, such as inspection vs accreditation, when both processes lead to granting of status. On a positive note, there is also potential for collaboration between PBs and QAAs, especially on aspects such as curriculum. PBs and QAAs should promote an integrated system, for the benefit of all, including the professionals, employers, HEIs etc.

Overall, there are aspects considered common in capturing the role of a professional body. These include: formal constitution; representation of professionals; specialised knowledge; ethics and public service; professional designations and licensure; status, prestige and power; and continuous professional development (Urban & Govender, 2014). Having analysed the respective constitutions establishing the two PBs, these aspects have emerged. So the PBs in the Namibian context seem to be practicing the international norm, as in other countries.

Higher education institutions in Namibia

The HE Act (Act No. 29, 1996: 5) defines HE as

... all learning programmes leading to qualifications higher than Grade 12, or its equivalent ... but does not include vocational education and training by a vocational education and training provider which offers vocational education and training programmes on level 1 to level 5 on the NQF ... HEI means any institution that provides or intends to provide higher education.

According to this Act (Act No. 29, 1996), the term HE may be used interchangeably with the term *tertiary education*. In addition, the Act stipulates that HE in Namibia is provided by

universities and does not include vocational education, which falls under the category of further education and training.

There are three higher education institutions in Namibia with university status, namely; University of Namibia (UNAM), Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), and International University of Management (IUM). The first two are public and the third is private. The EQA in HE is mainly practiced in these universities or HEIs. However, it is not clear how compatible the national EQA system and the HEIs are practiced due to lack of empirical evidence. The QA system is expected to be compatible with how Namibia's HEIs are established, how the HEIs function, and how they are governed.

Universities are primarily concerned with how to ensure the quality of their education and how to boost their local and global competitiveness (Otara, 2015). Universities are beset by the pressure from international competition, public accountability, increased student enrolment, liberalisation of the education system, globalisation of education, and social economic dynamics (Otara, 2015). These factors exert pressure on the universities to continue to bolster QA (Otara, 2015).

The University of Namibia (UNAM), as well as the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) are public universities which have their roots in the establishment of the Academy for Tertiary Education (Act No. 13 of 1980). Act No. 9 of 1985 was promulgated and, by it, the Academy, consisting of a university component, a Technikon and a College for Out of School Training (COST) - was established. Shortly after independence in 1990, it was resolved to restructure the three components into two independent HE institutions, namely, a university and a polytechnic.

Act No. 18 of 1992 saw the establishment of the University of Namibia, leaving the Technikon and COST together as stand-alone units, under the auspices of the new university, until the promulgation of the Polytechnic Act. Two years later, COST merged to become the Polytechnic of Namibia (Act No. 33 of 1994). The Act provided for the phasing out of vocational training courses and the granting of degrees by the Polytechnic. This is how the Namibian public universities were born, post-independence.

As a free market economy, Namibia is open to nationals as well as international individuals opening up private HEIs. However, there are QA mechanisms in place that private HEIs should

comply with. So far, Namibia has one private University – the International University of Management.

The University of Namibia

Formerly known as the 'Academy', University of Namibia (UNAM) was established by an Act of Parliament, the University of Namibia Act No. 18 of 1992. According to the UNAM Act (1992), "the aims of the university shall be to provide HE, to undertake research, to advance and disseminate knowledge, to provide extension services, to encourage the growth and nurturing of cultural expression within the context of the Namibian society, to further training and continuing education, to contribute to the social and economic development of Namibia and to foster relationships with any person or institution, both nationally and internationally" (UNAM Act, 1992: 5).

As far as the Constitution of the University is concerned, "the University shall consist of - (a) a Chancellor; (b) a Vice-Chancellor; (c) such Pro-Vice-Chancellors as may be appointed by the Council in terms of section 8(1); (d) a Council; (e) a Senate; and (f) the academic and administrative staff, and students of the University" (UNAM, 1992: 73).

Over the years, UNAM has grown into eight faculties; Agriculture and Natural Resources, Economic and Management Sciences, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, Law, and Science. The University offers undergraduate and graduate programmes to over 19 000 students, and to date has produced over 17000 graduates who are serving the country in different capacities. To meet the educational needs of the diverse nation, UNAM has 12 campuses and nine regional centers nationwide (UNAM, 2019).

Quality assurance implementation at UNAM

In terms of QA, UNAM established a Centre for Quality Assurance and Management (CEQUAM) on 01 January 2010. The main purpose of CEQUAM was to develop the University's capabilities in the area of QA in order to improve and update academic and managerial activities (UNAM homepage, 2019). It is also responsible for administering and facilitating the operationalisation of UNAM's QA and Enhancement Policy and Procedures (UNAM, 2019).

Given the purpose, the Centre enables the University of Namibia to implement QA in a more systemic way. UNAM's implementation approach enhances the University's quality of teaching and learning, research, community service and internal support services. It further enables UNAM to assure itself and its stakeholders that the University's policies, systems and processes for the development, maintenance and enhancement of Quality in all its educational provisions are functioning effectively (UNAM, 2019).

CEQUAM is an institution-wide technical organ with a broader role across multiple departments. As part of QA implementation, each department (academic and support) is responsible for systematically and continuously carrying out QA processes based on rationally established and widely disseminated performance standards/benchmarks. The role of CEQUAM is to coordinate these processes centrally, and to provide departments with professional support in their perpetual processes of self-evaluation/reviews and improvement (UNAM, 2019).

UNAM further implements QA by engaging and acting as a conduit between the relevant bodies and networks nationally, and beyond borders. These include the only international QAA – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies of Higher Education (INQAAHE); external regulatory bodies (national) such as the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) and National Council for HE (NCHE); continental networks like the Association of African Universities (AAU) and HE Quality Management Initiative for Southern Africa (HEQMISA); as well as other PBs and external Accrediting Agencies (UNAM, 2019).

CEQUAM is responsible for:

- ensuring a good Quality Culture within the University;
- improving the Quality standards of academic, research, community engagement and support services activities within the University. This entails participation by all stakeholders;
- building capacity within the University in terms of QA tenets and practices, and
- implementing quality standards that are benchmarked with local, regional and international best practices, whilst taking into consideration the specific needs and conditions of the University of Namibia.

The objectives of CEQUAM seem to cover the university aspects comprehensively, including the 3 main areas of HE which are; Teaching & Learning, Research & Community Engagement, as well as, support services. According to UNAM (2019), effective implementation of QA is the basic principle for ‘closing the Quality loop’, and the University believes that repeating the cycle of QA activities can bring about continuous quality improvement as every next cycle translates into better quality. The reviews are guided by four key philosophical questions, which are based on a ‘fitness for (and of) purpose’ approach that responds to the questions:

- What is the University trying to do?
- How is the University trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the University change in order to improve?

To aid the process of QA implementation, CEQUAM has designed the main activities to assist with the implementation of internal and EQA. CEQUAM does so by: providing quality standards and measures for all programmes, centres, and departments; coordinating the internal and external reviews; organising seminars and capacity building training workshops in the area of QA for the University’s staff and students; promoting a culture of quality in every aspect of the university; coordinating registration of qualifications on the NQF; coordinating programme accreditation; and linking UNAM with external QAAs (UNAM, 2019). Overall, implementation of QA at UNAM is supported by different QA policies and procedures, as well as the National QA System for HE under the auspices of the National Council for HE (NCHE) and some provisions of the NQA statute (UNAM, 2019). Judging from the UNAM QA documentation, the university is committed to continuous improvement and enhanced quality. QA documentation comprises the UNAM QA policies, IQA procedures and mechanisms according to which UNAM, or a specific unit or function within UNAM, ensures quality specifications and standards are maintained. These policies, procedures and mechanisms include continuous revision and monitoring activities to evaluate aspects such as suitability, efficiency, applicability, currency and efficacy of all activities, with a view to ensuring continuous quality improvement and enhancement (UNAM, 2015).

As part of the internal and subsequently EQA implementation plan, divisions have the primary responsibility of maintaining high quality standards in carrying out their mandate and roles in

the UNAM QA system. The responsibility and accountability for quality and QA is vested in the Vice Chancellor, while the institutional responsibility for the management of the QA system resides in the line function of the Pro-Vice Chancellor: Academic Affairs. The University Senate has formal responsibility for the oversight of all matters pertaining to the quality of learning and its provision. The UNAM Council has the formal responsibility for final approval of all institutional policies. The Centre for QA and Management (CEQUAM) has overall responsibility for the promotion of a culture of quality and co-ordination of QA activities at UNAM (i.e. academic, administrative, and support services), assisted by a University-wide QA Committee (QAC) for the implementation of this policy. This also shows that QA at UNAM tends to enjoy the support of institutional management, incorporated in the institutions strategic platforms, such as the University Senate and Council – the governing body. Each division head i.e. Dean or Director at UNAM is tasked with the responsibility for QA – while the VC takes overall accountability. The Pro-Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs has the direct supervision of CEQUAM. Placing the responsibility of CEQUAM under the Pro-Vice Chancellor: Academic Affairs (PVC: AA) however, tends to view QA as an academic function rather than an overall aspect (academic and supportive), a misinterpretation that can have dire implications.

The Namibia University of Science and Technology

The former “City Campus” (former Academy) became the main campus of the Polytechnic under its founding Rector, Dr Tjama Tjivikua, who was appointed on 04 August 1995. From 01 January 1996, the Polytechnic became independent and autonomous. After 20 years of tremendous growth and relentless pursuit of a new status under the visionary leadership of Dr Tjivikua, the Polytechnic was renamed the Namibia University of Science and Technology (Act No. 7 of 2015). The University’s governing structure comprises the Council (supreme policy-making body), Senate and a Students’ Representative Council. The Vice-Chancellor is supported primarily by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Administration and Finance, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research & Innovation, and a Registrar.

NUST's QA vision is to ensure the enhancement of student learning through quality assuring academic programmes and services, and is also the guiding principle for all the institution's quality endeavors (NUST QMF, 2015: 3).

The objectives of the University are –

- a) to contribute to knowledge creation and advance knowledge through teaching, research and scientific investigation, with an emphasis on applied research;
- b) to support and contribute to economic and social development through globally relevant, professional, technological and career-focused HE, and effective community engagement, with an emphasis on industry involvement;
- c) to drive, promote and facilitate technology development and technology transfer and innovation and diffusion;
- d) to engage in national and international partnerships and cooperation with other universities, organisations and institutions; and
- e) to preserve and promote the traditional and constitutional principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs subject to this Act and other laws.

According to the Constitution of University, the University consists of –

- a) the Chancellor;
- b) the Council;
- c) the Vice-Chancellor;
- d) Deputy Vice-Chancellors as may be appointed by the Council in terms of section 14(1)
- e) the Senate; and
- f) the academic and other staff of the University (NUST Act, 2015).

Quality assurance implementation at NUST

In the quest to implement its QA vision, NUST has (since the years of the Polytechnic) established a QA Unit (QAU), responsible for all QA matters of the University. To enable implementation of QA within the institution, the University has put in place a QA Policy, as well as a Quality Management Framework (QMF) as the main guiding documents. The documents explain how the institution defines quality i.e. *the primary purpose of the QM*

policy is to provide NUST's stakeholders with an understanding of institutional quality and QM in order to ensure the smooth implementation of the QMF; and to outline the structures, key features, guidelines and procedures, and roles and responsibilities pertinent to the management of institutional quality (NUST QMF, 2015: 7). It further explains why the institution engages in QA activities and what methodologies are employed to ensure quality. It also explains where NUST sits within the wider context of national and professional QA requirements.

Through the QA unit, NUST is determined to promote a quality culture in the institution by monitoring quality standards, and benchmarking against best practices for continuous improvement. The main functions of the QUA are as follows:

- promoting a quality culture and QA systems;
- establishing and monitoring quality standards and practices;
- reviewing and evaluating QA systems and procedures
- attending to specific recommendations from faculties;
- ensuring that the various structures of NUST become the drivers of their own; and
- benchmarking research and improvement of QA system at NUST (NUST, 2015).

The QA implementation approach of NUST is structured in such a way that QA and quality enhancement of student learning rest with every institutional member at NUST. Therefore, academic, non-academic and administrative staff carry a primary responsibility for upholding standards and enhancing the quality of student learning. It is the professionalism and creativity of all staff (academic, non-academic and administrative), individually and collectively, that makes a vital contribution to the enhancement of the quality of all its services. NUST is responsible for the academic standards of all qualifications and awards granted in its name, including all qualifications and awards offered by the institutions through collaborative arrangements. It is also responsible for all non-academic services that it offers. NUST further complies with national QA requirements. HEIs, therefore, must operate a comprehensive system of institution-led monitoring and review (annual and periodic). The performance areas of the QAU include: coordination and management of programme accreditation; coordination and management of institutional audits; conduct of quality

reviews (department and programmes); management of student evaluations and peer reviews; and management of QA reports. Seeing from NUST's QAU's policies and framework, NUST implements QA in such a way that it is taken as the responsibility of all stakeholders – academic, non-academic, and administrative staff.

The International University of Management

The International University of Management (IUM) was founded, first as a non-degree awarding body. On 26 October 2002, IUM obtained a University status when it was officially launched by the then state president of the Republic of Namibia, His Excellency Dr Sam Nujoma.

IUM has its roots in the institute of HE which was founded in 1994, and is a sole Namibian initiative which started with one student and has now grown into an institution whose student population was more than 9000 by 2019. IUM was officially launched as the first private university in Namibia on 26 April 2002 and its Hi-Tech campus (main campus) at Dorado Park in Windhoek was inaugurated on 26 April 2011. The institution is governed by a Council, headed by a Chancellor, a Vice-Chancellor, and 3 deputy VCs.

In terms of QA, IUM has established a Directorate of QA and Management (DQAM) with dedicated staff to serve. IUM also developed an institutional QA guiding document. There exists an IUM Quality Assurance and Management Policy. QA policy covers all aspects of the institution such as governance, accountability, strategic planning, human resource planning and management, finance management, and property management services.

Quality improvement at IUM takes place through the processes of continuous improvement of academic and support services functions, and activities aimed at promoting excellence. Self-evaluation is accepted as the primary mechanism of QA. It is the responsibility of each functional unit at IUM to establish and apply effective procedures for regular self-evaluation. Each unit is also expected to monitor and evaluate progress annually, and undertake comprehensive self-evaluation at least once every three to five years. Furthermore, each unit is entrusted with the responsibility of constantly and systematically soliciting feedback from stakeholders, and using the outcome for quality improvement.

DQAM regularly arranges and coordinates external institutional audits to be conducted by reputable QA authorities, e.g. NCHE, NQA. DQAM is responsible for following up on recommendations resulting from audits. The overall responsibility and accountability for quality, and QA is vested in the vice-chancellor. The institutional responsibility for the management of the QA system resides with the vice-chancellor, assisted by the Director DQAM. Senate has the formal responsibility for matters pertaining to the quality of learning and its provision. The governing Council has the formal responsibility for final approval of all policies.

Analysis of quality assurance in the Namibian context

All the three HEIs have established institutional QA frameworks, and have developed QA guiding documents. This to a certain extent could signal a culture of quality. However, the actual implementation cannot be confirmed through means of documents only. The experiences of the sampled stakeholders at these HEIs will tell the story, particularly that of their respective lifeworld.

Similar to other parts of the world, the system adopted by Namibia has also basic approaches which include accreditation, audits, registration and certification. The question is whether EQA has improved the quality of HE.

Stansaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman and Westerheijden (2011) contends that the impact of EQA tends to improve structural, organisational and managerial processes within HEIs. In Australia, it is argued that external monitoring has indeed improved QA processes of Australian universities in their core areas, although it is criticised for having overly concentrated on the input and processes of QA at the expense of the education outcomes and standards (Kis, 2005). As a result, it is hard to see that external monitoring has transformed quality in Australian HE (Kis, 2005). A lesson from Australia is that, there is need for Namibia to ensure quality of education outcomes and standards, in order to achieve or improve student transformation. Improvement of QA processes alone cannot be sufficient.

In order to ensure quality HE, HEIs should inculcate a culture of quality in all their activities (HAQAA, 2017). This study emphasises that the role of QA is crucial in supporting African HE systems and institutions to respond to the challenges of HE. Furthermore, the emphasis is

that, implementation of EQA in Namibia should aspire to support the HEIs, in order to more effectively respond to the challenges that the HE system is faced with – nationally and from a global perspective. My position is that the national development of the QA system is one thing, its implementation is another and the latter is critical, especially from the implementers' perspective. In other words, how implementers experience the roll out is of fundamental importance. What justifies this study is that, whatever the experience of the stakeholders with regards to implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia, the knowledge would go towards benefiting the existing system. Put differently, the experiences of the stakeholders may encourage improvement or review of the system.

According to HAQAA (2017: 5), *the success of QA in HE is based on the principles, that quality and QA are primarily the responsibility of HEIs; and the autonomy, identity and integrity of HEIs are acknowledged and respected.* Furthermore, HAQAA (2017) suggests that the methodologies used in QA in HE should include standards that should be subjected to consultation with stakeholders. Standards should be benchmarked with international standards; and external peer reviewers with diverse expertise and experiences should be used in QA reviews (HAQAA, 2017). The African Standards and Guidelines for QA were only published in 2017, years after the establishment of the three QAAs for HE in Namibia. Also, the guidelines came after the Namibian Universities had established their respective QA units or centers – with the concomitant policies, systems and frameworks. HAQAA (2017) provides guidelines for implementation of QA continental wide, aimed at the harmonisation of QA systems. Ideally, for the guidelines to be effective, African countries, specifically Namibia, would need to adjust QA pre-developed frameworks and systems accordingly.

The challenges facing the continent and its HE system is to take charge of its own destiny and not to be forever a developing continent dependent on handouts. In order to liberate its full potential and work cooperatively in the continental interest, and to realise its aspirations, Africa has to unleash its potential to become self-reliant in its HE provision, by for example, making good governance the hallmark of its HEIs; and assuring fair distribution of resources , greater equity and opportunity for all to access HE by establishing multilateral relationships and programmes, where joint or corporative ventures will promote QA, mobility, exchange, and pooling the resources and capacities in HE (HAAQA, 2017: 7).

According to Baldwin (1997) in Liu (2017), implementation of a combination of external and internal QA processes brings about 3 main favourable consequences: more rigorous course approval procedures; increased awareness of students' perspectives on teaching and learning; and a perceptible shift in the climate, with a new attention to teaching issues and an intensification of debate about effective learning. However, the non-favourable consequences are: an excessive bureaucratisation of procedures associated with pedantry and legalism; a greatly increased administrative work load for academic staff, taking them away from their 'core business'; a formalism that can stifle creativity and individuality, the very qualities that universities should foster; and a professionalisation of academic staff, associated with a policing mentality and a lack of trust (Baldwin, 1997 in Liu, 2017). The internal implementation has implications for external implementation and vice-versa. According to Banji (2011), in the quality culture perspective, quality is not seen as a process that can be operated through evaluation and measurement procedures alone, but as values and practices that are shared by the institutional community and that have to be nurtured on many levels and by various means at the same time. The approach demands the involvement of internal and external stakeholders, acknowledging the fact that a quality culture cannot be implemented from above, although strong leadership may be necessary for starting and promoting the process in the first place (Banji, 2011). The three HE institutions' respective documents also indicate a strong dedication of QA responsibilities for the Universities' executive management, as well as critical platforms such as Universities' Senate and governing Councils.

The diagram below (figure 3.1) is a model developed by Kauppila (2016) to illustrate an integrated approach that is meant to strengthen IQA, especially by ensuring evaluation on all 3 areas of HE. The model provides for evaluation at external level (EQA), and on two levels internally: institutional and unit level. This allows for 'vertical integration'. The model also allows for integration of institutional/Internal Management Systems (IMS), which is 'horizontal integration'. Kauppila (2016) *"defines an IMS conceptually as a single set of interconnected processes that share a unique pool of human, information, material, infrastructure and financial resources in order to achieve a composite of goals related to the satisfaction of a variety of stakeholders"*. The model aims to promote evaluation that caters holistically for the whole HE system in order to impact the internal, as well as external

environments. My view is that, while different countries, including Namibia, may prefer to adopt this model, what is fed into the model determine the success of its usage. For example, what are the criteria used in evaluation of the different missions? What are the existing internal management systems and how compatible are they for integration purposes? As Manatos, Sarrico and Rosa (2017) point out, integration is particularly interesting in HEIs due to their traditionally loosely coupled and fragmented organisational structures. This is another challenge of HEIs, their fluid nature. In other words, Manatos et al. (2017) express the dynamics that characterises HEIs, making planning of such systems a challenge. It is for this reason that Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) view universities as irrational. The successful integration of IMS can lead to improved QA system, and general institutional operations and practices. That has the potential to encourage a quality culture, giving the stakeholders essential experiences of the QA system, and HEI system at large. Figure 3.1 shows the internal quality management system model.

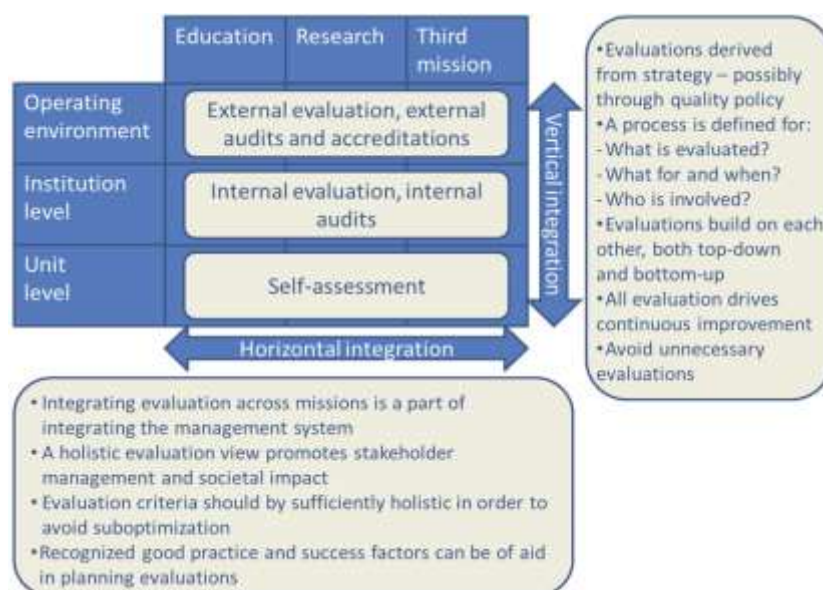


Figure 3.1: Internal quality management system (Kauppila 2016, p. 204)

The following points are useful for QA implementation, which the present study also deemed the suitably generic for every country system including Namibia. Features of an effective QA system (Kis, 2005):

- **Clarity of purpose:** The aim of external QA (EQA) should be clear to all stakeholders in order to create a coherent system (Kis, 2005).

- **Legitimacy:** According to Brennan (2001), quality judgements which may lack legitimacy in the eyes of those stakeholders on the receiving end of them are not likely to be acted upon if action can be avoided.
- **Dynamic link between internal and external processes:** The balance between internal and external QA cannot be emphasised. The two should complement each other. The cooperation between different stakeholders is essential (Kis, 2005).
- **Flexibility, confidence in HEI and more focus on internal processes:** Harvey and Newton (2004) in Kis (2005) argue that quality improvement depends on the trust that stakeholders would have in HE. It is essential to take into account the expectations and values of the staff, particularly if it is assumed that lasting quality improvement is based on the energies and initiatives of staff (Newton, 2000) in (Kis, 2005).
- **Adequate follow-up procedures, feedback linked to action:** Follow ups are important ways of taking action towards the recommendations of reviews. Without follow-ups, improvements cannot be expected.
- **Regular and cyclical quality monitoring, viewed as a process:** QA should be respected and carried out as a continuous process rather than an event, in order to achieve long lasting impact.
- **Prudence and flexibility in linking results to funding:** The issue of linking QA to funding is debated in literature, with some for it, and others against it.

All the three universities, as well as the QA agencies, and the PBs, have the aspect of promoting a 'quality culture' in their respective policies or in their guiding institutional documents. From analysing the documents of the three HE institutions, it shows that QA is an integral part of each university. Each university has implemented internal QA, by establishing dedicated QA unit/centre/directorate. Each HE institution is expected to build its own internal mechanism that focuses on quality improvement to complement the external QA mechanism (Banji, 2011).

The promotion of a quality culture can be an effective fundamental base for QA in an institution. However, theoretical provisions are one aspect, practice is another. All the institutions, including QAAs and PBs indicate good intentions for the implementation of QA. Again, the objectives and activities however do not necessarily translate to actual

implementation. The actual implementation is hard to read or infer from the documents developed, hence the need for this study to explore the stakeholders' experiences. The stakeholders' experiences will assist in understanding how the actual implementation is done, compared to what is documented. This will tell of the actual quality culture (or not) of each institution. The QAAs have not indicated aspects of IQA in their documents. One would have expected QAAs to prioritise indicating their own quality practices, given the importance of IQA as also expected from HEIs. This goes to show little deliberate effort in the internal quality culture of QAAs. Even more, literature on stakeholders' experiences on IQA of QAAs is scarce – the availability of which would have been profound for this study in showing how IQA of external quality assurance bodies shape the experiences of the stakeholders within the broader framework of implementing EQA. Internal quality assurance is important for the stakeholders served by these QAAs, in order to have confidence in the EQA system. A good QA system should: ensure that HEIs and programmes satisfy at least a minimum level of quality in order to protect students; contribute to the improvement of all institutions and programmes whatever their level, and encourage HEIs to develop their own internal quality culture; and fulfill both of the objectives above at a reasonable cost, which should not exceed the estimated benefits of the quality improvements Werber et al. (2010).

Fragmentation of the national quality assurance system and overlapping mandates

It is clear from the literature reviewed, that the Government of the Republic of Namibia is serious about quality in HE as evident from the establishment of statutory institutions responsible for external quality assurance. In line with this, the national QAAs have put measures in place to assure and enhance such quality. However, having structures in place does not automatically lead to the effectiveness of such structures. It seems that there are many problems with regards to implementation with EQA in Namibian higher education system, characterised by fragmentation and overlapping mandates. To illustrate these overlaps, the mandates of the three national quality assurance agencies, as well as that of professional bodies are summarised as follows:

Table 3.1 Overlapping mandates in external quality assurance in Namibian higher education system Source: Author's own design

Body conducting quality assurance					
Quality assurance activity		NQA	NCHE	NTA	Professional bodies
Registration of Providers	of	No	Yes	Yes	No
De-registration of Institutions	of	No	Yes	Yes	No
Accreditation		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Institutional Audits (monitoring)		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Certification		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NQF registration		Yes	No	No	No
Licensing (of students)	(of	Yes	No	No	Yes

It is clear from this table that there are overlaps in the different mandates of the QAAs. These overlaps have potential to constrain effective implementations from the QAAs themselves as they have to spend a lot of energy protecting their territories and interests. The biggest victims of the unregimented quality assurance system would be the higher education institutions who must comply with, and be subjected to, more than one similar processes from different quality assurance agencies, as well as, Professional Bodies, which all have legal mandates to do so. Even where there are no overlaps like in the case of NQF registration which is a sole mandate of NQA, the different systems and processes ought to be aligned and integrated. For example, while a university programme must be registered on the NQF by NQA, the same programme must be accredited by NCHE. It is therefore, essential that these two processes be aligned. Both processes are cyclic and subjected to review. How quality

assurance is conceptualised by QA practitioners in external QAAs might influence the way they develop and implement the system. For example, if QA is understood as a means to regulate higher education, its implementation will be more compliance-focused. If it is seen as a developmental tool, quality assurance will be more enhancement-led to promote continuous improvement. The complexity comes in where there are multiple bodies which have similar roles or sometimes contradictory roles as it seems to be the case in Namibia. It would be difficult to implement EQA given the above challenges of overlaps, and non-aligned quality assurance frameworks. It is therefore, further important to explore the experiences of the stakeholders in implementing the quality assurance system, given the conceptualisations and set-ups of frameworks in these agencies.

The overlapping, non-coordinated and non-aligned nature of quality assurance calls for integration, interrelations, and interconnectedness of frameworks and eventually systems. The impact of the different QA bodies is essential in the higher education system of the country. Thus, the EQA system should be characterised by deliberate effort to ensure efficiency and effectiveness, and this impact should boil down to HEIs.

The aspect of overlaps and non-aligned functions within different frameworks is also attributed to the existence of multiple quality assurance agencies, which are entrusted with the quality assurance frameworks. While I do not argue against the existence of multiple quality assurance agencies, which is the current state in Namibia; the argument is for the promotion of an integrated system, where there are interrelations amongst the quality assurance frameworks.

It is a point of interrogation, regarding the multiple quality assurance agencies versus a single agency. With a single body, matters of overlaps and non-coordinated and non-aligned functions are minimised. However, the existence of multiple quality assurance agencies also have advantages compared to 'a single agency'. Different scholars in the fields of quality assurance and/or higher education have argued for and against multiple quality assurance agencies. In relation to the existence of quality assurance agencies, single or multiple, agencies are said to divert the focus of the QA exercise from the aspect of improvement, to the aspect of accountability (Lockett, 2006). This compels higher education institutions to focus more on complying with the quality assurance agencies (accountability), than on improving internal operations. However, multiple QAAs tend to advantage the quality

assurance exercises, as multiple agencies bring the advantage of an intense verification process. According to Harvey (1997), "it (EQA) may damage learning by diverting academic staff's attention away from the improvement of learning to compliance with the bureaucratic imperatives and to attempt to improve performance on indicators that are at the very best poor operationalisations of learning quality." It is argued that HEIs are themselves better at improving internal operations, compared to QAAs. These arguments are additional to the way QA frameworks under different QAAs are organised to facilitate the promotion of QA of HEIs.

Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) argue against multiple agencies, for the following reasons:

- Multiple agencies impose an excessive load on higher education institutions.
- There is likely to be duplication, since more roles have similar needs.
- a system including two or more agencies is unstable, one quality assurance agency is likely to capture the other; and
- accountability agencies tend to be advisory, and are likely to take on an improvement role.

In many countries, several national quality agencies exist with institutions having to respond separately to each agency's requirements. This situation can lead to an "over-assessed" higher education sector, a situation that might be avoided in the case of a single national quality agency for higher education (Brits, 2010).

Possible advantages of a single-agency system according to Woodhouse (1995: 17) are:

- lower total system cost;
- consistency of approach and less institutional staff time used;
- no conflicting instructions, recommendations or directives; and
- a simple relationship between the agency and the institution and other bodies.

Additional to the advantages of a single QAA is the fact that, when all frameworks are housed under one agency, and assuming they are mandated through one legislative document/Act, aspects of coordination, alignment and demarcations of roles would be clearer. There would be less audit fatigue on the institutions. Issues of QA would be more integrated, and the synergy within the quality assurance system, from the different frameworks, is likely to be more pronounced. While I am not necessarily arguing for a single quality assurance agency in

pursuit of a more effective implementation of the quality assurance system for higher education in Namibia, a single agency certainly has advantages in relation to an integrated system.

Advantages of a multiple-agency system according to Woodhouse (1995: 17) include:

- variety of approaches: factors are less likely to be overlooked;
- triangulation, permitting the same factor to be reviewed from different angles;
- specialisation of the various agencies by function: Each agency can be simpler and more focused;
- specialisation of the various agencies by type of institution: The autonomy of each institution and the variety of different institutions are recognised, and the whole higher education sector is not treated like a homogeneous industry; and
- enhancement of the range of accountability if the agencies have different masters.

Waheed (2013) has alluded to the highly criticised systems of quality that are complex, inconsistent, fragmented and inefficient. Waheed further argues that such systems are normally characterised by overlapping frameworks that regulate quality in higher education, including higher education institutions as well as vocational education and training. This scenario is clearly demonstrated to be the case in the Namibian quality assurance system – fragmentation and overlaps. Waheed (2013) has therefore opted for a “one strong national agency for higher education, with an integrated system, where all elements of quality assurance are linked, considering a “single, yet differentiated unit”. For this study, my emphasis is on the integration of the different frameworks, housed by the different agencies. The different functions should be aligned, coordinated, interrelated and have synergy.

As far as multiple quality assurance agencies are concerned, most European countries use legislative acts to govern the respective quality assurance agencies. These legal Acts are expected to give clear descriptions of the role and functions of the statutory bodies (Waheed, 2013). In Namibia, the different quality assurance agencies are also established by different legislative Acts. However, it is in these very Acts, where the overlaps are, and that is where fragmentation started. Furthermore, the functions as in different Acts, are not designed in a way that is coherent, hence the non-coordination and non-alignment.

The multiplicity of QA agencies in Namibia and their lack of synergy and integration necessitate an exploration of stakeholders' lived experiences of implementing quality assurance to tease out the implications for such a system.

Chapter summary

This chapter provided the national context of QA, inclusive of IQA and EQA. The chapter provided the Namibian HE landscape, and specific QA approaches and frameworks, as used by different organisations and institutions. With the HE landscape and QA frameworks discussed, the chapter gave an analysis of the QA system in the country, its strengths and weaknesses. Overall, the chapter argued for an integrated and aligned QA system.

The next chapter focuses on the research approach of the study, including justification of the research paradigm and the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides the methodology underpinning this study. In other words, the chapter provides discussions on the study paradigm, the theoretical framework of the study, as well as the research design. I could not find research studies on the Namibian quality assurance system which are phenomenological - exploring the experiences of the stakeholders on the implementation of the EQA system. This study was an opportunity to contribute to the existing knowledge of QA discourse in Namibia, from a stakeholder perspective.

This study made use of the interpretivist paradigm, and phenomenology was used in two ways; as a theoretical framework, as well as a research design. As a theoretical framework, phenomenology is used as a lens to understand the experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation of EQA; as well as, for meaning making. The study uses phenomenology as a research design, to guide data production, data analysis and sampling. The chapter also discusses the research approach.

The study's research questions needed to be answered within an appropriate theoretical framework and research paradigm. The study also needed to be appropriately analysed to derive accurate findings and subsequent discussions. It was imperative to ensure a clear rationale and alignment between the theoretical framework and the research questions, which impacted on the thematic analysis of the study. The research questions were thus, designed to align with the theoretical framework in order to increase the quality or trustworthiness of the findings. In line with the theoretical framework and the preferred research paradigm, all research questions were concerned with experiences. Overall, the study's guiding question (including the sub-questions) sought to discover the stakeholders' experiences in the implementation of EQA for HE in Namibia.

Research paradigms

According to Guba & Lincoln (2011), a research paradigm is a set of basic beliefs which represent a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to the world and its parts.

All paradigms have different ways of providing guidance on how problems should be understood and addressed, as guided by their respective common beliefs (Kuhn, 1970). For research, a suitable paradigm is required in order to respond to the study questions. A discussion on the different paradigms provides a comprehensive picture of the paradigms and justification for the choice of paradigm used in a study.

Positivist paradigm

Positivism looks at regularities to make predictions and establish scientific laws (Dammak, 2015). Based on this factor, positivists believe that the role of the neutral researcher is to present an objective explanation of matters of concern, and predict laws (Dammak, 2015).

The ontological position of positivists is that of realism (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Positivists strive to understand the social world like the natural world. In nature, there is a cause-effect relationship between phenomena, which once established, can be predicted with certainty in the future (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The researcher should seek a cause-effect relationship between the independent variable, which is the intervention and cause of any improvement, and the dependent variable, the outcome of the intervention (Dammak, 2015). Taking realism as its ontological stance, positivism assumes that reality exists and is driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms (Guba & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, reality is "out there" in the world, independent of the researcher (Pring, 2004) and not mediated by our sense of it (Scotland, 2012), and essentially discovered through scientific and conventional methodologies (Bassey, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 2011). Scotland (2012) observes that the ontological stance of positivism is to go out into the world impartially, discovering absolute knowledge about an objective reality. The epistemology of the positivist paradigm is dualist and objectivist, where the investigator and the investigated exist as independent entities, and the investigator is able to study the object or the investigated without one influencing each

other (Guba & Lincoln, 2011). In other words, what is researched and who is researching are two different aspects, which have no influence on each other, unlike in interpretivism and critical paradigms, where there is a relationship between the researcher and what is researched.

Objective and scientific methods are appropriate for studying natural objects. However, they are not as successful when they are applied to social phenomena as this study's phenomenon. The implementation of EQA in Namibia has to be context driven, as findings of the same phenomenon in different countries will differ accordingly. In positivism, reality is not influenced by context, and different research studies conducted at different times and in different places on a similar phenomenon, are expected to yield similar results.

Positivist researchers use data collection methods to gather quantitative, numerical data that can be tabulated and analysed statistically (Dammak, 2015). According to Gall, Gall and Borg (2003), positivist research often generates numerical data which means that the use of quantification to represent and analyse features of social reality is consistent with positivist epistemology (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). The scientific paradigm seeks predictions and generalisations, so different methods often generate quantitative data (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Examples of methods falling within the paradigm are: experiments, quasi-experiments, standardised tests, scales, questionnaires, closed ended questionnaires, structured interviews and descriptions of phenomena employing standardised observation tools (Pring, 2004: 34). For positivists, empirical facts are real, in addition to personal ideas and thoughts (Tuli, 2010). Positivist research is related to quantitative methods, i.e. experimental (cause and effect) and non-experimental where questions and hypotheses are proposed in advance in a propositional way and then subjected to an empirical test (falsification) for verification, under conditions that are carefully controlled (manipulated) so that the results are not influenced (Guba & Lincoln, 2011).

Given the characteristic of the positivistic paradigm, it is not suitable for this research which, in the first place, focuses on a social phenomenon, where a relationship is believed to exist between the researcher and the researched, as opposed to independent variables assumed in a positivist paradigm. For example, the relationship between the researcher's positionality to the phenomenon, and the phenomenon at hand, renders a close 'research relationship'. At the centre of this study is subjectivity, where each stakeholder of EQA is treated as unique,

having a different story to tell, as opposed to positivistic which focuses on objectivity. Each stakeholder is expected to narrate their own unique story as far as the implementation of EQA is concerned. In other words, nothing about the implementation of EQA in Namibia is considered as objective or representative of a single reality. Every stakeholder has a unique experience shaped by their own context. Positivism has been criticised for the following aspects which further prove positivist paradigm unsuitable for this study: First, it fails to differentiate people and social sciences from natural sciences, and deals with human beings like any other natural objects (Bryman, 2008). Second, it seeks to dilute the complex and render them simple by simplifying and controlling variables, which is why its application seems difficult in educational research (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Third, it assumes that generalisation is applicable in social sciences (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013).

Critical paradigm

This paradigm has a lot more in common with the interpretivist paradigm, although there are also differences which makes interpretivism more suitable for the study compared to other characteristics of the critical paradigm. Ontologically, reality in the critical research paradigm is described within a political, cultural, historical, and economic context (Dammak, 2015). It is assumed that reality exists, but it has been shaped by cultural, political, ethnic, gender and religious factors, which interact with each other to create a social system (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This study is open to the cultural and political context which influences the experiences of stakeholders in the implementation of the EQA. However, it allows this kind of influence to emerge through the individual stories of their experiences. This is unlike in the critical paradigm where the political influence (for example) is primarily the focus in the narratives of the participants. Unlike interpretivism, critical paradigm has a deliberate political agenda where researchers place themselves as ideologues when they should remain objective, dispassionate and disinterested (Morrison, 1995, cited in Cohen et al., 2007). As a result, that may encourage people to make radical changes irrespective of their desires and needs (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Critical methodology aims to question the taken-for-granted aspects (Fox, Easpaig & Watson, 2019), to deconstruct the dominant knowledge and assumptions (Fox et al., 2019), to interrogate values and assumptions, to expose hegemony and injustice, to challenge conventional social structures, and to engage in social action (Crotty, 1998, p. 157).

Historical realism is the ontological stance of the critical theorists who view reality as tangible and historically placed in social and institutional structures (Guba & Lincoln, 2011). As for interpretivism, the epistemology of the critical paradigm is transactional and subjectivist, and based on real world phenomena and associated with societal knowledge (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013).

Critical methodology is directed at raising the awareness of participants and interrogating accepted injustice and discrimination (Dammak, 2015). Instead of generating knowledge of the social world as it exists and perpetuate the knowledge status quo (Kincheloe, 2008), critical researchers endeavor to bring to light the beliefs and actions that limit human freedom, with the ultimate aim of transforming the situation (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The task of critical educational researchers is to confront those in positions of power and expose the oppressive structures that subjugate people and create inequality (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). According to Guba and Lincoln (2011), "The inquirer is cast in the role of instigator and facilitator."

A commonality between interpretivism and critical paradigm, which is different from positivism is the aspect of sampling. Purposive sampling is key in critical paradigm in order to understand the target groups, their problems and expected changes that may happen (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Open-ended interviews, focus groups, open-ended observations, open-ended questionnaires, and journals are methods commonly used to generate qualitative data. Like interpretivism, analysis often includes thematic interpretation of data placing explicit values on them (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

Interpretivist Paradigm

This paradigm is considered as constructivist, naturalist, humanistic and anti-positivist, and emerged in contradiction to positivism for the understanding and interpretation of human and social reality (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Interpretivism rejects the notion that a single, verifiable reality exists, independent of our senses (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). According to Crotty (2003), it is culturally and historically situated in interpretations of the social life-world. The ontology of interpretive research is that reality is subjective – different from one person to another, and our reality is mediated by our senses (Scotland, 2012). Scotland agrees with Schwandt (1994) who argues that Interpretive research is concerned with subjective

meanings and seeks to recognise individuals' interpretations and understanding of the social phenomena. Guba and Lincoln (2011) posit that realities exist in the form of multiple and intangible mental constructions that are based on experiences which are local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the persons or groups holding the constructions. The goal of interpretive research is not to discover universal, context and value free knowledge and truth, but to understand the interpretations of individuals about the social phenomena they interact with (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

The ontology of the interpretive paradigm is relativist (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Interpretivists do not believe that reality is "out there". Rather, they view it as socially constructed (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Interpretivism espouses subjective and transactional epistemology, therefore, the inquirer and the inquired are fused into a single (monistic) entity and their interaction leads to certain findings (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013).

Interpretivists adopt the idea of multiple realities in conducting qualitative research on individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpretive methodology seeks an understanding of phenomena from an individual's perspective; investigating interactions among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which they inhabit (Creswell & Sinley, 2017). Therefore, reality is constructed through interaction between language and various aspects of an independent world while actual words of individuals become the evidence of multiple realities (Creswell & Sinley, 2017). For example, the meaning of quality is constructed through interaction between consciousness and the world, rather than through discovery.

Interpretive researchers employ methods that generate qualitative data and, although numerical data may be involved, it is not relied upon (Dammak, 2015) as is the case with positivism. Examples of data collection methods that yield qualitative data include: open ended interviews with varying degrees of structure (standardised open-ended interviews, semi-standardised open ended interviews, and informal conversational interview), observations, field notes, personal notes, documents etc. (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Interpretivists think that quantitative research methods are not adequate to comprehend social phenomena, and believe in qualitative techniques that are diverse. The qualitative aspect of these techniques presents human beings as the primary research instruments. These techniques include phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study,

historical and documentary research and ethno-methodology. This study employs phenomenology as a theoretical framework and research design.

There are three extensive approaches to select a sample in interpretive research known as convenience, purposive or theoretical but the most suitable sampling technique for this study is purposive sampling, which helps to obtain rich information (Cohen et al., 2007). This study made use of purposive sampling, which is in line with the paradigm, as well as the theoretical framework. Data was sourced from purposively sampled stakeholders who were information rich. Contrary to positivists who rely on randomisation, interpretivists use purposeful sampling and select individuals and sites that are information rich (Creswell 2014: 214).

This paradigm was the most suitable for this study, due to its characteristics which were in sync with the purpose of the study. The ontology and epistemology of this paradigm are in line with the study (this I explain in turn). This study took reality as multiple and subjective. Furthermore, the methods of research design as outlined earlier were in line with the study's research design. For example, it was important for this study to engage a qualitative research approach for the type of questions and purpose of the study. The purposive sampling of stakeholders with experience in the implementation of EQA was also critical to the study, and in line with the research methodology. Even the criticisms of the paradigm contribute to its suitability towards this study. The interpretive paradigm has been criticised for, among other things, being "soft", incapable of yielding theories that can be generalised to larger populations, and the involvement of the researcher with participants, which compromises objectivity (Grix, 2004). After the discussion of the third paradigm, the critical paradigm, an elaborated justification of the choice of the interpretive paradigm for this study is provided.

The main difference between the three paradigms is mainly in the ontology, epistemology, and methodology – wherein lies their respective theoretical and philosophical positions. Next, I present further justification for the interpretivist paradigm as the most suitable for the study. I also provide the study's ontology, epistemology and methodology in relation to the interpretivist paradigm.

Edelheim (2014) and Guba and Lincoln (2011) outline the logical primacy of a paradigm as follows:

1. The ontological question: What is the form and nature of reality and therefore what is there that can be known about it? E.g. if the real world is assumed, then what can be known about it is 'how things really are' and 'how things really work'.
2. The epistemological question: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and would be knower, and what can be known? Knowledge production.
3. The methodological question: How can the enquirer go and find out whatever is believed to be known?
4. Axiological Question: My role in the research. Examples of paradigms: Positivist, critical theory; interpretivist with examples for each one.

Each research paradigm contains the above logical assumptions. These basic assumptions determine my worldview of the phenomenon. In line with the interpretivism paradigm, the study phenomenon's logical primacy is ontologically concerned with what the reality of EQA is in Namibia. The epistemology of the study is intersubjective knowledge construction. Epistemologically (how I came to know the reality of the implementation of EQA in Namibia), this was established empirically by engaging the experiences of the core-researchers. Put differently, I have established knowledge from the experiences of the core-researchers, through interpretation. Methodologically, I also discuss (Chapter 5) how I went about enquiring the experiences of the stakeholders on the phenomenon.

The philosophical base of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Boland, 1985). Interpretivist researchers discover reality through participants' views, as well as their own background and experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Interpretivist paradigm allows researchers to see the world through the experiences of the participants (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). As Andrew, Pedersen and McEvoy (2011) put it, central to interpretivist paradigm is the understanding that participants are actively involved in meaning construction by drawing on their experiences of the phenomenon under study and helping the researcher to make sense of what they perceive in order to build an understanding of the phenomenon. Interpretivist paradigm positions the researcher within the context, involves researcher in collaborating with participants, and collects participant-generated meanings.

The study is in agreement with the following principles of interpretivism as expressed by Cohen (2002: 22). These principles justify the suitability of the paradigm in this study, given the comprehensive theoretical framework.

- **People actively construct their social world:** Each stakeholder's experience of the implementation of EQA is different, and is uniquely influenced by their context, and how overall, individuals have constructed their social world in relation to this phenomenon.
- **Situations are dynamic and not static:** The QA situation changes with different aspects, i.e. time, developments in the system, leadership etc.
- **Reality is multi layered and complex:** Value shall be attached to each stakeholder's experience or story.
- We need to examine situations through uniqueness of the core-researchers.

Interpretivism supports scholars in exploring their world by interpreting the understanding of individuals (Than & Than, 2015). Interpretive researchers do not seek the answers for their studies in rigid ways. Instead, they approach the reality from subjects, typically from people who own their experiences and are of a particular group or culture (Than & Than, 2015), i.e. HE fraternity. Interpretivism is much inclusive because it accepts multiple viewpoints of different individuals from different groups (Than & Than, 2015). There are multiple stakeholders in HE, QA in particular. With interpretivism, all stakeholders' diverse viewpoints can be accommodated. Interpretive paradigm often seeks answers for research by forming and underpinning multiple understandings of the individual's worldview (Than & Than, 2015). The acceptance of multiple perspectives in interpretivism often leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Klen & Meyers, 1998; Morehouse, 2011 in Than & Than, 2015).

Qualitative approaches often give rich reports that are necessary for interpretivists to fully understand contexts (Than & Than, 2015). In seeking to understand the experiences of stakeholders, qualitative methods were the most appropriate, as they sourced in-depth information. This is opposed to quantitative research approach where a world is described in numbers, which was not going to be of much assistance to the phenomenon under study. I needed to understand the world of the core researchers through gaining insight into their backgrounds, beliefs and experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Interpretivist researchers seek methods that enable them to understand in depth, the relationship of human beings to their environment and the part they play in creating the social fabric of which

they are a part. Interpretivists do not prefer using the methods that offer objective or precise information (Than & Than, 2015).

In summary, the table below indicates the characteristics of interpretivism in relation to this study.

Table 4.1 The interpretivist characteristics of the study adopted from Cantrel (2001).

Feature	Description
Purpose of research	Understand and interpret stakeholders' experiences of the implementation of EQA system for higher education in Namibia
Ontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are multiple realities. • Reality can be explored, and constructed through human interactions, and meaningful actions. • One can discover how people make sense of their social worlds in the natural setting by means of daily routines, conversations and writings while interacting with others around them. • Many social realities exist due to varying human experiences; including people's knowledge, views, interpretations and experiences.
Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events are understood through the mental processes of interpretation that is influenced by interaction with social contexts. • Those active in the research process socially construct knowledge by experiencing the real life or natural settings.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquirer and the inquired-into are interlocked in an interactive process of talking and listening, reading and writing. • Data collection involves more personal and interaction.
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data is collected by unstructured interviews (including focused groups) and document analysis. • Research is a product of the values of the researcher and the ethics applied by the researcher.

Theoretical framework of the study

Phenomenology as theoretical framework

While drawing on an interpretive paradigm, the theoretical lens of the study was drawn from phenomenology. This section discusses the use of phenomenology as a theoretical lens, drawing on the tenets discussed next

Life World (Lebenswelt)

One of the most distinguishing features of phenomenology is the peculiarity of its philosophical base, which is embedded in the phenomenological concept of lifeworld (lebenswelt) (Anosike, Ehrich, and Ahmed, 2012). The concept is derived from Husserl's phenomenology, and refers to the everyday world as experienced by men and women (Shawa, 2019; How, 2003). The peculiarity in the context of this thesis is expected to emerge from the unique experiences of the stakeholders. In the context of lifeworld, the peculiarity is shaped by the different experiences of the stakeholders, as described next in the context of lifeworld. Finlay (2009) contends that the lifeworld is the world of experiences as it is lived and that for phenomenologists, we each live in a 'reality' which is (a) the world of objects around us as we perceive them and (b) our experiences of ourselves, body and relationships.

Further, for phenomenologists there are certain essential features of any lifeworld, namely; identity, embodiedness, sociality, temporality and spatiality. These are basic structures for the elucidation of the lifeworld. *“As a fraction of the lifeworld, self-hood is a continual background meaning of my thoughts, feelings and behaviour, if I am to describe myself, then I do not look inside myself, it is my experiential world that speaks of me”* (Finlay, 2009: 16). It is the experiential world and background of the stakeholders’ that speaks of how they view the implementation of EQA in Namibia. In terms of temporality, the question is how time, duration, or biography impact the nature of the Experiences. In terms of spatiality, Ashworth (2016: 23) *“gives an example that it is the person’s picture of the geography of the places they need to go to and act within affected by the situation? (Frustrations and possibilities?) Moreover, this geography will not merely be physical, rather there will be social norms and a host of other meanings associated with places”*. Practically, the experience of the current sampled participants in this study is shaped by time (or era), and how long they have served in their respective capacities. A QA director at any one of the universities who served the past five years, as opposed to a QA director at the same University who will serve in the next five years, will both have their experiences uniquely shaped by the time or era that they served. This is the context in which one ought to understand the concept of lifeworld, and its essentiality to experience. More so, in existential terms, the lifeworld of an individual can be understood as comprising three universal horizons of experiences as follows:

- Being a body in space (Umwelt)
- Being a self in time (Eigenwelt)
- Living with others (Mitwelt) (Finlay, 2009).

Husserl's (2013) analysis of the lifeworld is firstly a clarification of the relation between scientific theory and the pre-scientific practically oriented experiences. Second, Husserl's analysis of the lifeworld can be regarded as a new introduction to, or way towards, the transcendental-phenomenological reduction. Finally, the analysis of Husserl (2013) of the lifeworld can be seen as a radicalisation of his analysis of inter-subjectivity, in so far as concepts like historicity, generativity, tradition, and normality are given a central transcendental-philosophical significance (Zahavi, 2003).

“The lifeworld cannot be understood purely in a static manner, it is not an unchangeable background, but rather a dynamic horizon in which we live, and which lives with us in the sense that nothing can appear in our lifeworld except as lived” (Stanghellini & Mancini, 2017: 30).

Socio-cultural Background

An acceptance of the role of interpretation involves an individual’s socio–cultural background which is always implicitly present. Interpretation is founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. Interpretation is always based on historicity and our experiences (Husserl, 2013). Historicity here refers to the core-researchers or participants’ experiential world. Critical to consider is what shaped their respective experiences in terms of the afore-mentioned aspects - historical happenings in one’s life, that have shaped one’s experience of EQA in Namibia.

Intentionality

Socio-cultural background and intentionality are part and parcel of the lifeworld. The concept of intentionality, refers to how people experience the world differently, and in the process also attach meaning differently (Finlay, 2009). Some have explained intentionality as the notion that consciousness is always consciousness of something (Stanghellini & Mancini, 2017). For example, different stakeholders may experience the same system differently due to their consciousness as applied to the EQA system for HE in Namibia. What does the practice of implementing EQA mean to the different stakeholders? What meaning does each stakeholder consciously attach to the experience? According to Ashworth (2016), any experience is an inextricable amalgam of: a mode (or a mixture) of consciousness, which may be perception, imagination, memory, judgement, etc.; and a content, that is the thing perceived, the event imagined, what is apparently remembered, and so on. In philosophical literature, the two are termed the noema and the noesis, and the amalgam is termed intentionality (Ashworth, 2016). Put simply, intentionality refers to doing something deliberately, such as engaging in QA matters to achieve a certain purpose. *“It does not refer to something without thinking, such as reading billboards while crossing the road”* (Yuksel &

Yildirim, 2016: 10). Intentionality in the case of this study would refer to the implementation of EQA (as an object), and the appearance of this object in one's consciousness. The implementation of EQA happens in the mind of people in a conscious way and that is the experience this study would like to engage through phenomenology (and lifeworld). Implementing EQA for HE (in Namibia) is an intentional experience of the stakeholders. The stakeholders' lived experiences of implementation of EQA are intentional acts dependent on the stakeholders' consciousness. Therefore, the essence of the phenomenon will be derived from the act of the stakeholders' experiencing or implementing EQA for HE in Namibia. From Husserl's point of view, phenomenological lifeworld can be a contradiction. Phenomenological lifeworld can embody intentionality i.e. consciousness, but sometimes stakeholders can do this simply as part of the system and as a 'taken for granted' aspect. That is how Habermas (1987) challenges the taken for granted interpretive understanding of the lifeworld, encouraging critical lifeworld in human Experiences.

Finlay's (2009) interpretation of the lifeworld helps in positioning stakeholders' lived experiences by understanding their identity, the dictates of the current period, and the way the stakeholders relate among themselves within the quality assurance space.

Another important understanding of lifeworld is provided by Habermas (1987) who contends that:

"The lifeworld is given to the experiencing subject as unquestionable. By the everyday lifeworld is to be understood as the province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted as common sense. By this taken-for-grantedness, we designate everything which we can experience as unquestionable; every state of affairs is for us unproblematic until further notice" (Habermas, 1987: 130).

A Habermasian perspective of lifeworld assists in teasing out the experiences that reveal the taken-for-granted aspects in the implementation of external quality assurance mechanisms in Namibia. This is an important aspect to tease out while exploring the stakeholders' lived experiences. The Habermasian perspective further assists in examining the taken for granted view that may have shaped the stakeholders' experiences in implementing quality assurance, and provide space for critique. Generally, phenomenology was more suitable for this study as it enabled the researcher to examine the essence associated with the implementation of EQA for HE in Namibia as it is experienced by the stakeholders. In making meaning of the data, I

adhered to the explanation provided by Finlay (2009) and Habermas (1987). From Finlay's perspective, I was interested to understand the world of objects around us as we experience or understand them; and our experiences of self, body and relationships. In other words, I focused on how stakeholders understand implementation of quality assurance and their own experiences, as well as their relationships with other quality assurance stakeholders in Namibia.

From a Habermasian perspective, I critiqued the 'taken-for grantedness' view that may have shaped the stakeholders' experiences in the implementation of quality assurance. This meant that, in meaning making, I teased out how stakeholders understand quality assurance, and how they experience the implementation of quality assurance as individuals. I particularly focused on:

- i. How do the 3 national QAAs and Professional Bodies interpret and implement the Acts of Parliament that established them.
- ii. how stakeholders' individual experience of the implementation of quality assurance contributed to the overall understanding of the implementation of quality assurance in Namibia;
- iii. how the stakeholders' relationships contributed to the lived experiences in implementing quality assurance; and
- iv. how the stakeholders' total lived experiences of the implementation of quality assurance could reveal the taken-for-granted aspect that requires change.
- v. What are the lasting solutions to challenges experienced by stakeholders in the Namibian Higher Education Quality Assurance system?

Research design

A research design is a blueprint, plan or logical structure of enquiry. It is a guide for the collection and analysis of data, ensuring the validity of research findings (Anderson, 2013; Burns and Grove, 2003). The purpose of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial questions with as much clarity as needed. The research design of this study was interpretivist paradigm based on phenomenological theoretical framework and the concept of lifeworld. As already indicated in Chapter 4, this

was an interpretivist research because it sought to discover reality through participants' views, their own background, and experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The study made use of phenomenology as both the research design and theoretical framework for data analysis. Phenomenological research studies attempt to understand people's perspectives and understandings of a particular situation (or phenomenon) (Van Manen, 2016), and this is what this study attempted to do.

Phenomenology as research design

In terms of the research design, the study made use of the tenets of phenomenology to guide the processes of data production and data analysis. The study used principles of the theoretical framework (phenomenology) as a methodology rather than a method. The rationale was that the study does not aim to use phenomenology rigidly, but to design an appropriate approach, using only the applicable principles or tenets of phenomenology. Suitable for this study is the following description of a methodology: *"A methodology is not a correct method to follow, but a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches (i.e. transcendental phenomenology) are responsive to particular questions and subject matter"* (Laverty, 2003: 26). Similarly, Van Manen (2016) argues that the use of methodology requires reflectivity, insight, sensitivity to language, and openness to experiences. To discover or uncover the stakeholders' experiences of the implementation of EQA for HE in Namibia, Van Manen's (2016) argument is consistent with what this study did, i.e. remaining open to the experiences of the core-researchers, in responding to the main study question, by generating meaning that is driven from the produced data.

Phenomenology emerged during the era of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, as a philosophy of human beings, subsequently, Edmond Husserl, a German philosopher became successful in his attempt to establish phenomenology as an approach to study lived experiences of human beings at the conscious level of understanding (Qutoshi, 2018). Husserl (1935/1965) argues that the positivist paradigm was inappropriate for studying phenomena because it could not describe the essential phenomena of the human world, such as values, meanings, morals, feelings, and the life experiences and creations of human beings (McPhail, 1995). According to Qutoshi (2018), Husserlian perspective of phenomenology is central to the concept of description of the invariant aspects of phenomena as they appear to consciousness.

Descriptive because its point of departure consists of concrete descriptions of experienced events from the perspective of everyday life by participants. Thus, the classical' phenomenological research method with Husserlian framework of descriptive research focuses on 'seeking realities not pursuing truth' in the form of the manifestation of phenomena as it is in the form of life world made of interconnected, lived experiences subjectively (Crotty, 1998). In line with Husserlian (1935/1965) framework of descriptive research, this study sought to uncover the real experience of stakeholders in the implementation of the EQA system. There would not be one truth of how stakeholders make meaning of the EQA system. Generally, a phenomenological research study is understood as a study that attempts to understand people's perspectives and understandings of a particular situation or phenomenon (Van Manen, 2016). According to Giorgi (1997), it is a study which provides social researchers with rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is experientially lived. In other words, a phenomenological research study tries to answer the question 'What is it like to experience such and such?' By looking at multiple perspectives of the same situation, a researcher can start to make some generalisations of what something is like as an experience from an 'insider's' perspective (Van Manen, 2016). As such, the phenomenological lens blend well with an interpretive worldview in which this study was couched. Meaning attached to the experience of implementing EQA is interpreted from individual experiences, through rich description of experiences as provided by the interviewed stakeholder. The researcher adopts a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks; and sets aside judgements about the realness of the phenomenon (Finlay, 2012). Finlay (2012) has also said that:

Phenomenological research characteristically starts with concrete descriptions of lived situations, often first-person accounts, set down in everyday language that avoids abstract intellectual generalisations. This is similar to in-depth interviews that I carried out to produce first-person account descriptions of the phenomenon. The researcher proceeds by reflectively analysing these descriptions, perhaps ideographically first, then by offering a synthesised account; for example, identifying general themes about the essence of the phenomenon (Finlay, 2012). Out of the descriptions of the different core-researchers, essential themes are derived to reflect the phenomenon as a whole from the core-researchers' perspective. Importantly, phenomenological researcher aims to go beyond

surface expressions or explicit meanings to reading between the lines, so as to access implicit dimensions and intuitions (Finlay, 2012). In the study, these are realised through face-to-face interviews.

As it is the world over, HE has multiple stakeholders, and QA is no exception. Phenomenology as a research design (guiding the data production process), as well as a theoretical framework (applying the phenomenological principles throughout the study) is the best philosophical/theoretical framework to discover and interpret the multiple stakeholders' individual experiences of the implementation of EQA in Namibia HE. In terms of sampling (amongst multiple stakeholder category, the closest to the phenomenon are selected). Phenomenology helped me tease out the taken for granted aspects, as implicated in the stakeholders' experiences. A phenomenological approach has value that cuts through taken-for-granted assumptions, prompting action or challenging complacency (Lester, 1999). This approach is well complemented by in-depth interviews as used for the study's data production.

I have particularly drawn on the interpretation of phenomenology by Finlay (2009), and the understanding of (Habermas, 1987). The theoretical underpinning of the data production and analysis was the phenomenological lens on aspects of the lived experiences generally, and aspects of the lifeworld. Specifically, phenomenology may be expressed in the lifeworld. Finlay (2009) outlines the principles which underlie the variants of phenomenology as discussed next.

Phenomenological studies are committed to description over explanation

The focus in the study was on the meaning as they would emerge from the lived experiences in order to understand human experiences (*verstehen*) (Finlay, 2009). Descriptive research refers to the kind of research that focuses on what the interviewees say, in order to discover new meaning and provide new knowledge where little is known about a phenomenon of interest.

The importance of interpretation in phenomenology cannot be over-emphasised. Phenomenology is descriptive in the sense that it aims to describe, rather than explain (Finlay,

2012). I agree with Heidegger (2008: 37) that “interpretation is not an additional procedure: it constitutes an inevitable and basic structure of our being-in-the-world.” Finlay (2012: 20) further argues that “interpretation is inevitable and necessary because phenomenology is concerned with meanings which tend to be implicit and/or hidden”. Finlay (2012) makes three important points. First is that, any description of lived experiences by participants needs to be seen in the context of that individual’s life situation. Secondly, interpretation is implicated as researchers make sense of data by drawing on their own subjective understandings and life experiences. Thirdly, interpretations are filtered through a specific historical lens, and arise in a particular socio-cultural field which relates to the specific co-creating researcher-researched relationship involved.

Phenomenological Reduction

The use of phenomenological reduction is also an important principle in phenomenological studies. This includes the suspension of any presuppositions, interpretations, and prior understandings; and understanding the world from the co-researchers’ point of view. Husserl names this process *Epoche* (Finlay, 2009). *Epoche* is preceded by bracketing the researchers’ presuppositions. According to Hoffman (ND) *Epoche* is a way of entering a space of openness to the experiences of phenomenon we attempt to understand, in its pre-reflective sense. Phenomenological reduction means that once we have opened up, we close in on the meaning of the phenomenon as it appears in our experiences or in our consciousness. Therefore, the aim of a phenomenological research project is to arrive at phenomenal insights that contribute to our thoughtfulness and practical tact, by using the methods of *epoche* and reduction.

Subjective experience is of interest to the phenomenologist, only as an entrance point to understand the phenomenon under investigation; since the aim of phenomenology is to arrive at the essence of a phenomenon rather than at the essence of a singular experience (Gibson and Hanse, 2003: 193 in Anosike et al., 2012). In other words, while the experience of the researcher is important to the study, it is critical to access that of the core researchers or that of stakeholders of quality assurance for higher education in Namibia; in order to interpret and draw relevant study implications on the phenomenon. This calls for a

phenomenological attitude or phenomenological reduction and epoche that opens up the researcher's core views.

According to Zahavi (2003), Husserl occupies himself with the issue of inter-subjectivity, which he argues contains the key to the comprehension of objective reality and transcendence. Hua (1/169, 9/245-246, 8/129) in Zahavi (2003), argues that, it is only possible to realise the full extent of the significance of inter-subjectivity when we realise how little the single subject can manage on its own, and that a radical implementation of the transcendental reduction will eventually lead to a disclosure of transcendental inter-subjectivity. Put differently, in allowing others' views (uncontaminated by researcher's views), we see the significance of inter-subjectivity, as that brings about objective reality as Husserl terms it. Husserl further argues that inter-subjectivity can only be treated as a transcendental problem through radical *mich-selbst-befragen* (Hua, 6/206 in Zahavi 2003). Only the researcher's experience of, and relation to, another subject; as the researchers' experience that pre-supposes the other, really merit the name intersubjective (Zahavi, 2003). Put simply, the aspect of inter-subjectivity only applies in relation to the researcher's experience. This implies that similarities between the experiences of the core researchers and insights from literature, merit the name inter-subjectivity.

Retaining a non-judgmental attitude

Where an individual's expression is both accepted and valued, what comes from the co-researchers is considered as truth. To arrive at the approximations of truth regarding this study phenomenon, I further adopt Finlay's following phenomenological approach.

- a) Finlay (2012) has adopted a phenomenological approach with a strong idiographic and narrative element in search of rich descriptive data, which is suitable for this research. Firstly, the approach considers a participant's particular experience of implementing EQA for HE in Namibia. Secondly, it creates themes common to the implementation of EQA. Thirdly, it probes philosophical and international aspects of implementing EQA to encouraging best practices, through literature. Idiographic aspect would perceive human behaviour as individualistic, unpredictable and subjective (Treadwell, 2014: 30). Furthermore, the idiographic element aims to describe and assess the subjectivity

and individuality of humans, rather than to discover universal laws (Treadwell, 2014: 30).

- b) The importance of descriptive and interpretive research is strengthened by Dilte (1923/1988) in McPhail (1995), who states that, through descriptive or through interpretive research, one would not arrive at objective knowledge, but would move closer to approximations of truth.

Research approach

Qualitative and quantitative research

There are two basic approaches to research, namely; quantitative approach and qualitative approach (Creswell & Sinley, 2017). Although there is a third approach, the mixed methods (where quantitative and qualitative can be combined), qualitative and quantitative are the main research approaches. The two research approaches have different characteristics, and it is these characteristics which determine which approach to use in a particular research study. The two are discussed to justify the use of qualitative research approach for this study.

The quantitative approach involves the generation of data in quantitative form which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour; and such research generates results in non-numeric narrative form (Kothari, 2004).

I borrow from the work of Mack, Woodsong, Maqueen, Guest and Namey (2011) to differentiate between quantitative and qualitative research. According to Mack et al. (2011) the two main research methods differ in the following 5 ways:

Table 4.2 Two main research methods adopted from Mack et al. (2011).

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Analytical objectives	The kind of analytical research study objectives would be to: quantify variation, predict causal relationships, and describe characteristics of a population, of a given study phenomenon.	The research study would aim to: qualitatively describe and explain relationships, describe individual experience, as well as to describe group norms.
Types of questions	Close ended questions are more suitable as opposed to open ended questions. Focus is on narrow questions.	It allows broad flexible questions in order to dig deeper, in pursuit of describing relationships and experiences in depth.
Types of data collection instruments	There is use of highly structured methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and structured observations is said to be suitable to this approach.	There is use of semi-structured methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation are the common instruments in qualitative research.
Forms of data	Because of close ended and narrow questions, studies produce numerical data (obtained by assigning numerical values to responses).	Because of the broad flexible type of questions studies produce textual (obtained from audiotapes, videotapes, and field notes).
Degree of flexibility built into	The study design is stable from beginning to end. Participant responses do not influence or	Some aspects of the study are flexible (for example, the addition, exclusion, or wording of particular

study design	determine how and which questions researchers ask next, and the study design is subject to statistical assumptions and conditions	interview questions). Participant responses affect how and which questions researchers may ask next. The study design is iterative, that is, data collection and research questions are adjusted according to what is learned.
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Generally, the quantitative approach seeks to confirm hypotheses about phenomena, and the instruments are more rigid in quantitative research. However, the qualitative approach seeks to explore phenomena making use of instruments that are more flexible. In the end, both approaches categorise responses to questions (Mack et al., 2011).

In terms of sampling, the qualitative approach uses small numbers for non-representative cases, compared to the quantitative which uses large numbers for representative cases. This is because qualitative studies do not aim to generalise, as opposed to quantitative research which aims to generalise findings. Generalisability is much harder with qualitative analysis because it does not use probability samples (Bacon-shone, 2013).

In the context of this study, the differentiation of the approaches was useful in deciding the approach appropriate to the phenomenon at hand. The phenomenon of the study focused on the experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation of the study. What that means in terms of the research approach is that, the study requires an approach that is flexible enough to go into the phenomenon in depth. The research instruments were ones that would solicit in depth, the type of data responsive to the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, this particular study is also designed in such a way that numerical data would not be helpful. "Quantitative research is good at providing information in breadth from a large number of units. But when we want to explore a problem or concept in depth, quantitative methods are too shallow. To really get under the skin of a phenomenon, we will need to go for ethnographic methods, interviews, in-depth case studies and other qualitative techniques" (Muijs, 2010).

Characteristic of the qualitative approach is the idea that “that there is a true reality out there that we can measure completely objectively, is problematic. We are all part of the world we are observing, and cannot completely detach ourselves from what we are researching. Historical research has shown that what is studied and what findings are produced are influenced by the beliefs of the people doing the research and the political/social climate at the time the research is done” (Muijs, 2010). The author further notes that “Subjectivists point to the role of human subjectivity in the process of research. Reality is not ‘out there’ to be objectively and dispassionately observed by us, but is at least in part constructed by us and by our observations” (Muijs, 2010). The characteristic of qualitative research its subjectivity, as it takes every situation or every individual as unique. Reality is constructed, rather than assumed to be out there. For this study, the aim is to create meaning out of the stakeholders’ experiences. Put differently, reality was shaped by the experiences of the stakeholders. “In the qualitative research approach, theory emerges from data. The emergence of theory from data allows me to construct and reconstruct theories where necessary, based on the data generated, instead of testing data generated elsewhere by other researchers” (Daniel, 2016).

From the characteristics of the approaches, this study speaks more to the qualitative approach. The quantitative approach was not suitable to this study as it focused on collecting and analysing information in the form of numbers and scores that measure distinct attributes of individuals and organisations. The quantitative approach also emphasises the procedures of comparing groups or relating factors about individuals or groups in experiments, correlational studies, and surveys (Fischler, ND).

The third approach is the mixed method, which does not have its own characteristics, but rather uses a combination of the qualitative and quantitative approaches. A mixed method approach capitalises on the advantages of the quantitative and qualitative methods while offsetting the drawbacks of each (Dowd, 2018).

Qualitative research

“Not everything that can be counted counts, not everything that counts can be counted” – Albert Einstein. It is important that a research study be guided by an appropriate approach which contributes effectively towards responding to the study objectives and questions. Qualitative researchers have to use key principles of research design, such as, linking the

research questions to the methodological approaches, considering issues of analysis and data collection as integrated, and being clear about the purposes of the research (Mohajan, 2018).

Qualitative research has gained space in the social domain as a form of social action with a focus on the people's interpretations to make sense of their experiences and meaning system in order to understand the social reality or perspective of individuals (Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative research is a form of social action that stresses on the way people interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals (Mohajan, 2018). Its basis lies in the interpretive approach to social reality, and in the description of the lived experiences of human beings (Mohajan, 2018).

Silverman (2019) and Mason (2002) describe qualitative research approaches as having the following in common:

- Having a naturalistic approach to the subject matter. Being grounded in an "interpretivist" position i.e. they are concerned with how the phenomena of interest are interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted, as well as the meaning that people bring to them (phenomena).
- Being based on research methods which are flexible and sensitive to social context.
- Being based on analytic methods which take account of complexities and differences as well as social and cultural contexts.

Qualitative research was particularly helpful in this study as it helped me to engage aspects, such as: the implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia; the life world of the stakeholders, including their respective contexts which might have shaped their experiences; how stakeholders/participants are affected by the implementation of the EQA system; and why they are affected the way that they are affected. The purpose of using qualitative research for this study, was to describe and interpret issues or phenomena systematically from the point of view of the individual or population being studied, and to generate new concepts and theories (Mohajan, 2018). However, description and interpretation of data was logically preceded by data production, which involved typical characteristics of qualitative studies, similar to those outlined by Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler (2010) in Than & Than, (2015):

- The study was carried out in a naturalistic setting.

- I asked broad research questions designed to explore, interpret, or understand the social context.
- Participants were selected through non-random/purposive sampling methods based on whether they had information vital to the implementation of EQA for HE in Namibia.
- I took an interactive role where I got to know the participants and the social context in which they lived.

To further justify the suitability of qualitative research in this study, I borrowed the following qualitative research principles (Mohajan, 2018) about the qualitative approach being one which:

- tends to focus on how people or groups of people can have (somewhat) different ways of looking at reality;
- takes account of complexity by incorporating the real-world context – can take different perspectives on board;
- studies behaviour in natural settings or uses people's accounts as data; usually with no manipulation of variables;
- focuses on reports of experiences or on data which cannot be adequately expressed numerically;
- focuses on description and interpretation and may lead to development of new concepts or theory, or to an evaluation of an organisational process; and
- employs a flexible, emergent but systematic research process (Mohajan, 2018).

There are many characteristics of qualitative research. These characteristics, as cited earlier, tend to guide how qualitative research should be carried out. The characteristics also show advantages associated with the approach. However, there is also criticism levelled at qualitative research, like that the results of a study may not be generalisable to a larger population because the sample group is small and the participants are not chosen randomly (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009). The research focused on a specific group of people, hence the small sample was appropriate. Furthermore, generalisability of the findings to a wider, more diverse population was not the aim.

Study population

The target population is the population of interest that the study intends to study or treat Majid (2018) also defines it as the total of respondents that meet the designated set of criteria (Burns & Grove, 1997). The target population for this study was the three national quality assurance agencies, namely NQA; NCHE; and NTA; and the two selected professional bodies, which have implemented EQA – and have done more EQA engagements, compared to others. Amongst the population were three HEIs with a university status in Namibia. The higher education institutions were UNAM, NUST, and IUM. The core-researchers within the participating institutions were the respective heads (CEOs) and, senior officers at national quality assurance agencies; heads of the professional bodies; heads of QA units, and Deans; and students who participated in a form of focus groups. I go into details of how participants were selected (sample).

Participant selection

The aim of data participant selection in phenomenology research is to use criterion sampling in which participants meet predetermined criteria. The most important of those criteria is the participant's experience with the phenomenon under study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The diverse participants would also serve for inter-subjectivity in some instances where participants may experience similar situations relevant to the phenomenon.

Sample refers to a formal plan that is specific on sampling size and procedure for recruiting participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Participants (the sample) were purposively selected from the participating institutions due to their experiences of the phenomenon under study, that is, their experiences of the quality assurance system for higher education in Namibia. As alluded to, the study was underpinned by a phenomenological framework; which requires 'a relatively homogenous group of participants' (Yuksel et. al., 2016). These were key role players in the implementation of EQA in higher education in Namibia (such as academics and academic administrators, and students) at the participating higher education institutions; and senior quality assurance officers at both national quality assurance agencies and professional bodies. Students were also purposively selected to participate as beneficiaries of the EQA system. According to Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, (2018), small samples are most

suitable for phenomenological research. A total of 33 participants from national quality assurance agencies, professional bodies, and higher education institutions were selected to participate in the study. This was to ensure a broader and in-depth coverage of the phenomenon being studied, and reliability thereof.

The study sample was a total of 33 participants comprising of 14 individuals, and 3 focus groups (UNAM: 8, NUST: 6 and IUM: 5). This sample of 17 participants comprised of the following participants:

- **Group 1:** From three national quality assurance agencies – The head of quality assurance agency; and 1 chief quality assurance administrator/officer from each of the three QAAs; 6 participants in total. The quality assurance agencies are the ones who house the external quality assurance framework and regulate the implementation of such a system. Therefore, heads of these agencies as well as chief quality assurance administrators were purposively selected and interviewed.
- **Group 2:** From two professional bodies – The heads of each of the 2 selected professional bodies, equaling two in total. Professional bodies are not quality assurance agencies per se, but they played a role in quality assurance as they set standards and regulated professional studies in HE and beyond, including inspection of higher education institutions offering professional qualifications and the registration of students in the respective fields/disciplines. The study thus, sampled the heads of the professional bodies to participate in the study. While there are many professional bodies regulating various professional fields in Namibia. It study selected two professional bodies on the basis of quality assurance encounters they had with higher education institutions in recent years through accreditation of professional programmes. This was established from the QA heads at universities or academic deans for the higher education institutions who participated in the study. Therefore, two of the professional bodies with the most frequent encounter with participating higher education institutions, and/or who have accredited more of the professional programmes from these institutions, were purposively selected to participate in this study.
- **Group 3:** From three higher education institutions – one head of quality assurance unit, per institution; one dean of an academic faculty per institution; and one focus

group with students per institution; six individuals and three focus groups (comprising 19 individuals), therefore 33 in total. Heads of quality assurance units were sampled with the understanding that they were the most experienced members of staff in the phenomenon being studied at institutional level, that is, implementation of external quality assurance in their institutions. Deans of academic faculties (one dean from each institution) were sampled with the understanding that they were the most strategic and also experienced at faculty level, on the phenomenon being studied. The particular dean from each of the participating higher education institutions was sampled based on the number of quality assurance encounters with the professional bodies and national quality assurance agencies particularly through accreditation, provided that these engagements took place under the leadership of that particular dean.

Students were selected on the basis of being faculty representatives because they were believed to have a lived experience of the phenomenon being studied, on behalf of the student body they represent. Each faculty at all the three higher education institutions that participated in the study had an equivalent of faculty representative structure in place. The total number of students in the focus groups was determined by the number of faculties per institution, that is, one senior student per faculty - UNAM nine faculties = nine students; NUST six faculties = six students; and IUM five faculties = five students.

Alongside interviews with various participants sampled from participating institutions, policies and other documents related to quality assurance were analysed to see how mechanisms for assuring quality were articulated and as a way of triangulation to validate data, mainly factual data collected via interviews.

Methods of data production

In the process of conducting a phenomenological research, data production is one of the fundamental stages and processes which contributes to the findings of research studies. It is an essential component to conducting research (Karjonboon, 2005). In this study, data was generated using three methods, namely; document analyses, unstructured interviews, and focus group interviews. The three methods are discussed next.

Unstructured interviews

According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2017), making use of multiple tools to collecting data allows for flexibility and plurality of perspective in the search for meaning in data. The main method of data production for this phenomenological study were individual unstructured interviews (including focus group interviews). This was in line with the theoretical framework of the study. In phenomenological studies, as is the case with this particular study, the focus is on the lived experiences of the stakeholders. It therefore was paramount that the lived experiences of the stakeholders be told by the stakeholders themselves, with the researcher's facilitation. The justification for using unstructured interviews in this phenomenological study was that interviews allowed for in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. Unlike other forms of data collection such as questionnaires, interviews allowed an open discussion and the opportunity to ask probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Unstructured interviews helped me to gain in-depth understanding of stakeholders' lived experiences in the implementation of the quality assurance system.

According to Alsaawi (2014), there are different types of interviews that can be implemented in social research such as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Each type has its own objective and focus. Research questions and the information needed to provide holistic answers to these questions will determine the most convenient type to be employed. The structured interview is at the quantitative end of the scale, and is more used in survey approaches (Watson, 2015). The rest of the scale, semi-structured and unstructured, is the area occupied by qualitative researchers, with the interviews characterized by increasing levels of flexibility and lack of structure (Watson, 2015). Watson went on to justify the usage and usefulness of unstructured, in-depth interviews by stating that: "In the unstructured interview I clearly have aims for the research and a topic of study, but the importance of the method is to allow the interviewee to talk from their own perspective using their own frame of reference and ideas and meanings that are familiar to them. Flexibility is the key with the researcher able to respond to the interviewee, to trace the meaning that s/he attaches to the 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess & Burgess, 1998: 102), to develop unexpected themes and adjust the content of interviews and possibly the emphasis of the research as a result of issues that emerge in any interview."

Face to face interviews in this type of research is critical. Face to face interviews are most preferred tools for gaining an understanding of human beings and exploring topics in depth in order to elicit rich information about personal experiences and perspectives, also allowing for spontaneity, flexibility, and responsiveness to individuals (Carter, Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, Neville, 2014). Face to face in-depth interviews were conducted with quality assurance practitioners at national quality assurance agencies and selected professional bodies; and academic administrators, namely; QA directors and the deans of academic faculties who experienced the most implementation of external quality assurance system (in terms of the number of encounters with external quality assurance activities) as well as students. This was meant to explore the lived experiences of the various role players in quality assurance in higher education in Namibia. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), qualitative research interviews seek to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the participants, with the aim of understanding the meaning of what participants say. The researcher or the interviewer often uses open questions. In phenomenological studies, the interviewee or respondent is the primary data for the study (Kajornboon, 2005). Interviewees are also referred to as co-researchers in phenomenology, further implying that they become the primary data sources in phenomenological studies.

Since this was a phenomenological study where lived experiences of stakeholders on the implementation of external quality assurance must unfold naturally, unstructured interviews were found to be the most appropriate for this study. Unstructured interviews are more casual interviews, compared to structured and semi-structured. I did not need to follow a detailed interview guide. Each interview was different from the other, and interviewees were encouraged to speak openly, frankly and give as much detail as possible. Although this type of interview yields a huge amount of data, it is appropriate for researchers who want to focus on a specific phenomenon in depth (Alsaawi, 2014).

Once the unstructured interviews were decided upon, I needed to make sure that the respondents had:

- a clear idea of why they have been asked;
- basic information about the purpose of the interview and the research project of which it is a part;

- some idea of the probable length of the interview and that you would like to record it (explaining why); and
- a clear idea of precisely where and when the interview would take place (Kajernboon, 2005).

With the necessary skills and know-how of the interview and interviewee, unstructured interviews have advantages. According to Kajernboon (2005), one of the strengths of unstructured interviews is that no restrictions are placed on questions. Unstructured interviews are flexible and the researcher can investigate underlying motives.

As much as in-depth data or narratives of core-researchers' experiences is required, it is not guaranteed through the mere use of phenomenology and its tenets. To a large extent, the strengths of the findings through a phenomenological approach depends on the subjects being interviewed, and the ability and skills to articulate well. Further, the researcher has to ensure accuracy in the process of interpreting to avoid mistakes and arriving at wrong implications. An example is how one interprets a satisfactory, good or an excellent QA system.

Kajernboon (2005) points out that, if not well planned, unstructured interview may have disadvantages, which may impact on the data or information that one is trying to gather for the study. One of the shortfalls according to Kajernboon (2005) of unstructured interviews is that the researcher's interview guidance may be limited in terms of the structure of questions. This could affect the way the interviewees respond. The interviewee would need to be well conversant with unstructured interviews to provide sufficient and quality information. Equally, the interviewer would also require high technical skills of conducting unstructured interviews, in order to obtain the required information from the interview participants or stakeholders in the case of this study. According to Kajernboon (2005), the researcher may not obtain data that is relevant to the question of the study. The interviewer needs to think about what to ask and to ask questions carefully and phrase them properly and know when to probe and prompt.

Another setback of unstructured interviews is particularly more pronounced if the interviewer is a novice and inappropriate as a novice interviewer may be tempted to be biased, unconsented and asks inappropriate questions. Also, respondents may talk about irrelevant and inconsequential issues. Consequently, it may be difficult to code and analyse the data.

To mitigate the shortcomings of individual unstructured interviews in this study, I drew up broader, unstructured questions to guide the interview sessions. Participants' responses that were found to be irrelevant to the study were filtered and discarded. Each interview session lasted for about one hour.

Focus group discussions

A focus group is defined as a small group of people engaging in collective discussion on a topic selected by the researcher (Watson, 2015). In addition to individual unstructured interviews with quality assurance practitioners from national quality assurance agencies and selected professional bodies, another set of interviews was conducted with student representatives from the selected higher education institutions in the form of focus group discussions. Typically, the researcher facilitated the focus group discussions. The composition of the focus group was guided by the topic of research and research questions. In this study, the focus group discussions with guiding questions, focused on the lived experiences of students from the participating higher education institutions on the implementation of quality assurance as the unit of analysis. The purpose of the focus group discussions was to determine students' experiences as primary beneficiaries of the EQA system in HE.

The study employed in-depth, unstructured focus group discussion. The aim of unstructured focus group discussion/interview in this study was to obtain unstructured, in-depth data on the phenomenon. The students who participated in the focus group discussions were selected mindful of the phenomenon, and in line with the theoretical framework of the study. The members of each focus group should have something in common i.e. characteristics which are important to the topic of investigation, for example, they may all be members of the same profession or they may work in the same team (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009). A study using focus groups to collect data should include several groups, not just one, because any individual group is subject to internal or external factors of which the investigator may be unaware (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009). The interactive aspect is also very strong in the focus group discussions. Interaction is the key to focused groups. According to Webb and Kervern (2000), the idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one

to one interview. When group dynamics work well, the participants work alongside the researcher, taking the research in new and often unexpected directions.

Focus groups tend to focus on more than one participant at a time, rather than on producing data from a group of participants who can hear each other's responses and provide additional comments that they might not have made individually, and this stimulates the identification and sharing of various perspectives on the same topic (Carter et al., 2014). This perspective sharing is of importance in the case of students. Students would need to feel confident in participating in the research studies. As individuals, they may lack that social support from their peers, unlike when they are in a group. Participants can challenge, argue and debate with each other, and this usually leads to in-depth and rich data (Alsaawi, 2014).

Document gathering

Quality assurance policies, Acts, regulations, systems, annual reports guiding and establishing participating professional bodies, national quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions were gathered and analysed to identify features and characteristics of the external quality assurance system implemented in Namibia. This is the process that preceded document analysis in this study. The study makes use of personal and official documents as sources of information – for historical or social value or to create a larger narrative on a particular phenomenon (Tight, 2019).

Document Analysis

The process of data analysis to a large extent, includes synthesis of data as contained in the given documents. Mohajan (2018) says document analysis is a social research method and is an important research tool in its own right, and an invaluable part of most schemes of triangulation (the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon). Document analysis was important in this study, as it provided additional information (about the study phenomena) that might have shaped the experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation of the quality assurance system. It also provided information that one might not necessarily get from the stakeholders as participants in the study. Documents also provided context (including historical factors) within which research participants operated.

Document analysis helped in shaping the discussions and interviews, depending on the information contained in the documents. This could facilitated triangulation.

Document analysis has often been used in combination with other research methods with a purpose of triangulating, supplementing and corroborating findings across different data sets (Mackieson, Shlonsky, Connolly, 2019). Document analyses as a method of data production was used in conjunction with interviews and focus group discussions to complement data collected through interviews and focus group discussions; and also as a way of triangulation and validation of data obtained through unstructured interviews and focus group discussion.

Like every other form of data production, document analysis both great returns and points of concern. These should be kept in mind when using this method, so that one may possibly have mitigating factors to offset the disadvantages of this particular method.

Compared to scheduling interviews with different participants, it was easier to gather the needed documents for analysis. It was manageable as documents remained as they are, and once collected, one could simply save or store them. With documents, there was also much flexibility in terms of when to analyse them and to go back and forth to the documents as required. With an exception of a few, I collected most of the documents online, which made it even quite convenient as there was hardly any need to print. This experience is in line with Tight's (2019) perceived advantage of document analysis

1. Documents are stable, rich and rewarding resources.
2. Documents represent a natural source of information.
3. Documents are available on a low-cost or no cost basis, requiring only the researcher's time and energy.
4. Documents are non-reactive, meaning that they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or research process.

I kept mindful that as much as the collected documents were useful to the study, the documents were developed for a different purpose. I then had to read almost everything in the document and filter out what was relevant for the study. This alone required analysis or analytical skills. Another challenge was to read the document and label what was found missing. In other words, certain information was expected from certain documents, but was not part of the documents. That was better than simply reading the document as is.

Requesting documents was a challenge. In the first place, it was hard to know what documents existed in which organisation or institution, especially if the documents were not uploaded online. One had to rely on the participants to initiate and provide some of the documents. Secondly, although institutions were provided with permission letters, there were delays in providing some documents which were not readily available online. These challenges were consistent with challenges of document analysis outlined by O’Leary (2014) as captured below.

Disadvantages:

1. Documents are often created for a different purpose. Analysis skills are therefore, critical.
2. Documents may not be available or easily accessible.

In analysing data that emerged from documental analysis, a self-designed checklist was used. In the process of document analyses, what is important when analysing documents is to not consider the data as “necessarily precise, accurate, or complete recordings of events that have occurred” (Bowen, 2009). All who analyse documents in their research must consider the important issues surrounding the types of documents and the ability to use them as reliable sources of evidence in the social world.

In this study, I particularly analysed all relevant legislative and policy documents pertaining to the phenomenon being studied, that is; implementation of external quality assurance system for higher education in Namibian higher education system. Documents that were analysed were Acts, systems, policies, regulations, annual reports, manuals and guidelines and procedures guiding implementation of quality assurance of the participating institutions (i.e. professional bodies, quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions). The aim was to understand how QA was portrayed and documented to the stakeholders.

I developed a strategy for gathering and analysing the documents. Gathering the relevant documents was the first step. After gathering the documents, I always had to confirm authenticity (of the documents) with the institutions. I then organised the documents in such a way that I filtered the aspects that were related or relevant to the study. I noted the aspects that I wanted to see from the documents, while also providing for aspects which could not be foreseen, but would still be relevant to the study. The next step was to categorise the

documents, and analyse similar documents and eventually similar aspects accordingly. This was done knowing that the documents were developed for different purposes. The procedure I followed was in line with the eight-step process outlined by O’Leary (2014) given below.

1. Gather relevant texts.
2. Develop an organisation and management scheme.
3. Make copies of the originals for annotation in case of hard copies. Or an e-folder in case of electronic usage.
4. Assess authenticity of documents.
5. Explore document’s agenda, biases.
6. Explore background information (e.g., tone, style, purpose).
7. Ask questions about the document (e.g., Who produced it? Why? When? Type of data?).
8. Explore content.

In this study, the focus group discussion questions concerned with how students understand quality and quality assurance, and how they experience its implementation with particular emphasis on how they see it enhancing the quality of their learning experience. Participating students were also asked to suggest areas for improving the quality of student learning experiences. Each of the focus group discussion sessions lasted for an hour.

It was of paramount importance that, for the information from the documents to contribute meaningfully to the study, I be as objective, consistent, and non-biased as possible in the analysis process as possible. Furthermore, I maintained a high level of objectivity and sensitivity in order for the document analysis results to be credible and valid (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis

Data analysis is understood as the systematic organisation and synthesis of the study data with regards to the particular phenomenon (Polit & Hungher, 1994). According to Creswell (2014), interpretivist researchers are most likely to use qualitative data production methods and analysis to have increased reliability. In an inductive approach, the researcher begins by producing data that is related to the topic under study and looks for patterns in the data to develop a theory that could explain the patterns; moving from specific observations to

broader generalisation and theory. In this qualitative study, the data were qualitatively analysed, discussed and interpreted in written narrative form as per qualitative research method conventions. Dowling (2007) points out that narrative research is a story of the day in the lives of individuals as told by the same individuals. The researcher re-tells or 're-stories' this into a narrative chronology, combining views taken from the participants and the researchers experiences (Dowling, 2007).

In line with the tenets of the theoretical framework, throughout the study, I identified my pre-judgements and presuppositions in order to keep them out of the study and keep the study unbiased. The study findings should be based on the co-researchers' experiences. This process is named Epoche – a term used by Husserl (Yuksel et al., 2016). Epoche requires a new point of view in order to avoid pre-judgements when the researcher is faced with a familiar object (Yuksel et al., 2016).

In analysing this data, I used two levels of phenomenological understanding:

- (a) Design - An organising analytical framework as suggested by Van Manen (2016);
- (b) Framework - Meaning making analytical framework as described by Finlay and Habermas.

This phenomenological study adopted the steps of data analysis as follows (Van Manen, 2016):

1. **Bracketing** - Bracketing is the process of identifying and holding in abeyance any preconceived beliefs and opinions that one may have about the phenomenon that is being researched. The researcher 'brackets out' (as in mathematics) the world and any presuppositions that he or she may have in an effort to confront the data in as pure a form as possible. This is the central component of phenomenological reduction - the isolation of the pure phenomenon versus what is already known of the phenomenon. Additionally, phenomenological reduction during data analysis also means that the researcher eliminates overlaps, repetitions and vague expressions, otherwise known as cleaning the raw data (Yuksel et al., 2016). This process too is referred to as phenomenological reduction.
2. **Intuiting** - Intuition occurs when the researcher remains open to the meaning attributed to the phenomenon by those who have experienced it. This process of

intuition results in a common understanding of phenomenon being studied. Intuition requires that the researcher creatively varies the data until such an understanding emerges. Intuiting requires that the researcher be totally immersed in the study and the phenomenon.

3. **Analysing** - Analysis involves such processes as coding (open, axial, and selective), categorising and making sense of the essential meanings of the phenomenon. As the researcher works/lives with the rich descriptive data, then common themes or essences begin to emerge. This stage of analysis basically involves total immersion for as long as it is needed in order to ensure both a pure and a thorough description of the phenomenon.

Through a phenomenological approach, a researcher is enabled to 'intrude' more into the study by making interpretations and linkages; relating the findings to previous research or commentary, to personal experiences or even to common-sense opinions; and developing tentative theories (Lester, 1999).

Particular steps in phenomenological data analysis by Lester (1999) include the steps below.

- Horizontalising- the researcher should see every statement as of equal value. Everything regarded irrelevant to the phenomenon, as well as repetitions and overlaps, should be removed. The remaining part of the data are called horizons.
- Reduction of experiences to the invariant constituents. This step involves clustering horizons into themes, using textural language.
- Thematic clustering to create core themes. Clustering and thematising the invariant constituents – the core themes of the phenomenon as experienced by the core researchers.
- Comparisons of multiple data sources to validate the invariant constituents, such as interviews and document analysis.
- Constructing of individual textual descriptions of participants. The researcher describes the experiences of the co-researchers using verbatim excerpts from their interview, and facilitate the understanding of the participants' experiences.

- Describing - At the descriptive stage, the researcher comes to understand and to define the phenomenon. The aim of this final step is to communicate and to offer distinct, critical description in written and verbal form (Lester, 1999).

In a qualitative research, the researcher becomes the instrument for data collection. It is up to the researcher to gather the words of the participants and to analyse them by looking for common themes, by focusing on the meaning of participants, and describing them using both expressive and persuasive language (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, I identified my personal stance with regard to my experience and background as a quality assurance practitioner to shape the interpretations through the coding and theme making process. According to Mohajan (2018), data analysis is actually a dynamic process weaving together recognition of emerging themes, identification of key ideas or units of meaning and material acquired from the literature. Each transcript is read thoroughly in its entirety. The aim at this stage is to use the data to think with, and to see whether any interesting patterns can be identified.

“These emerging patterns are identified by the researcher, because they appear to illuminate the research question and the literature reviewed. As the data analysis continues these patterns begin to be developed into a number of thematic categories of description. Each transcript is then examined closely for phrases, sentences or paragraphs, i.e., participant quotes, which stand out for the researcher as central to the broader area of interest. The qualitative research data are descriptive, in the form of interview notes, observation records, and documents; and data are analysed inductively. The study emphasizes on a holistic approach, and final outcomes. The sources of data are real-world situations, natural, non-manipulated settings” (Mohajan, 2018).

Additional to data analysis, done as per the phenomenological tenets discussed in the latter section, the study also needed a tool to analyse the findings. The tool would bring out critical aspects that would respond to the research question, and bring out the essential implications as may be contained in the stakeholders’ experiences of the implementation of EQA system in HE in Namibia. A good analysis tool is one with tenets that are complementary to the study’s chosen research paradigm, as well as the conceptual framework; and that ensures consistency in methodology and approach of the entire study. I borrowed some ideas of critical theory to argue the taken for granted aspects and the needed change.

A critical theoretical stance offers an appropriate framework for examining lived experiences of stakeholders in the implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia. The use of critical theory in this study is justified through the characteristics of the theory:

- Critical theory is grounded in the notions of justice and centring marginalised voices in order to promote emancipation, liberation and equity;
- Critical theory in its many forms, centres lived experiences in order to identify and locate the ways in which societies produce and preserve specific inequalities through social, cultural and economic systems (Martinez-Aleman, 2015:8);
- Critical practitioners attend to the differences between groups and seek to remedy underlying systemic inequities that produce differential outcomes;
- Critical enquiry encourages evaluators to account for implicit biases pertaining to one's identity. "all critical enquiry is grounded in lived experiences, therefore, power relations and social justice are central concerns" (Martinez-Aleman, 2015: 3).

Coding

Phenomenology, as a theoretical lens, serves as a base and guidance for the coding system. I read the transcripts repeatedly prior and during the coding process. The coding process was done several times, before the final three stages, namely; pre-coding, categorising, and theme emergence from the data. Although the coding stage indicated is only the pre-coding, there was much coding behind the scenes, before finally reaching the 'neat' stage of pre-coding. By the time I reached the pre-coding stage, much refinement was done. The codes were then further combined according to patterns to produce categories. The data was quite overwhelming, and so categorising was quite useful in the organisation of the data for it to be manageable. With the categories, which are largely underpinned by meaning and structure, themes emerged. A theme is a conglomerate of a particular and specific aspect as is discussed in the next section.

Themes

Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016) describe a theme in the context of qualitative analysis as an implicit topic that organises a group of repeating ideas, enabling the researcher to answer the study question(s). It contains codes (or categories) that have a

common point of reference and a high degree of generality unifying ideas regarding the subject of enquiry (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The experiences of the stakeholders with the implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia is described in three broad themes, and specifically under the different categories (under each theme). The categories can also be referred to as sub-themes, where details are provided, giving a much organised analysis.

It was a process of engaging the data in order to draw befitting and meaningful themes. It is a demanding process, but well worth the trouble. Through the process, I became ‘intimate’ with the data, after having to read every script a number of times, back and forth as I narrated/presented the data. The four themes that emerged from the data are also presented in Figure 4.1 in detail including the main phenomenon (far right of the diagram), the emerged themes from the phenomenon or study; as well as the different categories. Theme 1: *Contextual understanding of QA*; Theme 2: *A Fragmented QA system*; and Theme 3: *The Value of support and integrated planning*; Theme 4: *Communication*. The themes are supported with descriptive narrations and verbatim citations – the stakeholders’ direct voices.

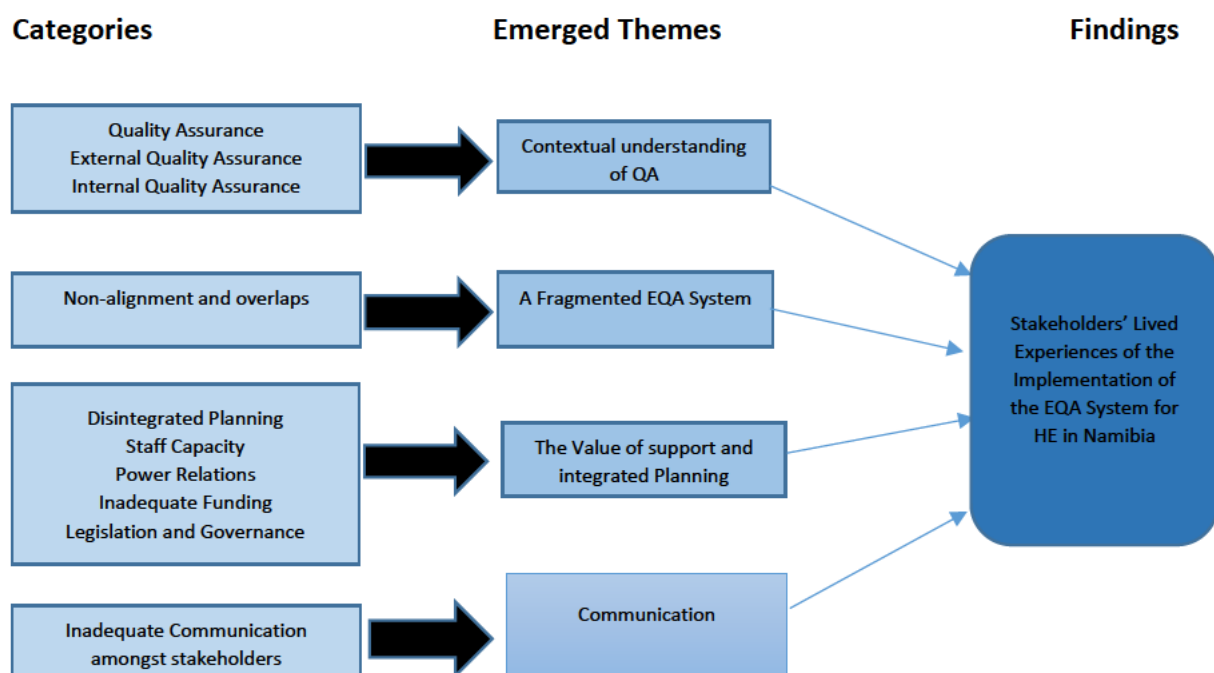


Figure 4. 1 Demonstration of Emerged Themes (source: Author's own design)

Data trustworthiness/data quality (validity)

The most applicable validity type for this phenomenology study is data trustworthiness. Lemon and Hayes (2020) observe that trustworthiness of a research study determines its worth. Since a qualitative research study does not use instruments with established metrics about validity and reliability, it was pertinent to address how I ensured that the findings of the study were credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. Trustworthiness is all about establishing these four components. Credibility is equated to internal validity with a focus on truth value that is embedded in the researcher's confidence of the findings based on the study phenomenon. (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Credibility of this study's findings was achieved by the use of multiple data sources through triangulation. Transferability or generalisability refers to how the research findings are applicable to other contexts; that is, similar, populations, and phenomena. According to Yuksel and Yildirim (2016), validity of qualitative research refers to the trustworthiness of the data interpretation, ensuring that the findings emerge from proper implementation of the research method. The context in which qualitative data collection occurs defines the data and contributes to the interpretation of the data. This study made use of thick descriptions to show that the findings of the study can be applicable to other contexts, circumstances, and situations. The thick descriptions were used to ensure transferability in data analysis (Lemon & Hayes, 2020)

Bracketing is another form of validity. According to Kim, Jun, Rhee and Wreen (2020), in Husserlian phenomenology, bracketing is used to achieve the meaning of the phenomenon through the first person bracketing, and first person eidetic reduction by the person who experience the phenomenon. Researchers can communicate verbatim interview transcripts to the core-researchers to verify their responses (Yuksel & Yilidrim, 2016). Researchers can also use their subjectivity statements (phenomenological reduction/bracketing statement) to measure validity, and to also see how their own preconceptions might have changed (or not) after analysing and engaging the data on participants' experiences.

Descriptive validity is another way of assuring quality data. This refers to the accurate recording of descriptive interviews. The raw data as obtained from the core-researchers should be accurate, in order to work towards accurate interpretations. Hence, for this study,

data has been presented descriptively as it came from the core-researchers, to aid accuracy interpretations.

Conformability refers to the degree of neutrality in the findings of study. This means that the findings are based on participants' responses and not on any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. In this study, I made sure that my bias does not skew the interpretation of what the participants said to fit a certain narrative. To establish conformability, I provided an audit trail, which highlights every step of data analysis that was made in order to provide a rationale for the decisions made.

Dependability refers to the extent to which the study could be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent. This means that if another researcher wants to replicate the study, they should have enough information from the research report to do so and obtain similar findings as the study did. Dependability includes the aspect of consistency. You need to check whether the analysis process is in line with the accepted standards for a particular design (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). In this study, I used inquiry audit in order to establish dependability. This required an outside person to review and examine the research process and the data analysis in order to ensure that the findings were consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

Ethical considerations

Research ethics have become a central issue in education and no research can be conducted without due regard to ethics. Ethics are closely associated with morals and involve embracing moral issues in the context of working with humans (Gregory, 2003) in (Ramrathan, Le Grange & Shawa, 2017).

Ethical considerations were prioritised and therefore discussed and agreed with the core-researchers in this study. Fleming and Zegwaard (2018) emphasise the importance of keeping the identity of participants confidential, including the protection of the participants' names by avoiding usage of self-identifying statements and information. "Participant confidentiality means the participants' identity are known to the researcher, but data was de-identified and the identity is kept confidential" (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018: 211). The study tried by all

means (as discussed in this section) to remain confidential and anonymous with the core-researchers.

Issues in this study that require ethics (namely: identities of the core-researchers, information shared and confidential documents) have been brought to the attention of the core-researchers, except for issues which might emerge only during the actual data production which I could not foresee. Of course many ethical issues only emerge during the investigation and they cannot always be pre-empted (Ramrathan et al., 2017). However, even during data production, no further sensitive issues have been picked up.

Positionality: Being a staff member of one of the public Universities in Namibia, I had to interview close stakeholders, and had to ensure they participated voluntarily and willingly - this was achieved by ensuring that I used no kind of power to force participation or to force the participants to say anything out of their own will. I also guaranteed and ensured confidentiality by committing through an assuring signed document.

The purpose of the study was explained and participants were assured of high level of confidentiality; and they were informed that their personal information was not going to be disclosed. Participation was on a voluntary basis and informed consent was obtained from each respondent (see appendix 2). The anonymity of all respondents was guaranteed and personal information was kept confidential at all times.

Informed consent: I informed all participants of their rights to participate only voluntarily and to say only what they felt they could say or were comfortable to say. I explained the process to the participants to ensure they were fully aware of what they were participating in, as well as explained how the research findings were going to be used. This was also a pre-requisite to obtaining ethical clearance.

Data dissemination: it is critical for me to disseminate this study data, especially for policy makers which is also the purpose of the study – to contribute to existing knowledge. However, I also had to ensure confidentiality of the core researchers during data dissemination. This was done by not revealing the core-researchers' identity details.

As a phenomenological study, based on interpretive paradigm, and involving description of data, I ensured true and evidence based presentation of data through transcripts and quotes

or direct voices of the core-researchers, while maintaining anonymity. Namibia, being a small country with an equally a small HE landscape, there is an ever present risk of core researchers being easily identifiable from the description of data, even though anonymity is maintained by all possible means, and Ramrathan et al. (2017) attests to anonymity being problematic in qualitative research. Even though names may not be divulged in qualitative studies, the nature of qualitative and interpretive paradigm studies with their thick descriptions, it is possible to identify research sites and participants (Ramrathan et al., 2017).

This study conformed to research ethics in such a manner that permission was sought from the heads of participating institutions (*see appendix 3*). Ethical clearance was sought from the UKZN Research Ethics Committee (*see appendix 1*). The data collection only commenced after I obtained ethical clearance and permission.

Chapter summary

This chapter focused on the study's research methodology, in terms of the theoretical framework as well as the research design. The chapter justified the choices of the research methodology aspects, arguing how particular aspects and their characteristics suited the study. Specifically, the chapter argued that interpretivist paradigm was the most suitable of the three major research paradigms, according to its theoretical and philosophical beliefs. Also provided in the chapter was the justification for the choice of the qualitative research approach and phenomenology, which was used in two ways; as a theoretical lens, and as a research design. In the next chapter, I present the study data.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION

Introduction

Little is known about the experiences of stakeholders in Namibia regarding the implementation of the EQA system. The void in previous literature and research studies triggered my interest to conduct a study on this phenomenon. To address the void in a scholarly manner, this phenomenological study presents the stakeholders' lived experiences of the implementation of external quality assurance system for higher education in Namibia, as emerged through the data production process. Ultimately, this study aimed to bring out the fundamental meanings and structure of the EQA system in Namibia, from a stakeholder perspective. However, this chapter focuses only on the descriptive presentation of the data.

This chapter presents data as produced from 14 unstructured, in-depth interviews, as well as 3 focus group (unstructured) interviews, and document analysis. As discussed in the previous chapter, themes were developed from the data, in alignment with the interpretive paradigm, theoretical framework, as well as the research questions. A purposeful sampling technique was used to identify 14 stakeholders with experiences of the phenomenon, as well as three focus group discussions. All the interviews yielded a wealth of data. I conducted every interview personally, which helped me to familiarise with the data.

To study how stakeholders' experienced the implementation of EQA in Namibia, I used the research framework to respond to five fundamental questions linked to the main research question:

1. How do the 3 national QAAs and Professional Bodies interpret and implement the Acts of Parliament that established them?
2. What are the stakeholders' experiences and understanding of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia?
3. How do stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia?
4. Why do the stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia, the way they do?

5. What are the lasting solutions to challenges experienced by stakeholders in the Namibian Higher Education Quality Assurance system?

With phenomenology as a theoretical lens, the study adopted a lifeworld approach. Phenomenological, lifeworld-based research is often described as research on lived human experiences. This is because the lifeworld speaks through lived experiences (Van Manen, 2016: 58). This chapter is a presentation of the findings of the human lived experiences of the implementation of the EQA system in Namibia. As a fundamental principle, the phenomenological approach demands that the researcher remains true to the facts (as they emerged from stakeholders in this case) and how they reveal themselves (Husserl, 1960). In order to present the data in the most authentic way, I audio-recorded all the interviews, and subsequently transcribed all the audios. As per the interpretive and phenomenological tenets, the idea was to treat each stakeholders' story as unique. I then read each transcript meticulously, in order to understand what data each transcript yielded. According to Finlay (2014), we immerse ourselves in the data, listen to the whole recorded interview and re-read the transcript several times to get a sense of the whole picture. After reading each transcript, the views and thoughts of that particular transcript were bracketed, to avoid direct influence on the next transcript; a process called phenomenological reduction. Only after the completion of phenomenological reduction, could specific investigations begin (Whiting, 2001). As I created meaningful, logical analysis by studying the transcripts individually, I also analysed and communicated all transcripts holistically. The study's method of data analysis through phenomenology and the interpretivist paradigm involved descriptive presentation of the findings.

Summary of participants

The study focused on participants (stakeholders) from institutions closely involved with the implementation of EQA in the country. The institutions were the three quality assurance agencies (NCHE; NQA and NTA); the three higher education institutions with a university status (UNAM; NUST; and IUM), and the professional bodies (ICAN and HPCNA). From these

institutions, the individual stakeholders interviewed were fourteen, and the focus groups three.

While phenomenology prefers a lower number of interviewees, this study's number was justified by the fact that the phenomenon required sufficient representation of critical stakeholders involved in the implementation of EQA in order to increase the validity and quality of the findings. The study reveals the value that stakeholders hold of QA, in terms of both EQA and IQA. The interviews, as a method of data production, enabled me to enquire in-depth from the participants' experiences, which further enabled the production of rich data.

To maintain confidentiality, given the small population of the study, the presentation of data does not reveal the identities or their particular places of representation. Each institution and group is however given a designation as used in data presentation for ease of reference.

Table 5.1 Summary of participants

Organisation/Institution	Interview Type	Number of participants
Quality Assurance Agencies	Individual unstructured interviews	
National Council for Higher Education – QAA1		2
Namibia Qualifications Authority – QAA2		2
Namibia Training Authority – QAA3		2
Higher Education Institutions		
University of Namibia – University1		2
Namibia University of Science and Technology – University2		2
International University of Management – University3		2
Professional Bodies		
Institute of Chartered Accountants in Namibia PB1		1
Health Professions Council of Namibia – PB2		1
Higher Education Institutions		

University of Namibia – FG1	Focused group discussions (unstructured)	7
Namibia University of Science and Technology – FG2		5
International University of Management – FG3		5

Data presentation as per emerged themes

Theme 1: Contextual understanding of QA

Getting the stakeholders' experiences on the aspects of quality assurance, external quality assurance and internal quality assurance helped me to put the experiences into perspective. Their views of what they understood in terms of these QA aspects also painted a picture of what their expectations were for the implementation process. My view is that, how people understand the concepts determines their concomitant expectations, in terms of implementation. Participants explained or defined QA in general, and EQA and IQA in context as they experienced these constructs specially.

Quality Assurance

One of the stakeholders defined QA by qualifying it as originally a concept that started in industry. The stakeholder stated:

...Quality assurance itself is not a higher education concept, as you might know, it started in the industries. To understand the functions of quality assurance in higher education, we must understand the background why it was, the rationale behind having it in higher education, and where it is coming from (University 2, participant 1).

The same stakeholder stated that QA in HE was mainly an accountability tool for HEIs by government.

The stakeholder expressed that:

...in a nutshell about quality assurance in higher education...is ensuring that higher education institutions are accountable towards their mission, they are accountable towards the funding they receive... (University 2, participant 1).

Another stakeholder described accountability by stating that:

...Quality assurance system in terms of the national, is a system to ensure conformity of our higher education system, the institutions and the programmes that are to be offered by those institutions in such a way that they conform to the set standards and that they are responsive to the national needs and those national needs then cascaded to the institutional units within the institutions (QAA 1, participant 1).

Still in terms of accountability, another stakeholder described QA by saying:

Quality assurance are the measures that are put in place to ensure that the norms and standards for any particular programme (be it in Namibia or any other place) are met in terms of the curriculum, the delivery, who delivers it, and the level it is being delivered (University 2, participant 2).

Quality assurance has to do with the measures that the institutions put in place to make sure that the institution becomes accountable...that it is focusing on improving to make sure that the education that the students are receiving is of good standing, it is of value. Value addition (University 2, participant 1).

The accountability aspect was mainly attributed to massification of HE. The view was that, with massification, the question of quality assurance came into being, and that before QA, everyone was providing education without any standards in place for regulating purposes. The stakeholder specifically posited that:

...with the massification of higher education, the government started looking at how best to fund higher education. Funding higher education by then was accountability from the institutions. They didn't know what was going on, they did not know what was taught in higher education institutions, so higher education institutions could do whatever they did and the government had no input; not even in the programme, and that is how they introduced most of the systems that we now call quality assurance system - because they needed accountability from the higher education institutions (University2, participant 1).

Firstly, it is an eye opening process; secondly, it's a process that keeps you in check; and thirdly, it is a process that holds you accountable (University1, participant 2).

The notion of QA has been associated with meeting standards and keeping the standards that are set. This stakeholder stated:

Quality assurance is really about meeting the standards that we have placed and yeah! It is just about keeping those standards. I really think that in general, that is what it is about (PB2, participant 1).

Quality assurance in Namibia, though it is new, I may say that it is at baby stage and it is maturing, because it is benchmarked with very high standards internationally (University 2, participant 2).

Another stakeholder from one of the HEIs noted that:

Quality assurance processes for programmes firstly, is to ensure that whatever we have are [sic] comparable and it follows systemic processes. And those processes really need to be of quality (University1, participant 2).

Some of the participants described QA as a broad concept that tends to contain a lot of aspects that lead to quality. In terms of the higher education context, the stakeholders defined QA as a process that seeks to ensure quality, but is inclusive of aspects such as institutional processes and management strategies.

Well...it is a broad concept, and it means you must strive for quality at each aspect of the higher education field...for instance, right from the beginning, all your processes and management strategies, and your everything actually that you do, must be according to standard- acceptable standards. Starting from all your policies and all your activities and basically everything (University3, participant 2).

In line with QA being described as a broad concept, others have defined QA as subjective, having diverse opinions. One participant stated that:

...quality assurance is, in a lot of cases, very subjective, and I am sure you got a lot of opinions. From a national perspective, I think about the collective effort that, as a country, is being promoted to ensure that there is excellence in education and training... (QAA3, participant 2).

One stakeholder's understanding of QA was as a means of connecting the world. The thinking was that the set standards defining quality should not only be local, but universal.

I think quality assurance in higher education is crucial in the sense that university education is universal, which means that it is not localised, and I think quality assurance are the measures that are put in place to ensure that the norms and standards for any particular programme, be it in Namibia or any other place...that the norms and standards are met in terms of the curriculum, the delivery, who delivers it, the level at which it is being delivered (University2, participant 2).

Some stakeholders viewed QA as quality improvement and quality enhancement. One stakeholder expressed this view thus:

...quality assurance always is really about quality improvement, it is an ongoing quality improvement programme... (PB1, Participant 1).

The same stakeholder further said:

My advice is, do not see the process as a pass or fail. All of us tend to think of a pass or fail. Now, if one is in that mind-set, it is sometimes easy to fall into a negative attitude towards the process. Avoid the pass or fail mentality; make sure that the whole institution has recognised that it is quality improvement. Quality enhancement (PB1, Participant 1).

According to one of the stakeholders, QA was also necessitated by the apartheid history of the country, where HE was mainly for the elite. Government saw the need to establish QAAs to spearhead EQA.

By then, only some PBs existed, without the QAAs ...the professional bodies had all the power to decide who could become an engineer, who could become a chartered accountant and so on...and that is why you find that there were only a few black CAs, a few black engineers, and so on. So, that is part of the history, I think it was a lot of misinterpretation and abuse of the power of the mandates (University2, participant 1).

It was said that QA should aim to ensure that HEIs add value to economic development, as the main function of higher education – to contribute to socio-economic development. According to one stakeholder, much higher education funding in Namibia in particular, comes directly from the government or the state.

The key question that would be addressed by QA is: what is the value addition that higher education institutions are making towards economic development? (University2, participant 1).

Through the focus group interviews, students from the third group saw QA as:

Meeting standards, getting a quality qualification, and producing employable graduates (FG3).

QA is when standards in the university are high (FG1).

When University has quality and qualified lecturers and we have all infrastructure that we need (FG2).

The above data on QA came from individual stakeholders through unstructured interviews. It is interesting to see the data on this same aspect (QA) from the document analysis.

According to the NCHE *Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Namibia*, QA is described as:

An umbrella term which includes various models for ensuring quality, including programme accreditation, institutional audit, institutional accreditation etc.

The NQA regulations for NQF describe QA as:

Processes leading to the development of a new or revised qualification [which] must involve rigorous internal quality assurance processes by the qualification developer. These internal processes may be inclusive of persons or organisations external to the qualification developer.

The NUST quality management framework highlights three aspects in the context of their QA, namely – improvement orientation, accountability, as well as compliance. The framework further describes quality assurance as:

Referring to the process of ensuring that an institution develops, implements and maintains the quality of its provisions through continuous evaluation and improvement. It refers to the evaluation or assessment of the extent to which the institution (or part of the institution) is delivering on its promises or goals.

According to the UNAM QA policy, QA is described as:

An all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of higher education system, institutions or programmes.

According to the IUM quality assurance and management policy, it is:

A continuous process of establishing and developing policies, procedure and guidelines for evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving) the quality of the institution and its programmes through (internal and external) regulatory mechanisms for accountability and improvement, and providing information and judgement based on an agreed and consistent process with well-established standards that are sustained by a strong quality culture (IIEO-UNESCO: 2011).

External Quality Assurance

Stakeholders mainly discussed the aspect of EQA within the national context. Many described EQA as made up of the legal frameworks, policies, structures, and the processes. Some described EQA as the three quality assurance agencies involved in external quality assurance of training providers in the country, namely; the Namibia Qualifications Authority, Namibia Training Authority, and the National Council for Higher Education.

Primarily, one looks at the statutory regulators and that would be the NQA, NTA, and NCHE taking responsibility for the quality. The qualifications framework on the placement based on the content description placement of qualifications, so that is where we have NQA and we the have NTA at the lower end of the framework...and then obviously NCHE as your statutory regulator of higher education quality – they look at institutional capacity and look at the delivery of the qualifications (PB1, participant 1).

We have three quality assurance agencies who are involved in external assurance of training providers in Namibia. The Namibian Qualifications Authority is one; the National Training Authority responsible for vocational training; and the national council for higher education which is responsible for programme accreditation and registration for institutions for higher learning. NQA also being responsible for accreditation and as well as the national qualifications framework. Those are the three institutions involved in external quality assurance (QAA2, participant 1).

National quality assurance system [is] housed by three quality assurance bodies or agencies that is National Council for Higher Education, Namibia Qualifications Authority, and the National Training Authority. All three are

charged with different mandates, but you find also some mandates that are overlapping... (University1, participant 1).

We have three sister organisations that are really operating in that space, sort of taking the lead in Namibia (QAA3, participant 1).

Well, it (EQA) is a good experience, I mean it is tough to go through all that. It is always a learning experience. Always different viewpoints - which is good – makes you think. And I would also say it is good, because it keeps you up to a certain standard...things you must look at, which you probably wouldn't have looked. I wouldn't say this is a negative thing (University3, participant 2).

According to the stakeholders from the unstructured individual interviews, these were the organisations responsible for promoting the implementation of EQA.

One of the stakeholders described EQA in Namibia, characterised by the three regulatory authorities as being *shaky*.

The external quality assurance for higher education in Namibia is shaky (University3, participant 1).

In line with that, other stakeholder's view on Namibian EQA was that:

It would be difficult to talk about a complete EQA system, as the three agencies do not work together as a system; they work in silos (University2, participant 1).

The same stakeholder went further to acknowledge and admit that in their experiences, EQA was working to some extent.

To some extent, it (EQA) is working very much in my experiences, because it is providing direction; it is working because it is providing uniformity; it is working because it is providing consistency; it is working because it is providing the relevance of higher education across the spectrum (University 2, participant 1).

In the same vein, another stakeholder acknowledged that there were improvements in the way higher education was co-ordinated. Specifically, the stakeholder stated:

We have seen some improvements in the way in which higher education is coordinated, the level of understanding about higher education and qualifications, and we have also seen some structural improvements because of quality assurance activities in terms of structuring higher education. I can give an example of when the national qualifications framework before it was

implemented, anyone could come up with qualification that they feel they want to offer (University1, participant 1).

An example of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was used to demonstrate the benefits of EQA. Stakeholders indicated that EQA brought with it the benefit of international recognition of the national programmes or qualification, easing the credit transfer process.

...programmes that are accredited, once they are accredited at local [sic], this will also improve in terms of international recognition of the programmes and to make it easy for credit transfer and recognition in other countries (University1, participant 1).

The focus group discussions indicated that they did not know much about EQA, with only a few having opinions like:

It is those authorities from outside like NQA and NCHE, who come to do accreditation and see that the curriculum is good (FG3).

Students expressed in terms of EQA:

...EQA is bodies like NQA who deal with quality of universities in the country... (FG1)

It is the government and other bodies outside the Universities... (FG2)

NCHE and NQA are our EQA bodies. They check to make sure that the Universities in Namibia are performing and that the quality is good (FG3).

The UNAM QA policy described EQA as:

The process whereby a specialised agency collects data, information, and evidence about an institution, a particular unit of a given institution, or a core activity of an institution, in order to make a statement about its quality.

Through document analysis, the NCHE system document referred to EQA as:

...A demand for greater accountability and efficiency in the use of public funds, mass participation in relation to shrinking resources, greater stakeholder scrutiny of education and training processes, mobility of students, and cross border education, due to the internalisation of higher education and the changes brought about by information and communication technology, and the

concomitant need for explanation and recognition of standards in different countries.

Internal Quality Assurance

Stakeholders also expressed their positions with regard to the aspect of IQA. All stakeholders from the HEIs, QAAs, and PBs expressed an understanding of the importance of IQA, and why it needed to take first place. However, there were challenges that stakeholders noted which seemed to shifted IQA to the background.

One of the biggest challenges that I have experienced on [sic] the implementation of this quality assurance system, especially the one from the NCHE, is the fact that the internal quality assurance is kind of shifting to the background because there is so much required in higher education...the preparation time is not there to do internal QA...this is because, it is almost like the government is the authority wanting these programmes and you need to stop what you are doing to accommodate what they are doing. That is how I experienced it... (University2, participant 1).

We need more support and that support is to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions quality assurance systems internally... (university1, participant 1).

The primary responsibility for quality assurance or for quality specifically lies with institutions themselves. It is on that basis that higher education institutions established internal quality assurance mechanisms or systems. ...we have a centre for quality assurance and management, to coordinate internal quality assurance activities (University1, participant 1).

I think internally, without necessarily waiting at the end for the outcome response from our accreditation body, I think within, we should be able to do the quality assurance, but CEQUAM needs really to be strengthened in order to be able to do such (University1, participant 2).

Staff members at HEIs were said to be at different levels of understanding QA matters, depending on how long they had been with the institution. Staff members at HEIs were also said to have different attitudes when it came to implementing QA, or IQA in particular. One of the QAAs expressed an opinion with regards to internal QA of the agency as a great determinant of the agency's work in monitoring quality in the HEIs. That further emphasised

the need to strengthen IQA at the agency as a priority before the agency is able to monitor quality in HEIs.

Some of the examples from stakeholders on this point were as follows:

At institutional level, I want to see an activity or a change that internal quality assurance systems are also capacitated...the people leading, the practitioners in quality assurance. The national agencies may also take a lead in terms of capacitating internal quality assurance systems (University1, participant 1).

... (as a QAA) ...we also have to meet some standards of quality, because, only when you meet the standards in terms of capacity; capacity in terms of quantity and quality, and also standards in terms of your operations in the system; that you are also able to coordinate and assure quality of other institutions (QAA1, participant 1).

...when we go there (at HEIs) for accreditation of audit, we should not see reports and say IQA is not up to standard (QAA1, participant 2).

Similarly, a number of stakeholders from the QAA noted the different levels of understanding in the HEIs, as far as IQA was concerned. The staff at HEIs were said to be at different levels of understanding, accepting and practicing QA within their respective HEIs. The stakeholders expressed that many staff at HEIs were practising quality and quality assurance as mere compliance.

While the understanding is good within the (QA) units, the faculties are not there yet (QAA1, participant 2).

They put quality management systems in place to ensure that they have ticked the box. So, for them it is not a living process that contributes towards the quality oriented goals of the institution...it is we have done it, because regulators require us to do it (QAA3, participant 2).

In the focus group discussions, students stated that:

We should have the correct infrastructure in place, such as labs (FG3).

...IQA is making sure that everything in the university is well run, and that our voices as students are heard, and all things in the university is of quality (FG2).

...quality institution, with good processes and well qualified staff... (FG1).

Theme 2: A Fragmented EQA system

This theme demonstrates how participants experienced the implementation of the EQA system. The participants expressed themselves in terms of the different aspects of EQA, how EQA was practiced and how it was faring, and what their experiences were.

Non-alignment and overlaps

Stakeholders expressed that the EQA system was characterised by non-aligned and/or overlapping and fragmented frameworks. According to the stakeholders, this matter (non-alignment and overlaps) was a national topical issue amongst the HE stakeholders, which had been around for a couple of years, but to date, the problem was not yet solved.

...overlaps, fragmentation of the QA systems, non-alignment of activities which have become a topical issue and has been around for a couple of years now (University1, participant 1).

Actual implementation indicated we do things in a very fragmented manner. We don't think of a system as a whole. We do not think of the system as a whole, we do not think of quality from the start, we do not think of quality to the end... (QAA3, participant 2).

A lot of consultations have been done in many cases the National Council for Higher Education has had consultants to look into this matter and NQA also has consultancies for example two or three times. The Ministry of Higher Education is in the process- they did a lot of benchmarking. Benchmarking was done two times or three. The Ministry also had what they call UNESCO scoping study. It looked into the matter of overlaps and a committee was established between the three agencies. The Ministry of the Minister needs to pronounce herself on the way forward (QAA2, participant 1).

We started the conversation with our line Ministry – the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation to find lasting solutions within the country, in terms of doing away with these overlapping mandates and making sure there is clarity in the system as to which body or bodies will be responsible for registration of institutions, be it vocational education or higher education, and which bodies will be responsible for accreditation (QAA3, participant 1).

The discussion started way back. We had a retreat...that was 2013, to look at the issues of overlapping functions. It is something that is coming a long way, even before I joined here (QAA2, participant 2).

The overlaps were also seen as stemming from the establishing mandates/Acts. This, according to the stakeholders, was also the reason why it was a complex process to amend the Acts which, at the same time, for them would also be the ultimate solution to overcome the overlaps and encourage alignment.

The overlaps stem from the legislation that is in place. Unfortunately, the three pieces of legislation speak to this particular area of quality assurance which seems to be common amongst all three entities, primarily we call it accreditation. So, the three quality assurance bodies all have the mandate of accreditation within their establishing Acts (QAA3, participant 2).

I am not sure how consultation was done, when Acts were developed, but especially on the accreditation. When I take the NQA and the NTA, both are responsible for accreditation of vocational education training providers (QAA2, Participant 1).

The Namibia Qualifications Authority, looking at accreditation of institutions and programmes, but then also responsible for the administration of the national qualifications in the country. The interesting scenario we have in Namibia at the moment is that the Namibia Training Authority, as part of our training Act, is also mandated to quality assure institutions and bodies that operate particularly in the vocational education training space. And then you have the National Council for Higher Education, that is also mandated to quality assure programmes and institutions in the higher education space (QAA3, participant 1).

...We believe these QA bodies are established by Acts, and we believe that they are operating according to the Acts... (FG3)

According to this stakeholder, the overlaps were not only in the EQA frameworks:

I think often where it becomes a bit challenging for us is a country with providers that offer both higher education and vocational education and training. So there are overlaps. It does create challenges, systemic that it...for institutions, be it in the tertiary, higher education space or vocational education training space (QAA3, participant 1).

...ultimately, for us to do away with these overlaps in terms of mandates, we need to amend the establishing Acts (QAA3, participant 1).

Get rid of those overlaps between the two legislative systems, to remove the overlaps between NQA and NCHE...because that is the legal level and that legal framework also affects the policy. There is a bottle neck there. The roles and responsibilities of the NQA and NCHE are overlapping, where higher education is concerned. Each Act must be reviewed separately to remove some things which are not working well and which are obsolete (University 3, participant 1).

After asking the students if they were aware of overlaps:

...if there are overlaps, we just want the institutions to work well together (FG1).

...the institutions should work according to their mandates. Each one (FG2).

...It is good if our institutions just work together to make sure there is quality in universities (FG3).

According to the stakeholders, the roles of the three agencies entrusted with EQA were non-aligned and overlapping. One of the stakeholders from the QAAs shared that, a study revealed that the overlaps between two QAAs (NTA and NQA) were about 85% (of overlapping functions).

...in fact, there was a recent study that was done in 2014/2015, that indicated that there is 85% overlap between the standard that NTA has and the standard the NQA has. So, in essence, we managed to close the loophole, but in doing so, we catalysed a stage, created more problems and brought challenges for ourselves. So, in as much as we have tried to deal with the challenges that are there, the fact is, until we go back and change the legislation from where our mandates come from, we are not going to be able to resolve this issue within a very short time (QAA3, participant 2).

The overlaps were reported as wasting resources in the higher education sector where, like in many other sectors, resources were dwindling. For instance, from the QAAs, there were too many separate reviews done at different times for the same purpose – QA. According to one of the stakeholders:

(Overlaps) can be costly for the country. It is very costly because of the aspect of redundancy of programmes of higher education institutions after they have been accredited (University2, participant 1).

The overlapping mandates are not working. They need to be reviewed so that activities are aligned. How these are going to be reviewed, that is yet to be known, but we have expressed that need. It is unfortunate that it seems that

our ideas are falling on deaf ears because we don't see much progress for quite some time now...in terms of revisiting and aligning the system to make it more effective and more efficient (University1, participant 1).

It is unfortunate that, to review the system it is at political level, thus institutions may initiate, but it will take the political will to realise this (University1, participant 1).

It was said that, as a result of the overlaps and non-aligned functions, HEIs were frustrated and academics were complaining that they were left with no time to concentrate on equally important activities. A stakeholder noted that:

... (Overlaps cause) review fatigue amongst academics...the reviews are just too many, and these exercises, they happen at different times, and they are not aligned. Academics complain that they are left with no time to concentrate on equally important activities like teaching, research and community engagement (University1, participant 1).

When you speak to the institutions, they would clearly share some of the frustrations that they are currently having in terms of these overlapping mandates...the fact that they have to meet similar requirements from an accreditation or quality assurance perspective (QAA3, participant 1).

We have tried to find a way of working together with the other two quality assurance agencies. It has not necessarily been easy. We have had agreement in respect to which entity is going to look at which particular area, but in my opinion, that has not worked very well for us, because in some instances, we always find ourselves sort of clashing and having a very similar area of operation; and that has not really created a good environment, or rather conducive environment (QAA3, participant 2).

Due to the non-alignment and non-compulsory aspect of the accreditation framework, the value of accreditation was compromised. For example:

Accreditation is not compulsory, meaning that alongside with programmes that are accredited, there are programmes that are not accredited, which compromises quality (University1, participant 1).

...because the Act of the NQA, actually simply encourages institutions to pursue accreditation, they are not compelled to. Legally, they are not compelled and a lot of them opted not to pursue that avenue (QAA3, participant 1).

We realised that the NQA Act and the regulations actually or more specifically the Act, says the training providers may apply for accreditation. So, from a technical legislative basis, it means that if an entity felt they wanted to apply for accreditation, they could...they are not compelled to do that (QAA3, participant 2).

The interesting thing which, to me, should not be is that accreditation by NCHE is actually optional. I do not know if you are aware of that? You have to interrogate that. It should not be. It should be compulsory. Programme accreditation is what we ask for if a student or anybody from another country comes here and presents his qualification (University2, participant 2).

The compromise was said to also be a result of accreditation backlog:

We have realised that the backlog is huge and we are now in the process of thinking whether we should rather stick to the new programmes, and help institutions to build up their capacity- quality assurance capacity, so that they can look at their own programmes (QAA1, participant 2).

Some of the EQA activities, namely registration of qualifications on the framework, as well as accreditation, were said to be cyclic. However, these two activities had different durations and they were done at different times uncoordinated, without the two cycles ever running parallel. This situation was said to result in one cycle lapsing before the other, i.e. the NQF cycle which is five years lapses, and the NCHE accreditation cycle which is six years would still be valid. Therefore, it was proposed that programmes should first be registered on the NQF, before accreditation by NCHE. For NQA, which is also mandated with accreditation, the arrangement was that they accredit private HEIs, and their accreditation duration is three years.

Institutions are accredited for three years, while their programmes are registered on the NQF for five years. Come the third year, the institution and its programmes' accreditation expires, while the programmes are still valid on the framework (University1, participant 1).

NQA registers our qualifications on the NQF for 3 years, ok. And NQA accredits the same qualification for five years ...then we have to review the qualification every two years... (university3, participant 1).

The EQA for higher education in Namibia is still shaky. That is right, I am saying it is shaky. There are grey areas because there is no clear definition between

the roles of the NQA and NCHE. There are overlaps, and so there has to be some amendments to the legal framework (University3, participant 1).

Some of the stakeholders narrated how the law was clear in some instances, but wrongly implemented. The NCHE and NQA laws were said to be directed by their respective Acts.

According to this stakeholder:

The law of higher education says anybody can offer private higher education, establish an institution, and offer private programmes, but before doing so, they must be registered. The law of qualifications says, institutions should be accredited, and the programme should also be registered on the qualifications framework. Now the procedure or the law of the qualifications require such processes to be carried out when the institution is already in operation, because it cannot be carried out in a vacuum. They must be operating for them to be accredited and the programmes to be reviewed and to be registered (QAA1, participant 1).

The stakeholder further noted that:

I do not find it in writing, perhaps it was a gentleman's agreement. The procedures right now are that institutions should be accredited, first before they are registered (before they start operating). At the same time, we are sensitising the public not to register at unaccredited institutions. We are doing it the other way round, and we are causing pressure on the institutions (QAA1, participant 1).

Another stakeholder expressed a similar view, stating that there was inconsistency and lack of clarity in the design and implementation of the NQA system.

NQA advertises everywhere....They tell the public not to register at unaccredited institutions, and to not enrol for unaccredited programmes. Yet, when NQA come for accreditation at the institution, they want to find the students, the lecturers, classrooms, and library books etc...so there is a contradiction there (University3, participant 1).

The above quotes also indicated a delay (caused by the conflicting procedures and misunderstood laws), and the wasting of resources. For example:

...we are an open market system that responds to demand and supply. A private institution is, in essence, a business. The business responds to what is in demand in the market, i.e. there is a mine that is opening up, and this private institution might just want to offer a certificate of six months to re-train people, maybe in the mining sector or to be ready for what is coming up. Now, it takes them not

less than a year to go through these systems of our accreditation, registration, registration of qualifications...whatever. By the time we are done with them, they no longer need this business product that they thought they would benefit from...so this is the pain we are causing the beneficiaries... (QAA1, participant 1).

This is the pain we are causing the beneficiaries. The way how we are doing things now, we are just hurting the beneficiaries, when we are supposed to make life easier for them (QAA1, participant 1).

The main challenge is, the law says NCHE is established to promote quality assurance in higher education. The integrity now of that law and that mandate is at stake because, if you are unable to promote quality in such a way that really helps your beneficiaries, the trust and the confidence of your beneficiaries in your work will drop to zero (QAA1, participant 1).

...our clients, which are the training providers in many cases they are confused. They also complain because in order to prepare for external audit, you will have to put in resource, human, sweat and money. And they really complain that this week or this month is the NCHE or that. After a while is NTA, and it is having an impact on their resources. And sometimes they are confused. Should we go for registration first, or where do we go? (QAA2, participant 1).

The stakeholders also observed that there were overlaps between what the QAAs were doing and what the PBs do. This is said to somehow hide behind the terminology used by PBs. In essence, PBs were said to, at times, claim to accredit schools.

you will find that a programme in 'that school' has just gone through accreditation by a PB, and in a month or two, its NCHE wanting to take the same programme through the accreditation process. It is another overlap that leads to apathy and review fatigue, and wastage of resources and time (University1, participant 1).

...we all work with HEIs and we heard already from the institutions that sometimes you have NCHE going there and having inspection then the week after we go there and the inspections are tiresome. Sometimes we (and NCHE) overlap with some of the functions that we are doing or some of the things that we say, especially when it comes to the implementation of the programmes (PB2, participant 1).

At the end, both issue certificates of having gone through the process of quality assurance successfully.

(Implementing EQA)... is very exhausting. You got many people to please (University3, participant 2).

According to stakeholders from one of the PBs, joint work/accreditation is one way of eliminating overlaps and saving resources. Ultimately, the joint effort makes the exercise a much more robust process. The head of this professional body observed that:

...In pursuing collaboration on accreditation with NCHE, the first thing the institute did was to work with NCHE and create a combined quality assurance accreditation manual taking the professional body expertise in this field and taking the expertise of the NCHE. Where there was overlap, eliminating the overlap and, at the same time, expanding the scope of the accreditation and Nangula...that was a tremendous breakthrough! That was really a win-win for the HEI, the PB, and the QAA (PB1, participant 1).

With regards to the overlapping mandate between the NQA and NCHE, the HE Act, No 26 of 2003, states:

NCHE must accredit, with the concurrence of the Namibia Qualifications Authority, programmes of higher education, provided at higher education institutions.

Monitor the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions.

The VET Act, No 1 of 2008 states:

The NTA, in respect of vocational education and training and subject to the policies and procedures determined by the Namibia Qualifications Authority, may – accredit education and training providers and programmes; register assessors, conduct assessments, including the recognition of prior learning and conduct quality audits; issue award and certificates.

In relation to accreditation which is the overlapping framework, The NQA Act, No 29 of 1996 states:

NQA accredits persons, institutions and organisations providing education and courses of instruction and training....

The stakeholders felt that three quality assurance agencies were too many.

When it comes to National agencies in my view, they are just too many for a small Namibian higher education system where you only have two public

universities, one private university and many small colleges (University1, participant 1).

Theme 3: The Value of support and integrated planning

This theme speaks to the aspects that shaped the experiences of the stakeholders. Stakeholders indicated that they experienced the EQA system the way they did because of the aspects contained in this theme. The significance of this theme is to describe reasons why stakeholders think they experienced the system in the way that they did.

Disintegrated planning

All stakeholders spoke highly about the need for an integrated EQA system. Equally, all stakeholders attributed the EQA failure pockets to lack of integration in the frameworks within the EQA system. Some referred to QAAs working in silos in the process of implementing EQA.

I come from a strong belief in integrated planning. This integrated planning is something that the country has explored and intensively interrogated during the drafting of our national vision that for us as a country to prosper, we need to collaborate with each other, within government in between government and other institutions (QAA1, participant 1).

It would be quite difficult to talk about a complete system, because the three (QAAs) don't work as a complete system. They all work in silos (University2, participant 1).

What they do not realise is that, in a lot of instances, a lot of these things are interlinked. All of these activities are interlinked to another activity, so you cannot necessarily look at quality assurance selectively. You need to look at quality assurance holistically (QAA3, participant 2).

One of the participants explained that stakeholders show lack of confidence in integrated planning, despite the country's stand on the matter.

We still have a long way to go in terms of integrated planning. There are some indications that institutions, especially government statutory bodies such as the external quality assurance bodies are [showing] some signs of wanting to collaborate in writing, but in practice, it is impossible (QAA1, participant 1).

From document analysis, with regards to cooperation in QA matters and amongst QA stakeholders, the NCHE quality assurance system for higher education institutions in Namibia notes that:

NCHE performs its programme accreditation and institutional audit responsibilities with due regard to the legislative responsibilities of other stakeholders in quality assurance in higher education. It seeks to establish efficient communication channels and models of cooperation with these stakeholders to streamline the accreditation process, and minimise the impact on institutions (NCHE QA system, 2009).

With the overlapping mandates, one of the QAAs indicated successful collaboration with one of the professional bodies, specifically a joint accreditation that involved and resulted in a co-developed accreditation manual. The stakeholder said:

I was fortunate to forge a partnership with one professional body, fortunately this professional body comes from the same school of thought as I am, so, it was effortless to make this integrated planning approach possible (QAA1, participant 1).

The same stakeholder indicated that the QA system has emphasised the need for communication amongst stakeholders in the system:

the quality assurance system specifically says one needs to collaborate with others, and I understand that background...because the target is the same, the beneficiaries are the same, the expected output is the same, it is the same country we are serving, it is the same resources we are using...so then, why not pursue an integrated approach so that things can be better, and we save a lot of resources (QAA1, participant 1)

Another participant shared that one of the government reform mechanisms was business process re-engineering, where each institution of government was supposed to review processes and demonstrate how alignment can be done, so that processes are not protracted and they are responsive to the needs of the citizens. Each accounting officer was responsible for such a project as part of their performance agreement. The accounting officer in the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation was said to have chosen the alignment or re-alignment of QA processes, and did this through a committee.

This committee only pops up when the PS is supposed to report on his performance agreement. If he is to report tomorrow, then immediately the

committee must meet. If the reporting meeting is postponed, then so is his interest in this committee. So there are those efforts, but the foundation on which they are laid is very weak (QAA1, participant 1).

The implementers of the system (HEIs) cited the fragmentation and overlaps as problematic. What is even more problematic for them was the working in silos of the agencies. The silo work is said to have led the schedules of the three bodies to never coincide. This process cost institutions, the government and the country at large. Even worse, the silo work at times rendered accreditation redundant.

We have a number of programmes that have been accredited, but now they are redundant because they are phased out according to the schedule on the qualifications framework. That is one challenge we have as stakeholders (University2, participant 1).

The same stakeholder also posed a question in the same regard:

What are the institutions going to do with the results of their accreditation if the programmes are phased out? (University2, participant 1).

The lack of integrated planning was observed as stemming from non-coordinated activities between QAAs. Agencies were said to carry out their activities in silos. Stakeholders expressed that integrated planning amongst the QAAs and PBs did not happen, and their schedules did not speak to each other; leaving the HEIs frustrated and resulting in wastage of resources.

There is no unity in terms of what they (EQA bodies) do, so that is costly in the first place, for the institution (University2, participant 1).

According to the stakeholders, there is a discrepancy between PBs requirements and the NQA requirements, in terms of the required programme credits. An example was provided:

The interesting thing is that there is a discrepancy between the professional body's requirements and NQA requirements for a level 8 degree. As for a level 8 degree, NQA requires 480 at honours level. BEng as we call it. The professional body requires 560 credits (University2, participant 2).

Stakeholders from the HEIs expressed the need for a conversation amongst all the bodies involved in EQA, where they should hold dialogues on integrated planning. It was proposed

that the dialogue begin with these different bodies understanding each other's roles, cutting out the overlaps and implementing the EQA system without burdening the HEIs.

The external role players, if they can put together an integrated system, where they understand each other's work, and then just come and speak the same language...this has also caused a lot of confusion (University2, participant 1).

Some stakeholders attributed the lack of integrated planning to a lack of common values and common vision on the matter, amongst the stakeholders. One of the stakeholders from one of the QAAs said:

I have observed collaboration between some institutions, but I think it would be better maybe we need to go [sic] (I don't know, maybe I can call it a drawing board), but we need to come together and map together the vision or the purpose why there is external quality assurance in Namibia. Perhaps, once we all see one vision why we need to do this, and why we are doing this, it will help that collaboration (QAA1, participant 1).

This stakeholder believed integration was not happening, and observed that:

My overall assessment is just that, because we do not see the same vision, it becomes very difficult. I was fortunate to have forged partnership with one of the professional bodies. Fortunately, this professional body comes from the same school of thought as I am, so it was effortless to make this integrated approach possible (QAA1, participant).

The same stakeholder attributed this disintegration of EQA to the fact that, there was a discrepancy between what was written and what is implemented. The discrepancy, they said, seemed rooted in the fact that those who wrote the policies were not the ones who implemented them.

I came here, I found everything written, but my job is to implement. However, if I do not embrace the spirit of those who wrote it, it will never be possible... (QAA1, participant 1).

Furthermore, the lack of integrated planning was also attributed to the lack of understanding shown at country leadership level through the line Ministry.

...there is a situation where some people just have no understanding, and that is what is very dangerous. You would hear even the very high level people would be asking, 'why do we have this? Why are you doing accreditation, when this

one is also doing accreditation'? It means that person has not spent a little time to understand why things have been done differently, so that common understanding is really important to understand what this institution, the policies and the law is all about. In my view, there are really things that can be streamlined or integrated to make our work more effective (QAA1, participant 1).

Many stakeholders indicated that there was much difference between what is being practiced and the guiding policies, mandates or regulations.

Staff capacity

According to the stakeholders, the lack of capacity was real and needed urgent attention, especially on the EQA side. The stakeholders are confident that the promoters of the system (QAAs) were in need of capacity building, as most of them joined the system from different backgrounds, and not from a QA background.

The promoters of the system also need capacity building. Most of them- they joined the system, and they are not coming from quality assurance background as we know quality assurance is relatively new, so they learned through the process...and the knowledge is limited to deal with the system that they are presented with. There is a lack of analysis to go beyond just implementing the system, there is more to that... (University1, participant 1).

Affirming what the stakeholder from one university said in the earlier quote, stakeholder from the QAAs themselves, stated:

My experience is that we have a quality assurance system for higher education institutions in Namibia, although I feel like there is a lot to be learnt. We are kind of learning as we are going. There is no one with that experience that can guide and say this is what. By now, we were supposed to have monitored some of the recommendations (from accreditation), but this has not taken place yet. And institutional audit which is also another component of quality assurance, we have not done that yet (QAA1, participant 2).

We have staff members who would not be able to critically review or assess the self-evaluation review reports that are supposed to go to the experts for their evaluations ...We don't just do a critical analysis of the documents and we just rely on the experts or academic experts to guide us... (QAA1, participant 2).

...there are still gaps in terms of capacity. That is why we have gone through this process of realigning structure to strategy (QAA3, participant 1).

Stakeholders from QAAs admitted that there was need for staff training and continuous re-training on the matters of QA, given that they all came from different backgrounds, and all of them came to meet the QA subject for the first time.

All of us have come to deal with this subject for the first time in our lives, so it's a matter of now we need to re-train these staff members...to be able to have at least minimum specialisation in the subject they are coordinating (QAA1, participant 1).

As an institution, we will also have to meet some standards of quality, because only when you meet the standards in terms of capacity, capacity in terms of quantity and quality, and also standards in terms of your operations in the system, that you are able to coordinate and assure quality of other institutions (QAA1, participant 1).

The staff at QAAs were seen as lacking analytical skills to deal with the system. This aspect was expressed by stakeholders from HEIs, as well as from QAAs themselves. A stakeholder from one of the QAAs expressed the following regarding the lack of capacity.

Another stakeholder from the QAAs, admitted that:

Our own capacity is weak. As I said, last year we brought in consultants, experts in this field (QA) who did training for us (QAA) and the HEIs (QAA1, participant 2).

The capacity of staff at one of the QAA, namely; NQA was emphasised by the HEIs stakeholders. The staff at HEIs did not have confidence in the guidance they received from NQA as a QAA.

The quality at NQA is weak, because the NQA is not properly equipped to assure quality of a university (University3, participant 1).

Further, they expressed being subjected to sub-standard evaluations.

...components of auditing and quality assurance and other aspects of higher education, they do not have the capacity. It has affected us from a professional point of view, because we want to be quality assured by somebody who knows what quality in higher education is (University3, participant 1).

The quality of the EQA itself leaves a lot to be desired. The level of conceptualisation, understanding and what-have-you...People at NQA cannot interpret in an innovative way - the regulations in the NQA documents. They try to employ them in a mechanical way (University3, participant 1).

To add to the actual lack of capacity, the stakeholders also condemned on the NQA's lack of etiquette during auditing exercises.

To be honest to you, I think NQA should prepare the people that they send to come do assessments. It is personal how you see your role and how you fulfil it, and how you approach people when you do the site visits, which is sometimes a problem (University3, participant 2).

The HEIs also expressed the need for capacity building for staff to effectively implement IQA. A stakeholder suggested to:

...invest more resources, more energy to build capacity for internal quality assurance systems. That will, in my view, have more impact in terms of realising the actual quality which is the quality of student learning experiences, because currently, the approach taken seems to be improving systems in the way the institution is managed, but fails to filter down to the classroom where learning, teaching and learning takes place (University1, participant 1).

Another stakeholder from one of the HEIs came out strong on the issue of capacity, specifically capacity of the QAAs' staff. The staff member expressed that Namibia lacked capacity, so much that people who get employed by the QAAs were hardly qualified to train staff in the HEIs. In the stakeholder's words:

...the big challenge which I have not seen in the South African system for example. What happens is that, in Namibia, due to lack of capacity. You would find that people that get employed (in QAAs) are not at the level of training a Dean. It is also where the misinterpretation of the mandates come in, because you get people that are not capable to train the institutions, and in the end, you get a watered-down product. So, that in itself, is a problem, because capacity in Namibia is not there (University2, participant 1).

Professional Bodies, however, were confident of their own capacity as far as their secretariats were concerned. However, the stakeholders, particularly the HEIs felt they (PBs) should have capacity to carry out rigorous QA processes, i.e. accreditation.

One stakeholder from one of the HEIs regarded professional views (from PBs) very profound in terms of their functions, as they had a mandate, not only to approve, but also to monitor programmes and ultimately to register students as professionals.

...they are the ones that are doing what we are training the students to go [and] do, and so, they know exactly where the deficiencies are when they receive our students... (University2, participant 2).

...but the outcome (if you like) the programme outcome, that the professional bodies must have a strong say. They must say what type of competencies do we want and skills that we want from a graduate...when he comes out and that is why, they are very very critical and profound. They are very important. You cannot develop without them (University2, participant 2).

The stakeholders from HEIs indicated that the few PBs they dealt with had to source and rely on external expertise (outside the country) for rigorous QA processes. One stakeholder also confirmed that PBs in the country did not have the capacity for rigorous QA assessments/accreditation. He stated that:

...I think the fact that the engineering Council here which accredits us, has had to rely very much on the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), so we are thinking we should rather do our accreditation straight with ECSA – they are the only Washington Accord compliant professional body in SADC (University2, participant 1).

...the Engineering Council of Namibia does not even have the capacity to evaluate that...because they don't have, so, they had to send it to the Engineering Council of South Africa (University3, participant 1).

Another stakeholder expressed that:

...they (PB) also have that challenge concerning staff and you know you always have to have that – proper qualified staff to have to do A B C and D...University3, participant 2).

One of the PBs' senior confirmed the views of the HEIs by stating:

I will be very frank and honest in saying that we borrowed extensively from our sister institute, the methodology. We did not at all have capacity or the resources to develop the methodology by ourselves, so we looked outside and we collaborated with the South African institute...because ultimately, we want

to have a qualification that is benchmarked at comparable levels to South Africa and Zimbabwe (PB1, participant 1).

Power relations

The stakeholders felt that there were a number of matters that were attributed to power relations in the system. Power relations, at times, hindered progress in implementing the system, and also limited the operations of the different institutions and agencies.

Stakeholders felt that, even when dialogues and different conversations were held, the ‘powers that be’ tended to change what was agreed and the final products would not look like anything the dialogues consisted of. An example was that of the Acts, particularly the HE Act. A stakeholder who was involved in the discussions of the HE Act at the time indicated that:

...during the HE Act discussions when the Act was a draft, there was a lot of conversations going on, lots of debates, lots of consultations, but in the end, what gets passed, you cannot change because it depends on the different leaders, the different ministers in their own understanding of the mandates. A lot of stakeholders might have actually provided their input into the issues of overlapping at the time when it was just a draft bill. The result of the outcome was different and this is not only the issue of mandates, it is not only specific to higher education, it is more of a country issue (University2, participant 1).

Due to powers vested in leadership, i.e. ministerial leadership, QA is said to be at times practiced just to please leadership, without much meaning on what is being done. A stakeholder from one of the HEIs noted that:

The quality assurance agencies would want to also have proof of what they do. They want to accredit to show the minister that they have accredited so many programmes for that specific year, regardless of what is going on in the institutional calendar. So, there is no communication between the institutional calendars and the calendars of the agencies...you know. That is the key challenge (University2, participant 1).

...currently, because of the different entities, there is also an issue of power relations, although agencies may come to the table and say ‘how do we align’? They may agree on the table, but implementation depends on the people who

are leaders of those institutions. It just constrains implementation (University1, participant 1).

The same stakeholder noted that the institutions basically prioritised what the government as authority wanted to see, with internal institutional arrangements taking second place. This was how they experienced EQA at their institution.

One of the biggest challenges that I have experienced in the implementation of this quality assurance system, especially the one from the NCHE, is the fact that the internal quality assurance is kind of shifting to the background because there is so much required in higher education...the preparation time is not there to do internal QA...This is because, it is almost like the government is the authority wanting these programmes and you need to stop what you are doing to accommodate what they are doing. That is how I experienced it... (University2, participant 1).

Another view from one of the stakeholders on the issue of overlapping mandates was that, the stakeholders involved; the QAAs, and HEIs, could only make suggestions to the line minister, and it was up to the Minister to take action. The stakeholder said:

...but really, this whole process can only commence once the ministry of higher education, training and innovation takes up a position and say, 'fine we have looked at all of what you said, we have consulted our people internally, and this is how we are going to re-organise ourselves as a ministry'. We cannot initiate change to legislation without the blessing of the mother ministry. We cannot start thinking of changing and making changes, if we don't have the support of the ministry (QAA3, participant 2).

We don't really have a close relationship with the Ministry of Higher Education at the moment. The Ministry does not reciprocate by giving us feedback and giving us input, or even sharing their plans and strategies as a ministry. And that sort of leaves us in the dark, because we are not sure what their intentions are... (QAA3, participant 2).

...we understand the challenges and we are working on finding lasting solutions. We understand also that the lasting solutions can ultimately only come through amendment to the establishing Act (QAA3, participant 1).

Issues of power relations were said to have serious implications in the operations of the QAAs. The line ministry had a final say even in the governance of the institutions. For one of the QAAs, a stakeholder from this agency narrated how the Ministry or rather the line minister's actions threatened the independence of the agency.

The Council (NCHE) is falling as a department under the Ministry of Higher Education, so that makes things very difficult for the operations of the agency...like now, a new ministry came on board in 2015, and things have changed completely, where the independence of the council was really threatened, also affecting work security for staff (QAA1, participant 2).

The stakeholders felt they cannot have independent reviews, especially if the line minister is not in favour of the outcome of the review. There is no autonomy, because the QAA is just a directorate within the ministry. The minister has the power to say otherwise. Furthermore, the stakeholder also stated:

We have advised some of the international universities that wanted to become open universities not to use the word 'university', because in our draft criteria, the word university is protected. The university...is a well-known university, they want to open and they were saying that is how they are called, and they have already spoken to the Minister, and the minister gave them a go-ahead. They need to follow the internal processes with NCHE and NQA. They went back to the Minister and the Minister was just saying, let them use it (QAA1, participant 2).

Funding

Most of the stakeholders attributed many challenges regarding the implementation of EQA to inadequate funding.

The second aspect of capacity really relates to resources that we have at our disposal. You know very well that our country has been going through some significant challenges recently with finances, and unfortunately, that has trickled down to organisations such as ourselves and have other institutions whereby we really are not able to execute some of our mandates as frequently as we should...limitations because of funding (QAA3, participant 2).

From a funding perspective, we get an annual subvention from the government. Now, obviously that subvention is not at the expected level. It does create a lot of challenges, in terms of operations and so on (QAA3, participant 1).

Other aspects related to funding were said to create power or dominance, such as HEIs not being able to implement their own programmes due to lack of funding. Instead HEIs implemented programmes that were funded at the discretion and power of the line Ministry or the funders. One of the stakeholders said:

Sometimes, the programmes are demand driven. Even though I planned to introduce 5 programmes or 6 or 10 within the next strategic plan, the industry might demand otherwise and I might have to shelve my programmes that I prioritised, because the industry says it will fund (University2, participant 1).

Another ministry will come and say 'I want to you (the HEI) to introduce sign language, I am funding it, and meanwhile the programmes that you have planned according to the institution's plans are programmes that you must still look money for. So you take these funded ones (University2, participant 1).

One stakeholder from one of the HEIs expressed how capacity affects the University from a funding perspective:

...for now, we are fine, but its fine in terms of the constrains that we are facing. I will want all my Masters holders who have been here for five years to go for PhD when I am given the resources to do that...but given the financial challenges that we are facing, I cannot let them go. At the same time, we also face challenges; people are moving on, so you need to do the continuous capacitating (University1, participant 2).

Another stakeholder from HEI stated:

The international benchmarking is a bit of a challenge, because we always have money problems to work out something (University3, participant 2).

We are supposed to be seven full-time staff in the quality assurance department, but due to financial constraints, and so forth, we have only four at the moment (University3, participant 1).

According to the stakeholders, many challenges are caused by inadequate funding. The lack of staff capacity in the agencies and institutions is also attributed to inadequate funding. The well qualified people are said to be costly to the government, thereby compromising quality.

The government has to make do with what they have, because they cannot pay a professor to do the job, so funding again becomes a problem, the salary structure becomes a problem. To be able to do a good job, you need to have good people to do the job (University2, participant 1).

In line with the previous quote, a senior from one of the professional bodies indicated:

Sometimes, you have got to pay a price to get more effective return. It might sound like a lot, but if you think of, for example, if we were to recruit 10 or 20 top chartered accountants for the Receiver of Revenue, within a year, they

would have collected triple their salaries, because that is highly specialised. So, it is a bit of -you have to invest in order to get returns (PB1, participant 1).

Funding in the perspective of salaries is a challenge that one of the seniors at one of the PBs alluded to in relation to professional graduates. The professional graduates are well qualified and they are said to go through well monitored programmes, but the government is said to be unable to make use of these professionals, as they tend to demand bigger salaries. The senior noted:

Professional accountants are vital to business, but they are also so vital to government. The government represents in some form or other 60 to 65% of our Namibian economy. Unfortunately, the government cannot afford professional accountants, it is as simple as that. The auditor General's office does not have a chartered accountant; Ministry of Finance and in-land revenue do not have chartered accountants, most of the SOEs and parastatals do not have chartered accountants (PB1, participant 1).

Legislation & Governance

The three QAAs are all established by Acts of parliament, so are the two public HEIs. The PBs too are constitutionally established. The private institution is established by a charter, as prescribed in the national constitution. All the QAAs, the PBs, as well as the HEIs are governed by their respective legislation and governing bodies. Legislation and governance also has a lot of influence on the operations and strategic matters of these agencies and/or institutions.

The establishing Acts are said to have influence on the implementation of the EQA systems. Some stakeholders feel the legal framework is clear, but misunderstood. There is also the view that the mandates of the three QAAs are not well coordinated – they overlap. One of the stakeholders expressed the view that:

Perhaps, I cannot attest that it is fully enabling, but so far, I really find it very useful and it has proper guiding structures. That is now on the adequacy of the legal framework that is in place. I think on the implementation, there are some misunderstandings, and those misunderstandings really are contravening the provisions of the law, and I have a bit of fear that if we continue the way we are doing, one day it will have legal repercussions that government will have to bear. I think in terms of the legal provision, I am satisfied, but in terms of how we are carrying out or implementing our laws, I think it leaves a lot to be desired (QAAs1, participant 1).

According to the stakeholders, most of the challenges faced in the implementation process were stemming from the legislation. The aspect of EQA was particularly said to have challenges stemming from the legislation.

Some stakeholders confirmed great support from their respective governing bodies, although all the QAAs cited their governing bodies to be too big in terms of numbers, which they said was not so efficient. According to one of the stakeholders from one of the HEIs:

The governing council owns these QA processes, they own basically everything that happens at the institution, because they are the ones that are driving it. All policies get approved at governance level, so basically they can't not support what they are there for (University2, participant).

In the governance phase, I believe, yes, an eleven-member Board. The trend internationally is to go sort of a six to seven-member board, and that guidance will come through the revised legislation from the Ministry of Public Enterprises. But the eleven-member Board is still manageable. It is not a challenge per se, but we understand that is where the world is going – a smaller and more efficient Board (QAA3, participant 1).

We got a council consisting of over 30 people, which in itself is a challenge. The size of the current council is too big. It is an area we have identified, a proposal is on the table to look at the size of the council. So, it is a challenge currently, but that is because of the law... (QAA2, participant 2).

Stakeholders from one of the QAAs indicated that the kind of governance underpinning the institution (QAA) was problematic. Problematic in the sense that it is kind of mixed governance that is imposed on the institution.

Governing structures in practice is a bit of a challenge because there is a mixed kind of operation. The institution having been established by law makes it kind of a corporate like a public agency not from central government. However, in practice, the institution is also expected to operate like a central government institution, and that brings in a bit of a challenge, because it is really not clear what operational procedures you ought to follow, because corporate world has different procedures as government procedures. Operations governance-wise is satisfactory, but practical operations really leaves a lot to be desired (QAA1, participant 1).

Stakeholders from one of the QAAs expressed that it would really be ideal if the agency was run as a stand-alone institution, comparable to similar institutions around the world – meeting the basic or minimum requirements.

Theme 4: Communication

Communication amongst stakeholders is a bridge that ought to shape the experience of all stakeholders favourably. The needs of all stakeholders in the Namibian HE system could only be fulfilled if they are known through communication. Depending on the kind of conversations that the stakeholders in QA in HE in Namibia have, the success of the system will be determined accordingly. The ASG-QA by implication expects stakeholder involvement and this would be achieved through communication.

The study participants alluded to the aspects of communication and how it shaped their experiences.

Inadequate communication amongst stakeholders

...there's no communication between the institutional calendars and the calendars of the agencies, you know. That is the key Challenge (University2, participant 1).

One of the stakeholders indicated that they made attempts to collaborate with sister agencies, with no success to date.

...same thing, we tried from December with one of our sister agencies. We have not yet come to an operating manual on how we collaborate. We have casually collaborated to audit an institution and that was like March, but until now we are yet to come to the table. From March to December or to November, we are yet to come to the table to firm up our approaches. So, I am trying to paint the picture how fast it took with a professional body, compared to almost a year now struggling to get same kind of approach with a sister agency (QAA1, participant 1).

Another stakeholder expressed how the inadequate level of communication amongst the stakeholders affected planning negatively, and impacted the system.

...there are no conversations that are going on between the bodies, and as such, they cannot plan if they cannot talk (University2, participant 1).

Who should steer these conversations? Because everybody is a boss on their own, who should be concerned? Should it be steered by the government offices or should it be steered by the higher education institutions because they are the ones that I actually feeling the burden? (University2, participant 1).

Other participants indicated that they only had conversations on a needs basis:

To be honest (conversation), is something that we do when we start engaging them for example when we start with a program that has to be registered only then do we closely engage them. A programme that has to be accredited only then do it closely engage with them. And as I said, we should not do it that way because quality assurance is a continuous process, so we need to redo things differently we really need to do things differently because if we do it only when there is you know accreditation process for a particular program then I think we are leaving out certain things because we need to see in terms of that programme evolving... (University 1, participant 2).

...that is the real conversation we normally have with NQA. They want to be convinced that this program that you said is going to be offered at level eight is it really a level 8 programme (University 2, Participant 2)

...those conversations are done with NCHE and that's why I say that programme accreditation must be a must (University 2, Participant 2).

...our relationship I think it is a healthy relationship that we have but I think we can improve the relationship, because many times we only meet when the issues to addressed. So, maybe we need to have more platforms where we discuss issues, just not wait for when the're problems then let's get together and address the issue. So, I think maybe it is something that we can work on to improve...

Students had this to say regarding communications:

We want to see our HEIs in the country talking to each other, so that they can share experience, in order to improve quality. Communication is important in all aspects of life (FG1).

We want to be connected in the higher education fraternity, talking to each other and growing together as institutions of one country. All institutions must therefore discuss on how to work better together, in order to grow together (FG2)

One may also conclude that there is indeed inadequate level of communication amongst the different stakeholders on this matter. This is evident from the interviews

that I held with the core researchers. Almost every interview attracted a question of conversation or communication amongst the stakeholders. However, very little substance came out of this question from many participants. Some (as indicated in the quotes) indicated limited communication while others indicated the need for more conversation or communication.

In conclusion, the themes that emerged from the data put into perspective the stakeholder's experiences of the EQA system in Namibia.

Connecting the research themes to the research questions

External Quality Assurance falls within the umbrella concept of quality assurance. Both are relatively new concepts in the Namibian context of higher education. The implementation of the EQA system is therefore, also a new phenomenon in the Namibian context of HE. As with HE, EQA involves a number of stakeholders, including the establishments (QAAs) that are entrusted with the implementation, as well as the HEIs - who are the actual implementers of EQA. Thus, core to this study, is the exploration of how stakeholders experienced the implementation of the EQA system in Namibia, ultimately making meaning out of this phenomenon in order to address the scholarly void and contribute to the existing literature.

To fill the gap that justifies this study, five questions were designed to gauge the experiences of the stakeholders on the phenomenon, as was presented in this chapter and discussed in the next chapter. In this section, I discuss the emerging themes, in relation to the research questions.

The research questions shaped the categories and the themes, to ensure that the data presented speaks to the main research question. Although the data seemed voluminous and overwhelming, after categorising and grouping into themes, I discovered data saturation, as stakeholders seemed to experience the system in similar ways. The categories and themes as described in this chapter comprise individual stakeholders' knowledge, views, beliefs, and unique experiences of the phenomenon.

How do the 3 national QAAs and Professional Bodies interpret and implement the Acts of Parliament that established them.

This question aimed at establishing how the implementers of EQA responded to the respective legislations that established them. Many of the themes spoke to this question, especially *theme 2: A fragmented EQA system*. Most of the stakeholders alluded to the establishing Acts of the QAAs, and how they (Acts) are basically the root of the fragmented system. Fragmentation however, did not mean that the QAAs were not implementing the Acts accordingly, but that the Acts were designed with conflicting functions. The other relevant theme to this question was *theme 3: the value of support and integrated planning*, in particular the *legislation and governance* category. This theme was specific on the establishing legislation and how QAAs were interpreting and implementing the Acts, as well as how the HE fraternity (from a QA perspective) was being affected by the legislation.

What is the stakeholders' understanding and lived experience of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia?

This research question aimed to explore the stakeholders' experiences of the implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia. the question dealt with a documentation of how participants conceived the key terms, (QA, EQA and IQA) which are central to the study.

In line with the first theme, *the contextual understanding of QA*, I bracketed my preconceived ideas and biases on this aspect, in order to present the authentic description of the stakeholders understanding of the matter. The findings as described under this theme respond to what the understanding of the stakeholders were...of EQA, including QA and IQA, which are essential components of EQA.

How do stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia?

This research question was associated with descriptions which speak to how the stakeholders experience the implementation of the EQA system in Namibia. The stakeholders described a *fragmented EQA system*. This theme emerged from almost all the stakeholders (with an exception of students). Responses on this matter featured in every stakeholder's interview

transcript, without a direct question from me? The description presented under this theme responds to the research question and this goes to show that indeed, this is how the stakeholders experience the system. The stakeholders identified a number of factors which shaped their experiences. Those concerns were coded and eventually grouped into a category under this theme. Those concerns aim to respond to how the experiences of the stakeholders were shaped.

Why do stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia, the way they do?

Categories placed under the third theme respond to the *value of support and integrated planning*. This theme described why stakeholders experienced the system the way they did. Put differently, the findings as described under different categories in this theme justified the experiences of the stakeholders, responding to the third question of why their experiences were shaped in the way that it is.

What are the lasting solutions to challenges experienced by stakeholders in the Namibian Higher Education Quality Assurance system?

This question was designed to explicitly highlight the possible solutions that this phenomenological study was bringing to the fore through the voices of the stakeholders. The stakeholders made some suggestions towards a more desired EQA system that would be more responsive to the Namibian HE system, in particular the QA aspect. The stakeholders' views of an improved system stemmed from their respective experiences. All the four themes responded to this question, discussing in particular, the possible solutions towards a better EQA system.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the descriptive findings, through the categories and themes that emerged from the data collection. A summary of the interview participants was provided to indicate the representation of the stakeholders, which justified the phenomenological type of sampling. The chapter described the lived experiences of the stakeholders' of the implementation of the EQA system for higher education in Namibia – through the identified

categories and themes. The emerging themes corresponded with the research questions describing what the stakeholders' understanding of QA is, how stakeholders experienced the system, and why they experience the system the way they did. Critical was to describe the findings as authentic as narrated by the stakeholders, in line with phenomenology and lifeworld in particular.

The next chapter discusses the study findings in relation to literature, to the theoretical lens, phenomenology, and in particular lifeworld, as the fundamental bases for meaning-making of the stakeholders' experiences.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the Namibian HE lived experiences of the stakeholders' implementation of the EQA system, as was generated by individual unstructured interviews, as well as focus group discussions. The data as presented in the previous chapter was categorised, and emerged in four themes, corresponding with the research questions. The stakeholders narrated their lived experiences of the phenomenon. I analysed documentation and continually engaged in a reflexive dialectical analysis, considering the impact of my subjectivity and inter-subjectivity on the study (Finlay, 1998).

In the section of the findings, the aspect of meaning-making is discussed as per the study's theoretical lens. The meaning making is based on the lifeworld approach, an aspect of phenomenology.

Achieving a smooth implementation of systems is normally a challenging phenomenon. It is even more challenging with complex systems such as QA, and EQA in particular. Complex in the sense that the system comprises a large number of stakeholders – in different categories, with different demands, as well as, a variety of frameworks (within the system). With this combination, the system may face a number of challenges affecting implementation. The challenging factors are attributed to many aspects guiding the practical implementation discussed in this chapter, guided by the theoretical framework, particularly the aspect of lifeworld. Lifeworld is critical to experience because *“in the lifeworld, we come to an understanding of who we are, what we want to be, and which projects we take along”* (Abma, 2005: 510). Additional to the experiences, the discussion also teases out the aspects that have been taken for granted, and consequently, highlights the needed changes. The discussions are guided by critical enquiry, through which the study aimed to bring about emancipation within the EQA system and its stakeholders. By discussing the implementation aspect of EQA, the study aims to contribute to the knowledge, practice, discourse, and ultimately have (the Namibian) leadership informed on this phenomenon.

Research Question 1

The first research question sought to establish how the QAAs interpreted and implemented the legislation that established them. This information did not only have to come from the stakeholders working for the QAAs, but it was also complementary to get the views of other stakeholders e.g. those from HEIs, as to how they viewed the implementation of EQA by the QAAs.

Literature in Chapter 2 reveals that legal frameworks constitute the most significant challenge for implementation at all levels: national, agency, HEIs, and consortium level (Kelo, Fernandez de Labastida, Fredriks, Heinze, & Markowski, 2018). The study reveals that all stakeholders were aware of the nature of the Acts that established the QAAs. The QAAs staff, as well as other stakeholders interviewed, were of the view that EQA was implemented as per the establishing Acts. The study further indicated that, just because the QAAs were implementing the respective Acts accordingly, did not mean the EQA implementation was smooth. The lack of smoothness in the implementation process was attributed to the fact that the design of the Acts brought about inconsistency, fragmentation, and territory protection. This shaped the experience of the stakeholders in as much as the system was found wanting. The stakeholders yearned for a system that was well demarcated in terms of functions of the different QAAs, and a system that had complementary functions to accelerate efficiency and effectiveness on the HE system.

It was also clear that the stakeholders were overwhelmed by the fragmented system, despite the willingness and appreciation of having a system in place. The study also shows that the stakeholders preferred that QAAs hold communications to improve the situation, despite what was contained in the legislations. Some stakeholders indicated that there were conversations initiated to practice the implementation differently, provided it was within understanding and agreement of the different QAAs. As much as the conversations happened, the real action was not effective. However, protection of territories and compliance attitudes dominated the QAAs. Implementing what was given in the Acts as mandates was found to be correct compliant, hence the QAAs were protective of their mandates. This was not ideal, given the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the system, under such legislations.

Students represented through focus groups could not expressed much knowledge about the QAAs. However, students could not paint a picture as to whether they think the QAAs were fulfilling their respective mandates.

Research Question 2

With this research question, I aimed to explore the stakeholder's understanding of the concept of EQA in HE, in the Namibian context. I was interested in also exploring the related concepts, namely; quality assurance and internal quality assurance.

The study showed that the stakeholders had an understanding of QA, although they defined the terms differently. This was intimated in the literature (*see chapter 1 – meaning of quality assurance in higher education*) that QA, like quality is also a contested concept, defined differently by different stakeholders. The difference was, in some cases, merely a difference in terminologies, and occasioned by the type of stakeholders, in terms of spatiality and identity. In other words, stakeholders from HEIs defined QA differently from stakeholders from QAAs or PBs.

Interestingly, a stakeholder from one of the HEIs defined QA as an aspect that is derived from the industry. Similarly, this aspect of QA originating from the industry also came out from literature. This source of QA is necessary for HE stakeholders to know, if they (HE stakeholders) are to apply the concept contextually, from the original definitions and practices that were meant for a different type of industry. In the context of this study, spatiality matters in the lifeworld of the stakeholders. Spatiality in this case, would mean a HE related environment. QA from the industry is different in that, the industry is a different space, and also deals with different types of products. Furthermore, the difference between QA in the industry and QA in HE is that the products in the industry can be manipulated to achieve the intended and desired outcome. For example, all the watches can be produced to be exactly the same, functioning exactly the same, in the preferred colours. Any watch that may come out different, even slightly different, may be considered an error, and not qualified for sale. In other words, QA in the industry aims for excellence. In higher education, through

QA, it is not possible to aim for excellence given that the products cannot be manipulated to perfection. Harvey and Green's (1993) description of quality as perfection: zero defects, getting things right the first time (focus on process as opposed to inputs and outputs) would therefore, suit industry not HE. Watty (2003) suggests that the dimension of quality as perfection can be removed (from HE), since higher education does not aim to produce defect-free graduates. Equally, the products cannot perform the same. Even those products (which are students in the case of HE) who do not perform to meet the minimum requirements set for success, are not discarded. In fact, good practice in academia requires extra academic support for such students. Academic support is an aspect that is critical in HE. Through document analysis, this aspect is quality assured, in the QA accreditation framework of the NCHE. Theme No. 5 of the NCHE QA system is *facilities and support*, and the first criterion is support which requires: efficient academic support services to support the quality of academic outcomes and enhance student success in the programmes.

As part of the quality assurance concept, academic support is one of the aspects that were discussed in all of the focus group interviews. I discovered it was a matter very close to the students, as it focused on giving them support necessary for academic performance. As part of quality assurance, institutional services are critical (especially to students).

One of the key words which came out as stakeholders described QA was the aspect of accountability. The aspect of accountability was cited as a tool that government uses to ensure quality delivery by HEIs. This was in line with literature which cites accountability as the main purpose for government within the concept of QA. Literature also reveals that the purpose of QA is largely debated to be between accountability and improvement or both. According to Thune (1996), accountability and improvement are mutually exclusive since there is a conflict in terms of method between them. However, it is argued that accountability and quality improvement may be combined in a balanced strategy. The study showed that accountability was mainly seen as the reason for QA and particularly for implementing EQA. What this meant in the context of this study was that, stakeholders' experiences of the implementation of EQA was a way to respond to government. The QAAs would implement EQA to the satisfaction of government. Equally, with accountability, HEIs would implement EQA in compliance to government through the QAAs. One of the dangers of over-elaborate

bureaucratic systems of external monitoring is that they can lead to a 'compliance culture' to the detriment of real quality improvement (Williams, 1997). Complying with government also comes with conditional benefits such as funding. It would, however, be problematic if EQA was implemented merely for these reasons. Implementation of EQA might be merely compliance driven, to fulfil conditions in order to get funding.

Depending on how it is demanded and how it is delivered, accountability can be good or bad. Government may demand accountability in such a way that it encompasses the aspect of improvement. Put differently, the accountability mechanisms may contain improvement aspects. If accountability is demanded in a manner that it does not improve the quality of HEIs' services, including student transformation which is at the core of QA in HE, it may render QA non-impactful. Mere accountability will not be encouraging to the stakeholder, and as a result, QA will be viewed as a good to have.

The purpose of EQA, has potential to shape the experiences of the stakeholders. Therefore QA (and EQA) should be purposive for the implementers to have a successful and impactful experience. Due to requirements of accountability and conformity, higher education institutions are required to voluntarily take part in external evaluations. These evaluations can be linked to quality improvement with the help of internal evaluations (Kauppila, 2016). Critical to ask is whether EQA can fulfil both purposes i.e. accountability and improvement. To this, Vroeijenstijn (1995) argues that it is difficult for external quality assurance to serve two masters. It cannot work for the HEIs serving improvement and for the outside world serving accountability at the same time.

Stakeholders described QA as improvement (*See chapter 2*). In line with the literature, stakeholders see improvement as an aspect largely influenced by the HEIs or through IQA, more than through EQA. The study also discovered that HEIs believed that the improvement impact was mainly felt from IQA. The QAAs indicated that they would like to see the EQA system maturing to a point where QAAs will do less rigorous QA in the institutions. This indicates that the stakeholders preferred to have QA for improvement purposes, more than

accountability. This further speaks to the sociality between the EQA bodies and the HEIs. In their lifeworld, in terms of sociality, the study findings suggested a collegial relationship.

Between the two contested purposes - accountability and improvement, the study showed that EQA in Namibia was implemented more from an accountability perspective. The general experiences amongst the stakeholders was that government was in charge of EQA. It was further expressed that HEIs, as well as QAAs implemented EQA to please government more than for the purpose of institutional improvement. It therefore, goes to show that accountability was implemented from a place of compliance and ultimately, *power*. It is an aspect of power when institutions are simply implementing EQA as compliance and adherence to the government call. HEIs would particularly not improve the quality of their services, if implementation of EQA was done for compliance only. Both QAAs and HEIs would also not improve their IQA and quality culture, if priority was given to government. It is such kind of manipulations and controls within the systems which should change in order to emancipate the implementers. QA is an aspect that requires purposefulness from the implementers to yield effectiveness. The custodians of quality, the implementers, should drive the agenda. In other words, the stakeholders should be afforded the autonomy to design the implementation of the system. This is not to say government should have no say in the implementation of QA, but that the custodians and promoters should be the drivers of the implementation. In the context of this study, the lifeworld feature which shaped this kind of experience was embodiedness. The lifeworld meaning is based on the power aspect – which does not only enforce control, but ultimately affects the attitude of the stakeholders.

The study also revealed that stakeholders described QA as a means to assess how HEIs are working towards their goals as prescribed their respective missions. This would, for me, serve both improvement and accountability purposes. Generally, institutions which are seen to be in line with their missions or achieving their missions are actually achieving quality. This is quality defined as *fitness for purpose* (Harvey and Green, 1993). In my view, fitness for purpose is extended to the value addition for students, also defined as transformation in terms of quality. According to literature in Chapter 1, graduates of the HE system should have the ability to play a central role in the socio-economic development of any country...(EUA, 2008). This can only be achieved, if students are transformed. This goes to show that, an HEI's mission should always incorporate strategies of achieving value addition for the students.

Achieving institutional mission can most likely include achieving student transformation – a critical aspect of QA, where students are seen as critical stakeholders of HE and QA. These strategies ought to be indicated in the strategic plans of the HEIs, indicating the necessary action plans. It is by achieving the value addition or transformation that HEIs further fulfil their responsibilities of contributing to the socio-economic development of the country. What this also means is that, without the successful cognitive transformation of students, the realisation of socio-economic development might not come to fruition. The reason is that, it is the HE students or rather graduates who are supposed to be transformed, in order to make a difference in society. The question that HE stakeholders are asking is: what is the value addition that HEIs are making towards economic development? This question then calls for quality enhancement in HE to ensure quality is fulfilling the purpose of transformation, i.e. particular transformation of students, as per the definition explained in Chapter 1 by (Noboho, 2019).

It is important that for an institution to know whether it is achieving its mission, including the achieving the transformation of students through quality HE. The implementation of EQA should be inclusive of rigorous, effective monitoring mechanisms. As I engaged with the stakeholders, the findings revealed a concern on the lack of monitoring mechanisms, meant to ensure that the institutions are strengthened in their services. Monitoring mechanisms at framework level, such as accreditation, are in place within the EQA mechanisms in Namibia. They are, however, not very effective due to capacity of staff members at the QAA. The HEIs are therefore not well monitored, to ensure improvement. These monitoring mechanisms of accreditation are in the form of *improvement plans*. One of the QAAs admitted to lack of capacity in terms of monitoring through improvement plans:

The major challenge for us is just capacity wise. Capacity to monitor these things...we have reports from the institutions – the improvement plans, but the system is not clear...do we go back to the panel? Some of these things are academic, we will not be able to do.

The above quote could mean that the use of improvement plans within the accreditation framework is therefore, not effective, as the responsible QAA does not have the ability to implement them effectively. This is unfortunate, especially for HEIs, where accreditation is critical in terms of EQA. Accreditation is the main form of assuring quality of academic

programmes, especially for non-professionally regulated programmes. This is in line with the views of Kis (2005) and Woodhouse (1999) – *see chapters 2 and 3*.

The aspect of adhering to set standards has also come out from the study as a description of QA. These are some of the aspects that are taken for granted in a system of this nature. As long as there are standards, they are respected. Critical is whether the stakeholders do interrogate the set standards. None of the stakeholders have indicated any interrogation of the set standards. The standards are accepted as they are. In other words, as long as the QAAs continue to promote QA as per the set standards, stakeholders seem to be satisfied. As long as the HEIs are adhering to the set standards, QAAs are satisfied. These are also the standards that have been set and approved by government to which the HEIs are held accountable. The critical question should be: are the standards serving HE sufficiently? Have the standards remained relevant to HE? Mere compliance in implementing the set standards could be counter improvement.

Having analysed the national QA documents, the system in Namibia seems to be more criterion based, rather than standard based. In my view, criterion based is more beneficial as it tends to be timeless. For example, the criterion could be library infrastructure. Meaning at any time, the relevance of the library infrastructure will be measured accordingly, taking into consideration the aspect of temporality i.e. what is relevant at a certain given time. That is in contrast to set standards – which could be more rigid, especially if the reviews of the standards are not done regularly.

What this also meant is that the stakeholders did not see a distinct difference between standards and criteria. The two terms seem to be used interchangeably. The lack of understanding of concepts is also problematic and shapes the stakeholders' experiences.

Many stakeholders have described QA as a broad aspect, that is also subjective. This should speak to the context that should be embedded in the QA meaning and practice. The institutional and national context should determine the meaning and practice of QA. The study findings revealed situations where consultants were involved in the development of national policies, and certain aspects were amiss due to lack of context. This matter further speaks to literature which refers to the QA systems and policies in the continent (Africa) as

being eurocentric. In other words, certain failure pockets in African QA systems were attributed to poorly *contextualized* systems, and Namibia was no exception.

The other concepts that the study dealt with under this theme were the IQA and EQA. These concepts are related to QA, and they (IQA and EQA) were interlinked. I was interested in establishing the stakeholders' understanding of both, although the study largely focused on the EQA system. From the interviews with the stakeholders, EQA was described mainly within the Namibian context.

The study showed that stakeholders viewed EQA as the three EQA bodies (QAAs). These were the government bodies entrusted with the promotion of EQA, as per their respective mandates. In reference to these three bodies, stakeholders made reference to the legal frameworks, the policies, structures and the processes (of the same bodies) that were in place to implement EQA. What this meant for this study was that, the implementation of EQA was mainly shaped by the policies, structures and systems in place as promoted by the QAAs. What was contained in these policies, structures and systems, and equally who was in the QAAs, and how they were promoting or implementing EQA, shaped the experiences of the stakeholders. The study revealed that stakeholders had concerns with some of the legal documents as far as the implementation of the EQA system in the country was concerned. This aspect is discussed in the next or second theme. It is interesting that most of the stakeholders did not regard PBs as EQA bodies. During the discussions, PBs were often spoken of as an after-thought. I attributed this to the lack of sociality between HEIs, QAAs and the PBs in their lifeworld. For example, stakeholders from the HEIs, who are not in professionally regulated programmes, did not have any relationship, and therefore no engagement with the PBs. From the findings, even the QAAs did not participate in terms of sociality with all professional bodies. This was of concern, as the PBs and QAAs should at all times work together. Given the small population of a country like Namibia, particularly in terms of the HE landscape, the PBs were not in large numbers. However, only about less than five got mentioned by the interviewed stakeholders, including students.

According to the findings of the study, the EQA system was not seen, nor treated as an actual system with interlinks amongst the different bodies, the different frameworks and the different policies. The different bodies and systems were each treated individually and each QAA seen on its own. This was problematic for a system where all aspects should be working

together, since they should have been interlinked in the actual sense. Theoretically, the different QA frameworks were interlinked. Otherwise, it was not worth referring to EQA as a system if aspects were not interlinked, and if there was no relationship between and amongst the frameworks. Treating the different frameworks independently certainly impacted the implementation of EQA, which would not work accordingly.

As for internal quality assurance, the study showed that IQA is mainly seen to be an aspect of HEIs. Not all QAAs and PBs seem to view internal operations as having to consist of IQA. This is where the QAAs, as well as the HEIs needed to familiarise and adjust their systems to be in line with the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) as shown in literature of (HAQAA, 2017). The ASG-QA are particular on the importance of EQA, equally the importance of IQA. The fact that IQA is not strong amongst the EQA bodies, also indicates the type of QA culture that exists or that does not exist within these bodies. The presence of IQA in an institution determines the quality of the particular institution's products and services. In my view, in the everyday lifeworld of the QAAs, and all other institutions, stakeholders practice IQA. However, it happens 'by the way' – which is not commendable. There was need for deliberate effort and action on IQA, in addition to the natural or 'by the way' lifeworld. Internal quality assurance was critical, but as it is, it seemed to be taken for granted.

Furthermore, literature has shown that a quality culture (as discussed in chapter 2), is critical to the implementation of QA in general, including within the EQA bodies. In other words, the lifeworld of the individuals tends to characterise the culture of the individuals as far as implementing QA is concerned. It is the everyday way of doing things, the way of implementing QA and EQA that shapes the stakeholders Experiences of the implementation of EQA. Cultivating IQA should be made a point in each institution or body. From the internal quality culture, flows the everyday way of doing things. With time or in terms of temporality, the quality culture would normally improve, and consequently improve the institutions at large.

In line with IQA, literature conducted for this study has also shown that meta-evaluation is just beginning to make baby steps in African countries. This could be the reason why IQA is less popular within EQA bodies and more popular as an aspect of HEIs. This is simply because quality assuring the evaluators i.e. QAAs and PBs is not a culture. Literature on ASG-QA makes

reference to the importance of meta-evaluations. The study showed that some stakeholders in QAAs and the PBs made reference to it (meta-evaluations), though not in a direct way, and particularly not in the way that it (IQA) should actually be quality assured. Quality assurance, especially through the adopted methodologies in many countries, including Namibia, tends to bring out the strengths and weaknesses or areas needing improvement in an institution and its services. This initially comes through the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The SER is used as an assessment tool to verify different quality aspects in an institution. This means that if an institution or department does not engage in IQA and subsequently EQA, that institution or department would not benefit from the introspection exercise - that is the SER, nor from the EQA or external panels. By extension, that institution or department will also less likely improve its services and operations. The EQA bodies need to convince and build trust with the HEIs, by first having their own systems quality assured.

It is a concern that, although the study findings showed HEIs' stakeholders' dissatisfaction with the EQA framework, no particular reference was made to the lack of meta-evaluations. This goes to show that it is a concept that is not quite popular within the HE fraternity in Namibia. This also indicates that having EQA only performed in HEIs...is an aspect taken for granted. There is no policy or regulations in Namibia speaking to the IQA or EQA of QAAs and PBs. This further shows that even the policy makers and the leadership have taken it for granted that these EQA bodies are themselves quality and do not need to be quality assured. This arrangement does not only have a negative impact on the implementation of the EQA, but ultimately, has an impact on the outcomes of QA, be it in the EQA bodies themselves, as or the HEIs.

Research Question 3

This question sought to establish how the stakeholders experienced the EQA system for HE in Namibia. The question was also paired with the second theme of the study, namely; *a fragmented EQA system*. From the study findings, there were pockets of success as a result of EQA, but mostly expressed were the grave concerns about how stakeholders experienced the implementation of the EQA system. The findings pointed to a fragmented EQA system, comprising overlaps and non-alignment embedded in the different frameworks. This theme revealed how the lived world of the stakeholders was influenced by sociality and temporality

mainly. The relationship between and amongst the different stakeholders impacted their lifeworld. The implementation process - throughout (from the point they started experiencing the implementation of EQA) also impacted the stakeholders' experiences differently, at different times and aspects of temporality, in terms of the lifeworld. Depending on the stakeholders' places of operation or where they implemented the EQA system from, i.e. QAAs, PBs, HEIs; the spatiality aspect shaped their experiences. In other words, EQA was implemented in a certain way, depending on where the implementation was done from and the unique context of that particular space.

Through engagement with the different documents in chapter 3, (particularly the 3 Acts of QAAs) pertaining to EQA in Namibia, there were overlaps and non-alignment in the EQA activities of the different EQA bodies. The experiences of the stakeholders were shaped from the point that EQA influences IQA - where HEIs are the primary custodians. Through document analysis, the findings indicated that the HEIs, QAAs as well as PBs stakeholders' lifeworld was shaped by the everyday implementation of EQA, which was within the different legal and operating documents. Put differently, the fragmentation was within the said documents, particularly, the establishing documents.

From the findings, stakeholders were frustrated by the status quo of EQA activities. These EQA activities were meant to benefit the stakeholders in terms of improving the quality of their services and operations, but, instead; stakeholders saw these activities as time wasting or being done at the expense of their actual work i.e. teaching & learning, and research. Stakeholders were required to repeat similar processes by the different EQA bodies. The findings also indicated that the stakeholders developed an attitude that was negative towards the implementation of the EQA system. The embodiedness of negative attitudes and frustration caused the stakeholders to implement EQA out of obligation. At the same time, the stakeholders who were entrusted with the promotion of EQA i.e. EQA bodies understood that running a system in such a way was counterproductive, and change should be non-negotiable. Non-aligned and overlapping activities resulted in stakeholders' QA apathy and fatigue for all stakeholders including those from HEIs, and those from EQA bodies. What this further meant for this study was that stakeholders experienced the implementation of the EQA system in terms of lifeworld embodiedness. In terms of embodiedness, the implementation process influenced the attitude of the stakeholders. Stakeholders felt fatigue

due to overlaps. Overlapping and non-aligned activities tended to show lack of seriousness of the country leadership who influence policy decisions, specifically the line ministry's leadership.

The study revealed that the issue of the fragmented system, and particularly what constitutes the fragmentation, were issues known by the stakeholders through their experiences of implementing the system. The study similarly revealed that the stakeholders in all the relevant institutions, made efforts to address the matter. However, the fragmentation was still not resolved. The fact that the authorities were aware of the matters negatively impacting the implementation of the system, but did not seem to be addressing the matter (at least not urgently) was discouraging to the stakeholders; both the promoters and the implementers. Stakeholders were not motivated to establish strong institutional quality culture, if in the first place they were experiencing the system in an unpleasant way, and if the policy makers were not showing commitment to addressing the issues. This also showed lack of depth in understanding the matter from the side of policy makers. Anyone who understands the value of quality assurance, and the concomitant importance of HE, is expected to work hard at addressing such a matter; knowing it would be in the best interest of the nation. This would mainly be regarded as of utmost importance, as HE is understood to be critical for national development, particularly, socio-economic development. It is ironic that the same leadership puts accountability measures in place to hold HEIs accountable through EQA, yet the same leadership turns deaf ears to the issues hampering progress in the implementation of the same system.

In the end, if overlaps and non-alignments are not solved, not only does it discourage the stakeholders, but ultimately renders the EQA exercise redundant. The study findings revealed that at the time of the study, implementing the EQA frameworks did not provide any positive impact, due to fragmentation and overlaps. For this reason, stakeholders were not encouraged to commit to the course of EQA, as they did not see a way of succeeding with the current state of affairs. The only reason why stakeholders continued to implement the EQA system, was out of obligation and the need to comply, which was counterproductive to the system.

The study has also revealed that the EQA system was implemented in misinterpreted ways, mainly by the QAAs. Sometimes the ways in which the system is implemented creates hurdles

for the stakeholders, impeding the development of HE in the country. For instance, stakeholders who envisage opening up private HEIs are discouraged by the overlaps, unclear and fragmented processes. The EQA bodies were not clear in their own processes, and this had negative implications on the national goal of expanding access to HE (specifically in the case of private HEIs). Furthermore, the misinterpretation and discrepancy in applying the law could have repercussions for the government, given that the QAAs who are entrusted by government with the responsibility of promoting EQA were all state owned. Being state owned also meant that the QAAs had limited autonomy in promoting EQA in the most objective way, compared to if the QAAs were not state owned. The state influence was, at this point inevitable, given that the state is the authority. This could also cause private HEIs to feel secondary to the public HEIs, if the state which owns the public HEIs has the final say in EQA matters. Private and public HEIs' contribution to the nation should both be critical, and fairness should prevail for both. In terms of the lifeworld, the experiences of the stakeholders in this case, were shaped by their identity. Those with public status or identity were not exposed to extra EQA activities, as those with a private status or identity. Similar agencies in Europe are normally autonomous. The agency is by nature an independent organisation with a steering body (QAANZ, 1999). However, institutions and government may be represented on the board of the quality assurance agency, or contribute to the funding of the agency or evaluations (QAANZ, 1999).

From the study findings and the study literature, it is necessary to give befitting autonomy to the bodies entrusted with the promotion of EQA, to ensure implementation is accepted by both public and private HEIs. Furthermore, the autonomy of the QAAs would enable them (QAAs) to quality assure HE without fear or favour. With the current relationship between state and the state owned agencies, the latter may feel an obligation to be in favour of the state.

The study showed that the fragmentation and overlaps also caused tension amongst the EQA bodies themselves. Each EQA would rely on the fact that they have the authority to exercise their respective mandates, despite the overlaps. More so, because each body would want to be seen to be complying with the mandate as entrusted to it by the state. In the end, even the EQA bodies would be merely complying with the law, without giving due credibility to the

system. Those entrusted with the implementation should also be given all the necessary autonomy to implement as seen fit. Contrary to befitting autonomy, the aspect of improvement becomes questionable in the process of EQA. Already the IQA is shifted to second place, with EQA taking the first place. Still in the latter case, IQA should be prioritised, promoted and supported by EQA. The custodians should be given priority to design and implement the systems as seen fit, and to design the systems according to the experiences as best lived. The opportunity to design and implement the systems from the experiences as derived from lifeworld should be seen as of upmost importance. The lifeworld of the different HEIs can never be the same in each institution, as the contexts are unique. The uniqueness of the different HEIs is best known by the institutions themselves, hence; the institutions should also be at the forefront of quality assuring their respective systems, as deemed fit, while also ensuring integration with each other. In other words, all stakeholders, particularly the state, the EQA bodies, and the HEIs, should prioritise IQA in the first place, while EQA remains critical. All this should be done in the spirit of integration.

The implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia was not all gloomy. The findings of the study indicated that the stakeholders experienced the positive impact of the system, despite the fact that the fragmentation and overlaps were overwhelming. The study showed that there were pockets of success in the implementation of the system. The implementation and coordination of the qualifications framework particularly brought with it logical processes and outcomes in the development of qualifications. National qualifications are standardised, and there is consistency in the implementation of this particular framework. There is consistency in how the qualifications are developed and implemented, and in the nomenclature of national qualifications. According to this study, these standards made implementation of the EQA system, particularly this aspect of NQF, pleasant and impactful to the stakeholders. The standardised and well-coordinated NQF also impacted the HE system in an effective way, evincing the quality of qualifications. By extension, the quality in national qualifications benefitted the students and academics of the different institutions, and the nation at large in terms of internationalisation. The well-coordinated and consistent national qualifications also dealt with the challenges brought about by massification as also indicated in literature review. With massification, expansion of HE could affect the goal of expanding quality access to HE in the country. Different institutions could offer qualifications that were

not up to standard or of low quality. This is an example that goes to show that, if well implemented, EQA plays a critical role in HE. Kis (2005) confirmed the usefulness of EQA by arguing that, external quality monitoring ensures the integrity of higher education, including international integrity; through something similar to an accreditation procedure.

However, the standardisation and coordination of qualifications alone cannot guarantee quality of qualifications. Critical is what the qualifications contain, in terms of relevance and responsiveness. How far do the HEIs, together with the QAAs, go into quality assuring the qualifications? How often are the qualifications regulations reviewed to ensure relevance and responsiveness? How rigorous are the regulations for qualifications?

It should not be surprising that the NQF is one of the frameworks within the EQA system, which is functioning and making an impact, giving stakeholders a more pleasant experience. The reason could be that, the NQF was one framework that did not overlap with other EQA frameworks (see literature in Chapter 3). As stated earlier, the issue of fragmentation and overlaps also contained non-alignments. The NQF was not aligned with the other related frameworks, which posed a problem in the implementation of the system at large. Stakeholders tend to lose motivation for implementing all frameworks of the system which are not even interlinked.

This study has overall, described the system as fragmented, with overlaps characterised by non-alignment of frameworks, according to stakeholders' experiences of the implementation of the EQA system. In the context of this study, the characteristics which shape the everyday experiences of the stakeholders. Put differently, the lifeworld of the stakeholders, as far as implementation of the EQA system is concerned, are shaped by the aspects discussed under this theme. The whole lifeworld is mine, just as the whole lifeworld gains its meaning from my sociality; the whole lifeworld is relative to my embodiment; the whole lifeworld is temporal and spatial; the whole lifeworld has its priorities and saliences which mark out the individual's cares and concerns, as well as their projects (Ashworth, 2016). As discussed, the stakeholders' lived experiences of the implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia derived its meaning from their respective lifeworld. The meaning of the stakeholders' experiences was derived from the relationships that the stakeholders have with each other. The relationship between the different EQA bodies, the HEIs, including the government

(sociality). People are central parts of each other's lifeworld, also impacting each other's selfhood because of sociality (Ashworth, 2016). The aspects of the different relationships also impacted the embodiedness of the stakeholders. It is through the body that we are able to pursue our projects and by "project" here is meant purpose (Ashworth, 2016). Embodiedness also includes the attitude they derived from implementing the system. The stakeholders have been in different spaces at different times in implementing the system. The findings revealed that stakeholders attempted to amend the system for a while now, in terms of temporality. This further shows that the lifeworld aspects are interdependent and interlinked. No wonder some authors have referred to the lifeworld features as 'fractions'. Ashworth (2016) has termed such elements "fractions" because these are not independent categories or parameters or perspectives. Rather, they are mutually entailed, with overlapping or interpenetrating meanings.

Under this question and the matching theme, I discussed how the stakeholders experienced the implementation of the EQA system. In the next section, I will provide justification for the study findings, why the stakeholders experience the system in the way that they do. More specifically, *why* the stakeholders experienced a fragmented system.

Research Question 4

The third research question, namely; *why do stakeholders experience the implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia the way that they do?* Is matched with the third theme; *the value of support and integrated planning*. The different aspects which justify the experiences of the stakeholders in this phenomenon are discussed. The study showed that, the reason why stakeholders experienced a fragmented EQA system, was the aspects that had been taken for granted, namely; *disintegrated planning; lack of staff capacity; power relations; and legislation and governance*. Critical for this last theme was the fact that, these aspects are what needed to change in the EQA system for HE in Namibia. Equally, these were the aspects that were taken for granted in the implementation of the EQA system. Critical theory seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them (Asghar, 2013). Emancipation of stakeholders from fragmented experiences of the implementation of the EQA system should begin by addressing these aspects. Even though

the suggested changes imply usage of these aspects in the future, stakeholders' lifeworld still played a role in terms of the afore experiences which informed the present and the future. Emphasis should be on emancipatory changes to the lifeworld experiences of the stakeholders. The lifeworld is temporal, and reflections rely on past experiences even if the question is about anticipation for the future (Schütz 2002).

Integrated management Systems have become a mainstream concept (Kauppila, 2016). This too should take centre stage in the EQA system of HE in Namibia, with leadership championing it. The study findings showed that stakeholders attached significant value to integrated planning. As the implementation of the system was done at the time of the study, there was evidence of lack of integrated planning or disintegration. Amongst the frameworks which should be related and interlinked, is total disintegration in the legal documents, and logically, in the practical implementation as well. In other words, the establishing documents were, in this case, the root 'evil'. The documents which gave mandate to the different EQA bodies were clearly not integrated. Through analysis of the documents, there was an indication that the different mandates were planned in isolation, without consideration of related Acts, policies, institutions, frameworks and activities. This situation caused disintegration of the whole system, giving stakeholders unpleasant experiences of a cumbersome implementation process. In a similar vein, the study indicated that the support to implement the system is inadequate, again rendering the stakeholders experience unpleasant.

Logically, the frameworks should be integrated, since they serve the same targets, with the same purpose, and even using resources from the same source/s. It is also important to recognise that with every new Act, policy or framework; there is need to consider Acts, policies and frameworks that have been in existence before in order to create integration between the new and the old (or the existing and the incoming). Integration should be designed within the system, and from the root of the system, if it is to be systemically applied. With the current implementation of the EQA system, there is a deep lack of integration amongst the supposed-to-be-related Acts, policies, and frameworks. The stakeholders' attempts to bring about integration in the implementation process has not worked. While the components establishing the system have not been integrated from the beginning, implementation is logically expected to be disintegrated too. Going forward, the HE fraternity

has, from lived experiences, recognised that the disintegrated system is a challenge, and it is rendering the EQA system and QA in general a redundant exercise, or at least less effective. In an attempt to rectify the situation, the stakeholders at QAAs and HIEs have made suggestions to have the Acts amended towards an integrated approach, and alignment of functions. However, the study findings indicate that each of these bodies have made the suggested amendments in isolation. Suggesting and drafting the amendments in isolation will most likely perpetuate the current challenges experienced. For the best integration approach, all related Acts, policies and frameworks ought to be amended together to iron out the gray areas and align the EQA activities. Importantly, the policy and decision makers should carefully amend the Acts, to achieve well demarcated mandates and functions among the different bodies. The integration in the context of EQA should, not only be between EQA bodies or frameworks, but also be between EQA and IQA, as the two are dependent on each other.

The findings revealed that the integration philosophy in Namibia has emerged since the country first drafted the national vision, and it was meant to boil down to every national system. The country's philosophy of integration was the right thing to do for optimal achievement of purpose and prosperity, in whatever the system would be. This philosophy, to date, seems to be only honoured in black and white (in terms of writing) and not in actual practice. It is 'biting' that the good intentions that the country introduces only go half way. They are not respected nor practically implemented as national principles. This diversion from such principles tends to fail the nation through implementation of systems, such as EQA for HE. By extension, failing the implementation of EQA has direct damaging impact on the outcome of HE, impacting the country at large. For example, if the quality assurance process of HE is not done up to the required standard, the quality of the HE outcome, will not be of acceptable quality either. In the first place, quality assurance should improve HE through the academics and other staff. However, if the implementation of the process is frustrating, the academics and staff will not be encouraged to commit to the EQA processes. This, in the end, has dire consequences, not only on the HE system, but also on national development at large. If the national quality assurance and the HE systems are not competitive, the dream of being part of the international community will be shattered for all stakeholders, as internationalisation takes into account comparable quality. Comparable quality is enhanced

through harmonisation of systems. If national frameworks cannot be harmonised into a functional system, it would almost be impossible to achieve harmonisation with other countries.

Through document analysis, I discovered that the NCHE system clearly suggests cooperation measures upon implementation of EQA. The NCHE is one of the QAAs which has successfully managed to implement collaboration with one of the PBs, with the aim of mitigating the challenge of fragmentation and overlaps. From the study findings, this kind of collaboration was attempted between two QAAs with no success. It shows that the situation was more tense between QAAs, while cooperation was much easier between QAAs and PBs. The QAAs were in competition with one another, and the competition was proving to be unhealthy. It is also the QAAs that are directly under the state governance, reporting to the same ministry. These QAAs were also in tense competition due to anticipated recognition from the government. Ironically, in cases where the government senior officials were to take the lead in integrating the frameworks, they (senior official) too showed no commitment, further discouraging the stakeholders. The sociality aspect of QAAs was therefore, in jeopardy, as they could not create a healthy relationship.

The study also showed that, in the case of professional programmes, there was a discrepancy between the requirements of the PBs, and that of the QAAs (for the same programmes). This, in itself, indicated the need for integration between the EQA bodies responsible for quality assuring the very same programmes, but would approach the HEIs for the same purpose (QA) at different times, with different requirements. For example, for the BEng (honours), the NQA would require 480 credits, while the Engineering Council of Namibia (ECN) would require 560 credits. One would think the need for integration was self-expressed which, however, did not seem to be the case. In a case such as this, the HEI then opted to follow the requirements of the PB. The reason for this choice was not necessarily because the requirements were higher, but because the role of the PB is more compelling. The PBs were responsible for the recognition of the graduates as professionals in the field, a process well known as registration. Without meeting the PB requirements, the students would not be allowed to practice as professionals, hence the choice of the HEIs. However, without meeting the requirements of the NQA, the HEIs can still offer the programmes and the students can still practice as professionals. The NQA frameworks are not compulsory, so the HEIs might not see the need

to always comply with their (NQA) standards. The non-compulsory aspect of the frameworks demonstrated the lack of seriousness of the frameworks. What is the need of having a QA framework that is not compulsory? How is it useful to have some programmes or some HEIs quality assured and not the others? The credibility of the EQA system was therefore, compromised.

To enhance the establishment of pleasant lived experiences in implementing the EQA system, dialogue amongst the key players is critical. The findings of the study indicate that there was no adequate dialogue between the different EQA bodies, as well as between the EQA bodies and the HEIs. The inadequate conversation was an indication that integration would not be achieved without amending the Acts. For that reason, the EQA bodies failed to have interim measures working, while awaiting the amendment of Acts. Even in cases where amendments of the cases might happen, it will always be necessary for the stakeholders across to have conversation, to maximize the effectiveness of the integration of the system, and to enhance its credibility. In terms of critical theory and the communicative rationality of Habermas, dialogue is a communicative situation in which participants express both system and lifeworld values, and are openly and mutually exchange perspectives to reach a mutual understanding of a situation (Abma, 2005). Only through dialogue can the different stakeholders work together towards designing the EQA system, from their respective lifeworld experiences.

The study also showed that the HE stakeholders in Namibia lacked common vision and purpose on the aspect of QA and EQA in particular. Each EQA body was implementing their respective frameworks in isolation, hence integration at the moment was a far-fetched dream. The common vision, common value would confirm the need for EQA in the country and ultimately, its importance. This different understandings of the system can be attributed to the implementation that continued to be done in isolation. The different EQA bodies should invest deliberate effort in understanding each other's roles, in order to successfully foster integration. For integration of internal and external evaluation to be successful, attention should be paid to the roles of the stakeholders. Kauppila (2016) emphasises the need to integrate EQA activities, and thereafter, institute coordination to achieve continuous improvement. Kauppila (2016) advises that evaluation tools be designed for a holistic view.

Since the disintegration stems from the different mandates, the fragmentation also has to do with the multiple agencies, established by different Acts, without clear demarcation of mandates. In Namibia, one of the concerns was to address the 'harmonization of QA in the country (who is responsible for what?)' in a context in which there were three agencies responsible for different aspects of QA (DIES, 2017). The issue of fragmentation seems to be rife in countries with multiple QAAs. In a different interview, a stakeholder from one of South African HEIs indicated that: " *We spend a lot of time repeating or duplicating work already done in some of the accreditation and registration processes. A more streamlined approach would mean that we could engage more fully with the qualitative depth of quality concerns rather than seeking always to provide the answer that will make the question go away*" (DIES, 2017). Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) have criticised the aspect of multiple levels, citing the reasons which have (now) been experienced by the stakeholders in Namibia. They aptly argue against multiple agencies thus:

It would be inefficient to establish multiple agencies addressing different objectives separately. Unless the multiple agencies have clearly distinct spheres of responsibility (such as evaluation of research versus evaluation of teaching) it is not desirable or stable to have separate external agencies for the following reasons: Firstly, multiple agencies impose an excessive load on higher education institutions. Secondly, there is likely to be duplication, since the two roles have similar needs. Thirdly, a system including two or more agencies is unstable; one quality assurance agency is likely to 'capture' the other. Finally, accountability agencies are tending to be advisory, also and are likely to take on an improvement role (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995).

While EQA has a lot to offer in the HE system, it also hampers innovation. External quality reviews inhibit innovation through its conservative or rigid evaluation criteria (Kis, 2005). In order to ensure the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms, there is need for constant reflection and change in external quality assurance, including periodic change in both purposes and in the QAAs themselves (Kis, 2005). The problem is that the quality assurance bureaucracies become established and politicians become reluctant to dissolve QAAs as this would appear an admission of failure. As a result, external quality assurance systems risk becoming 'standardised' (Kis, 2005).

The study revealed that the other aspect that shaped the implementation experiences of the stakeholders was staff capacity. The implementation process was expected to largely depend

on the capacity of those who should lead or participate in it. The implementation process would require capacity of all stakeholders if it is to be done successfully. However, capacity alone would not be sufficient. Other critical related aspects such as leadership support and funding would complement the capacity building aspect. In this study, staff capacity, especially that of the QAAs and PBs, was critical as the staff is entrusted with the execution of EQA. The same EQA bodies were also responsible for giving support to the HEIs to better practice IQA and eventually EQA. In the same vein, HEIs also need to build capacity for implementing both IQA and EQA.

The study also showed that the inadequate capacity of staff hampers the implementation process as there was no sufficient capacity to deal with the demands of EQA. There was a high turnover at the QAAs, and most of the staff members who got recruited came from different backgrounds, other than QA. This meant that the staff members required intensive training on the subject of QA. Nationally, there is limited capacity to offer training. There is also no professional training offered in the form of university training or for any qualification in the field of QA. The national staff members in QA rely mainly on international conferences and consultants for training. There are international institutions which offer professional training, although at a high cost; hence only very few people have benefitted.

The challenge with relying on conferences, especially international conferences, is that the specific capacity demands of individuals would not be met, and especially the national context would not be addressed. International conferences would largely address general matters of QA. Equally, international consultants might address individual demands. However, they would lack the depth of national context. International training would make a difference in training. However, for novice QA staff members, national training would be a good base.

The study findings showed that staff members at QAAs admitted inadequate capacity for executing EQA and in particular inadequate capacity to train the HEIs members. The staff at QAAs were said to lack analytical skills required to deal with the implementation of the EQA system. Analytical skills would be necessary in implementing the system in the most holistic way, and ultimately in a critical way. These kind of skills were necessary, equally for those assessing and those assessed. Analytical skills are a must have if one is to do proper assessment. Equally, analytical skills are a must have if one is to produce proper self-evaluation report. Implementing the EQA system without these skills would mean sub-

standard work, with a ripple effect on the outcome. The assessment of QA is a rigorous process, that also looks at profound aspects in HE. For anyone to do a proper assessment, one needs to go into the depths of the matters and do thorough analysis. If assessment is done on face value, without in-depth analysis, the outcome will less likely be a true reflection, and by extension, the needed improvement will not result from the process. In a different interview which focused on SADC countries, respondents from Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and the Seychelles highlighted lack of QA capacity at the institutional and national level (DIES, 2017). Some such admissions were; “There is a lack of capacity on QA issues in the institutions”; “Lack of capacity at both the QA Agency and Institutional level” (DIES, 2017).

The nature of EQA assessments was mainly that the assessors were sourced nationally, but most of them internationally. As per the findings of the study, the national QAAs tended to play purely administrative roles, when it came to these EQA exercises. The QAAs tended to rely too much on the external panels, beyond the need for subject-matter expertise. In the preparation stages of these exercises and throughout, QAAs staff was required to give continuous in-house training to academics and other staff members at HEIs. This is where most inadequate capacity was felt. QAAs’ staff members tended to feel intimidated to enter into dialogue with academics and staff at HEIs, due to inadequate capacity. HEIs’ staff also looked down on the QAAs’ staff, intimidating them, especially given their (QAAs staff) positions. This, in the end, hampered communication and affected implementation of the system negatively. This is where support for QA practitioners was needed, especially from the leadership or line Ministry. Without the necessary support, QAAs would not lead the implementation with confidence, and similarly, HEIs would not take the QAAs seriously. In the context of this study, this would give stakeholders across the HE sector an unpleasant experience. Even in terms of positions, the staff members at QAAs tended to be recruited at low levels. Altogether, QAAs’ staff were intimidated to train and to hold dialogue over QA matters with staff at HEIs, especially professors and other academics. In terms of the lifeworld features, identity played a role here. Who one is, in terms of position, shaped the lifeworld experience. Furthermore, the lack of confidence implied embodiedness as a lifeworld feature that shaped the experiences.

One of the critical steps in the EQA system was the monitoring aspect. To ensure continuous improvement, it was critical to ensure functional monitoring mechanisms. There were in-built monitoring mechanisms in the accreditation and institutional audit frameworks. The monitoring aspect was done through means of 'improvement plans'. The improvement plans would comprise recommendations from the actual QA exercises, i.e. accreditation and audits. Profoundly important as these improvement plans may be, QAAs were unable to monitor these improvement plans due to inadequate capacity. According to Kis (2005), for HEIs, the most important function of quality assurance was an analysis of strengths and weaknesses and the formulation of recommendations for further improvement. With the frustrations that the HEIs have, especially with the overlaps, they would not pay attention or attend to the improvement plans on their own, without the QAAs and PBs facilitating; mainly because some HEIs' stakeholders' perception was that EQA does not add value to their services, but that it (EQA) adds unnecessarily to their work loads. If EQA bodies are supported in terms of building capacity, it will improve the implementation process, further rendering pleasant experiences to the stakeholders.

The PBs have broad professional requirements that they demand of the students and eventually graduates. The PBs quality assure the HEIs' programmes through processes that are not as rigorous due to limited capacity within the PBs. From the findings of the study, PBs tended to do a better job when they teamed up with QAAs, although it was not common practice, in the Namibian context, that PBs and QAAs did joint QA exercises. From the experiences of the stakeholders, as the study revealed, the one joint exercise that was done proved that the combined effort assisted the HEI by going through the process only once. This further helped the two EQA bodies in carrying out an integrated process, complementing expertise from each side. In the beginning, the process was demanding, as the two bodies needed to combine their regulations and methodologies. This way (combined), it became manageable for the HEIs to go through the process once in a phase of a certain framework, i.e. accreditation. In the end, this process also led to the same outcome for a programme, as opposed to a possibility of opposite outcomes emerging out of similar processes by different bodies. The duration of the certificates' validity also coincided for both EQA bodies involved, as opposed to an HEI awarded different certificates by different bodies, which also tended to have different validity periods and expiry dates.

From the study, it emerged that QAAs, HEIs, as well as PBs all lacked adequate capacity in their respective institutions to effectively facilitate the implementation of the system. On a brighter side, all the stakeholders from these institutions were aware of their own weaknesses; some claimed lack of support in terms of funding to facilitate capacity building.

The study revealed that there were power relations within the EQA system for HE in Namibia. These power relations are not always healthy. For a system that aims to serve accountability, power relations would be necessary to a reasonable extent, where the relations are not threatening or compromising. The power relations should rather serve the purpose of being supportive and progressive – what the EQA system for HE in Namibia needs in order to yield the required results. As it was, the power relations within the EQA system in Namibia, were hampering progress in the implementation of the EQA system and creating discrepancy between policy and practice – aimed at implementing the EQA system for HE in Namibia. The power relations also caused stakeholders to practice mere compliance in the process of implementation of EQA. Critical theory was in contrast to traditional theory that explores and confirms the status quo, whereas critical theory challenges the status quo (Asghar, 2013). Similarly, this discussion aimed to challenge the status quo, by suggesting more emancipating strategies which should be employed within the EQA system.

The power relations are mainly practiced by the leadership at ministerial level (line ministry). The power relations are also practiced between and among the different QAAs, attributed to their different Acts and overlapping mandates. Therefore, each QAA tended to implement the EQA system, for the sake of complying with the authority/state. Each QAA is eager to be seen implementing their mandate. The challenge is that, the implementation was not yielding the intended results, as the overlaps were not working. Mere compliance is not focused on the results and impact, but on fulfilling the mandates as required by the state. The QAAs were enforcing their mandates on the HEIs, without due regard to the schedules and calendars of the institutions. In the end, the HEIs were also playing the compliance game, experiencing a frustrated implementation process that was not result driven. The risk was that the HEIs were implementing the system under frustrating circumstances, further shaping their perspective of EQA as unpleasant and negative. The dominance of EQA on HEIs also meant shifting IQA to the back. The findings revealed that EQA was time consuming when HEIs were required to

repeat similar EQA processes - due to the fragmentation of the system. This kind of practice hampered the effectiveness of IQA, and the cultivation of a strong quality culture; ultimately affecting the transformation process of the students – which should be the ultimate outcome of the system. Unhealthy power relations have no place in the EQA system.

If the IQA of the respective HEIs is not strengthened, the intended objectives of IQA is not reached. The intended objectives of EQA (from HEIs) will not be achieved either. Support for HEIs from the EQA is critical to strengthen IQA, which will in turn empower HEIs to implement EQA. These bodies (EQA) can only support and empower the HEIs, if they (EQA bodies) too are empowered and supported. This needs to be practiced under enabling conditions and environment, i.e. aligned, well-coordinated and integrated EQA system. This is not only to benefit the HEIs, but for the QAAs to implement EQA effectively and impactfully.

Although the study revealed aspects of power relations, the study also indicated that the stakeholders tended to see them (relations) as normal. Most of the stakeholders used frames like, 'waiting for permission from the Minister'; referring to the ministry as the 'mother-body'; implementing EQA 'as per the mandate'; and respecting 'the authority'. Due to all these superior names, the stakeholders felt there was nothing else they could do, but to wait on the powers that may be to address the issues one day.

As per the findings, the fragmented, overlapping and non-aligned EQA system was widely discussed by stakeholders of the HE fraternity, i.e. QAAs, PBs, HEIs. This discussion began as far as 10 years back, but the challenges were still not addressed. The QAAs, PBs, HEIs seemed to know from implementation experiences how the system should be better designed. However, the final say lay with the 'mother body' to give 'permission'. Meanwhile, the authority was kept happy as long as the mandates were applied as they were or as per the establishing Acts – which is exactly what was not working. Those who work with the system should be given a chance to suggest better working mechanisms. In this case, those who worked with the system should especially be the ones to lead the changes, given that they would be doing so from lived experiences. Their lifeworld thus far, as far as implementation of the system was concerned, had been shaped by having implemented a fragmented system. The lifeworld experiences they had gained thus far, could be useful in altering the system towards a non-fragmented one. The lived lifeworld and the experiences gained through the implementation of the system was a strong tool for Namibia to better the EQA system. The

lifeworld experiences was also a strong tool for cultivating and strengthening institutional quality culture. Power relations should be used for support through accountability, aiming to influence change and continuous improvement. Habermas expressed that institutional systems function productively, only when they are institutionalised and anchored in people's lifeworlds (Luckett, 2006). There is a danger of allowing institutional systems to colonise lifeworld systems, through bureaucratisation by the state (Luckett, 2006).

Due to the fact that the QAAs, as well as public HEIs are state-owned, the aspect of power-relations is heightened. The autonomy exercised by the QAAs, HEIs, is way too limited for the type of institutions that they are, and particularly the mandate that they are expected to execute. All strategic discussions are done, mindful that the governing bodies of these institutions have to report to the line minister. That in itself can hamper objective discussions and decision making. After all, the line minister must have the final say. This means that the immediate people who are affected by the system do not have the independence or the autonomy to make objective decisions. Decisions are made for them by the powers that be. The powers should grant whatever is sufficient autonomy to these institutions, in order to implement the EQA system effectively, without any fear of not being in favour of the leadership. Sufficient autonomy should be granted, as long as there is no violation of the principles of the EQA system. The power relations applied on HEIs may also be seen at play to the advantage or disadvantage of public or private HEIs.

Without autonomy, there are also aspects that the QAAs will not be able to apply or practice. Serving a dynamic discipline such as HE, requires dynamic and constant change as well. It is almost impractical to seek the minister's permission every time the agencies, and HEIs need to implement aspects that will assist in keeping up with the rest of the world. In this world of today, where globalisation and internationalisation are forces of change, remaining comparable, in terms of quality is key. Comparable quality worldwide is in favour of the nation at large, especially for student and staff mobility. Furthermore, the mandates of the EQA bodies imply legality (legal matters) in most cases. For example, if a HEI decides to sue a QAA, that QAA should be able to act with urgency on the legal issues, by having an institutional or internal lawyer or legal advisor on the structure. However, with the QAAs being state owned, for any legal matter taken against them, they (QAA) will have to depend on the state attorneys; a lengthy and bureaucratic process.

Literature has proven that there is a relationship between funding and quality HE. Higher education in general, is a costly system in terms of what needs to be invested to produce quality graduates. As literature in this study revealed, most countries have a huge percentage of their national budgets dedicated to HE. This is done with the hope of perceived high return on investment aiming to benefit countries, in the form of socio-economic development. In the same vein, the implementation of quality systems, EQA in the case of this study, requires ample resources to be implemented effectively. From the study findings, stakeholders lived experiences of the implementation of EQA is largely influenced by availed resources; financial and human which, to a large extent, have financial implications.

The study found that, apart from QAA, HEIs were hardly implementing their plans as per the needs of the institutions, and this was due to lack of funds to facilitate institutional plans. HEIs may initiate and develop academic programmes as per the needs of the institution and that of the country, and in line with the institutional mandate and mission. However, the implementation of these programmes often do not materialise for a long period, or until the academic programmes are no longer relevant due to lack of funds. This has direct implication for the quality of the institution, and the country at large. Equally, the implementation of the EQA system requires funds for the EQA bodies, as well as for HEIs. However, funds have been dwindling of late, and implementation of systems such as EQA is affected. The system cannot be implemented in the best possible way, due to limited funds. The IQA suffers from this challenge despite a larger portion of the national budget being directed to HE. The study revealed that HEIs' leadership could be placing the implementation of QA at institutional level as a lesser priority, not investing reasonably in the implementation of IQA. Internal quality assurance and external quality assurance are interrelated and interlinked. Unpleasant lived experiences of the implementation of the IQA has a direct impact on the implementation of the EQA and vice versa. The implementation of EQA should be done in the totality that it exists. Put differently, the everyday lifeworld of the HE stakeholders has an impact on the implementation of EQA. That is also the reason why this study is looking at stakeholders in different places, and not just those placed in QAAs. Therefore, investing in or funding all stakeholders and all frameworks is critical, as these aspects are all interrelated, despite the fact that the practice on the ground is being done in a disintegrated way.

Aspects such as inadequate capacity which affected the implementation of EQA were also a result of inadequate funding. It was inadequate funding that constrained the institutions financially, and not able to train continuously. In the same vein, properly qualified professionals were not employed in QAAs, nor in HEIs, due to unaffordability of salaries. In the process, quality as should be embedded in the implementation of EQA is compromised, leaving stakeholders with lived experiences that view implementation as substandard, as many initiatives might not have been carried out due to lack of funding.

HEIs QA strategies, should be inclusive of all the relevant EQA and PBs QA activities; combining the vertical and horizontal integrations for a holistic QA system. In other words, the HEIs' IQA strategies should be based on the mission and vision, and integrated with EQA activities. Such systematic planning could decrease evaluation workload and increase the impact of various evaluations (Kauppila, 2016).

Institutional integrated systems should precede national systems. Put differently, integration should begin with integration of institutional activities, then the integration of EQA (the different EQA activities) and eventually EQA and IQA. Such tools can also be worthwhile in creating a common language within the evaluation context of an HEI (Kauppila, 2016).

Research Question 5

I give importance to the experience of the stakeholders, hence the need to derive recommendations from them. After experiencing the system the way it was, what was discovered as good (most probably needing improvement), what was found wanting, and what could be the best solution to close the existing gaps? What are some of the possible solutions to a better EQA system for HE in Namibia?

The study showed that part of stakeholders' unpleasant experience was attributed to the design of the system through the Acts of parliament. The most common and pressing need was a changed system, in terms of mandate and functions. If the establishing Acts can be amended to suit the country's HE landscape, by implementing more favourable mandates, then the country can yield better results. A less or non-fragmented system was viewed to be more practical in terms of achieving the goals of EQA. It was even more pressing to have a

EQA system that is responsive, as EQA was expected to influence IQA and therefore, the entire HE system.

Participants from HEIs often felt EQA was imposed and tended to take up most of their teaching and research time. In the case of Namibia, this perception was strengthened by the fragmented system, where staff in HEIs experienced review fatigue. With the review fatigue, staff cared less how the EQA process was supposed to be of help in improving the IQA. At the end, the attitude of the stakeholders determined their response to EQA, hence the importance of their experience, and the use of their experiences for improving the system.

It was good that the agencies too were willing to have conversations towards a better system, with emphasis on a less fragmented system. Furthermore, the agencies, as well as the professional bodies, were willing to collaborate to curb EQA review fatigue and to achieve acceptance of other stakeholders in the spirit of EQA bodies being *'critical friends'*.

The aspects that the study revealed as requirements for an improved system included capacity building amongst QAAs' staff. Staff at the QAAs was seen as less conversant with the QAA practices, compared to staff at HEIs. This situation was attributed to the high staff turnover at QAAs. The staff often moved to HEIs' QA units, leaving QAAs to employ new staff members who were less experienced and less qualified. The capacity building was a grave concern, as knowledge and confidence are critical in EQA implementers for the success of the system. The fact that there were limited QA formal trainings leading to qualifications, left a big gap in terms of capacity. The available trainings were expensive and international.

The autonomy of the QAAs was another aspect that was critical to the effective implementation of EQA. The practice of EQA requires QAAs to exercise autonomy without state or any other kind of interference. Implementation of EQA ought to be done objectively, with the aim of bringing about improvement. This goes back to how the QAAs as organisations are established. A structure that is kept as a directorate within a government ministry is likely to have less autonomy to objectively implement EQA. It is even worse when you have sister agencies with different level of mandates. Some agencies are part of the ministry, some are independent. In the end, the QAAs which are part of the line ministry are most likely to comply with government as their immediate authority. Thus, an urgent need to restructure the agencies accordingly is necessary.

Another aspect that emerged as a way of closing the quality gap and leading to a desired system was the common vision of EQA amongst the stakeholders. The study revealed that there was disparity of EQA vision amongst the stakeholders. Some of the stakeholders were aware of this, hence the call to get back to the drawing board and iron out unnecessary differences. With a common vision, the system is most likely to succeed. Emphasis should be placed on inclusivity of stakeholders within the HE fraternity. If any important stakeholder is left out in the planning processes, the status quo (of uncommon purposes) is likely to prevail. In conclusion of the possible solutions, I propose an integrated model for QA in Namibia. This integrated model is backed by literature (*see chapter 1*) which sees an integrated model as essential to enhancement of quality.

Summary of the findings

EQA, which is the focus of this study, is a daunting responsibility that needs to be well understood, well planned, and well implemented in order to achieve its objectives. From the findings, the study revealed that the main aspect that played a role in the everyday lifeworld of the stakeholders, and resultantly shaped their experiences, was the fragmented EQA system. The findings indicated that QA was portrayed in the documents the same way as the interviewed stakeholders relayed. i.e. the overlapping mandates were clear from reading the different QA documents. The findings also revealed that the fragmentation stemmed from the different frameworks, housed by different EQA bodies. The EQA system was praised for having brought about consistency in the operations of HE to a certain extent.

The findings led to a call for change in aspects that were taken for granted in the implementation of the EQA system. Overall, a proposal was made of integrating the system, as a solution to overcome the overlaps, non-alignment and the fragmentation. The integration should begin at the level of legislation, to the level of EQA activities, including IQA. This is with the aim that an integrated system would give the stakeholders a more pleasant experience in implementing the EQA system.

It is evident from the Acts establishing these national quality assurance agencies that there were overlapping mandates. In addition to this, it seems that there is a lack of alignment between the quality assurance processes of the three different quality assurance agencies, as well as that of professional bodies. It is not surprising also to observe that there is no

alignment between internal and external quality assurance processes. This state of affairs may result in a quality assurance system drift; characterised by lack of integration, fragmentation, inefficiency and ineffectiveness; resulting in frustrations among the users of the system. This study was thus useful in uncovering the experiences of stakeholders in the implementation of the quality assurance system in Namibia, and in deepening understanding of the implementation of quality assurance, as well as add new knowledge to the quality assurance discourse.

Throughout the discussions, the voice of the students did not come out much, something of great concern. Students' knowledge of QA matters was too basic. For example, upon inviting the students for these focus group discussions, many of the students admitted to discovering that their respective HEIs actually had QA centres or units. Further questions, such as what their understanding was on EQA, could not yield near accurate responses. In fact, students did not know what was meant by EQA, nor the concept of IQA (not the abbreviations, but the actual concepts). Students were not aware of EQA bodies, a few knew of NQA, and those in professional programmes knew of their respective PBs. This did not mean that the students did not experience a lifeworld of QA in their respective HEIs. From what students could say, they experienced QA in their everyday lifeworld. However, it all got taken for granted. There was no deliberate effort towards practising and therefore understanding QA matters in the HEIs. It also showed that the QA centres or units at HEIs did not involve students in the dissemination of QA information. It could only be the duty of such units at institutional level.

Additionally, the available national documents on the matter were so limited to satisfy the document analysis. Mindful that the documents were developed for different purposes, the information relevant to this study was even more limited. There was limited documentation in Namibia on the aspect of QA in HE. What was available were documents i.e. Acts, regulations (or system documents), policies, and annual reports. Empirical research was way too limited.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of the study presented in the previous chapter. The focus was on meaning making and interpretation of the lifeworld experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation of EQA system in Namibia. The discussions focused specifically on the themes that emerged (matched with the research questions). In the first research question or theme, I discussed what the concepts of QA, EQA and IQA meant to the stakeholders, discussing how meanings were determined by the lifeworld features of the stakeholders, i.e. identity and spatiality. In the second research question, I discussed how the stakeholders experienced the system, particularly the aspects that shaped their lived experiences. For the third research question, I discussed the reasons why stakeholders experienced the system in the way that they did. The discussions were based on lifeworld and critical analysis. In the third theme or research question, aspects taken for granted were discussed, as well as the necessary actions required to transform the implementation of EQA in Namibia. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings that were presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7

Proposed Integrated Model for External Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Namibia

Introduction

The study examined the lived experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation of EQA for HE in Namibia, based on phenomenology and the concept of lifeworld. The findings of the study led to descriptions of how the stakeholders experienced the system, and why they experienced the system the way they did. This chapter concludes the study, based on those findings.

Overall, the study findings indicated that the stakeholders described their lived experiences of the system as a fragmented one (system). The findings also revealed why the stakeholders experienced a fragmented system – mainly because of the taken for granted aspects in the implementation process. Based on those reasons, I propose and present in this chapter, an integrated model for Namibia's EQA for HE. The chapter also suggests issues for further research, aimed at further contributing to existing knowledge.

Major challenges of the current EQA system in Namibia

Quality assurance of higher education programmes and institutions has been one of the cornerstones of the Namibian HE space since its inception. Quality assurance has the primary mission of building mutual trust among HEIs and other stakeholders all over Namibia. The study revealed that there were five major players in the quality assurance discourse of higher education institutions in Namibia, namely; HEIs themselves, professional bodies (where applicable), NQA, NCHE, and NTA. Although QAAs agencies were created with different mandates, some of the functions ended up overlapping. Namibian HEIs are subject to a number of reviews by different bodies and at different levels. Review types vary in scale from institution wide reviews to reviews at the programme level. Reviews also vary in terms of whether they are conducted by external bodies or internally within the institution. The different mechanisms and bodies potentially serve a number of purposes such as: to demonstrate accountability, to safeguard reputation, for programme improvement, or any

combination of these. The objectives of QA are manifold in principle, but in practice, focus on either accountability or improvement, although it is recognised that a balance can be achieved. The external/internal distinction implies a difference in terms of initiation and ownership. External reviews are typically initiated outside the institution, tend to be more accountability-oriented, and less sensitive to internal needs and missions; whereas internally-initiated reviews tend to be more problem-driven and useful as a means of improvement, and are more sensitive to institutional goals.

It is clear from the findings of the study that QA systems in Namibia were complex and multi-layered, and HEIs interact with multiple constituents or quality monitoring groups. QA in Namibia has been criticised for having been overwhelmed by overlapping and burdensome processes. These overlaps caused the HE QA system at national and institutional levels to be fragmented, causing implementation tension instead of systems playing complementary roles. One fundamental aspect of the QA discourse in higher education is the issue of alignment of EQA processes among multiple QA agencies, as well as between EQA and IQA, which comes with well-defined roles and responsibilities. There is therefore, a general desire to increase the resource efficiency of QA, to reduce unnecessary duplication and smooth out potential tensions between different QA methodologies, processes and practices in Namibian HE. A key goal in alignment is to increase the overall effectiveness of the quality assurance whole, and to provide a clearer focus and purpose to the constituent parts. The change is aimed at improving the lived experiences of the stakeholders in the implementation of the EQA system for HE in Namibia. The aim is to improve the EQA system itself – its design and its implementation. Overall, the improved EQA system should contribute to the improvement of the HE system in Namibia.

The challenge with this kind of arrangement was that the Acts which establish the three QAAs brought about overlaps. The QAAs' Acts have been given overlapping mandates amongst the QAAs. In addition, some of the functions of the PBs overlap with the functions and activities of the QAAs. These challenges have put the HEIs (and the academics) under enormous pressure, rendering all the stakeholders lived experiences in implementing the system unpleasant. For example, the academics feel EQA has been a burden adding to their normal workloads, as it tends to be done repetitively, due to overlaps and non-alignments (see *chapter 6*). Apart from overlapping mandates, the functions and activities of the QAAs and

PBs have not been aligned. Therefore, the entire system is characterised by fragmentation. The different frameworks, and the system as a whole lacked process map or process flow to guide the users of the system. Furthermore, there was no pace (in terms of synchronisation) between the calendars of the EQA bodies and that of the HEIs. The HEIs have not been well informed in terms of the processes and how they should flow.

The other challenge was the issue of capacity in implementing the EQA system. Both HEIs and the EQA bodies did not have adequate capacity required to implement the system effectively. The lack of capacity led to some components within the system not being implemented; particularly, the important aspect of monitoring. The inadequate capacity has also affected the internal quality assurance of QAAs, as well as that of HEIs.

Notwithstanding the benefits of alignment, there were a number of challenges. The varying review methods differed in terms of their missions and goals, their methods (desk-based versus site visit), procedures (schedules, timing and cycles), target audiences, requirements and differences in terms of attention to assurance, compliance, audit versus improvement, and enhancement. There are, in some instances, negative power relations practiced within the HE system, including QA. The negative power relations have hampered progress of the EQA system. Sometimes, leadership tended to use manipulative power, which led the stakeholders into a compliance culture, affecting the credibility of the EQA system negatively.

The afore-said factors have affected the implementation of the EQA system negatively, particularly the experiences of the stakeholders (*see chapter 6*). Having analysed the findings, I posit that the overall required change is an integrated system, promoting collaboration amongst the stakeholders, alignment between the frameworks, integration of the entire system, and a strong sense of ownership amongst the stakeholders. It is also advocated that leadership at every level champion the integration process, with the aid of support, such as capacity building.

Based on the foregoing discussions, this study sought to demonstrate how internal and external QA processes can be aligned to increase the overall effectiveness of the QA system in the Namibian HE as whole, and to provide a clearer focus and purpose to the constituent parts; as well as to effectively have an impact on the student learning experience. Alignment will also help to meet the prevailing general desire to increase the resource efficiency of

quality assurance, to reduce unnecessary duplication, and smooth out potential tensions between different methods. Harrison (2014) suggests three possible alignment types, namely; linear alignment, nested alignment, and contiguous alignment. Linear alignment implies that there is a direct relationship between review methods in an ordered fashion; that the outcomes from one process serve as inputs into another process. Nested alignment is similar to linear alignment in that there is a direct relationship between the levels or layers, but the key difference is that there is a hierarchy implied in the ordering. Each layer contains all the previous layers, or is contextualised by them. Finally, contiguous alignment implies the co-existence of different review methods that work alongside each other and contribute collectively towards achieving the same overall objective (Harrison, 2014). Since the proposed model sought to address co-existence of multiple QA agencies, it was based on the contiguous alignment mode.

The proposed Integrated Model for QA alignment

Given the challenges as presented, I contend that the current EQA system for Namibia requires a more integrated foundation that enhances the synergies between the different QA frameworks, based on specific principles providing a thread to create a stronger system. While Kauppila (2016) emphasises that the coordination of QA is critical, the integration is even more critical. I posit that it is best to coordinate what is integrated. Therefore, I conceptualise an Integrated Model for QA Alignment, which covers alignment between institutional and external agencies) (IQA and EQA) as well as inter-agencies alignment (multiple-agency EQA).

This integrated model for QA alignment that I propose prospers on the assumption that the Acts or legislation establishing the different EQA bodies have been amended, and have done away with overlaps. Furthermore, all of the EQA frameworks ought to be compulsory for integration to yield the best results. All stakeholder-institutions should develop their respective management approaches which should be linked to the integrated model. This further helps with the inter-link between IQA and EQA to ensure a seamless QA system in the entire HE spectrum. An institution would have ‘somehow’ completed the initial QA process, after going around the wheel of QA in the order of the frameworks (clockwise). However, the

QA process can never be completely done, as QA prospers on continuous improvement. Some of the frameworks are also cyclical. The registration of academic qualifications on the NQF, as well as the accreditation of academic programmes, will be happening continuously. The continuity is because HEIs will continue to develop new programmes. Institutional audit is a cyclical framework too. The cyclical nature of the QA frameworks is good practice, to ensure timely relevance of academic programmes.

The integrated model aims to promote a quality culture and strong monitoring mechanisms as a result of implementing the different frameworks in a more integrated and coordinated way. The HEIs should take primary responsibility of implementing the monitoring mechanisms or the Improvement Plans (IPs) (recommendations from the QA exercises or processes). The EQA bodies should support the HEIs in the implementation of the IPs. Since QA is developmental and improvement oriented, the implementation of IPs should be Quality Enhancement (QE). QE requires deliberate effort, especially from the custodians of quality – the HEIs. My emphasis is that each HEI should ideally establish QE mechanisms, to reinforce the developmental approach. The model should result in strengthened **Quality Culture**, **Monitoring Mechanisms**, and **Quality Enhancement** approach for each HEI. Furthermore, there is need for collaborators to develop integration policies for different frameworks, with clear objectives towards collaboration and integration.

To enhance the experiences of the stakeholders from a fragmented, non-aligned EQA system, I highlight several agents of change, who will need the required autonomy and power to take the necessary actions to mitigate the challenges facing the EQA system for HE in Namibia. The agents of change are: The Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation (MoHETI); the QAAs; PBs; HEIs staff and students; as well as employers. These (agents of change) are at the same time the implementers, promoters and beneficiaries of the system. The required actions amongst the agents of change borrowed from (Kis, 2005) are as follows:

- **Clarify the purpose:** The aim of external QA (EQA) should be clear to all stakeholders in order to create a coherent system (Kis, 2005).
- **Legitimate the frameworks/system:** According to Brennan (2001), quality judgements which may lack legitimacy in the eyes of the one on the receiving end are not likely to be acted upon if action can be avoided.

- **Create a dynamic link between internal and external processes:** The balance between internal and external QA cannot be over-emphasised. The two should complement each other. The cooperation between different stakeholders is essential (Kis, 2005).
- **Encourage flexibility, confidence in HEI and more focus on internal processes:** Harvey and Newton (2004) in Kis (2005) argue that quality improvement depends on the trust that stakeholders have in HE. It is essential to take into account the expectations and values of the staff, particularly if it is assumed that lasting quality improvement is based on the energies and initiatives of staff (Newton, 2000) in (Kis, 2005)
- **Establish adequate follow-up procedures, feedback linked to action:** Follow ups are important ways of taking action guided by recommendations of reviews. Without follow-ups, improvements cannot be expected.
- **Ensure regular and cyclical quality monitoring, viewed as a process:** QA should be respected and carried out as a continuous process, rather than an event; in order to achieve long-lasting impact.

For the integrated model to prosper, I propose that it be based on strong principles – enhancing synergy within the system. The following principles, adapted from CHE, SA (2016), underpin the integrated model:

- **Holism:** QA frameworks and legislation are interlinked and interdependent, as they cannot function independently from each other. Conversely, they cannot be implemented in a reductionist manner. The QA system should strive to cover all aspects of the legislative quality assurance mandate.
- **Alignment:** all QA processes and procedures of the QA system for HE in Namibia will be aligned to ensure coherence and consistence. This will eliminate the disconnections that are sometimes exploited by those who would not like to do things by the book. It will also assist in reducing unnecessary duplication within the different QA processes, and thus contribute toward improving resource and process efficiencies.
- **Complementarity:** the different QA processes and frameworks, will be designed and implemented with due cognisance of the interfaces and synergies between and among them, and with a view to leveraging such interfaces and synergies. At a

practical level, the principle of complementarity means that the processes and procedures of the different components of the QA system are designed in such a way that they fill the gaps in the system, but not duplicate, overlap with, replace or displace the processes and procedures of the other components. The establishing Acts of the different QAAs shall also be amended to embed synergies between and among the different QAAs and the QA frameworks.

- **Simplicity:** all QA processes will be simplified to make them less complex, more understandable by stakeholders, and more manageable; while at the same time maintaining or improving their sharpness, robustness and effectiveness.
- **Consultation:** all components of the QA system will be developed in a consultative manner. Institutions, professional bodies and other key stakeholders will be consulted extensively to ensure that the processes and procedures are fit for purpose, taking into consideration all contextual factors, and buy-in from the stakeholders. The consultative approach advances the accountability goal because it serves to provide assurance to stakeholders.
- **Collaboration:** the implementation of the QA system will take due cognisance of the complementary roles played by professional bodies in the quality assurance of learning programmes that lead to qualifications in professional fields such as accounting, engineering, medicine, law and others. The QA stakeholders will work cooperatively with such role players and collaborate with them in running joint projects or events, and integrating or harmonising their processes and procedures, where possible.

The proposed integrated model for alignment of IQA and EQA (including inter-agencies) in Namibia is as follows:

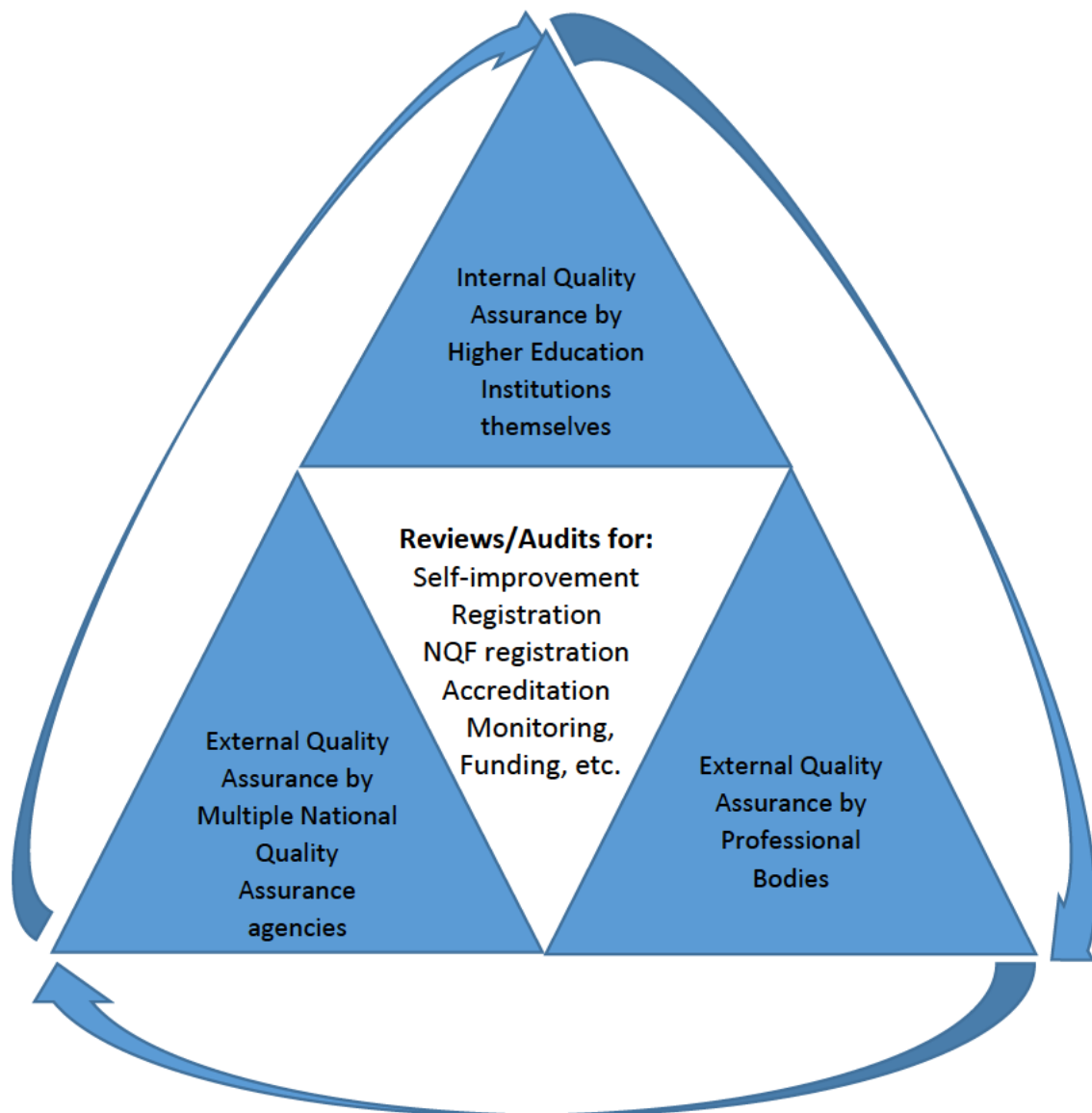


Figure 7.1: A Proposed integrated model for QA Alignment, based on Harrison's model (2014)

As can be seen in Figure 7.1, this model represents a Contiguous Alignment approach whereby processes and methods of different QA players in Namibia (i.e. between different QA agencies, professional bodies, and HEIs) coexist and work alongside each other and contribute collectively towards achieving the same overall objective. The outer arrows represent collaboration and communication amongst QA players. Collaboration and communication

would promote a conducive working environment with enhanced synergies and provide the stakeholders with improved experiences of the system. Based on this model, the study suggests a process flowchart of different QA processes and activities as follows:

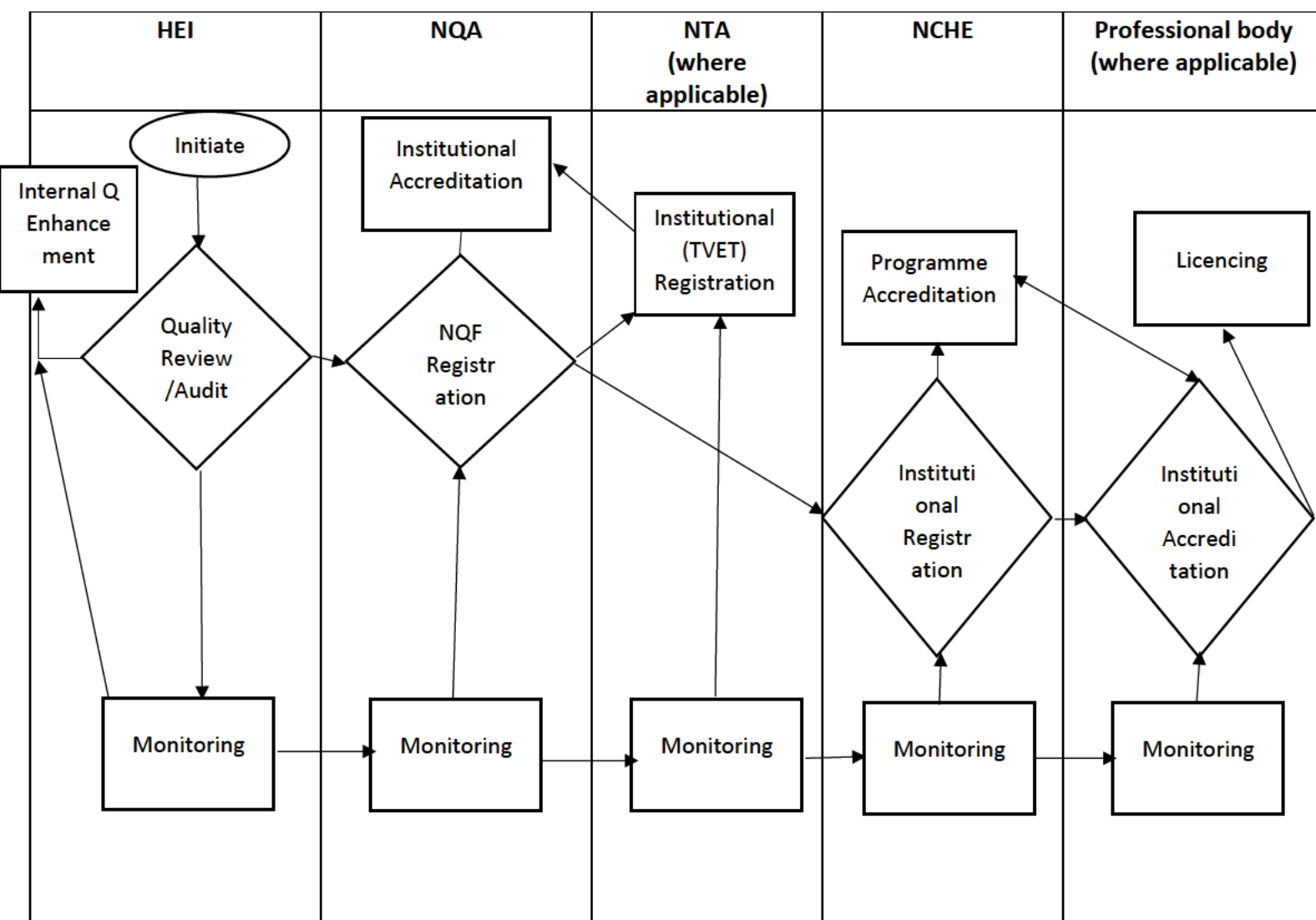


Figure 7.2 Integrated model for QA alignment showing a seamless process flow of different QA processes and activities by different players

Source: Author's own design

As can be seen in Figure 7.2, quality reviews/assessments form the cornerstone of QA activities in HE. This implies that, irrespective of the agency, all QA activities involve review or assessment in one way or the other, and are all cyclical. However, all activities, whether internal or external, also collectively aim at achieving a common goal; to improve quality. In

the proposed model, quality reviews/assessments (or audits) are normally initiated within HEIs, whether by the institution itself, or an external agency. The primary reasons for these reviews may differ. Some of the reasons are: NQF registration, institutional and/or programme accreditation and licencing of graduates, monitoring HEIs' own performance, providing information for external quality assurance audits; and providing information to the government for accountability and reporting, or funding purposes. In this case, the HEIs may need the review for internal quality enhancement, NQA may need it for NQF registration of programmes and institutional accreditation, NTA may need it for registration of TVET providers (where applicable), NCHE may need it for programme accreditation, and professional bodies (where applicable) may need it for institutional accreditation and licencing of the graduates. In addition, whether it is an internal review, or initiated by NQA, NTA, NCHE, or professional body; all reviews involve collecting data for ongoing monitoring of the implementation of review findings.

Therefore, it only makes sense to align internal and external review processes. Aligning these QA processes may help to reduce review overload, increase resource efficiency, avoid unnecessary duplications and overlaps, reduce potential tension from reviews pulling in different directions, increase effectiveness of reviews, and provide clear purpose and focus. This requires the harmonisation of the scheduling, timing and cycles by various role players. For example, currently NQF registration cycle is five years, NQA institutional accreditation cycle is three years, and NCHE accreditation cycle is six years. The current arrangements therefore, pose serious challenges to alignment. It is, therefore, imperative for the legislations establishing the QA entities in Namibia to be reviewed so that the mandates and review cycles are streamlined to have seamless QA processes. This will make it possible for alignment of internal programme reviews with external institutional reviews, alignment of internal teaching programme reviews with external QA agencies and/or professional body review/accreditation, alignment of review schedules, re-focused scope and purpose of internal reviews, and alignment of internal support service reviews with external support service accreditation.

For effective functioning of the EQA in Namibia, there are certain aspects that should be in place to ensure a well-rounded quality framework. These include: establishment of public HEIs or Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions; registration of academic qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework; Accreditation of academic programmes; institutional accreditation, Licencing (of graduates), as well as, Institutional Audit.

1. Registration of private HEIs and the establishment of public HEIs, done through an Act of Parliament.

The Registration of private HEIs is applicable to Namibian and non-Namibian private institutions, aiming to register as HEIs. There are gazetted regulations in place, and the Registrar is the Executive Director (formerly known as the Permanent Secretary) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation (MoHETI). The establishment of public HEIs is done through Acts of Parliament, requiring no further registration by QAAs. After the registration of private HEIs and/or establishment of public HEIs, sufficient time should be allowed for an institution to start operating and to prepare for the subsequent frameworks. Prior to the registration of private HEIs and the establishment of public HEIs, it is assumed that due diligence, rigorous enough for an HEI to be allowed to operate, is done.

2. Registration of academic qualifications on the NQF is facilitated through gazetted regulations, a mandate solely performed by the Namibia Qualifications Authority. The NQA regulates national nomenclature of qualifications, thereby standardising the HE system. This exercise is done in sync with the accreditation of academic programmes, to ensure synergy between the two. At all times, registration on the NQF should be *periodically aligned with the accreditation of the same programmes/qualifications*. Specifically, the validity period of the same programme on the two exercises should, at all times, coincide. A programme should never expire on the one framework, while valid on accreditation and vice-versa. Constant periodic alignment between the two frameworks cannot be over-emphasised.

3. Institutional accreditation takes a focus on academic programmes and the operations of the institution as a whole. The two aspects within institutional accreditation happen simultaneously - a commendable and encouraged practice to ensure synchronisation of activities and especially validity period of the two aspects. This kind of arrangement ensures that no institution's accreditation validity expires while programmes are still relevant, and vice-versa. Institutional accreditation is only applicable to private HEIs.
4. The accreditation of academic programmes is one function that overlaps the most amongst all the QAAs and the PBs. Through the integrated system, this function should be performed through joint accreditation exercise between the relevant QAA/s and the relevant PB. Accreditation is regulated by gazetted regulations and systems depending on the QAA. The integration process will therefore, require joint or combined criteria of the different EQA bodies for a joint exercise. This framework is cyclical according to the years as shall be agreed upon by the joint EQA bodies. Accreditation shall also be performed in accordance with the other frameworks on the system. At all times, accreditation of programmes should be periodically aligned with the registration of the same programmes/qualifications. Specifically, the validity period of the same programme on the two exercises should at all times coincide. A programme should never expire on accreditation, while valid on the framework and vice-versa. There should also be common certification for this framework.
5. Institutional Audit also overlaps amongst QAAs and some activities of the PBs. This particular framework does not result in pass or fail, and therefore, does not lead to certification. It is mainly improvement oriented. It is also cyclical and should, at all times, be done as a joint exercise between the relevant QAAs and all relevant PBs.
6. Licencing is a function only performed by relevant PBs in their respective lines of subject matter, e.g. Engineering, Medicine, Law. The licensing of graduates depends on the quality of education that the graduates would have gone through, as well as, the 'compliance' with of the HEIs' curriculum to the requirements of the particular PB.

Implications for an integrated model

The proposed model has implications for the agents of change, with emphasis being on leadership to champion the course. I draw on Kauppila's (2016) implications for evaluating university-industry collaboration.

1. Leadership of HEIs and EQA bodies collaboration

- a. Leaders recognise the importance of collaboration in the development of the mission and vision of the organisation/institution.
- b. Leaders engage with stakeholders of HE.
- c. Leaders act as champions of QA integration.

2. Strategy of HEIs and EQA bodies collaboration

- a. Integration is accounted for in the organisation's and/or institution's strategy, accounting for the needs and expectations of the stakeholders.
- b. Integration goals and strategy are based on understanding internal performance and capabilities.
- c. Integration strategy and supporting policies are developed, reviewed and updated (including the relevant Acts).
- d. Integration strategy and supporting policies are communicated and deployed through plans, processes and objectives.

3. People involved in HEIs and EQA bodies' collaboration

- a. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined to support the aims of integration.
- b. People's knowledge and capabilities required to succeed in integration are recognised and developed (continuous capacity building).
- c. People communicate effectively within their organisation and throughout the integrative partnership.

4. Partnerships & resources of HEIs and EQA bodies' integration

- a. HEIs and EQA bodies partnerships are managed, and work on a mutual agreement basis, and broad interaction in partnerships is supported.
- b. Funding and financial resourcing for integration are managed to secure sustained success.
- c. Technology is managed to support integration.

5. Processes, products & services of HEIs and EQA bodies' integration

- a. Processes and services are designed and managed to create value for the stakeholders.
- b. Integration projects are actively managed.

Internal Quality Assurance

Internal strategies of HEIs should be tied to the EQA integrated model. Institutions, especially HEIs, should have quality assurance policies in place, and the policy should facilitate QA activities and institutional strategies; including integration of different stakeholders. The QA policy in an institution should further promote the culture of quality amongst the internal stakeholders. In other words, a QA policy could help to prevent episodic and reactional attitudes towards QA activities; be it internal or external. Institutions, including QAAs, are encouraged to develop process flows to simplify and guide the stakeholders with ease.

Internally, QA matters should also be integrated, despite being all within one institution. An internal integrated model is critical, before anyone can demand an integrated model at EQA level. This should be applicable to both HEIs and QAAs. Meta-evaluations should take effect in QAAs in Namibia, following the ASG-QA. Integration should begin at IQA, before moving to integration at EQA.

For IQA at HEIs, the following aspects should form part of IQA in an integrated manner: Institutional mission, vision, and the three core business of HE, namely education, research and the third mission. The IQA at QAAs should be inclusive of the agency's mission, vision and internal activities. These should be treated as interlinked and integrated. Ideally, IQA should precede EQA. An institution and its internal staff should first of all be aware of its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). External QA should always be complementary to IQA.

External Quality Assurance

External Quality Assurance should, at all times, aim for an evaluation process that promotes enhancement and continuous improvement, rather than just accountability and compliance.

This too is better achieved through a system that is integrated. The integration strategy should be well documented and inclusive of support for IQA.

Areas for Further Research

Stakeholders experiences of Quality Assurance systems

Conducting this study around the phenomenon of stakeholders' experience in the implementation of EQA in Namibia required related literature, especially from elsewhere in the world. However, such literature proved to be extremely scarce and limited. This kind of literature is needed to ensure stakeholders satisfaction and buy-in of systems, and would be an effective way of designing systems that are responsive. There is need for similar studies across the scope of QA aspects, with a focus on stakeholder experiences.

Decolonising the African Quality Assurance systems

Literature conducted for this study, as well as the study findings, indicates that QA systems in Africa (Namibia included) are not contextualised enough. The QA systems are said to be eurocentric, and some failure in QA systems have been attributed to that. There is therefore, need for a study proposing an Afro-centric QA system.

Implementing and Incorporating the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)

The ASG-QA came after a number of QAAs in African had been established, thus the ASG-QA are less featured in the different QA systems in the continent. Implementing these guidelines may be challenge. Therefore, a study on ways of effectively implementing these into the existing systems is needed. This will assist Africa to harmonise QA in the continent and the world at large, better.

Impact Study on External Quality Assurance in Higher Education

There is limited literature on the impact of EQA in HE. Such a study will assist in improving the current practices of EQA, as it ought to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of EQA.

Quality Enhancement

The findings of this study indicate that there is not much that gets done after the implementation of Improvement Plans. There is need for a study that promotes Quality Enhancement (QE) projects that are embedded in QA systems – internal as well as external. Quality enhancement projects, if well designed and well implemented, have the potential to enhance the developmental aspect of QA system. QE projects also have the potential to look beyond what is already in existence to ‘what else is possible’. There is need for studies exploring the necessities of QE.

Meta-Evaluation of Quality Assurance Agencies in Africa

Particularly in Africa, meta-evaluations are not common practice. In Namibia, meta-, to the best of my knowledge, is non-existent, or it was the case, at least up until the conclusion of this study. It is taken for granted that QAAs are quality in themselves. Meta-evaluations will assist in improving the internal culture and operations of QAAs, which can result in enhanced stakeholders’ trust. Meta-evaluations should be seen as part and parcel of QA systems.

An Integrated Model: principles and implications of Namibia's external quality assurance system for higher education

Features of the integrated model	Principles underpinning the integrated model	Implications for the integrated model
<p>1. Quality reviews/Audit</p> <p>2. Registration of private HEIs (institutional registration) OR establishment of public HEIs by Acts of parliament</p> <p>3. Registration of qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)</p> <p>4. Accreditation of academic programmes</p> <p>5. Institutional Audit</p> <p>6. Licensing</p>	<p>Holism: QA frameworks and legislation are interlinked and interdependent, as they cannot function independently from each other. Conversely, they cannot be implemented in a reductionist manner. The QA system will strive to cover all aspects of the legislative quality assurance mandate.</p> <p>Alignment: all QA processes and procedures of the QA system for HE in Namibia will be aligned to ensure coherence and consistence. This will eliminate the disconnections that are sometimes exploited by those who would not like to do things by the book. It will also assist in reducing unnecessary duplication within the different QA processes, and thus contribute toward improving resource and process efficiencies.</p> <p>Complementarity: the different QA processes and frameworks, will be designed and implemented with due cognisance of the interfaces and synergies between and among them, and with a view towards leveraging such interfaces and synergies. At a practical level, the principle of complementarity means that the processes and procedures of the different components of the QA system are designed in such a way that they fill the gaps in the system; but not to duplicate, overlap with, replace or displace the processes and procedures of the other components. The establishing Acts of the different QAAs shall also be amended to embed synergies between and among the different QAAs and the QA frameworks.</p> <p>Simplicity: all QA processes will be simplified to make them less complex, more understandable by stakeholders and more manageable; while at the same time maintaining or improving their sharpness, robustness and effectiveness.</p> <p>Consultation: all components of the QA system will be developed in a consultative manner. Institutions, professional bodies and other key stakeholders will be consulted extensively to ensure that the processes and procedures are fit for purpose taking into consideration all contextual factors, and that there is buy-in from the stakeholders. The consultative approach advances the accountability goal because it serves to provide assurance to stakeholders.</p> <p>Collaboration: the implementation of the QA system will take due cognisance of the complementary roles played by professional bodies in the quality assurance of learning programmes that lead to qualifications in professional fields such as accounting, engineering, medicine, law and other. The QA stakeholders will work cooperatively with such role players and collaborate with them in running joint projects or events, and integrating or harmonising their processes and procedures, where possible.</p>	<p>1. Leadership of HEIs and EQA bodies collaboration</p> <p>a. Leaders recognise the importance of collaboration in the development of the mission and vision of the organisation/institution</p> <p>b. Leaders engage with stakeholders of HE</p> <p>c. Leaders act as champions of QA integration</p> <p>2. Strategy of HEIs and EQA bodies collaboration</p> <p>a. Integration is accounted for in the organisation's and/or institution's strategy, accounting for the needs and expectations of the stakeholders</p> <p>b. Integration goals and strategy are based on understanding internal performance and capabilities</p> <p>c. Integration strategy and supporting policies are developed, reviewed and updated (including the relevant Acts)</p> <p>d. Integration strategy and supporting policies are communicated and deployed through plans, processes and objectives</p> <p>3. People involved in HEIs and EQA bodies' collaboration</p> <p>a. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined to support the aims of integration</p> <p>b. People's knowledge and capabilities required to succeed in integration are recognized and developed (continuous capacity building)</p> <p>c. People communicate effectively within their organisation and throughout the integrative partnership</p> <p>4. Partnerships & resources of HEIs and EQA bodies' integration</p> <p>a. HEIs and EQA bodies partnerships are managed, work on a mutually agreed basis and broad interaction in partnerships is supported</p> <p>b. Funding and financial resourcing for integration are managed to secure sustained success</p> <p>c. Technology is managed to support integration</p> <p>5. Processes, products & services of HEIs and EQA bodies' integration</p> <p>a. Processes and services are designed and managed to create value for the stakeholders</p> <p>b. Integration projects are actively managed</p>

Thesis contribution

As per the intended purpose of the study, the thesis has made contributions to the QA discourse, applicable beyond Namibia.

Research question one - How do the 3 national QAAs and Professional Bodies interpret and implement the Acts of Parliament that established them.

The QAAs and the PBs are the ones entrusted with the responsibility of executing EQA in the Namibian QA system. These bodies are governed by legislation, hence, the need to establish how they (EQA bodies) interpret and implement EQA. This knowledge is valuable in understanding how the implementers execute the respective given mandates, and how the implementation has shaped the stakeholders' experiences. The study revealed that the EQA bodies did not share a common purpose and their interpretation of the legislation differed amongst them. The study further revealed that the stakeholders were aware of the diversity in terms of EQA purpose amongst the stakeholders. While pockets of success within the EQA system were revealed, concerns and challenges regarding the legislation and implementation of the system also surfaced.

Research question two – what is the stakeholders' understanding of the external quality assurance system for higher education in Namibia?

The study has contributed to the discourse of QA in HE in Namibia and beyond, through the analysis of the Namibian EQA system, description of its structure, functions, activities and overall its implementation. Furthermore, the study has contributed by highlighting and confirming the fragmented nature of the EQA system, giving details of the causes of fragmentation. This serves as a lesson for Namibia going forward, and for other countries with similar systems. Furthermore, the study highlighted the potential of non-alignment of functions and activities to hamper progress in implementing similar systems. The afore-mentioned have contributed to the discourse and knowledge of QA, particularly the importance of designing a befitting and contextualised system, and providing the required support for implementation.

Research question three – how do the stakeholder experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system for higher education in Namibia?

The study brought to the fore how the ontology, epistemology and axiology of interpretivist paradigm have shaped the views on the phenomenon. The use of phenomenology as a theoretical lens have assisted in painting a comprehensive picture of the EQA system in Namibia through the experiences of the stakeholders, who are the implementers, promoters, and beneficiaries of the system.

Research question four – why do the stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system the way that they do?

The study interrogated the phenomenon by asking critical questions that led me to the required change. Particularly through the Habermasian perspective, the study identified the aspects that have been taken for granted and require change.

Research question five - What are the lasting solutions to challenges experienced by stakeholders in the Namibian Higher Education Quality Assurance system?

In terms of practical implication, I proposed and presented an integrated model to mitigate challenges facing the Namibian system and similar systems elsewhere. The model encourages alignment and a strong sense of integration amongst the frameworks and collaboration among the stakeholders. Furthermore, the integrated model is meant to foster a common purpose amongst the stakeholders through the presented features and principles which characterise it (the model). Emphasis is for leadership to champion the integration cause.

Conclusion

In summary, in this chapter I presented the overall study implications. Given what emerged from the findings of the study, through the Habermasian critical theory, it emerged that there was need for change. Change is needed to mitigate the existing challenges in the EQA system for HE

in Namibia. I have argued, that the required change is mainly an integrated EQA system that aims to enhance the experiences of the stakeholders and ultimately to improve the HE system. The integrated model also has several benefits, such as: being a great way to bring together the stakeholders in HE; focusing energy amongst stakeholders; giving all stakeholders a voice; creating visible leadership at all levels; making key processes of QA and their results clear; highlighting strengths and areas for improvement; and improving communication (Ferreira, 2003).

I have further argued that, while an integrated model is required to mitigate the existing challenges, the establishing Acts ought to be enabling, i.e. amended to do away with overlaps. All the QA frameworks ought to be made compulsory. Moreover, leadership ought to champion the cause, if EQA in Namibia is to be effectively implemented.

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APPENDICES

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Ethics letter



10 September 2018

Ms Rebekka Nangula lipumbu 217063445
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms lipumbu

Protocol reference number: HSS/0857/018D

Project title: Stakeholders' lived experience of the implementation of the External Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Namibia

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 9 July 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Lester Brian Shawa
cc. Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
cc. School Administrator: Ms Sheryl Jeenarain

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
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Information and consent letter

06 November 2018

Ms Himee Kaimu
Director: Quality Assurance
Namibia University of Science and Technology
Windhoek

Ms Kaimu

SUBJECT: INTERVIEW ON PHD STUDY

I am a PhD candidate, registered with the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. I am now at a stage of data production. On 22 May 2018, I received permission from your institution to interview the Head of a QA Unit (as well as a Faculty Dean) regarding this PhD Study. In line with the research methodology, you have been selected based on your position as far as Quality Assurance in the institution is concerned. This interview depended on permission from your institution, as well as Ethical Clearance from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. At this point, both requirements have been met. Please see attached.

It is against that background that I would like to schedule an interview session with you. The maximum time the interview may take is 1 hour 30 minutes. I would like to propose any day in the weeks of 12- 16 or 19 – 23 November 2018. I am also flexible over the weekends. Kindly indicate your most suitable date and time.

Your dedication to this interview will be highly appreciated.

I also need to interview a Faculty Dean at your institution, who has the most programmes (compared to other Faculties) having gone through the accreditation process, under his/her leadership. I find your office to be the most strategic in identifying this particular Dean. I therefore kindly request that you help me with this information, so that I may contact them and request for a similar interview.

With thanks,


Nangula Iipumbu
Student No. 217063445
iipumbu@gmail.com
Cell: 0812520120

Letter seeking permission

P. O. Box 11233
Windhoek

29 May 2018

Prof. Oladele O. Arowolo
Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic & Research
International University of Management
P. O. Box 14005
Windhoek

Prof. Arowolo

SUBJECT: SEEKING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am a Doctor of Philosophy candidate (Namibian), registered with the School of Humanities, College of Education - Higher Education Unit, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

My PhD has a focus on higher education, and particularly quality assurance thereof. My research study is titled: *Stakeholders' Lived Experiences of the Implementation of External Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Namibia*. The study is supervised by Dr Lester Brian Shawa, of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education.

Drawing on phenomenology, the purpose of the study is to explore and assess stakeholders' lived experience of the implementation of external quality assurance system for higher education in Namibia.

The study is done to achieve the following objectives: Assess stakeholders' understanding of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia; explore how stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia?; and Analyse why stakeholders experience the implementation of the external quality assurance system in higher education in Namibia the way they do.

It is against the given background that I seek permission to interview staff and carry out documentation analysis in order to gain the required information. Documents such as the institutional Act, policies, systems, regulations from your institution will be analysed.

For this study, the following people (at IUM) will be interviewed:

- The head of the quality assurance Centre/Unit;
- X1 academic administrator, specifically a Dean from one of the Faculties that had the most external quality assurance engagements/activities (under the leadership of 'that' current Dean).
- X5 Students (in form of a focus group), particularly the Faculty representatives.

Permission letter



INSTITUTE OF
CHARTERED
ACCOUNTANTS
OF NAMIBIA

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29 May 2018

Ms Rebekka Nangula lipumbu
P. O. Box 11233
Windhoek
Namibia

Dear Ms lipumbu

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS
OF NAMIBIA STAFF**

Your request letter dated 24 April 2018 has reference.

We are glad to grant you permission to conduct research at the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Namibia, for your PhD studies, titled: *"Stakeholders' Lived Experience of the Implementation of the External Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Namibia"*. Information gathered during the research is to be used for the purpose of the study only and must be treated as confidential. We will be interested in any findings that can improve the Quality Assurance process and ask that you share these with the Institute.

For administrative arrangements around the research please contact the Head of Secretariat, Ms Wilna van Tonder at wilna@ca-nam.com.

All the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of J du Toit.

J du Toit CA(NAM) CA(SA)
CEO



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Research schedules

Student: Nangula Iipumbu, 217063445, UKZN

Interview Instrument

Title: Stakeholders' Lives experience of the implementation of the external quality assurance system¹ for higher education in Namibia

Higher Education Institutions

a) To the heads of QA units and academic administrators within the selected higher education institutions:

1. What is your understanding of quality assurance in higher education within the national and your institutional contexts?
2. What is your experience of the implementation of external quality assurance system within your institution in terms of QA processes and interrelations with the various QA agencies and professional bodies?
3. What challenges do you face when implementing the current external quality assurance system?
4. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of external quality assurance system with regards to improvement of 1) institutional management process and 2) enhancement of student learning experience?
5. How are your internal QA systems and processes related to external QA systems and processes by QA agencies and professional bodies?
6. What implementation challenges do you face when implementing your internal QA processes in relation to external QA processes?
7. What recommendations for improvement do you offer from both internal and external perspectives at both policy and practice levels?

¹ Quality Assurance System is inclusive of all functions of QA agencies, as well as professional bodies. Example of functions: accreditation, institutional audits; National Qualifications Framework; Registration of Private HEIs; and Licensing of students.

Student: Nangula Iipumbu, 217063445, UKZN

Interview Instrument

Title: Stakeholders' Lives experience of the implementation of the external quality assurance system¹ for higher education in Namibia

Quality Assurance Agencies & Professional Bodies

- a) **To the heads and QA practitioners within quality assurance agencies and selected professional bodies:**
1. What is your understanding of quality assurance within the Namibian higher education context?
 2. What is your experience with the implementation of external quality assurance in higher education from the policy perspective?
 3. How are your roles as a quality assurance agency/professional body related to those of other quality assurance bodies?
 4. What are your views on effective implementation of quality assurance by your agency/professional body
 5. What implementation challenges do you experience in executing your mandate as a quality assurance agency/professional body in relation to: 1) higher education institutions; 2) other quality assurance agencies/professional bodies?
 6. What policy and practice recommendations for improvement do you offer?

2

¹ Quality Assurance System is inclusive of all functions of QA agencies, as well as professional bodies. Example of functions: accreditation, institutional audits; National Qualifications Framework; Registration of Private HEIs; and Licensing of students.

Student: Nangula Iipumbu, 217063445, UKZN

Interview Instrument

Title: Stakeholders' Lives experience of the implementation of the external quality assurance system¹ for higher education in Namibia

Focus Group

a) To the students within the participating higher education institutions (Focus Group discussion):

1. What is your understanding of the quality assurance in higher education from the student perspective?
2. What is your level of involvement in external and internal quality assurance processes within your institution?
3. How do you experience implementation of external and internal quality assurance systems in terms of enhancement of your learning experience as a student?
4. What are the challenges you experience with regard to implementation of external and internal quality assurance systems?
5. In your view, what QA improvements do you want to see from the student perspective?

¹ Quality Assurance System is inclusive of all functions of QA agencies, as well as professional bodies. Example of functions: accreditation, institutional audits; National Qualifications Framework; Registration of Private HEIs; and Licensing of students.