

**THE ROLE OF STUDENTS IN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: A CASE STUDY OF
NAMIBIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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by

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Abstract

The interplay of the mechanisms such as globalisation, massification and internationalisation led to higher education systems across the world introducing quality assurance. As systems have massified, student bodies have diversified with the result that the quality of teaching and learning has become increasingly important and has drawn the attention of policy makers and researchers. The Namibian higher education system was no different in heeding the call to develop quality assurance systems. As this happened, calls to involve students in quality assurance because of their roles as “stakeholders” in higher education were also heeded, and in common with institutions in systems across the world, those in Namibia began to include students in governance and quality assurance.

Research on student involvement in internal quality assurance with a focus on higher education institutions in Namibia is scarce. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of students as stakeholders in the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions in three Namibian institutions. Roy Bhaskar’s (1978; 1989) critical realism and Margaret Archer’s (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism were used to build a theoretical framework which allowed for the exploration of students’ involvement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning. Critical and social realism both draw on the idea of a “depth ontology” and acknowledge that what is available to researchers empirically is only part of reality. As a result, critical and social realist researchers aim to move from empirical data to explore a level of reality not directly accessible via the senses. In the study underpinning this thesis, this involved using inference to move from interview data and documents to explore a level of reality from which events and experiences of events (both accessible empirically) emerge. A case study approach was used involving a “cross case” analysis of the three institutions.

Questions guiding the study aimed not only to explore ways in which students were, or were not involved, in assuring quality of their education, but also what constrained and enabled involvement. Ultimately the study focused on whether or not their engagement contributed to the enhancement of quality. As all the institutions in the study did allow students to be

involved in quality assurance, the question was the extent to which this involvement was “meaningful” in the sense that it could lead to change.

Insights derived from the study showed that although students were represented on various governance structures, their experiences were that their contributions to debates and the issues they raised were not heeded. Another significant way in which students were involved in quality assurance was through the provision of feedback on teaching and course design. The investigation showed that, although teaching and learning centres at the three institutions studied did use feedback from students to develop training programmes for academic teachers, feedback was mainly used for instrumental purposes such as personal promotion, an observation which raises questions about the extent to which its elicitation could lead to enhancement.

The use of Archer’s social realism allowed for the identification of a number of constraints on the potential of student involvement to contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning. One such constraint was the hierarchical nature of institutional organisations which led to student comments not always being treated seriously, sometimes because of perceptions of their “immaturity”. Another constraint was related to confused understandings of what constitutes “quality” in policy documents.

The study recommends that policies and manuals on student involvement should be designed to provide guidance to staff and students on how they should be involved. There is also a need to train students on their involvement as well as interrogate the student involvement beliefs and practices.

Key terms: quality assurance, student involvement, quality enhancement, higher education

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASG-QA	African standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESU	European Student Union
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
IUM	International University of Management
NCHE	National Council for Higher Education
NQA	Namibia Qualification Authority
NUST	Namibia University of Science and Technology
UNAM	University of Namibia
QA	Quality Assurance
SRC	Student Representative Council
VC	Vice Chancellor

Statement

I, Anneli Ndapanda Nghikembua, student number g07n5069 declare that this dissertation titled “The role of students in internal quality assurance: A case study of Namibian institutions of higher education” is my work and has never been submitted anywhere for degree purposes. All sources used in this study have been duly acknowledged and fully cited.

Ms A.N Nghikembua

15 February 2024

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Dedication

To my father Mr Elia Nghikembua, and brother Elia N. T Nghikembua for the assistance, and guidance you rendered during the initial stages of this study.

May your souls continue resting in eternal peace.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Context of the study

Over the past decades, significant growth in attempts to assure the quality of higher education has been observed. This is due to the effects of massification, globalisation, the perceived need to be a knowledge-based economy, increased calls for accountability and transparency and concerns about the quality of higher education in contexts where student fees were often rising exponentially (Boughey & McKenna, 2021a; Klemenčič, 2015; Samuel & Doran, 2011). In order to engage with these calls and concerns, countries across the globe established formal quality assurance bodies with the goal of improving and enhancing the quality of education.

An early attempt to assure quality in higher education across national borders was seen in the Bologna Declaration of 1999 (Bologna Declaration, 1999), which is the main guiding document of the Bologna Process and was developed with the purpose of building and consolidating trust within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). One of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration was to increase the competitiveness of Europe in higher education globally by assuring quality across the entire European economic area.

The Bologna Process (Bologna Process, 2005), focused on three key areas: the recognition of qualifications, the harmonisation of systems, and the formation of quality assurance systems (Alemu, 2019). The Bologna Process remains the pioneering model for benchmarking, in that quality assurance bodies often refer to the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Willemse, 2019), in spite of the fact that contexts are very different. Other regions across the world are following suit. In Africa, attempts to develop regional qualifications frameworks including, for example, a sub-Saharan framework, are accompanied by the development of African standards and guidelines.

In developing its own quality assurance system, Namibia initially adopted the European standards and guidelines before moving to the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in higher education (ASG-QA, 2015). The initiative to develop the ASG-QA was funded by the European Union's "Harmonisation, Quality and Accreditation" initiative. The working group included an expert from the European Higher Education Area and was coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA, 2015). Despite partnerships and negotiation, Woldegiorgis (2018) cautions that the Global North has more bargaining power due to its technical and financial might and may thus be in a position to impose its own interests, leaving Africa vulnerable.

Within the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Declaration, 1999:32) and the ASG-QA (2015), students are recognised as stakeholders in higher education, and that their participation is cited as crucial in the improvement of quality outputs and in the maintenance of standards. Student involvement can encompass governance, including the governance of teaching and learning, student affairs and research, institutional finances and policy and strategy (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Reviewing the literature, Bovill et al. (2014) note instances of students and staff working together as co-researchers, as co-creators of curricula and as change agents. Brookes (2003:18) notes that student involvement in internal quality assurance goes "hand in hand" with the development of a culture of continuous quality improvement. The importance of students in the quality assurance matters of their institutions has led to numerous countries globally developing quality assurance policies or manuals that identify ways in which students can be actively involved.

Despite the positive, well-argued purposes for student involvement, student involvement depends on the type of educational context that an institution creates. Neo-liberal thinking has impacted on universities in several ways. For example, the reduction in state funding has led to an increase in tuition fees and to the construction of students as consumers or "customers" wanting value for their money, in their quest to obtain a qualification which will allow them to gain an edge in the job market. The idea that universities should function as businesses has led to a focus on efficiency and on the use of metrics to measure performance. Neo-liberalism also promotes the idea of accountability to the public purse. All this can mean that the institution becomes focused on "selling" education as a "product"

to student consumers in the most efficient way possible (Thomas et al., 2001). Understanding institutions as businesses and students as consumers impacts enormously on the way student involvement is understood and what is done to involve them.

LeMaitre (2002) notes that globalisation has resulted in the imposition on the entire world, of cultural, political and economic priorities emanating from the Global North. She goes on to argue that quality assurance thus has the potential to impose a global model of a university. This presents an additional challenge to higher education institutions which are already confronted by the need to design quality assurance systems that foreground all the possible purposes of higher education and not only the purpose of preparing workers for the global economy. In newly democratic African nations, for example, the purpose of higher education in developing a critical citizenry (Molesworth et al., 2009) is particularly important, though this is often lost in the construction of universities as providers of “knowledge workers” for the global economy.

Another challenge experienced in the introduction of quality assurance is its association with New Public Management (Tolofari, 2005), a set of principles and practices introduced from business with the intention of making higher education more efficient, with its introduction contested on many accounts (Bleiklie, 1998; Chandler et al., 2002). Anderson (2006), Askling (1997) and Newton (2000; 2002) all note that academics feel that quality assurance is a bureaucratic burden and reduces their autonomy in curriculum design, as the corporate requirement is that the “product” should meet both institutional targets and external monitoring requirements. Students as stakeholders are, of course, involved in all this, yet probably understand little, if anything, of the debates about higher education and the role of quality assurance in it.

To date, no rigorous research around student involvement in internal quality assurance has been carried out in Namibia, hence the need for the study underpinning this thesis. The study aimed to investigate the ways in which students at the University of Namibia, the Namibia University of Science and Technology and the International University of Management were involved in the quality assurance of teaching and learning in their institutions, and also looked at constraints in involving students. Ultimately its goal was to

explore the ways in which student involvement did or did not enhance quality assurance. The findings of the study aim to contribute to more meaningful ways of involving students in the quality of their education.

Namibia, a developing country, gained its independence in 1990. Three universities were established shortly after this. The University of Namibia (UNAM) was established in 1992 and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) (formerly known as the Polytechnic of Namibia) in 1994. The International University of Management (IUM) was also established in 1994, but officially only launched in 2002 as the first private university in the country. The quality assurance units at the three universities, UNAM, NUST and IUM, were set up in 2010, 2007 and 2015 respectively (Kadhila, 2017; NUST, 2023; IUM, 2024; UNAM, 2024).

The Namibian Higher Education Act (Act No. 26 of 2003), hereafter referred to as the Higher Education Act, led to the establishment of national qualification bodies, namely, the Namibia Qualification Authority (NQA), the Namibia Training Authority (NTA), as well as of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and the development of policies on quality assurance. The NCHE is the umbrella body for all higher education institutions in Namibia. According to the Higher Education Act, the objectives of the NCHE are, amongst others, to promote the establishment of a coordinated higher education system, access for students to higher education institutions and quality assurance in higher education. In 2009, the NCHE introduced a system for quality assurance in higher education in Namibia, requiring both public and private institutions to develop and implement systematic internal quality assurance systems (NCHE, 2003; 2009).

Studies of student involvement in quality assurance at institutional level across the world are relatively few. As a result, not much is known about the impact of their involvement in the improvement of quality and the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms. The quality assurance policies of UNAM, NUST and IUM in Namibia indicate that students are stakeholders of the institutions. As stakeholders, their involvement in quality assurance is crucial in enhancing the quality of education (Cockburn, 2006; Elassy, 2015; Klemenčič, 2015). This leads to the rationale for the study on which this thesis is based.

1.2 Rationale for the study

Students are central to any higher education system, as all need to be taught and many are the academics and researchers of the future. It is inappropriate to view students solely as recipients of wisdom, given that learning is an interactive process (Elassy, 2015; Garwe, 2015; Klemenčič, 2015; Okogbaa, 2016; Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland, 2015). In 2017, when I was working for the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA), I became interested in whether Namibian students are actively involved in quality assurance matters and to what extent they have a voice in what happens in their institutions. I also began to wonder whether student involvement could contribute to enhancing and improving the education that they are receiving.

While working at the NQA, I learned that Namibia had adopted the standards and guidelines of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as set out by the Bologna Process. This was prior to adopting the ASG-QA. Both the ASG-QA and the Bologna Process construct students as stakeholders. As the result of a review of literature on student involvement in quality assurance at institutional level in Namibia and in Africa in general, I concluded that empirical studies of this nature are rare. Even more specifically, I realised that literature on student involvement in the quality of teaching and learning is limited and that most has been produced at an international level (see for example, Little et al., 2009; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Logermann & Leisyte, 2015; Tamrat, 2019).

This study on which this thesis is based draws on Bhaskar's (1978; 1979) critical realism and Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism. The theories act as lenses for identifying the underlying mechanisms leading to student involvement in the quality of teaching and learning at the internal quality assurance level. Archer is a critical realist, which means that she subscribes to Bhaskar's notion of a "layered ontology" and to the idea that the deepest, and arguably most significant, layer of reality is not empirically accessible. The value of Archer's work lies in the provision of a set of theoretical tools to better allow the exploration of the workings of agency in relation to structure and culture at the deepest layer of reality. My assumption in developing the study was that agency was important, in that universities could be understood to want to involve students in quality assurance and

students would want to be involved because of the high stakes involved for them. Using Archer's tools would allow me to explore the way agents were enabled and constrained by conditions in the domains of structure and culture as they went about pursuing projects that they had identified for themselves. In this case, the projects were understood to be, for institutional actors, allowing students to be involved in quality assurance, and for students, taking up opportunities to become involved. Chapter Two provides more insights into the theories and how they inform the study.

1.3 Research questions

The key research questions guiding the study on which this thesis is based were:

- In what ways are students involved, or not involved, as stakeholders in internal quality assurance processes at higher education institutions in Namibia?
- What are the enablements and constraints for student involvement in internal quality assurance matters?
- In what ways does student participation enhance, or not enhance, quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia?

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters which are organised somewhat differently to convention. It is important to note that the thesis does not include a literature review in the conventional sense. Rather, the literature is introduced throughout the thesis.

- Chapter Two introduces some key concepts in quality assurance, as the terms associated with them are used throughout the thesis.
- Chapter Three provides an explanation of the theoretical framework for the study, Bhaskar's (1978; 1998) critical realism and Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism. The theoretical framework is introduced immediately after the introductory chapter, as it provides a theoretical language which is used thereafter. It also provides a means of structuring the analysis.

- Chapter Four introduces the research design of the study.
- Chapter Five, the first of the analysis chapters, follows Archer's theoretical work in introducing the social and cultural conditioning in place as Namibia moved to develop its higher education system post-independence. This conditioning is important as, following Archer, although agents are accorded powers to effect change, they are always conditioned in doing so.
- Chapter Six continues to explore the social and cultural conditioning in place, but this time the focus moves to student involvement.
- Chapter Seven focuses on the way agents went about pursuing projects related to student involvement. It is informed by Bhaskar's critical realism in its structuring, in that it begins by focusing on events and experiences, both of which are empirically accessible, before using inference to explore the deepest layer of reality and the way involvement of students is enabled and constrained.
- Chapter Eight concludes the thesis and summarises responses to my research questions. It also provides some recommendations and indications of areas for future research.

Chapter Two: Key concepts in quality assurance

2.1 Introduction

Terms used in relation to quality assurance in higher education are employed in a variety of ways and might have different meanings in different countries and institutions, because they come from very different ideological positions about the nature of society and the role of the university (Elassy, 2015; Harvey & Green, 1993). This chapter briefly discusses the main concepts related to the object of my study.

2.2 Defining quality

It is clear from the literature that “quality” is a term that is difficult to define in the context of higher education. It is a term that is contested, is vague and understood differently in different contexts. As Green (1994) and Westerheijden (1999) state, it is a philosophical concept that lacks a general theory in the literature. Harvey and Newton (2004) suggest that it is because the conceptions of quality are personal and social constructs. They argue that each stakeholder constructs a view of quality based on certain attributes and that these selected attributes vary from stakeholder to stakeholder (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Kahsay, 2012). In recognising the complexity of the concept, Harvey and Green (1993) propose five ways of thinking about quality:

- quality as exceptional (excellence)
- quality as perfection
- quality as fitness for purpose
- quality as value for money
- quality as transformational

I discuss each in turn below. Watty (2003:5) provides the following diagram depicting these different definitions.

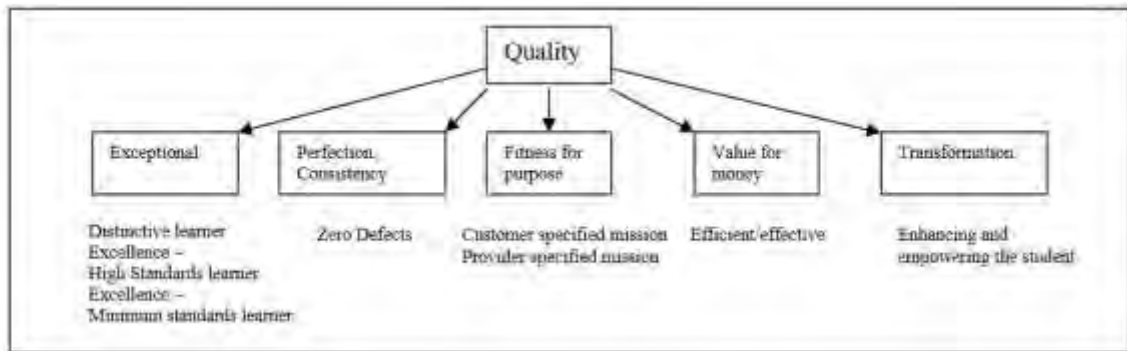


Figure 1: Definitions of quality (Watty, 2003:15)

2.2.1 Quality as exceptional (excellence)

This conception places quality on a pedestal and implies that it is distinctive, elite and not easy to achieve. Importantly, what it means to be exceptional is not defined, and as a result, what is considered to be so is based on popular opinion or history or some other characteristic. For example, in the United States, most people might consider that “Ivy League” universities are exceptional in that they can be accessed by very few and only with difficulty. The same would apply to Oxford and Cambridge Universities in the United Kingdom. Classifying institutions as “exceptional” or the “best in their class” in this way means that they have no need to prove themselves, as their reputations do this.

The concept of quality as exceptional, as already indicated, invites questions about who decides what is exceptional or “of quality”. When the components of “excellence” are defined, they may be virtually unattainable or attainable only to a degree. Universities such as Yale, Harvard, Oxford or Cambridge all benefit from endowments going back centuries and can thus afford to employ the “best” academics and provide resources that are unaffordable by most other institutions, particularly those located on the African continent. As Parri (2006) notes, the view of excellence is not appropriate to the mass higher education system, as it is only open to attainment by a few institutions.

University rankings, as implied by the term “excellence”, are not good measures of comparing higher education institutions, as different institutions pursue different missions and have different purposes. It is thus not fair to compare institutions with each other (Berthold et al., 2007). Readings (1996:21-43) concludes that,

[e]xcellence is invoked ... as always, to say precisely nothing at all: it deflects attention from the questions of what quality and pertinence might be, who actually are the judges of a relevant or a good University, and by what authority they become those judges.

Analyses of mission and vision statements for both NUST and UNAM show that quality is framed around the idea of excellence. Based on this, the setting up of quality assurance units and other structures such as committees makes the establishment of quality very difficult, as the goal of what they are promoting and assuring is so nebulous.

2.2.2 Quality as perfection (or consistency)

Quality as perfection means that the product or institution is flawless. The emphasis is on zero defects, an approach which is commonly employed in industrial settings, where physical products of a production chain must meet the exact specifications without any defects or deviations. This notion, however, poses problems for higher education institutions, as it does not consider different contextual conditions. Universities do not aim to produce identical graduates. Not all graduates would pass *cum laude*, for example. Harvey and Green (1993) emphasise that higher education institutions aim to develop critical and analytical thinkers. Thus, this definition is problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, the “product” of an educational process is multi-faceted, usually possessing some unforeseeable and unpredicted but desirable attributes. Secondly, it is impossible to define a “perfect” or “zero defect” graduate of an educational process. Quality as perfection also focuses on processes and checking that a product has “zero defects” at any stage in its production. This does not apply to higher education, where a student might develop late but still obtain a qualification. It also does not apply to research processes, where many wrong turns are possible before a successful outcome.

2.2.3 Quality as fitness for purpose

Many analysts and policymakers in higher education have adopted the notion of quality as involving “fitness for purpose”. It is viewed as a more functional definition as it is inclusive rather than an exceptional one. An example of judging fitness for purpose in a more

mundane setting could involve a decision about the purchase of a pair of shoes. Shoes can be robust, waterproof and hard-wearing. They can also be pretty and flimsy. The purchase of a pair of shoes depends on the purpose the buyer intends for them, for example, hiking up mountains or attending parties. As Stensaker (2007) notes, quality as fitness for purpose is the dominant approach in higher education, in that it allows for judgements to be made against the purposes and roles that a university identifies for itself.

The notion of quality as fitness for purpose can be extended to teaching and learning (Boughey, 2011). For example, universities of technology generally aim to produce applied knowledge and graduates for the “world of work”. Layton (1993) argues that the production of applied knowledge is dependent on opportunities for conceptual knowledge to be “translated” or “reworked” and not simply for it to be applied to practice. Teaching for applied knowledge would therefore not only involve developing students’ conceptual understandings but also on guiding their reflection as they worked with that knowledge in practice to reconfigure it and produce a new form of understanding. In a similar vein, the desire for universities to serve communities has implications for the introduction of service learning, where students take their learning into communities as a form of service but learn from communities as they do so.

The definition of quality as involving fitness for purpose can be problematic in relation to giving students a voice. Students’ understandings of what can constitute knowledge and how it can be known also often differ from understandings dominant in academic contexts. Bernstein (2000) identifies two ways of talking about the world around us: horizontal discourse and vertical discourse. Horizontal discourse draws on experience and common-sense observations to make statements about what we believe to be true. A statement such as “it always rains in summer” could be an example of horizontal discourse. Horizontal discourse is, however, context dependent, as it draws on experience. The statement “it always rains in summer” is not true for all parts of the world, for example. Vertical discourse, on the other hand, draws on abstractions and theorised accounts of the world in order to account for what is happening in any context. Many students experience vertical discourse for the first time when coming to formal education, and, depending on the quality of their schooling, will have more or less developed understandings of the abstract,

systematised accounts of the world taught there. Students' encounters with vertical discourse at university can cause difficulties, and, at times, may also be rejected in the context of calls for an education that equips them with skills for the world of work. However, vertical discourse, as Wheelahan (2010) notes, is powerful, as it allows us to make sense of multiple contexts across time. Skills-based, outcomes-based, or problem-based approaches can be problematic, as they only introduce sufficient knowledge to allow the skill to be developed. As a result, a student may not be exposed to what Bernstein (2000) terms the entire "knowledge structure". Although they might secure employment based on the skills taught in programmes they enrolled in, the rapidly changing nature of the world of work may mean that those skills will become obsolete in the course of their working lives. These observations about the "knowledge poor" nature of many programmes (Wheelahan, 2010) have led to calls from realists such as Muller (2000) and Young (2007) to "bring knowledge back in" to curriculum design.

Students are unlikely to be aware of objections to the nature of skills-based programmes, however, and are more likely to subscribe to popular discourses constructing higher education as preparation for the work place. As a result, their conceptions of quality will not encompass understandings of a higher education as providing "powerful" knowledge. Their reactions to theoretical courses in the curriculum, or even to entire programmes, may therefore not be informed and any evaluation or judgement they make is also likely to be impacted by the fact that theoretical knowledge is difficult to master because it is abstract and complex.

However, the notion of "fitness for purpose", when used in higher education, centres on the goals and purposes that a university identifies for itself in its mission and vision statements. If an institution has a stated mission of preparing students for the world of work, then, depending on the arrangements developed to ensure that the purpose is achieved, it can be said to be "of quality". Students, however, may not be familiar with mission and vision statements or, even, the notion of different institutional types and may well choose to enrol in a particular university because of its history, its reputation or, even, its location. Nonetheless, calls for students to be involved in the assurance of the quality of teaching and learning means that they need to make judgements about how well purposes are met as

they are considered to be stakeholders in the educational process (McDowell & Sambell, 1999).

As already indicated, the definition of quality as “fitness for purpose” involves looking at the arrangements an institution has put in place to ensure it can, indeed, meet the goals that it envisages for itself. The goals themselves may also be evaluated using the definition of “fitness of purpose” which, for example, would mean that the goal of a poorly resourced, rural university to become a world leader in space science would not be appropriate, as it lacked the facilities to produce research or provide programmes in the subject area. Harvey and Green (1993) also caution against developing vague mission or purpose statements. The definition of quality as “fitness for purpose” avoids questions about the imposition of purposes as purposes are identified by institutions themselves.

2.2.4 Quality as value for money

The notion of value permeates many discussions on the purpose of higher education and the perceived benefits it confers onto individuals and society as a whole. The move to introduce NPM to higher education, as noted earlier in this thesis, was based on discourses calling for accountability and transparency regarding the way taxpayers’ money was being spent. Efficiency and effectiveness, other goals of NPM, then invoke the notion of “value for money”.

Quality as value for money entails judging quality by assigning costs to processes or outcomes (Harvey & Green, 1993). In other words, if it is possible to achieve the same outcome at a lower cost, then the “customer” is receiving a quality product or service. Within this notion comes the idea of accountability. This means that higher education institutions need to take responsibility for the service they provide and the public funds they spend. With accountability, an institution is compelled to report, provide explanations, and justify to others, how funds have been spent. Stakeholders, including students and parents or taxpayers, also require value for money due to increasing costs of education.

The conception of quality as “value for money” is problematic when applied to higher education, opening up contentious issues including the extent to which the value of higher

education can be reducible to economic returns. In addition, it contributes to the construction of higher education as a market and of students as consumers who want value for the money paid in tuition fees, a notion which Goran and Wood (2007) discourage. This is because the relationship between students and a university is not just determined by the purchasing and use of a product, but by the interaction between students and academic teachers and the institution itself. This is not the norm in a general marketing relationship. Driscoll and Wicks (1998:60 in Goran & Wood, 2007) state,

We suggest that limits be placed on the application of the marketing concept in universities and urge relevant stakeholders to consider the dangers of taking the customer-seller analogy too far.

Additionally, the conception of quality as value for money sees quality as a return on investment. If the same outcome could be achieved at a lower cost, or a better outcome could be achieved at the same cost, then the “customer” has a quality product or service (Harvey & Green, 1993). Since governments require accountability from higher education institutions, this means that higher education institutions (HEIs) should have performance data and use performance indicators to show that what is being produced is enough to merit money spent, an issue which is contested, given that education cannot be quantified.

2.2.5 Quality as transformation

The final conception of quality identified by Harvey and Green (1993), “quality as transformation”, implies change. Higher education institutions are viewed as agents of cognitive and personal growth for students, an idea captured by Ashwin’s (2020) Manifesto. As Harvey and Green (1993) note, students’ transformative processes could be achieved through empowering students so that they are participants in the process of learning. Empowering students, however, depends on how students are viewed by the institution.

Quality as transformation is underpinned by the notion that students are not “customers” but participants in the transformational process. This conception of transformation is fundamental to the purpose of higher education. Obtaining a degree is not about being the same person who simply knows more, but about becoming a different person, a person who

looks at the world with different eyes. The conception of quality as transformation, as Delfino (2019) notes, includes behavioural, emotional, and cognitive change. This means that students do not simply assimilate information, but, for example, learn always to interrogate statements by searching for the evidence that supports them and evaluating its worth. They also learn the power of abstract thinking to conceptualise the world differently and to see things that otherwise would not be seen. Such changes can destabilise students and question their very identities. Transformation of the nature described above is, however, difficult to measure.

In South Africa, the concept of quality of transformation was developed to encompass,

. . . a wide range of social, political and economic changes which distinguish apartheid's undemocratic, racially based society from a non-racial, democratic society. In the area of higher education, transformation as "societal change" has a number of nonreducible dimensions. The most obvious dimension of transformation refers to equity and access and encompasses race, class, gender, disability, the urban / rural divide, and adult access. In relation to this aspect of transformation institutions are expected to reflect and represent the diversity of South African society in relation to its complement of staff and students (CHE, 2011:13).

Adding this dimension to conceptualisations of quality as transformation allowed for the measurement of the way, for example, that the historically white universities had "transformed" to allow access and success to the black students they had previously excluded. The CHE (2011) includes a further dimension to the concept of quality as transformation by referring to the extent to which core functions, such as teaching and learning, had "transformed" to meet the needs of more diverse and larger student bodies. While it is possible to look at empirical data to see the way institutions have "transformed" in the context of the first dimension, added to the conceptualisation of quality as transformation by the CHE, evaluating changes in teaching and learning is more difficult. Boughey and McKenna (2021a) go some way to doing this, however, with their conceptualisation of a continuum of positions constructing students as learners which then have implications for teaching.

Understanding the different definitions of quality outlined above has the potential to assist in an analysis of the priorities of different stakeholders in higher education (Lučin, 2005 in Kadhila et.al, 2013). Working through the definitions of quality also makes clear the fact that, in higher education, the concept is multidimensional, multilevel, and dynamic and is related to the context in which education takes place. Any definition of quality must, therefore, encompass the context in which the term is used (Kadhila, 2017).

2.3 External and internal consistency

Higher education institutions strive to meet both external expectations and internal purposes and goals and therefore need to organise their processes in a way which will realise what they hope and need to demonstrate. They thus need to engage with “external” and “internal” consistency.

External consistency involves an institution organising its resources and processes in order to meet the standards and expectations defined by its significant reference group (discipline, profession, type of institution). This ensures that the outcomes of the institution are reliable and acceptable in terms of the standards of the discipline, the profession, or the institutional category. Internal consistency, on the other hand, emphasises the need to focus on the purposes and goals of the institution and the adjustment of actions to suit its own principles and priorities.

The two concepts of “internal consistency” and “external consistency” are useful when the arrangements an institution has put in place to assure quality are evaluated. As already indicated, the definition of quality as involving “fitness for purpose” results in a focus on what a university does to ensure that it is, indeed, “fit” for the purpose that it has defined for itself. The two concepts also make it possible to identify both external and internal requirements and develop practices which meet both translate these into useful and applicable.

Having looked at definitions of quality, the next section of this chapter moves to looking at the different functions associated with quality.

2.4 The scope of quality work

In this section I discuss the differences between two key areas of quality related work: quality assurance and quality enhancement.

2.4.1 Quality assurance

In common with the concept of quality itself, the notion of quality assurance has been defined in different ways by scholars working from different ideological positions. Barnett (1992) views quality assurance as a means of ensuring that the “culture” of an institution of higher education is focused on conforming to the same guidelines and standards. Harvey (2004, in Matei & Iwinski, 2016:22) views quality assurance as a process of “establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations or measure up to the threshold minimum requirements”. Vlăsceanu et al. (2004:74) refer to quality assurance as,

. . . an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programs. ... quality assurance activities depend on the existence of the necessary institutional mechanisms preferably sustained by a solid quality culture.

Williams (2016) refers to quality assurance as policies, structures (for example, quality assurance units, quality committees), resources and procedures put in place to achieve, maintain and enhance quality.

The definitions given here indicate that quality assurance is a generic term to describe a set of practices intended to maintain standards. The literature on quality assurance, as already discussed in previous sections, identifies students as central to ensuring the quality of teaching and learning (Bovill et al., 2014; Moyo & Boti, 2020; Trowler, 2018).

Quality assurance can be internal and external. Internal quality assurance focuses on different functional areas of higher education institutions, such as institutional policies, governance, teaching and learning, management, research, community service, international co-operation and other mechanisms established and implemented in an institution, with the purpose of meeting the standards that apply to higher education (Redder, 2010 in Kadhila, 2017; ENQA, 2005). Additionally, internal quality assurance links quality to the context and considers specific elements such as the quality of assessment (for example, programmes / curriculum review or design), staff competence, appropriate public information, student intake, design and approval of academic programmes, and the student experience. Although the focus of the study on which this thesis is based was on internal quality assurance in three Namibian institutions, I was aware that it was influenced by external quality assurance processes.

Unlike internal quality assurance, external quality assurance is quality assurance performed by dedicated entities or units responsible for assuring the quality of higher education institutions or programmes at a national level. The entities or bodies could be accrediting agencies or evaluation agencies (Zhang, 2012). Although the persons / bodies responsible for external quality assurance differ from one context to another, generally, the external quality assurance system is linked in some way to the government, even if this is through funding. Depending on the national context, the agencies / bodies can be fully autonomous and independent from the state, autonomous but publicly funded, fully private and independent (such as university membership associations); or in contrast, operate as designated agencies within the state structures (for example, part of a ministry or a new unit) (Matei & Iwinski, 2016).

Although external quality assurance is important as it helps institutions to see if they are meeting their objectives and identifies areas of improvement, the burden of assuring quality still rests on the shoulders of higher education institutions, as they are at the core of the quality process. Harvey (1996) concludes that an external quality assurance approach in higher education might lead to a culture of compliance, a point also noted by Boughey and McKenna (2017; 2021a), who link this to social and cultural conditioning at institutional levels.

2.4.1.1 Quality assurance practices

The three main sets of practices associated with quality assurance are accreditation, assessment and audit. Quality assurance agencies could adopt one or more of these depending on their educational systems and tradition (Woodhouse, 1999). Accreditation focuses on evaluating an institution or a programme to make decisions about whether it meets threshold standards or qualifies for a particular status. Obtaining accreditation might have implications for the institution, including permission to operate, or its students who, depending on the outcome of an accreditation exercise may, or may not, be eligible for grants (Woodhouse, 1999). The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources, and procedures of an HEI or programme. The output of an accreditation is usually a yes or no decision, though graduations are also possible. In some systems, however, an institution may be provisionally or conditionally accredited and given an opportunity to resubmit an application for full accreditation once improvements have been made. The system developed by the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance (OAAAQA) does this (Woodhouse, 1999; Dill, 2000).

Assessment involves processes to make graded judgements about quality. In this respect, assessment goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary yes or no judgement (Dill, 2000). Assessment asks, "How good are your outputs?" The output of an assessment is a quantitative evaluation, a grade, whether numeric, literal or descriptive (Woodhouse, 1999). A quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives (Woodhouse, 1999). This involves checking the extent to which the institution has put in place processes that will allow it to meet those objectives. Audit thus asks, "Are your processes effective?" The output is a description of the extent to which the claims of the institution are correct (Woodhouse, 1999). Academic audits are carried out at institutional level. However, unlike accreditation or assessment, audits do not aim to provide a comprehensive review of resources and activities, nor do they directly evaluate the quality of teaching or learning. Rather, audits focus on those processes implemented by HEIs in order to assure and improve the quality teaching and learning (Dill, 2000).

2.4.2 Quality enhancement

Like quality assurance, quality enhancement means different things to different people (Harvey & Newton, 2007). Harvey (2004) views quality enhancement as having two strands. Firstly, it refers to the enhancement of individual students, the improvement of their attributes, knowledge, ability, skills and potential. Secondly, it refers to the improvement of the quality of an institution or programme of study. Comber and Walsh (2012), and Gvaramadze (2011) note that the Scottish quality assurance agency focuses on students, and thus constructs enhancement as putting measures in place in order to improve their learning experiences. Amaral (2007) states that academic staff tend to be more interested in quality enhancement, while institutions and governments tend to be more interested in quality assurance. Quality assurance is viewed as a top-down process, which is often inflexible and based on quantitative measurements, while enhancement is a bottom-up, negotiated process, based on qualitative judgements and engagement with academics (Williams, 2016). This means that quality assurance is about having quality systems and structures in place so that when an institution is audited, there is evidence of, for example, a quality assurance unit, policies or committees, whereas quality enhancement is about a culture and practices that are concerned with improving the quality of the institution. Each higher education institution has its own culture and practices.

It could be argued that quality assurance and quality enhancement should be viewed as integrated and interactive processes with both seeking to improve the quality of education offered by an institution. Students are key stakeholders in enhancing the quality of education (Garwe, 2015; Okogbaa, 2016). For students to be actively involved in matters relating to their education, institutions should have policies that clearly indicate what roles students should have in the internal quality assurance matters and how they will work together and with academic staff to both assure and enhance the quality of teaching and learning (ENQA, 2009; Lizzio & Wilson 2009). Table 1 offers a summary of the differences between quality assurance and quality enhancement. It clearly shows that both concepts are part of what could be termed “quality promotion”. Although both quality assurance and quality enhancement are the collective responsibility of all stakeholders in higher education, the focus of my study was on students, as they are the primary stakeholders in higher

education and should therefore play a significant role in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Table 1: Differences between quality assurance and quality enhancement (Elassy, 2015:257)

Quality assurance	Quality enhancement
Gives insufficient weight to the teaching and learning processes	Gives considerable weight to the teaching and learning processes
Tends to be associated more with assessment and accountability	Tends to be associated more with improvement and development
Meets external standards	Meets internal standards
Moves from the top to the lower level	Moves from the lower to the top level
A summative process	A formative process
A quantitative performance	A qualitative performance
Focuses on the past	Focuses on the present and the future
Less freedom (follows absolute rules)	More freedom (uses flexible and negotiated rules)
Provides more space to administrators	Provides more space to academics

2.5 Conclusion

As already noted, globalisation- and marketisation-driven reforms have led to changes in education. The cost of providing education as a public service led to demands for accountability on the way funding was spent. The term “quality education”, in common with other terms discussed earlier in this chapter, is complex (Kahsay, 2012), as its definition depends on context. Stakeholders have their own expectations of an ideal education. Education needs to be contextualised, and not simply driven by discourses emanating from the Global North. Scholars provide different views on what quality education means, largely based on their own ideological approaches to education. Heystek and Minnaar (2015) state that quality education has to do with national and institutional standards. Chapman and Adams (2002) note that quality education focuses on teaching and learning, training lecturers, lecturer-to-student ratios, student involvement and how students perform in tests and examinations, thus focusing on identifying indicators of quality. Scott (2018) argues that quality is high when we are confident that students are being effectively and efficiently provided with the teaching, resources, support and environment so that they reach their full learning potential, again focusing on indicators of the inputs needed for quality. A definition of quality education would thus depend on the structures that an institution has put in place, and it is based on the type of quality assurance system of the given institution.

Chapter Three: Theoretical underpinnings of the study

3.1 Introduction

As already indicated, the study underpinning this thesis sought to investigate the role played by students in the quality 'of teaching and learning at higher education institutions in Namibia. The theoretical framing of the study draws on Bhaskar's (1978; 2008) critical realism and Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism. Bhaskar (1978) notes that critical realism embraces the ontological, "world as it is" and epistemological, "world as we know it". I decided to situate this study in the critical realism in order to delve below the empirical observable of a social phenomenon, student involvement in quality education, to a deeper dimension in order to identify the underlying mechanisms leading to the emergence of student involvement and the quality of their education at three Namibian institutions. Underlying causal mechanisms are identified by Bhaskar (1978) as existing at a layer of reality not open to observation by empirical means. Critical realism thus aims to foster deeper levels of understanding and explanation of events that happen in a social world. Archer's social realism allows for a more in-depth exploration of what happens at this layer of Reality with a particular focus on agency. In this Chapter, I discuss the two theories and link them to my study.

3.2 Bhaskar's critical realism

Bhaskar's (1978; 1989) critical realism claims that there is reality independent of our understanding and knowledge of it. As humans, we are able to create knowledge about this independent reality (Groff, 2004). Our knowledge of the "real" world that exists independently of our knowledge and understanding of it is, however, relative. For Bhaskar, the social world is differentiated in the sense that there exists intransitive knowledge (which is unchanging regardless of the way we understand it) and the transitive knowledge of this world that is based on human activity.

Critical realism is grounded in three theses: the ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality. These are discussed in the next sections. I also demonstrate how critical realism underpins the theoretical framework of the study on which this thesis is based.

3.2.1 Stratified ontology

Bhaskar (1978; 1989) sees reality as consisting of three layers: the Empirical, the Actual and the Real (see Figure 2). The Empirical is the domain of experience and observation. Experiences and observations emerge from events located at a deeper layer of reality, the Actual and mechanisms located at the deepest layer of reality, the Real. Experiences and observations might be mediated by, amongst other things, language, culture, ideology or previous experiences. As a result, they are peculiar to individuals and are understood to be relative. For my study, I interviewed students, faculty deans, vice chancellors, the National Council for Higher Education director and quality assurance directors at the three institutions in order to elicit their observations and experiences of the involvement of students in the quality of teaching and learning.

As already indicated, the Actual is the layer of events. At this level, events emerge as the result the interplay of mechanisms located at the deepest layer of reality, the Real. In this study, events involving students included the meetings of various committees and institutional bodies such as senate and council, contributions to curriculum design including the completion of a survey or a comment made to a member of staff by a class representative. Critical realists acknowledge the existence of events regardless of whether they are witnessed or not.

The final layer of Bhaskar's stratified reality is the Real. The Real is made up of generative mechanisms or causal powers which produce events, observed or unobserved, at the level of the Actual that might be experienced or observed at the level of the Empirical. The Real thus hosts the structures, mechanisms and processes that are not observable but exercise causal powers that lead to the emergence of observable phenomena such as an event or a comment describing an experience. Although mechanisms have powers, they are not

understood to be strictly causal. The existence of a mechanism does not necessarily lead to the emergence of an event at the level of the Actual or an observation or experience at the level of the Empirical. Rather, mechanisms located at the level of the Real are understood to be tendential only as emergence depends on an interplay of mechanisms which may, or may not, be activated at any time.

A lot of research in higher education focuses on the exploration of experiences and observations of students and teachers (see for example, Borghi et al., 2016; Ginns et al., 2007; Morelock et al., 2017). For critical realist researchers, the focus is not on experiences or perceptions, but rather the structures and mechanisms located at the level of the Real that generate them. This is because the world is more than what we perceive or observe and know at a given point in time. For critical realists, the social world can be fully understood only if we understand the mechanisms that generate events and the experiences and observations emerging from them.

The interplay of discursive mechanisms promoting, amongst other things, freedom of movement and the construction of higher education as a “service”, with structures such as the unification of nations in common economic areas, in this case the European Union, is an example of emergence that led to the Bologna Protocol in Europe. As outlined in Chapter 1, the Bologna Process was initiated in order to allow for cross-border provision of higher education within the European Economic Area and the introduction of quality assurance formed part of this process. In many respects, it has served as a model in Africa (Alemu, 2019), as many African countries are now negotiating across borders regarding quality assurance and have developed documents to facilitate this process (see for example, ASG-QA, 2015). Quality assurance, as discussed in the next chapter, is related to a set of discourses termed “New Public Management”.

Figure 2 illustrates Bhaskar's (1978; 1989) three layers of reality.



Figure 2: The iceberg metaphor (from Fletcher, 2016:6)

As seen in Figure 2, we are not able to “see” the Real and may only be able to observe some of the events which occur at the level of the Actual (Bhaskar, 1998).

3.2.2 Epistemological relativism

Although Bhaskar (1978; 1989) posits a level of reality consisting of relatively enduring structures and mechanisms which exist independently of human thought and action at the level of the Real. He also acknowledges the relativism of coming to know that reality. The identification of three layers of reality, the Empirical, the Actual and the Real point to the dangers of conflating “what is” with “what can be known”, a process Bhaskar (1989:133) terms the “epistemic fallacy” committed by researchers who rely solely on empirical data. Bhaskar’s stratified reality allows for the separation of epistemology and ontology because ontology (the world as it is) is a separate activity from our knowledge of it (epistemology). Bhaskar’s (2008) epistemological relativism is based on premises about how knowledge of the Real is established. Once an object of investigation has been identified, an explanation of that object must be sought. This involves moving from empirical data captured in the form of observations or records of experiences in the form of, for example, interview data, at the level of the Empirical and observations of events at the level of the Actual, to the level of the Real. Researchers interpret this data which, in many cases, is already an

interpretation representing interviewees' views and perceptions. Critical realism therefore acknowledges the relativism of accounts obtained at the levels of the Empirical and the Actual and thus makes a distinction between epistemological relativism and ontological realism. In doing this, critical realists acknowledge human fallibility. Essentially, the view of the world presented by one researcher could be challenged by others.

As the interplay of mechanisms at the level of the Real cannot be accessed directly using the senses, any explanation of the Real needs to be achieved using the inferential processes of abduction and retrodution (Danermark et al., 1997).

According to Benton and Craib (2001:185), retrodution is:

A form of inferential argument which starts with some phenomenon, or pattern, and poses the question "What sort of process, mechanism, agency, and so on, if it existed, would have this phenomenon as its consequence?" The conclusions are not logically necessary, but it offers a rational process for devising candidate explanations.

Using retrodution to explore the level of the Real therefore involves developing a form of "transcendental argumentation" (Danermark et al., 1997) which involves asking questions such as "How is x possible?" or "What properties of x must exist for y to emerge in this form?". In other words, the aim of retrodution is to explain what the world must be like to trigger the emergence of an event at the level of the Actual and an experience or observation at the level of the Empirical. In the process of using retrodution, the fallibility of the researcher is always acknowledged.

Abduction, on the other hand, involves using explanatory theory to see data in a different way. Habermas (1978) states that abduction is a mode of inference leading to the "best" explanation, meaning we could have more than one explanation, an observation that relates to the concepts of "epistemological relativism" and "judgemental rationality" (discussed below). Essentially, abduction involves using theory as a lens to identify relations and connections that might not otherwise be obvious. Theory allows the researcher to

formulate new ideas, to conceptualise something differently and to see things that might otherwise not be seen (Danermark et al., 1997).

Using retroduction and abduction allowed me to move from empirical data to explore the level of the Real and identify structures and mechanisms leading to the emergence of events, observations and experiences identified in that data. These two explanatory tools helped provide in-depth explanations of the causal mechanisms leading to observations and experiences of students and staff members pertaining to students' involvement in educational activities and the mechanisms and structures put in place to facilitate students' active participation in quality assurance.

Given that there is reality outside of human experience and researchers could be fallible in understanding it, how then do researchers ensure that what we have to say as researchers has any merit? Bhaskar (1978; 1989) deals with this question using the concept of "judgemental rationality".

3.2.3 Judgemental rationality

Judgemental rationality involves using our reason and logic to arrive at the "best" explanation for a phenomenon we are exploring. Bhaskar (1989) cautions about the danger of accepting all accounts of the world as equally good, as this can result in extreme relativism. Sayer (1992:69), drawing on Bhaskar's thinking, writes of the need for our knowledge of the world to be evaluated in terms of its "practical adequacy". This, however, is not the same as the instrumentalist argument that knowledge is valid if it is useful to someone (Danermark et al., 1997). In order to arrive at an "adequate" account and exercise their best judgement, researchers need to use techniques well established in the literature on research, such as member-checking and triangulation, to arrive at an explanation of why events occur and why individuals make the observations and report the experiences we analyse in empirical data.

This takes us to another concept that is key to Bhaskar's thinking, "emergence".

- ***Bhaskar's notion of emergence***

Central to critical realism is the term “emergence”. Emergence relates to the way the interplay of mechanisms at the level of the Real leads to events at the level of the Actual and observations and experiences at the level of the Empirical. The configuration of mechanisms active at any one time thus leads to an event and to experiences and observations of that event. In the case of this study, emergence could refer to, amongst other things, the interplay of mechanisms leading to students being allowed representation on a committee, but observing that their inputs to meetings are not recognised. The idea that mechanisms at the level of the Real are not strictly causal has already been noted. A particular configuration of mechanisms at a particular point in time can lead to emergence, but as the world is an open system, it is unlikely that the configuration can be generalised. An example of this phenomenon was seen during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Many people who contracted the virus became very sick and even died. Others did not develop any serious symptoms. The emergence of symptoms (conceptualised as events at the level of the Actual) was related to particular configurations of mechanisms. So, for example, age and existing medical conditions played a part in the interplay of mechanisms, with the result that the virus alone, as a mechanism, did not lead to serious illness and death.

Bhaskar thus sees causal powers as emergent, in that emergence only occurs when the parts are organised into particular patterns. Another example of emergence is provided by Elder-Vass (2007), who notes that water is made up of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom (H₂O). Many of the properties of water, such as being liquid at room temperature, or being able to put out fires, are clearly different from the properties of its constituent elements. If these atoms were present simply as atoms, or organised into molecules of other types than water, the resulting substance would not have the properties of water. The atoms are arranged in a certain way and when they come together in the same composition, they emerge as water. The emergence is likely to lead to water in various forms. For instance, at the level of the Empirical, water might be in the form of ice, vapour or a liquid.

Critical realism was used as an “underlabouring philosophy” in the study underpinning this thesis, as it allowed me to delve beyond empirical observations of student engagement and explore what led to its emergence. Critical realism alone was, however, insufficient to allow me to see what I needed to see without additional theory. Archer’s (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism played this role.

3.3 Social Realism

Critical realism provides the metatheory for the study. It was to social realism, which is entirely compatible with critical realism, that I turned to complement the theoretical framing.

3.3.1 *Structure, culture and agency*

Archer follows Bhaskar (1978; 1989) in subscribing to the layered ontology of critical realism. Her theoretical work provides a set of conceptual tools to better understand the interplay of mechanisms at the level of the Real. More specifically, Archer is interested in agency and her work allows us to explore the way that agents are enabled and constrained as they go about making changes in the social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves. In the context of the study on which this thesis is based, agency is important, given institutional hierarchies where academics inevitably hold more power than students.

Following sociologists in a debate that has continued for centuries, Archer’s (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism is concerned with the relationship of what she terms the “parts” (structure and culture) and the “people” (agency). Archer argues that structure and culture are central to social life and are relatively autonomous of each other. For Archer, “structure” refers to material interests and culture to be about ideals, beliefs and values. Structures such as race, social class, gender, and education regulate access to the “goods” of the world. Archer argues that structures are activity-dependent, in that they require the activity of agents to be reproduced or changed. Archer (1995; 1996; 2000) accords power to structure in the form of “structural emergent powers and properties” (SEPs). Agents can be constrained or enabled by the SEPs they encounter in the contexts in which they find themselves.

Culture comprises the theories, beliefs, values, and ideologies that a society holds at any particular given time. Culture is collectively produced by people and guides the individual actions of person in a given society. For Archer (1996), culture exists in an objective sense between the physical world and the mental world. This means that, for culture to exist, ideas, values and knowledge must be shared (“I know what others know”). Like structure, culture is understood to be dormant until acted upon. Ideas, values and beliefs may exist, but are only reproduced or changed when people act on them or use them as the basis for their actions.

Culture is usually understood to be constituted discursively. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is thus used in this study to analyse data. Fairclough (1993:135) defines critical discourse analysis as,

... discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practices, events and texts, and wider social and cultural structures, relations and process; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by power and struggles over power.

In critical realist terms, discourses are understood to be mechanisms at the level of the Real, and as such, are intransitive and they possess causal powers termed by Archer (1995; 1996; 2000) as “cultural emergent powers and properties” (CEPs) which can enable or constrain the exercise of agency. Van Dijk (2006) points out that CDA is primarily interested in, and motivated by, the endeavour to understand pressing social issues. In the case of the study underpinning this thesis, the social issue is the involvement of students in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning. The identification of discourses helps organisations to examine themselves and obtain probable solutions to constraints in the ideational realm. It is my hope that the study on which this thesis is based will contribute to this, and that the identification of discourses will be useful to institutions and will enable more meaningful forms of student engagement.

Agents are people operating as social beings. Archer (1995; 1996; 2000) distinguishes between three types of agency: primary agents, corporate agents and social actors. Primary agents, according to Archer (2000:263) are “collectivities sharing the same life chances”. Primary agents are born into existing social and cultural contexts and are shaped by them. Although primary agents “play no part in the strategic guidance of society because they literally have no say” (Archer, 2000:268), they are not devoid of power, as Archer accords them “personal powers and properties” (PEPs), the most important of which is reflexivity. As Archer (2000:308) notes,

Human beings have the powers of critical reflection upon their social context and of creatively redesigning their social environment, its institutional or ideational configurations, or both ... it is possible for human beings to become agentially effective ... in evaluating their social context, creatively envisaging alternatives, and collaborating with others in bringing about transformation.

Reflexivity is exercised by means of an “inner conversation” in which private and social roles are balanced.

The collaboration with others noted in the quotation above leads to primary agents transforming themselves into “corporate agents” who are “aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organised in order to get it, can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural feature in question” (Archer, 1995:258). The transformation into another form of agency is termed “morphogenesis”. An example of morphogenesis in higher education could involve a group of students working together to make representation and express their concerns about a course. As primary agents, students can benefit by exercising their PEPs “to improve upon the inferior life-chances assigned to them” and become “active participants in society’s decision making” (Archer, 1995:258).

The final type of agent identified by Archer, social actors, are able to draw on the SEPs of roles to which they are appointed (or seize) as well as their own PEPs. An example of a social actor in a university might be a dean or a vice-chancellor. Both draw on SEPs of the deanship

or vice-chancellorate, roles that pre-existed their appointment to the position, but bring their own PEPs to the exercise of the role, with the result that deanships and vice-chancellorships are individual. An SRC president would also be a social actor.

Although Archer accords PEPs to all agents, she also acknowledges that they are socially and culturally conditioned from birth onwards and that the conditions in which they find themselves will always impact on the exercise of their agency. While agents have power, they are not completely free because of this social and cultural conditioning.

3.3.2 Analytical dualism and emergence

Having explored the concepts of structure, culture and agency, it is now pertinent to discuss Archer's (1995) arguments on the ontological view of the social world as stratified and irreducible.

As already indicated, Archer (1995; 1996; 2000) sees the social world as comprising the "parts" (structure and culture) and the "people" (agents). For many years, sociologists have been debating which is more dominant. Archer rejects all forms of what she terms "conflation". "Upwards conflation", or "Modernity's Man" has its roots in the Enlightenment of 18th century Europe and holds that, by exercising reason, human beings are able to "create" the social world, and thus, better the human condition. "Downwards conflation" draws on the idea that individuals are created by society, and therefore are not free to act as they see fit because they are entirely constrained by social structures and cultures. "Central conflation", originating in the work of structuration theorists such as Giddens (1984) sees the "parts" and the "people" as inseparable. Archer dismisses all forms of central conflation, arguing for the necessity of seeing when or how agents are able to bring about change.

Archer's solution to the need to see how agents are able to bring about change is to see structure, culture and agency as separate strata of reality each (as already noted) with distinct powers and properties (SEPs, CEPs and PEPs). Although structure, culture and agency always act simultaneously, Archer (1995; 1996; 2000) argues that, in research, they need to be separated for analytical purposes only. As already noted, Archer is interested in

change, how it happens, who brings it about and what constrains it. Her morphogenetic framework provides a means of understanding change over time.

3.3.3 The morphogenetic framework

Archer (1995; 1996; 2000) sees change as occurring in never-ending, three-phase cycles. The first phase of any cycle, termed T1, involves the social and cultural conditioning of agents. In Chapter One, the goal of the study underpinning this thesis was stated as to better understand student involvement in assuring the quality of teaching and learning at three Namibian universities. As I describe in Chapter Five, in critical realist terms, calls for student involvement can be seen to have emerged from an interplay of mechanisms located at the level of the Real, including globalisation, neo-liberalism and massification. Archer would see this interplay as conditioning in the first phase of a morphogenetic cycle looking at the emergence of student involvement in Namibia. Agents in the higher education system and in society would be conditioned more by mechanisms at play. I therefore date T1 from the time Namibia gained its independence in 1990 and started to overhaul its higher education system following the end of colonial rule. As this happened, the newly independent nation needed to engage with, amongst other things, globalisation and with discourses promoting neo-liberalism and calls for the introduction of new ways of managing universities, termed “New Public Management”, drawing on practices from business and commerce that included quality assurance. These mechanisms can be seen to have been part of the social and cultural conditioning of agents at the three universities in the study as they began to engage with quality assurance and the idea that students should be engaged in it.

The second phase of Archer’s morphogenetic cycle, T2 to T3, explores the social and cultural interaction that takes place as agents go about pursuing projects that they have identified for themselves. In the case of the study underpinning this thesis, these “projects” were understood to be related to involving students in the quality assurance of teaching and learning. Institutional managers and leaders identified projects related to student engagement including developing policies defining roles for students, and students also had projects in the sense that they wanted to be engaged with institutional matters. As agents exercised their PEPs to pursue projects, they were enabled and constrained by SEPs and CEPs in the contexts in which they worked and studied.

The final phase of the cycle, T4, allows for an evaluation of the extent to which change, “morphogenesis”, or non-change, “morphostasis”, has taken place. In the case of this study, T4 explores the extent to which student engagement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning has been meaningful, and thus its goals, as constructed in discourses prevalent at T1, have been achieved.

As already indicated, Archer insists on the separation of structure, culture and agency for analytical purposes only. It is therefore possible to posit morphogenetic cycles for each of these domains as shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5.

Cultural conditioning

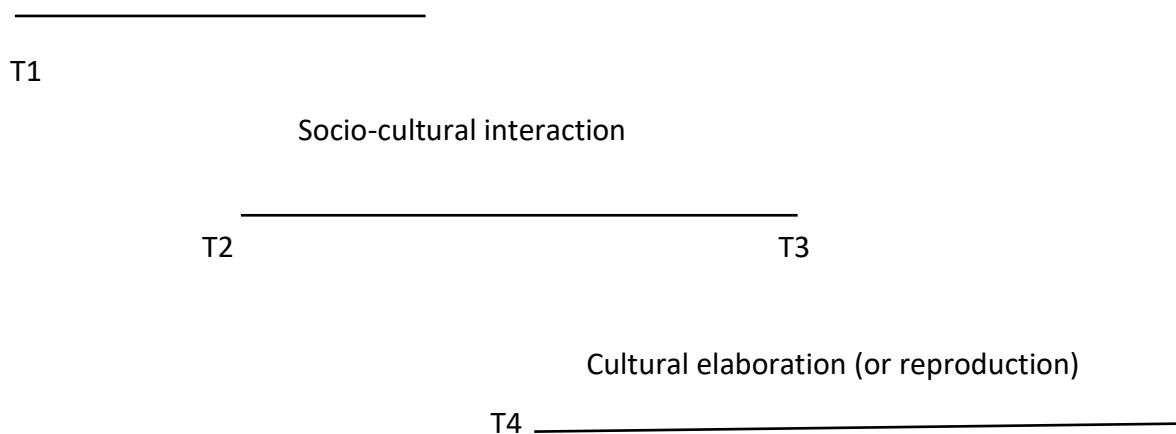


Figure 3: *The morphogenesis of culture* (Archer, 1995:193)

Structural conditioning

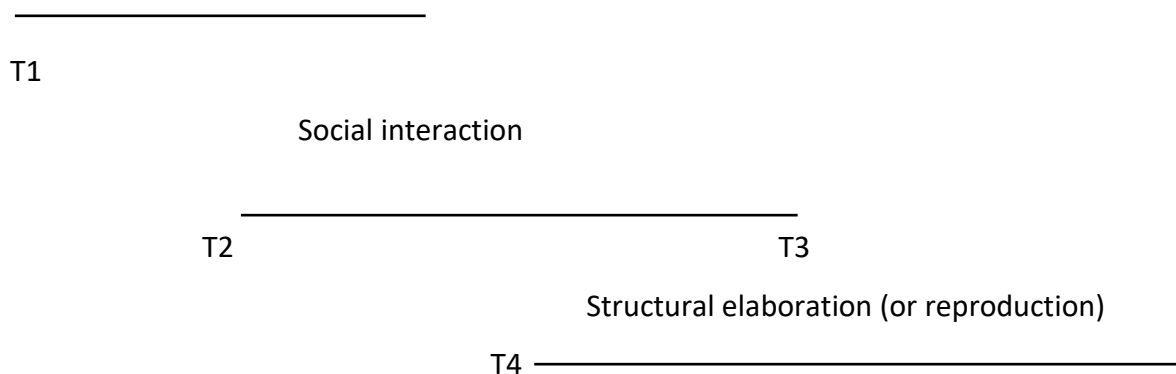


Figure 4: *The morphogenesis of structure* (Archer, 1995:193)

Socio-cultural conditioning of groups

T1

Group interaction (between primary
and corporate agents)

T2

T3

Group elaboration (increase of corporate agents)

T4

Figure 5: The morphogenesis of corporate agency (Archer, 2000:268)

In practice, mechanisms in the domains of structure, culture and agency are all in play simultaneously.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced Bhaskar's (1978; 1998) critical realism and Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism, drawing on her concepts of structure, culture and agency. The theories acted as lenses for identifying the underlying mechanisms pertaining to student involvement.

In the next chapter, I look at the design of the study underpinning this thesis.

Chapter Four: Research Design

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design and the methods that were used to collect and analyse data for the study on which this thesis is based. As indicated in Chapter Two, the study was underpinned by Bhaskar's (1978; 1989) critical realism theory and Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism. These theoretical underpinnings allowed me to design a piece of research that elicited the experiences and observations of participants at what Bhaskar terms the "level of the Empirical". I was then able to move on to identify events at the level of the Actual and mechanisms at the level of the Real, from which the experiences and observations emerged. In order to identify and analyse mechanisms in the domain of culture at the level of the Real, I used Fairclough's (1993) critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is grounded in a critical realist ontology (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). CDA allowed me to describe, interpret, and explain the sets of ideas (discourses) from which events and experiences and observations led to the emergence of student involvement in the assurance of quality in higher education. This Chapter describes the design of my study and details the selection of cases and sampling, data collection, data analysis, validity and ethical consideration. I end by deliberating on the limitations and constraints I encountered during the research process.

4.2 Research design

The design of my study focused on Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) morphogenetic framework. As indicated in Chapter Two, Archer argues that change occurs, or does not occur, in a series of three-phase cycles. The first stage of a morphogenetic cycle, termed T1, is when social and cultural conditioning of agents occurs. As explained in Chapter Two, Archer rejects the determination of agency by structure as well as the supremacy of agency over structure by assigning personal emergent powers and properties (PEPs) to agents. Agents are, however, always conditioned in the way they exercise these PEPs by their previous histories. As also indicated, Archer argues for the need for structure and culture, which she terms "the parts",

to be analysed separately from agency, “the people” although, in reality, mechanisms in each domain are in constant interplay.

In my study, T1 involved exploring the mechanisms in the period leading to the introduction of quality assurance and the identification of students as agents who could engage with it in Namibia at global, regional and national levels. I understood T1 as spanning the period from the early 1980s, when the set of management practices from business, which included quality assurance, was introduced to public services including higher education, to the mid-1990s in the United Kingdom, and the United States to the early 2000s, when Namibia introduced quality assurance to its own higher education system, via to the Namibian Higher Education Act.

The second stage of a morphogenetic cycle, termed T2 to T3, is a period of social and cultural interaction when agents exercise their PEPs in relation to mechanisms in the domains of structure and culture. In my study, the exercise of agency related to the involvement of students in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning at three Namibian universities, is detailed in Chapter Seven. This phase of my study involved exploring the constraints and enablements to the exercise of that agency. Agents were conceptualised as students seeking to be involved in quality assurance, as well as institutional managers and academics.

The final stage of a morphogenetic cycle, T4, is when it becomes possible to evaluate whether change (morphogenesis) has occurred or not. In the case of my study, this is when I was able to arrive at answers to the three questions that had guided my study:

- In what ways are students involved, or not involved, as stakeholders in internal quality assurance processes at higher education institutions in Namibia?
- What are the enablements and constraints for student involvement in internal quality assurance matters?
- In what ways does student participation enhance, or not enhance, quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia?

The three questions relate to change insofar as policies and procedures in Namibia identify students as stakeholders needing to be involved in quality assurance. The questions address the extent to which they are involved, reasons for that involvement, as well as the potential of their involvement to contribute to quality. The three questions are therefore all related to change.

Boughey and McKenna (2021a) caution that critical realism eliminates the need to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative approaches to research, as all studies can only begin with an exploration of experiences and observations at the level of the Empirical and events at the level of the Actual before moving to identify the mechanisms at the level of the Real, from which these emerged. The exploration of observations, experiences and event can involve qualitative and quantitative data. When quantitative data is collected and analysed, it is used descriptively, not inferentially. Critical realist research is not “mixed methods” research as it does not rely on pragmatism even though it can draw on a combination of both types of data. Scholars (Trochim, 2000; Williams & Wynn, 2012) point out that qualitative methods are the best way to uncover and explain social phenomena, as they allow researchers to immerse themselves in the research process and view the phenomena in context. This is consonant with an exploration of the levels of the Empirical and the Actual in Bhaskar’s ontology.

As well as using interviews, I also analysed documents related to the involvement of students in quality assurance. The combination of the different data collection and analysis techniques in the same study helped to guard against my own fallibility as a researcher, acknowledged by critical realists. It also helped me to use my judgemental rationality by providing multiple data sets to inform the “best guesses” I came to as I was identifying structures and mechanisms at the level of the Real, leading to the emergence of student involvement (Danermark et al., 1997). I provide more detail on my data collection and analysis in later sections of this chapter.

4.2.1 Case study

I adopted a case study approach for the study. Case study research design allows a researcher to develop an in-depth analysis of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2003), in this case, student involvement in quality assurance at three Namibian institutions. Yin also notes that a case study is a preferred method when asking “how” or “why” questions, when a researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. Stake (2006) explains that a case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what has to be studied, in this case, the role of students in the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions in Namibia. The metatheory of critical realism and the case study approach both share similar concerns in their desire to provide explanations for the phenomena under study. Critical realism seeks to identify the “structures that give rise to certain powers, tendencies, or ways of acting” (Mingers et al., 2013:796). If the case study is well-constructed, it can provide a clear understanding of the “causal pathway(s) at work in a causal relationship” (Gerring, 2007:45). As Gerring (2007) argues, both critical realism and case study are convergent models that support the possibility of peering into the “box of causality” in order to identify relationships and relational events lying between a cause and its supposed consequences.

Similarly, Easton (2010 in Williams & Wynn, 2012) states that the case study method is the best approach to explore the interaction of structure, events, actions, and context to identify causal mechanisms. For Easton (2010:119), a case study “involves investigating one or a small number of social entities or situations about which data are collected using multiple sources of data”. I understood the higher education system in Namibia and each of the three institutions in my study to be a “social entity”.

In the study, the higher education system in Namibia was conceptualised as an overall case through which student involvement in quality assurance could be explored. Each of the three institutions, UNAM, NUST and IUM, was then conceptualised as a sub-case within the larger case. In order to answer my research questions which referred to the overarching case, I conducted a cross-case analysis of the three institutions. This means that, although the three universities were studied individually, results are synthesised, and conclusions are

drawn in relation to their higher education system overall. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:193) argue that “looking at multiple actors in multiple settings enhances generalisability”, while Yin (2003) notes that case studies are used for analytical generalisations, where the researcher’s aim is to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theoretical propositions. My use of three sub-cases within an overarching case therefore contributed to the readers’ ability to see how conclusions I reached might apply to their own setting, and also contribute to the theoretical propositions in the form of discourses promoting student engagement, described in Chapter Four of this thesis.

4.2.2 Case selection and sampling

Seeking explanation across different contexts has implications for case selection and sampling (Gerring, 2007). The Namibian institutions selected for this study are the three main higher education institutions established in the 1990s and currently have university status. Their relatively long-standing status is likely to mean that they have more firmly established quality assurance structures and practices. In addition, these institutions offer a diverse array of programmes in knowledge areas such as Engineering, Computer Science, Education, Vocational, Social Sciences and Health. This provided me with the opportunity to choose students from various faculties in order to elicit a range of views. The three institutions’ organisational structure also made it interesting for me to investigate the representation of students in the various structures of the institutions in order to improve or enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

The selection of my cases was therefore the result of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling where the researcher selects information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002), and takes place when the researcher selects a sample from which the most can be learned. That is, entities are those with needed status or experience, or possess specific knowledge to provide the information that the researcher seeks (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013).

The benefit of purposeful sampling is that any common patterns that may emerge from the great variation in the results are of interest and value (Patton, 2002). In other words, purposive sampling gives researchers an opportunity to develop as much insight as they

possibly can into whatever key point is under examination, in this case, student involvement in the quality of teaching and learning. My study involved the following social actors; deans, SRC members, quality assurance officers, pro-vice-chancellors or chancellors and directors of teaching and learning units. The purposes of choosing these agents varied. The deans were chosen because of their role in setting academic standards, developing policies, and overseeing academic discussions on matters of teaching and learning. The QA officers are the custodians of matters relating to quality assurance of the institution, and thus, have the potential to provide insights on student involvement. They were likely, for example, to know the percentage of students responding to surveys, and so on. QA officers consult senior management personnel to enact and oversee quality strategies. I also interviewed the director of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), directors of teaching and learning units and pro-vice-chancellors as individuals concerned with enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

In selecting students, including class representatives from various faculties, I relied on SRC members for referrals. The SRC members provided a list of students from various faculties, from which I selected individuals. In this respect, I used snowball sampling, which occurs when a researcher gathers information from one or a few people and then relies on these people for access to others. Snowball sampling is especially useful where the sample is to find and recruit hidden populations, where individuals are not easily accessible to researchers (Green & Thorogood, 2009).

Before moving to the methods I used to collect my data, I describe the way I gained access to documentation and individuals at the three universities.

4.2.3 Gatekeeper permission

Conducting a study at an institution can be a very complex process, as either formal or informal permissions are needed in order to gain entry. Gaining gatekeeper permissions may involve lengthy transactions between the researcher and the organisation (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Formal access procedures require an understanding of the organisation's operational hierarchy and rules regarding professional etiquette for the recruitment of participants and data collection. This study followed formal procedures.

Ethical codes from institutions often set out guidelines regarding the circumstances in which gatekeepers should be consulted for permission. This enables the institution to identify the benefits and any potential harm regarding the research (Farrimond, 2013; Gorman, 2007). Before I embarked on data collection for this study, I applied for ethical clearance from the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) - Human Ethics (HE) sub-committee to access participants and relevant documents on quality assurance in the Namibian HEIs. The approval letter from Rhodes University (Appendix 1) was then emailed to the ethics committees at the three Namibian universities. Permission was granted to conduct the study (Appendices 2 to 4). The letters from the institutions indicated the local office-bearers that I needed to contact in order to proceed. I now return to my data to discuss the data collection methods used namely, documentation and interviews.

4.2.4 Data collection

This study used triangulation in the collection of data. Data triangulation involves collecting data from varying sources such as interviews and documentation in order to arrive at in-depth understandings by drawing on various perspectives (Yin, 2003). Robson (2002) states that data triangulation using more than one source of information improves the quality of a study. In my study, triangulation was a means of guarding against my own fallibility as a researcher drawing on her instrumental rationality to move from empirical data to a level of reality not directly accessible via the senses. Having more than one source of data allowed me to guard against possible bias.

I used interviews with the participants indicated above and documents to provide information. I discuss both below, but first I explain the procedures I followed to gain permission to conduct the study.

4.2.4.1 Documents

Documents are a product of a given context and are grounded in the real world. Documents helped provide information about the roles of agency and the institutional cultural and structural systems of the institutions. I analysed quality assurance policies and SRC Constitutions in order to understand the role that students play in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning at each institution. Quality assurance policies, with the exception of

one institution, were accessible online. According to the Inter-University Council for East Africa-German Academic Exchange Services (German: Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (IUCEA-DAAD), 2010), the purpose statements of quality assurance policies should contain explicit information about the relationship between teaching and research at the institution, the strategy on quality and standards, how the quality system is organised, responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units for assuring quality. Also, the policy should stipulate the involvement of students in quality assurance and ways in which the policy is implemented, monitored and revised. When subject to a discourse analysis, policy documents provide an understanding of the culture, belief and value systems espoused by institutions. Discourses related to student involvement were then triangulated with information from interviews with students in order to ascertain whether the values were being enacted or were merely symbolic.

4.2.4.2 Interviews

Generally, interviews provide an in-depth understanding as a result of the rich data collected through asking questions. This study used interviews as a qualitative data source because interviews provide direct access to the point of view of the interviewees, in terms of their perceptions and experience. In other words, interviews have a dynamic relation between the ontological “what” and the epistemological “how” (Bhaskar, 1978; 1979) by providing rich information about the observations and experiences of participants, from which a researcher can abduct and retroduct to the level of the Real. By allowing access, ultimately, to the level of the Real, interviews also allowed me to see how agents were enabled and constrained in relation to student involvement and thus, to answer my research question about enablements and constraints.

The study gathered data using individual and semi-structured interviews. The COVID-19 pandemic, which was first reported in Namibia in March 2020 (WHO, 2020), affected my plan for one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews, where I initially began with face-to-face interviews with QA directors, directors of teaching and learning, the director for the NCHE, and the VC, but had to move to online interviewing as the country moved into lockdown from April 2020 to November 2021 and staff from the respective institutions had to work from home. Online interviews were conducted using Zoom. Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with members of SRCs at the three Namibian universities

as well as with groups of students. Table 2 shows the participants interviewed for this study. Semi-structured group interviews were planned with the deans from a number of faculties at each institution. However, due to a lack of response from targeted participants, despite countless efforts made via email and telephone, individual interviews were conducted with some of the deans.

As I have noted above, studying the three universities in Namibia provided me with one overarching case in which three sub-cases were embedded. I therefore analysed interviews at each institution to allow me to build a single sub-case per institution, and then moved to working across the three sub-cases to build the overarching case.

My aim in conducting the interviews was to allow participants to express their observations and experiences of student involvement as freely as possible and in as much detail as they were able (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Since the interview guide contained open-ended questions, I rephrased and explained the questions whenever a participant did not understand.

Although I used the guide in each interview, I did not follow this to the letter, but used it as a guide only, as my aim was to make the interview as conversational as possible (Patton, 2002). I did not ask every question, nor did I follow the order of the questions on the interview guide, as in many instances, answers to some questions were provided in the discussion before I even asked the questions. I also allowed for follow-up questions when deemed appropriate.

Participants were invited via email to an interview and were asked to nominate a time convenient to them. Face-to-face interviews were held in participants' own offices.

Table 2: Participants interviewed for the study

Designation of interviewee	Number of participants
Members of the Student Representative Council (SRC members) (nine from each institution)	27
Other students (10 per institution)	30
Director for the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)	1
Directors of the Quality Assurance Unit	3
Director of the Teaching and Learning Unit	2
Faculty Deans	6
Deputy vice chancellor: Academics	2

Creswell (2014) states that, in deciding on participants for a study, the researcher chooses a number of individuals selected according to pre-determined criteria focused on the value of their potential contribution to a study. Roscoe (1975) in Sekaran (2000) states that a sample size larger than 30 and smaller than 500 is appropriate for most studies, although this depends on the methodological approach chosen by the researcher. It is perfectly possible to have a small sample of say, six participants, depending on how the research is framed methodologically. Smaller numbers help to build and maintain closer relationships and improve the exchange of information (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Hammersley (2015:688) concludes that a qualitative researcher's focus is often not so much on how many informants are sampled, but on which informants are sampled, in terms of the "fruitful development of the emerging theory."

Miles and Huberman (1994) note that empirical research often involves progressively lowering aspirations. A researcher might begin by wanting to study all facets of a problem, but soon it becomes apparent that choices need to be made. It is therefore important to be explicit about the goals of a study if the pitfalls of what they call "vacuum-cleaner" collection of data. A researcher may suffer from the accumulation of more data than there

is time to analyse, and detours into alluring associated questions that are time-consuming because of what the data reveals (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Case study research differs from other research designs, in that it involves intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual, a programme, event, group, intervention or community (Smith, 1978; Merriam, 1999 in Hlengwa, 2013). The number of participants selected for interview was informed by this observation.

4.2.4.3 The literature

In order to explore the social and cultural conditioning at T1 of the morphogenetic cycle under study, I also engaged extensively with the literature. I began by reading texts recommended by my supervisors and then followed up on references in those texts. I also kept a careful eye for new publications in the area of my study.

4.2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves the presentation and systematic arrangement of information from participants in a descriptive format and aims to find meaning in the practical knowledge and experience of the phenomena under study (Creswell, 2014). I analysed data for my study using Atlas.ti8 software. Methodologically, I used critical discourse analysis, retroduction and abduction. Below, I discuss how data was analysed.

4.2.5.1 Document analysis

Yin (2014) argues that documents are valuable in corroborating and augmenting evidence from other data sources in case study research (Yin, 2014). Documents help in providing further insights into the way the events are constructed and how people perceive them (Quinn, 2006). As already indicated, I collected and analysed quality assurance policies and SRC Constitutions. May (2001:176) states that,

... documents read as the sedimentation of social practices, have the potential to inform and structure the decisions which people make on a daily and longer-term basis; they also constitute particular readings of social events. They tell us about the aspirations and intentions of the periods to which they refer and describe places and

social relationships at a time when we many not have been born, or were simply not present.

In my analysis, my focus was on the cultural and structural systems pertaining to student involvement in the quality of education. Although my study was informed by a critical and social realist framework, and therefore sought to identify mechanisms from which events related to student involvement in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning emerged, along with observations and experiences of those events, I initially identified “themes” in my analysis. I conceptualised “themes” as issues which I could then subject to abduction and retroduction to move to a deeper layer of reality.

In doing this, I first had to familiarise myself with the data. I therefore read and re-read documents in order to identify sequences, and patterns (May, 2001). As Ary et al. (2014:527) note,

Technology can never replace the human researcher in terms of thought process and interpretation. The researcher must decide what data to process, and how to process it, the computer cannot reflect or transform data into meaningful findings.

After having understood the data first-hand, I then used the qualitative data analysis Atlas.ti8 software to code the data by breaking it down, rearranging and grouping it into identified themes aligned with the research questions (Shaheen & George, 2011 in Shanthi et al., 2015). Corbin and Anselm (2008) have identified two approaches that can be used during the coding process. Firstly, a researcher can approach data without any set of coding categories, and simply allow the categories to emerge from the data. In this way, the researcher immerses themselves in the data to allow new insights. The second approach involves having a preset list of coding categories based on existing theory or literature. The category names may be derived from the data itself, existing theory or from the literature. The researcher can combine both approaches (Shanthi et al., 2015). In my study, I used both approaches to coding. In my pre-coding phase, I allowed categories and names of categories to emerge. I then re-examined the data carefully, using my critical and social realist lenses, my research questions and literature.

I coded using short sentences, paragraphs, letters (for example, D) and phrases. Saldaña (2013:3) states that coding can range from a single word, a full sentence, to an entire paragraph. It is a generated construct which symbolises, and thus “attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later pattern detection, categorisation, theory building and other analytical processes.” After coding, I organised and refined the codes and grouped similar codes together to form categories or potential themes (for example, “roles and responsibilities”). Data is thus organised into a coherent framework that reflected the emerging patterns and relations. The categories or groups of codes were examined to identify overarching themes. The themes were revisited to ensure that they accurately represented the data and answered the research questions.

4.2.5.2 Analysis of interviews

Interviews, which lasted between thirty and fifty minutes, were digitally recorded with the participants’ permission. The recorded interviews were then turned into text for analysis purposes. As I have noted in Section 4.2.5.1, analysing data involves: a) organising and familiarising oneself with the data so that the data can be easily retrieved and also immersed in the data; b) coding and synthesising, searching for significant patterns, and discovering what is important. This is the core of data analysis and includes the identification of categories and themes. The interview recordings were transcribed and stored in separate protected folders for students (S) and members of management (MM). Similar to the steps taken to analyse documents, I read and re-read transcripts of interviews. I then went through transcripts looking for patterns of responses which I termed “themes”. This informed the coding and categorisation of major topics. I eventually created a code framework as in the example below.

Code Groups	Name	Grounded	Density	Groups
Discourses (5)	D1	2	0	{Discourses}
	D2	6	0	{Discourses}
	D3	4	0	{Discourses}
	D4	7	0	{Discourses}
	D5	4	0	{Discourses}
	Q1	42	0	{Ways of involvement}
	Q2	19	0	{Enablement and constraints}
	Q3-	23	0	{Enhancement and why involve students}
	Q3b	3	0	{Enhancement and why involve students}
	S11	3	0	{Structures}

Figure 6: A sample of coding

As shown in Figure 6, discourses were coded as “D1”, “D2”, “D3”. Structures were coded as “St1”, “St2”, and so on. “Q” codes represent the research questions and were also informed by the literature review. The code groups on the left side of the table are the examples of the short sentences and words used during coding. An example of an “St” code was “hierarchy”. As already indicated, my aim in analysing my data in this way was to identify patterns in the data.

My study could be classed as interpretative even though it was rooted in realism rather than relativism, as I was involved in interpretation as, firstly, I identified and explained observations and experiences at Bhaskar’s level of the Empirical, and secondly, because I then moved from those experiences and observations to identify mechanisms at the level of the Real. Interpretation is about bringing out a meaning, telling a story, providing an explanation, and developing a plausible explanation. The emphasis in the initial stages of data analysis is on sense-making or understanding the topic of interest. As a researcher, I had to organise based on what I saw. I read and tried to make sense of what I read in order to explain, develop theories, or pose new questions (Ary et al., 2014).

As indicated in Chapter Two, my study drew on Archer’s (1995; 1996; 2000) “morphogenetic framework” which sees change, or non-change, as occurring in never-ending, three-phase cycles. The first phase of each cycle, termed T1, is a time of social and cultural conditioning. In order to explore T1 in my study, I drew heavily on a reading of the literature. My exploration of T1 is reported in two chapters, Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four consists of my analysis of the emergence of quality assurance in higher education and the way that this conditioned agents, in that it identifies dominant discourses and structures at global, regional and national levels. Chapter Five then focuses on student engagement.

I read extensively to complete both chapters under the guidance of my supervisors, and discussed insights derived from my reading with them. I also produced multiple drafts of each chapter which they read and provided feedback on.

4.2.5.3 Inferential methods

Mechanisms located at the level of the Real cannot be accessed directly using senses. I therefore employed two modes of inferences, namely, retroduction, and abduction, to identify them.

Retroduction leads to the formation of a new conceptual framework or theory (Danermark et al., 1997). Retroduction identifies mechanisms that explain what caused particular events to occur, in my case, student involvement in quality assurance. It explains the world and the events observed through generative mechanisms that exist in the real domain. As Bhaskar (1998:17) puts it,

... theoretical explanation proceeds by description of significant features, retroduction to possible causes, elimination of alternatives and identification of the generative mechanism or causal structure at work.

In using retroduction, the researcher moves from a surface phenomenon captured at the level of the Empirical domain to a deeper understanding situated at the level of the Real by interpreting and re-contextualising particular actions and events situated at the level of the Actual (see Figure 7 for illustration).

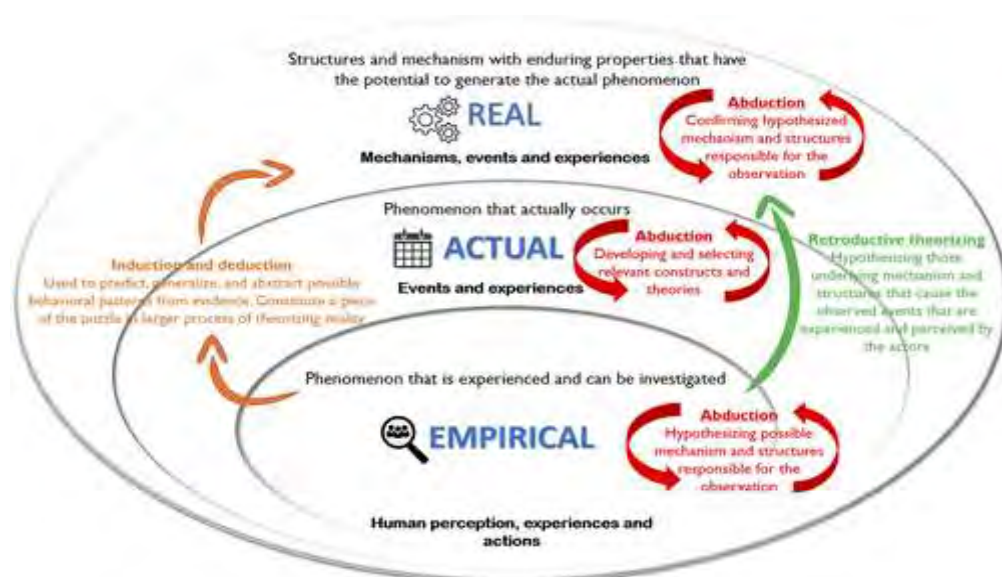


Figure 7: The application of retroduction and abduction (Mukumbang et al., 2021:4)

Williams and Wynn (2012:799-800) sum up retroduction as

. . . the core of the CR explanatory model, is derived from the ontological assumption of emergence and epistemological focus on explanation, the use of causal mechanisms as the basis for this explanation, the potential for multiple potential explanations, and the knowledge that these causal mechanisms may or may not be observable empirically.

Habermas (1978) states that abduction is a mode of inference used to broaden knowledge and stimulate the research process. Essentially, abduction is a means of forming associations that enable the researcher to discern relations and connections that are not otherwise evident or obvious through the use of theory. This allows the researcher to formulate new ideas, think of something in a different context, and to see things that otherwise would not be evident (Danermark et al., 1997). Abduction is thus a way of (re)interpreting data. It allows the researcher to test different frames of interpretation and to discern relations and connections not immediately apparent in the first instance (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013).

4.2.5.4 Critical discourse analysis

Discourse is a “cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations” that affords “a way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective” (Epstein, 2008:2). For Fairclough (1993:135), critical discourse analysis (CDA) aims to:

... systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.

Discourses refer to something real and have causal powers to affect emergence. They thus have real effects on social practice and social institutions. Critical discourse analysis aims to

explore the way discourse (re)produces social domination, that is, the power of one group over others and the ways in which dominated groups may discursively resist this (Billig, 2008).

Discourses are invoked in many ways, so some of the discourses identified in this study were invoked in the data without even using the words which I used to describe them. For example, I identified a discourse that I named “hierarchy” even though the word “hierarchy” did not appear in any of the texts I analysed. Fairclough (2001) acknowledges that discourses are only part of the picture of how mechanisms lead to the emergence of events and experiences. The mechanisms that I identified in the data may not be the only mechanisms that constructed the events and experiences in quality assurance in HEIs in Namibia. Discourses are in interplay with other discourses and with structures.

4.2.6 Validity

Validity, in the broad sense of trustworthiness or credibility, is a fundamental concept for all research. It seeks to understand why people should believe the results from a study (Maxwell, 2012). Validity depends on the relationship between the researcher’s conclusions and the reality of the research context. Maxwell (1992:281) states that the validity of a piece of research lies in “its relationship with those things that it is intended to be an account of” and not in the research processes used to produce it. However, the results might not be deemed legitimate if there are questions regarding the trustworthiness of any aspect of the research process or findings. Maxwell (2012) highlights two main threats to validity, namely, bias and reactivity.

Researcher bias is viewed as the “selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory, goals or preconceptions and the selection of data that ‘standout’ to the researcher” (Maxwell, 2012:124). In any given circumstance, the researcher may end up applying their personal views and perspectives as data is interpreted and analysed. In order to avoid this happening, I ensured that the interviews were recorded, ensured that transcriptions were verbatim and I engaged in continuous reflection in order to ensure that my own presuppositions do not influence my interpretations of the data. Participants were informed

that they could check their transcription and my interpretation of it. I thus used member checking as a way of contributing to validity.

As Maxwell (2012) puts it, reactivity refers to the influence of the researcher on the setting or individual studied. One cannot completely eliminate the theories, beliefs and perceptual lenses that the researchers bring to a study; however, what is important is understanding how a researcher might influence a situation. In order to avoid reactivity, I tried to be as neutral as possible as I interviewed participants, withholding any views or opinions that I might have had. Regardless of what the participants said, I tried as much as possible to indicate my own acceptance of it. As I have indicated, all face-to-face interviews were conducted in their own offices, not mine, in order to eliminate any reactivity occasioned by a choice of settings. In online interviews, participants were welcome to switch off cameras.

Three types of validity are identified in the literature (see for example, Maxwell, 2012).

- Descriptive validity concerns the factual accuracy or lack of distortion of claims. Walsh (2003) refers to this as related to the “credibility” of a study.
- Interpretive validity refers to the degree of understanding of participants’ inner worlds. In other words, the provision of valid descriptions of the physical objects, events and behaviours in the setting they study. These include participants’ intentions, perspectives or viewpoints, and thoughts, as accurately understood by the researcher. Interpretive validity is also termed as conformability and justifiability (Walsh, 2003). Maxwell (2012) explains that interpretive accounts are grounded in the language of the people studied and rely on their own words and concepts. The researcher needs to use all resources available in order to determine the most adequate account. From a critical realist perspective, interpretive validity refers to a researcher’s work with empirical data in the form of interview transcripts, narrative accounts and so on to move to the level of the Real.
- Theoretical validity refers to the ability of a report to explain the phenomena studied, including their main concepts and the relationships between them

(Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Maxwell, 1992). Theory functions as a lens through which a phenomenon or problem is studied. A researcher needs to use the concepts of the theory when looking through the lens.

These three types of validity are directly involved in assessing a qualitative account.

However, two other concepts need to be taken into account when assessing validity:

- Generalisability, which entails applying insights from the study more widely (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Maxwell, 1992). The sampling method used, target population, and sampling, all come in to play here. Although findings from case studies are not representative of the whole population, it is imperative to note that case studies are grounded “in reality”. Case studies “help catch unique features that might hold the key to understanding the situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar” cases (Cohen et al., 2009:256). Key to the generalisability of a case study is the amount of detail provided, which will allow readers to better assess whether or not the case is similar to their own circumstances. From a critical realist perspective, generalisability relates to the need to develop explanations of the interplay of mechanisms at the deepest layer of reality, the Real. In my study, the use of three Namibian institutions as sub-cases within the more over-arching case of Namibian higher education means that readers need to make judgements about ways in which the identification of mechanisms at the level of the Real and their interplay can apply to their own circumstances and provide insights which might be useful.
- Triangulation refers to the use of different data generation methods to ensure that conclusions are reasonable. I used document analysis and interviews, and in my analysis, I balanced insights from each source of data against each other. Stenbacka (2001) concludes that research bias can be minimised by the corroboration and triangulation of findings of different data sets.

4.2.7 Ethical considerations

Any researcher needs to take a number of ethical considerations into account before conducting a study. At the core, these considerations focus on the need to do no harm. Before conducting this study, and as already noted, ethical approval from Rhodes University

was obtained. The documentation related to ethics appear as appendices to this thesis. The following issues were considered as an application for ethical approval was developed.

4.2.7.1 Informed consent

Participants were requested to complete and sign an informed consent form before they participated in interviews. The issue of informed consent is closely related to voluntary participation (Cohen et al., 2011). I informed the participants of the purpose, nature and benefits of the study; their rights if they chose to participate, including their right to withdraw at any time; and the practical means I would use to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also asked to agree to the recording and transcription of the interview and were informed that they would receive a transcript to approve before any analysis began. Participants were also assured that I would share insights with them as they were developed as a form of member-checking. During lockdown, informed consent was obtained using email. In face-to-face interviews, participants were asked to sign the informed consent form before the interview began. I believe that my explanations supported the formation of a rapport with participants.

4.2.7.2 Harm and risk

Harm and risk refer to putting participants in a situation where they might be exposed to physical or psychological damage (Trochim, 2000). I do not believe that my study exposed participants to physical risk as, for example, COVID-19 precautions for in-person interviews were adhered to. However, there were potential psychological risks, given that I was interviewing social actors who had been involved in developing policies and procedures to allow students to be involved in the assurance of the quality of teaching and learning and I intended to identify discourses signalling their beliefs and values in my analysis of their interviews. I minimised harm and risk by explaining my study carefully to all participants and by guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality in reporting as far as possible.

4.2.7.3 Honesty and trust

At the beginning of each interview I attempted to gain the trust of participants by explaining my study and what I would do to ensure that they were not harmed. As I have indicated, my sense was that my explanations helped to establish a rapport, and I hope, trust in me as a researcher. I adhered to all the promises I had made to the participants and shared my insights with them as they became available.

4.2.7.4 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

As already indicated, I assured participants that I would maintain their privacy, confidentiality and anonymity regarding both their and their institution's identity by not revealing their names. Although I have revealed the names of the institutions serving as cases, I do not believe it is possible to link any participant to an institution used in this thesis. One participant remarked that the assurance was not sufficient, since I was recording their voices. My response was that, once the interviews had been transcribed electronically, the recordings of the interviews would be secured. All transcriptions were then assigned a code which did not allow them to be linked to individuals. If, in error, a participant mentioned their name or the institution, this was removed from the transcription. When interviewing students, I never asked for names, although, in the case of SRC members, I could have discovered them. I also explained that the interviews were being conducted for the purposes of research only and that I would disclose my findings to them as they emerged to seek agreement with them.

4.2.7.5 Voluntary participation

In order for participation to be voluntary, participants need to be fully informed. I have already described the information provided to participants, as I asked for their informed consent. Before each interview, I made it clear that participation was voluntary, and that individuals or groups were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

The fact that I am employed as a lecturer in the Communication department at NUST, which was one of the data-generation sites for the study, might have posed a risk. Social actors at the institution, such as deans and directors, might have thought that my aim was to critique their work. I therefore explained that my study's purpose was to better understand the involvement of students in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning and that any insights from the study could only be of use, in that they would seek to make their involvement more meaningful. Although I am a member of staff at NUST, I am not directly involved in quality management or the teaching and learning centre. In this, my interest is not related to my position in the institution. This was clarified with the participants.

4.2.8 Limitations and constraints

A limitation is an “imposed” restriction, which is out of the researcher’s control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). I began collecting data in November 2020, after months of waiting for the three Namibian institutions to grant me permission to conduct my study. Shortly after I had begun to interview participants, the World Health Organization announced the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 restrictions, involving physical distancing and lockdowns, limited the study to some extent, as it was difficult to consult the participants and institutions were closed, and classes and staff worked remotely. As a result, some individuals targeted for participation did not respond to my attempts to communicate with them. Several participants fell ill and could not join the focus group interviews.

Some participants, including SRC members, were students. For most students, involvement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning is limited to the provision of feedback in surveys or student-lecturer evaluations. This posed a challenge in obtaining supportive and relevant information from students. SRC members, however, served on governance structures and were thus much more informed about their rights to involvement and how this worked out in practice. Much of the more valuable data for the study therefore came from SRC members. The deans of students or student affairs officers were not included as an additional source as they are not directly involved in quality assurance.

This study also analysed minutes of meetings in order to establish if students were represented and that they had a voice. However, minutes are concise and are written in a “collective” voice. As a result, they could do little more than confirm the presence of students.

Despite these limitations, I believe that the information gathered was sufficient and of sufficient quantity to assist me in responding to the research questions.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the design of the study aimed at answering my research questions. I now move to looking at some key concepts in quality assurance as part of the social and cultural conditioning at T1 of the morphogenetic cycle on which my study was based.

Chapter Five: The emergence of quality assurance at T1

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the developments that led to the emergence of quality assurance in the higher education sector. I use Bhaskar's (1998) philosophy of a layered ontology, and Archer's (1995) social realism in order to understand the cultural and structural conditions that led to calls for student involvement in the quality of education at the global context and the impact that this has in the Namibian higher education context. Although culture and structure overlap and are intertwined since they both condition agents, Archer (1995) cautions against conflating structure, culture and agency in order to examine the interplay between them. I thus provide an analysis that addresses structure and culture separately, although I am mindful of the fact that, in reality, mechanisms from both domains will be in play simultaneously.

In terms of Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) morphogenetic framework, this chapter provides an exploration of T1, the first phase in the cycle that is the focus of the study on which this thesis is based.

Quality assurance emerged in the business sector, more specifically in Japan's large-scale manufacturing industry. Prior to 1900, visual inspection was used as a tool in evaluating a product to see if it met its requirements. In medieval times, craftsmen protected their manufacturing "secrets" via guilds, or organisations of artisans (Allais, 2009; Mishra, 2007). When manufacture was in the hands of individuals, quality could be controlled by the craftsmen who worked to create products in small volumes. The growth of industrialisation in the 19th century was also associated with an increase in populations, with the result that goods needed to be produced on a larger scale. As this happened and factories and mills were established, trained inspectors were employed to check quality. Products that were seen as defective were marked with a special mark or symbol, and then discarded or remade (Mishra, 2007).

Slowly, more formal measures involving published “standards” emerged in order to assure quality (Sharma & Kumar, 2011; Tuckman, 1995 in Paewai, 2011), and by the middle of the 20th century, quality control, which included measures to prevent the production of faulty goods, had become the norm. The shift from the detection of faulty products to prevention required not only the use of a set of quality management tools and techniques, but also the development of a new operating philosophy that required a change in the way companies were managed. In the 1980s, a new discourse of management and quality control, total quality management (TQM) emerged at a global level from its origins in the manufacturing industry in Japan, although the roots of TQM can be traced back to much earlier in the century when Shewhart (1931) developed the theory of statistical quality control, which involved testing samples and inferring the compliance of all products statistically.

As noted by Hafeez et al. (2011), TQM involves achieving quality in all functions of the enterprise. This encompasses interaction between all the functions of a company and at the interfaces with its suppliers and customers. TQM thus aims to achieve an overall effectiveness which is much higher than individual outputs from sub-systems as design, planning, production, distribution, customer focus strategy, quality tools and employee involvement. Therefore, customer satisfaction and continuous satisfaction is the main goal of TQM. Oakland (1989 as quoted by Miller, 1996:6) thus defines TQM as,

... an approach to improve the effectiveness and flexibility of organisations as a whole. It is essentially a way of organising and involving the whole organisation; every department, every activity, every single person at every level. For an organisation to be truly effective, each part of it must work properly together, recognising that every person and every activity affects, and in turn is affected by others.

The global economic recession experienced in the 1980s reinforced the need for cost control, as there were concerns related to customer service (Tuckman, 1995 in Paewai, 2011). The term “customer service” was then extended to the public sector and TQM became the overarching framework for the inspection, control, assurance and management of quality. One of the best-known TQM systems is the International Organization for

Standardisation (ISO), which provides accreditation and certification to businesses after having met a set of procedures or standards as pre-determined (Allais, 2009). Figure 8 illustrates some of the periods in the evolution of total quality management.

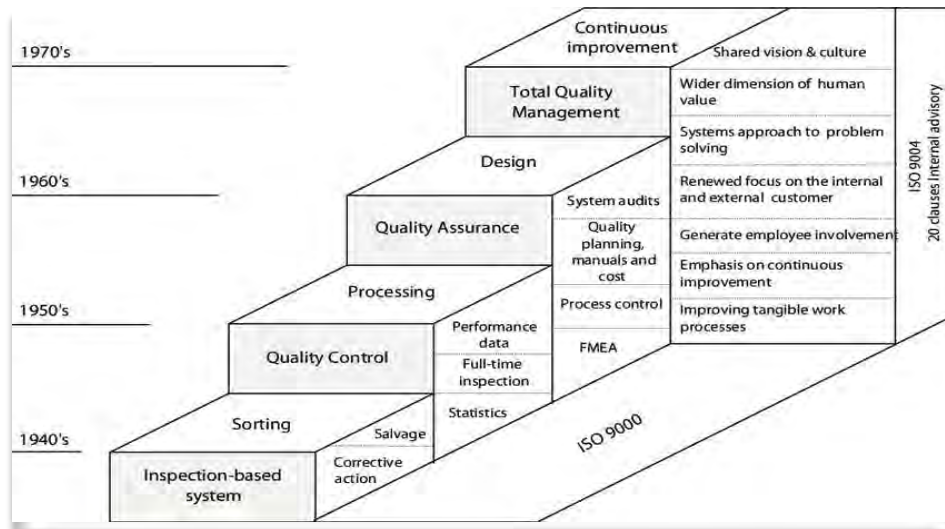


Figure 8: The evolution of total quality management (Hafeez et al., 2011:36)

The emergence of quality assurance to higher education can be seen to have resulted from the interplay of a number of structures and mechanisms, discussed below.

5.2 The emergence of quality assurance in higher education at a global level

In this section, following the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two, I discuss mechanisms located at the level of the Real, each with its properties and power (Bhaskar, 1998; Carnoy, 2005; Nayyar, 2007), leading to the emergence of quality assurance in higher education. In critical realist terms, quality assurance practices including, for example, the elicitation of feedback from students on teaching and course design can be conceptualised as events at the level of the Actual. Observations and experiences of those events then emerge at the level of the Empirical. Bhaskar (1998) notes that the social world can be understood only if people understand the structures that generate events and observations and experiences of them.

My identification of mechanisms leading to the emergence of quality assurance in higher education resulted from immersion in the literature. In reading and identifying mechanisms,

I was aware of the critical realist view on the partial and fallible nature of knowledge and was therefore careful only to identify mechanisms that I considered as well-identified. As I have indicated in Chapter One, this chapter exploring the structural and cultural conditions in place at T1 functions as a form of literature review.

I begin by discussing mechanisms in the domain of culture.

5.2.1 Mechanisms in the domain of culture (CEPs)

As I have already indicated, social realists understand the domain of culture to be constituted discursively. I therefore begin my exploration of the mechanisms by discussing discourses, understood to possess CEPs (Archer, 1995; 1996; 2000), leading to the emergence of quality assurance in higher education

5.2.1.1 Globalisation and the knowledge economy

Globalisation means different things to different people. Nayyar (2007) notes that globalisation can be viewed in a positive sense to describe a process of integration into the world economy and in a normative sense to prescribe a strategy of development based on rapid integration into the world economy. It can also be described simply as economic activities that have now expanded across the national borders (Badat, 2010a; Nayyar, 2007). This definition of globalisation can be seen to apply to higher education, where the relaxation of visa rules has resulted in large numbers of students studying overseas and the loosening of tariffs and taxes has seen universities from the United Kingdom and the United States operating “offshore” in places such as the “International Academic City” free zone in Dubai. As “cross-border” provision increased and countries saw higher education institutions opening campuses within their borders, so too did concerns about the quality of the education offered (see for example, Anthony, 2006; Knight, 2007). In a similar vein, the influx of large numbers of international students into a higher education institution, as for example, in Australia, also raised related issues related to quality (see for example, Foster, 2012; James, 2003).

The expansion of economic activities across national borders is also associated with what has become known as the “knowledge economy”. Unlike economic models of the 20th

century associated with the mass production of goods or “Fordism”, the knowledge economy is focused on the “reinvention” of existing goods. Reinvention of products such as cell phones or computers involves designing new features and launching a new model for which demand is then created globally through marketing. The tax-free movement of commodities and components across national borders means that the finished product might, for example, be manufactured using minerals from Africa, which are refined in Australia, and then shipped to Indonesia or Taiwan to be made into components. Components might then be transported to China for assembly.

The economic model focused on the reinvention of existing goods relies not only on design but also on the ability, amongst other things, to manage global supply chains and create demand in a range of socio-cultural contexts. As a result, the “knowledge economy” described above, requires what are called “knowledge workers”, and universities are now constructed as sites for their production. Although higher education has many purposes, its role as a producer of knowledge workers is now prioritised in national plans developed by governments across the world, which have been captured by discourses constructing economic success as dependent on knowledge. Knowledge, as embodied in human beings (as “human capital”) and in technology, is increasingly seen as central to economic development. A knowledge economy is therefore a learning economy, as it demands a large proportion of the workforce with a university degree and opportunities for lifelong learning. The number of students that a higher education system produces is seen as an indicator of a country’s potential to develop and disseminate advanced knowledge and supplying the labour market with highly skilled workers (Schilirò, 2012). Namibia has joined the trend, in that its national plan, “Vision 2030”, identifies the strategy of “transform[ing] most institutions of learning to ensure that these are responsive to the labour needs of Namibia” as a means of developing Namibia “into an industrialised country of equal opportunities, which is globally competitive” (Government of Namibia, 2004:10).

All this has resulted in more and more young people entering higher education to see a qualification which, they believe, will serve them well in the labour market.

5.2.1.2 Massification

Discourses promoting the massification of higher education also contribute to the emergence of quality assurance. In the context of discourses promoting higher education as a means to economic empowerment, national governments across the world have drawn on other discourses, citing massification as a means of economic development as the more graduates or “knowledge workers” a country can produce, the better its potential to participate in the global economy. Figure 9 illustrates the growth in numbers of students in higher education across major regions.

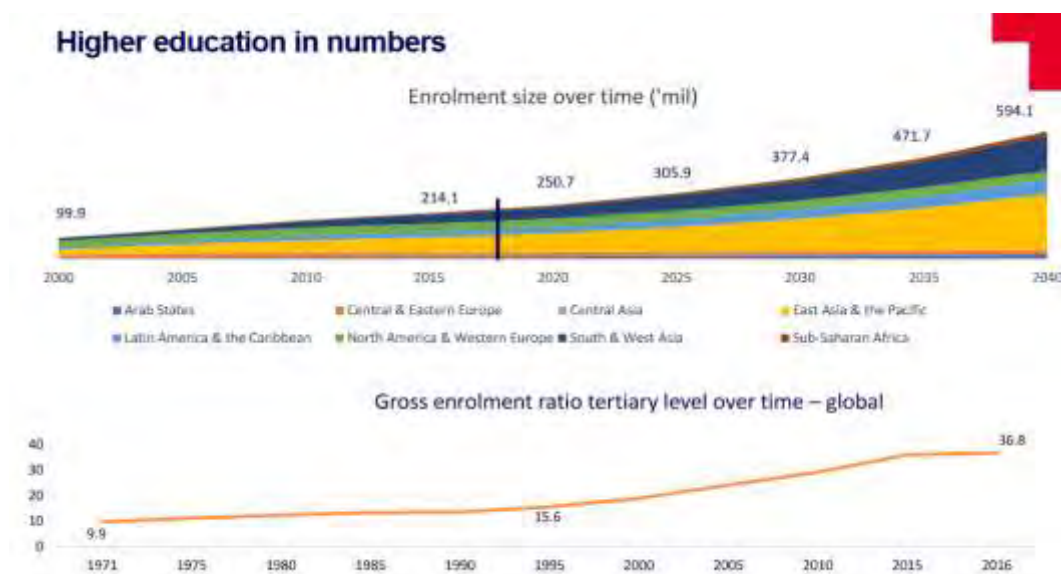


Figure 9: Enrolments in higher education across major regions (Calderon, 2018:3)

5.2.1.3 Democratisation and inclusion

However, this growth in student numbers has not only resulted from discourses promoting the concept of a knowledge economy. From the middle of the last century onwards, higher education systems have moved from catering for a small elite to catering for the masses, partly as a result of discourses promoting democratisation. Scott (2005) notes that, until the late 1940s, higher education in European and other industrialised countries was mainly reserved for social elites, mostly males, and accessible to only a small proportion of the population (Scott, 2005). The end of World War II saw higher education systems opening up to returning servicemen who had fought a war against fascism. In the United States, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, more popularly known as the “G.I. Bill”, aimed to reward veterans of the war by opening access to education that had previously been denied to them. By 1956, more than 2.2 million Americans had attended universities or colleges,

because of this Bill (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). In the United Kingdom, post-war socialist governments provided means-tested funding for anyone who gained a place at a university. As colonial rule in Africa ended and more and more countries gained their independence, higher education systems slowly started to open their doors to students other than traditional elites, because of the spirit of democracy infusing thinking across the continent.

As Trow (1973) notes, as student bodies massify, they also diversify, causing universities to change in profound ways. According to Trow (1973:8), curricula in what he terms “elite” systems tended to be,

... highly structured, reflecting academic conceptions of the degree course or professional conceptions of professional requirements. The courses of study, shaped largely by the character of the final examination, were on the whole highly specialised and governed by the professors’ notions of what constituted an educated man or qualified professional.

Once a system modifies, education is “modularised”, is linked to the concept of “learning credits” allowing for more flexibility in the way progress towards a qualification is built, and importantly, easier to access and more movement between major knowledge fields. In the context of the curriculum alone, it is not hard to see why concerns about quality emerged.

As student bodies grew and more “non-traditional” students registered for qualifications, these concerns grew. Badat (2010a) picks up on these points, cautioning that mass participation in higher education has its drawbacks, as it comes with the fear of a decline in standards and a loss of public trust in higher education institutions, hence the emergence of quality assurance.

At this point, it is worth noting that the responsibility for improving the quality of teaching in large classes in the context of massification and the diversity associated with it, tends to be allocated to academic teachers. Behari-Leak (2017:486), for example, asks

... to what extent can individual academic teachers mediate problems located at structural and systemic levels through their own practice? When the individual agency of the academic teacher is privileged in the context of an ailing system, the inherent danger in directing all efforts (and funds) to “fixing” the teacher is not difficult to identify.

In spite of cautions such as that made by Behari-Leak, quality assurance systems can look to the improvement of academic teaching as a panacea with criteria related to professional development included in frameworks./

5.2.1.4 Neoliberalism

The neoliberal philosophy has its roots in Chile, where a United States-backed military coup resulted in the death of democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende, who was later replaced by the dictator General Augusto Pinochet (Maisuria & Cole, 2017). Following Pinochet’s assumption of the presidency, the Chilean economy then shifted from a command economy (where the State is in control of major industries) to neoliberalism privileging market forces, self-interest and laissez-faire principles to governance. Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, and Ronald Reagan in the United States, both supported and introduced neoliberal reforms in their respective countries. Martinez and Garcia (2000 in Maisuria and Cole 2017:604) identify the following ideas in discourses promoting neoliberalism:

The rule of the market or liberating state enterprise or private enterprise from any bonds imposed by the government no matter how much social damage this causes. Associated with this is greater openness to international trade and investment. Cutting public expenditure for social services such as education and health care. Deregulation or the reduction of government regulation of everything that could diminish profits.

Cutting public expenditure is associated with the allocation of responsibility to individuals regardless of their ability to shoulder it. In higher education, the cutting of public expenditure is also related to the concept of the “knowledge economy” and the construction of higher education as a means to gaining more highly paid employment. The

rationale is that if higher education is a “private good”, in that it benefits individuals, it is not the responsibility of the State to pay for it.

The cutting of public expenditure for higher education has also resulted in higher tuition fees for students and the resulting construction of students as “consumers” or clients. Once students are constructed as clients or consumers, engaging with them becomes important and the concept of “customer satisfaction” enters the arena.

Harvey (2005 in Mendoza & Dorner, 2020) notes that discourses promoting neo-liberalism have provided the climate for the legitimisation of profit-making and the exploitation of labour. The casualisation of the academic workforce is one result of this (see for example, Kimber, 2003; Loveday, 2018), along with the impact of casualisation on the quality of teaching (see for example, Percy & Beaumont, 2008; Leathwood & Read, 2022).

The rise of neoliberalism is also associated with discourses promoting the “knowledge economy”, making knowledge a valuable form of capital, thereby putting universities, the producers of knowledge and trainers of the workforce, at the centre of the economy (Altbach, 2016). Information technologies have facilitated the rapid propagation of the knowledge economy globally, enabling the neoliberal project of globalisation seeking social cohesiveness in the world and led by the Global North and international organisations such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These organisations have shaped national policies in favour of the neoliberal project through loan programmes that have specific conditions and benchmarks meant to change national structures in favour of large corporations, open markets, and human development useful in the global market (Harvey, 2005). The policies in favour of multinational corporations, however, undermine national cultures and structures and create tensions as localities (Africa included) face a neoliberal hegemony in relation to their own history, and realities (Alcántara et al., 2013; Stiglitz, 2002).

In conclusion, in higher education, neoliberal discourses have contributed to decreasing state support, curricula designed to cater for the skills needed by the employers,

competition (including the use of ranking systems such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings), the commercialisation of research, the positioning of students as consumers, the outsourcing of services, the corporatisation of its governance, and increased managerialism (Mendoza & Dorner, 2020). Universities are thus faced with the difficult task of balancing efficiency by contributing to the global economy and equity by addressing the needs of a more diverse student body (Boughey & McKenna, 2021a).

The call for efficiency has resulted in HEIs outsourcing services to private suppliers, including providers supporting learning technologies in teaching and learning, a phenomenon that has become even more common post the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, discourses constructing the need for the assurance of quality have become more prominent. As the following section will show, calls for efficiency are also related to another set of discourses promoting “New Public Management”.

5.2.1.5 New Public Management

As indicated in Section 5.2.1.3, from the middle of the last century, democratisation across the world saw increased access to universities. Higher education was not the only public service to witness increased calls for its services. For example, in the United Kingdom, a National Health Service providing free medical care at point of contact was introduced following World War II, along with other social services. By the 1980s, it was clear that the provision of public services to increased numbers of people was costly and governments in the United Kingdom and the United States, under the leadership of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan respectively, began to look to cut costs by making the provision of services more efficient. The answer to increased cost efficiency was seen in the introduction of a suite of practices from business and commerce to public service known as “New Public Management” (NPM). Principles of NPM include the need for accountability and transparency to allow taxpayers to see how money had been spent, the need for strategic planning involving the identification of goals, objectives and strategies to achieve them. One assumption, for example, was that accountability and efficiency would be more evident when goals and strategies to achieve them were more clearly stated (Christensen, 2001). Along with activities such as institutional planning, quality assurance practices were therefore introduced to universities as part of NPM.

Other changes now evident in universities as a result of NPM, involved increased representation from business and industry on governing bodies, the appointment of the construction of vice chancellors with the powers of chief executive officers and the appointment of “executive deans.” Historically, deans were always elected as senior representatives of faculty and were generally well-respected for their academic work. As such, they were responsible to their faculties. Executive deans are seen as part of university “management” and are generally appointed on performance-based contracts.

The NPM, along with increased democratisation, saw changes in the composition of governance bodies such as senates and councils. Senates, historically the province of professors, now encompass students and union members as well as rank and file members of the academic hierarchy. Councils also increasingly include members who are appointed because of their expertise in business and industry.

Changes to higher education, such as those noted in the preceding sections, have brought critique in the form of, for example, Readings’ (1986) *The University in Ruins* and Ginsberg’s (2011) *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters*. Although the discourses explored in this section originated in the Global North, they have impacted on the African continent, where higher education systems have followed those in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia in introducing reforms emerging from them. As noted by Teichler (2004), student mobility, frameworks to recognise and transfer credits, and the construction of a higher education as a means to employment is now a global phenomenon. Countries across the world, such as Canada, United States, Austria and Japan (ENQA, 2009; Mhlanga, 2008; Kis, 2005) have established national quality assurance bodies. Namibia is no different and can be seen to have been conditioned by these discourses that are dominant at a global level.

5.2.2 Structural powers and properties (SEPs)

Structural change has been facilitated by protocols and policies at international and national levels. I have already discussed the Bologna Process that resulted in the Bologna Declaration of 1999 (Bologna Declaration, 1999), which led to the introduction of a common set of standards for universities in the European Economic Area. Other structural changes have

included the establishment of an international quality assurance association in the form of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), as well as regional associations and national bodies. On the African continent, a number of regional qualification frameworks, including the sub-Saharan Africa Qualifications Framework, are being developed. Qualification frameworks require quality assurance practices, including standards-setting if they are to operate.

National and regional quality assurance bodies have developed frameworks and policies for, amongst other things, standards-setting, programme accreditation and institutional reviews. Goldspink (2007) sees the development of frameworks and policies as a way towards greater transparency. However, they can also be seen as a means of imposing a global model of a university across the world (LeMaitre, 2002), as agencies in other parts of the world draw on those developed in the Global North as a form of benchmarking, even though the contexts are very different. In the study on which this thesis is based and following Bhaskar (1978, 1989) and Archer (1995; 1996; 2000), policies and frameworks were understood as structures contributing to the emergence of events at the level of the Actual related to student engagement in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning and to the experiences and observations of students and staff related to these events.

Other structures that have emerged globally and which have been taken up in the Global South are committees to “manage” teaching and learning and the assurance of its quality. The “management” of teaching and learning can be seen as part of NPM, with the goal of producing more “outputs” in the form of graduates who can become knowledge workers in the global economy. Yet another structure involves funding to support teaching and learning either at institutional levels or national levels. I have already cited Behari-Leak’s (2017) caution about privileging the agency of academic teachers in the face of larger and more diverse student bodies in contexts where outputs in the form of graduates matter. Funding for teaching and learning development activities draws on discourses privileging this agency. Yet another structure has involved the establishment of teaching and learning centres or units, often with the goal of contributing to better teaching, alongside guidelines for teaching developed at institutional level (Kis, 2005).

A final structure implicated in the emergence of quality assurance is technology. The use of information and communication technologies allows agents in different parts of the world to communicate effectively in speech and in writing. As a result, it was possible for policies and frameworks to be shared and for individuals involved in quality to communicate with each other much more easily than might have been possible before the advent of technologies such as email. Technology also allowed for the development of quality assurance practices. Student feedback on teaching and learning was initially facilitated by scanning technologies. Technology has also made possible the efficient development and analysis of large data sets used in, for example, cohort studies.

5.2.3 The emergence of agents

Alongside the development of structures to manage and enhance teaching and learning, higher education systems across the world have also seen the emergence of new agents in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning, thanks to NPM. The position of a deputy vice chancellor responsible for teaching and learning is now common, as are those of deputy deans with the same mandate (Kadhila, 2017). Quality assurance officers are yet another form of agency common in most institutions.

These social actors may ascribe to the discourse of accountable through assuring academic standards (Barnett, 1992) and aim to play a critical role in designing and implementing structures such as policies in order to improve and maintain quality assurance in universities. Boughey and McKenna's (2017) analysis of the impact of the first cycle of institutional audits on teaching and learning in South African public universities, which also draws on the theoretical framing of the work of Bhaskar (1978; 1979) and Archer (1995; 1996; 2000), shows that, although elaboration of structure and agency occurred, there was reproduction in the domain of culture, with the result that the stock of ideas available to inform teaching and learning was not sufficient to effect change.

5.2.4 Responses to the emergence of quality assurance at an international level

The introduction of quality assurance to higher education has not passed without critique in the form of observations which, in critical realist terms, are located at the level of the Empirical. For some (see for example, Houston & Paewai, 2013; Anderson, 2006), quality

assurance is viewed as a bureaucratic encumbrance. Ramsden (2003:218 in Bradley, 2005) notes that,

... quality assurance in universities has more of the characteristics of administrative burden than an exciting intellectual journey... It badgers teachers rather than working alongside them ... these characteristics seem to be present whether an intensive subject inspection system or a "lighter touch" of periodic institutional audit is employed...

In higher education, managerialism relates not only to financial matters but is now seen to concern itself with performance, quality control, accreditation, transparency, effectiveness, value for money, responsibility, benchmarking, good practice, peer-review, external verification, stakeholders or empowerment (Audit Commission, 1984 in Shore & Wright, 2005). Power (1994 in Shore and Wright 2000) notes that quality assurance destroys loyalty and commitment amongst employees. Quality assurance processes (for example, institutional audits) could lead to increased tension between departments and reduce academic autonomy in terms of curriculum delivery, design and standards (Askling, 1997 in Santiago et al., 2008; Newton, 2002). In addition, many academics feel offended by demands for increased transparency, which are viewed as a means of controlling academics rather than trusting them in the work that they perform (McKenna & Boughey, 2014). Quality assurance is also seen as creating a considerable workload for academic staff as they spend more time in meetings. They are confronted with overwhelming volumes of paperwork, which reduces time spent on conducting research or preparing for teaching. Shore and Wright (2000) have noted that some universities now run dress rehearsals in preparation for quality audit assurance visits. The audit visits usually take place to verify information provided by departments or institutions in self-evaluation reports.

Some observe that submitting documentary evidence now matters more than how an academic actually teaches (Askling, 1997; Baldwin, 1997; Pollit, 1993; Rasmussen, 1997 in Santiago et al., 2008). Johnson (1994 in Shore & Wright, 2000), for example, notes that the ability of an academic to, for example, inspire and motivate learning does not matter as much as the ability to produce documentation relevant to quality criteria. In addition, others

note that quality practices focus on accountability to taxpayers who want to know that their money is being spent economically, efficiently and effectively (see for example, Singh, 2010). As a result, accountability to knowledge, and to the disciplines, is lost. In relation to student engagement, Cook-Sather (2002:3) argues that honouring students' voices in quality assurance requires a willingness to

. . . count students among those who have the knowledge and position to shape what counts as education, to reconfigure power dynamics and discourse practices within existing realms of conversation about education.

This seems to be a huge task, especially in African contexts where the staff-student hierarchy is well established, and even, protected by academics.

Quality assurance, as already noted, was initially introduced into higher education from the business sector as one of the practices associated with NPM. Although management sits well in business and is seen as part of the quest for profit, in higher education, where governance has traditionally taken the form of rule through consensus, quality assurance could be viewed, as Power (1994:19) notes, the "control of control". Traditionally, a university has been seen as a public good, contributing to society through educating citizens and producing knowledge for the benefit of all. The construction of universities as providers of knowledge workers for the global economy shifts them into being seen as a private good, largely benefiting individuals, with the implication that academic institutions and their students, should pay a significant part of the cost of postsecondary education. The growing emphasis on cost recovery, higher tuition and university-industry links distracts from the traditional social role and service function of higher education that is central to contemporary society (see Chapter Six for further discussion). For some, the introduction of quality assurance has the potential to produce unintended events instead of addressing pertinent issues for academic staff and students (Stensaker et al., 2014).

Although many scholars view quality assurance as a bureaucratic burden, this perspective is related to individual contexts. All higher education systems are differentiated, formally or informally. In traditional universities, experiences of academic governance going back over

centuries means that many staff experience quality assurance as controlling (Boughey & McKenna, 2021b). Cardoso et al. (2013), however, add that academics in leadership positions seem to favour quality assurance, as they perceive it as providing an opportunity for institutions to reflect on their missions and purposes. Trowler (2010) argues that the ideas and practices that are associated with the discourses discussed at the beginning of this section are seen as appropriate responses to changes in the global world. Thus, quality assurance should not be viewed as a burden, if well incorporated within the university structures, it can provide valuable information that is relevant to the improvement or enhancement of the quality of education (Hogson, 2011).

Having discussed mechanisms at a global level, in the next section I move to an exploration at a regional level.

5.3 African-level conditioning

Many African countries have been subjected to colonialism, a macro-structure at the level of the Real (Bhaskar, 1998). As Archer (1996) notes, previous cultural systems are needed to explain present context, in this case, it would help in understanding quality assurance in the African context.

Some higher education institutions in Africa, including the University of Al-Karaouine in Fez, Morocco and Al-Azhar University in Egypt (Mohamedhai, 2011), have their roots in or were created as a result of affiliation with European institutions during the colonial period. For instance, Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone was affiliated with Durham University in England from 1876 and the University of Ghana, Legon, with the University of London from 1948 (Hayward, 2006). These universities were staffed by Europeans or Africans trained in Europe. Their governance, course curricula, and methods of instruction as Mohamedhai (2011) notes, were modelled on European universities.

After African countries gained independence, their higher education institutions became “autonomous” universities, however, they were still modelled on European universities

(Mohamedhai, 2011). This means that the African universities were conditioned by European models. In the cultural domain, the universities would have been exposed to discourses on what constitutes for example, “good” curricula or “best practices”.

As quality assurance was introduced to higher education systems in the Global North, African countries began to set up similar national and regional quality assurance systems, often with the help of “aid” projects. Khelfaoui (2009) states that African countries encounter the Global North as a source of funding equipment and skills and often leap at the chance to become involved in projects without interrogating who will benefit. In the end, African universities lose their autonomy in relation to the design and management of programmes adapted to their own realities.

From the late 20th century, countries in the Global North began to be captured by discourses promoting an economy fuelled by knowledge (Altbach, 2016). At the same time, they needed raw materials from the countries in the Global South, which are often processed in their own countries by citizens from the Global South to whom they have offered scholarships for training or jobs. As already indicated, LeMaitre (2002) asks questions about the contribution of quality assurance to the imposition of a global model of the university in all contexts. Adopting quality assurance values and practices from the Global North requires developing countries on the African continent to develop the conditions that make quality possible, and this results in modelling their universities on those elsewhere. The idea that higher education reforms need to be context-specific so that they take into consideration the realities of developing countries is often ignored.

Discourses promoting the idea that a failure to create a knowledge society would mean that African nations would not be able to compete in global markets, resulted in a number of changes (Hayward, 2006; Materu, 2007; Mhlanga, 2008). The Association of African Universities (AAU) launched a quality assurance programme in 1999, with the purpose of developing quality assurance systems in African universities (Oyewole, 2012). In 2007, the African Union (AU) developed a strategic document on “harmonisation” in higher education in spite of the fact that, ideally, and as previously noted, reforms need to be context-specific. The lack of proper infrastructure and funding has left Africa in a vulnerable position

(Woldegiogis et al., 2018). One result is discourses constructing African countries as “inferior” and Africa as unable to manage its own affairs.

The interplay of the mechanisms outlined above has led to the emergence of various structures in higher education systems in Africa. For instance, the African Union Commission, with the assistance of European Higher Education Area, developed the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in higher education (ASG-QA), noted earlier in this thesis, in order to further strengthen and harmonise quality assurance systems on the continent. The ASG-QA were benchmarked against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Willemse, 2019). The ASG-QA (formally endorsed in 2019) were, however, contextualised for the African higher education landscape. They also draw on the work of regional quality assurance networks or associations such as the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE), and the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES) in Francophone Africa. The sub-regional quality assurance network, the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) was established in 2015 and aims to promote the harmonisation of quality assurance systems in the region and to share best practice (Ngara, 2016).

Many African countries, as already stated, were conditioned by European models due to colonialisation, and were thus exposed to discourses promoting “best practices” and the “harmonisation” of education systems. In relation to the concept of “best practices” it is necessary to ask questions about “best for whom?”. What might be “best” in one context will not necessarily be best for another. If this is the case, further questions need to be asked about whom the imposition of “best practices” are benefiting.

In the next section, I look at the development of quality assurance in the Namibian context.

5.4 Social and cultural conditioning in Namibia

The majority of HEIs in most countries have implemented more structured and systematic approaches to quality assurance, with the goal of ensuring high academic standards and

quality education (Kadhila, 2017). Many African countries, however, continue to face significant constraints in implementing quality assurance due to a lack of infrastructure and finances, which is attributed to their colonial histories (Woldegiogis et al., 2018). Namibia is a case in point.

- ***A brief history of the Namibian higher education institutions***

According to Archer (1995), structures pre-date action. It is therefore important to say a little about the structure of the Namibian higher education system in order to contextualise the introduction of quality assurance to it.

Namibia, originally known as South West Africa, was colonised by the Germans and declared a German “protectorate” in 1884. During World War I, German South West African forces were defeated by South Africa, and in 1920, the nation was placed under the administration of South Africa by a mandate provided by the League of Nations. By the 1960s, the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) was involved in a guerrilla struggle with South African forces occupying the country. This ended in 1988, when a peace plan for the entire region was forged by the United Nations. Elections in 1989 brought SWAPO to power and in 1990, Namibia gained its independence, ending more than a hundred years of colonial occupation.

The first higher education institutions in Namibia opened in the 1970s/1980s (Brannelly et al., 2011). Before this, higher education was only available to students who were able to travel to South Africa to study or enrol in institutions providing distance education (Brannelly et al., 2011; Otaala, 2003). In 1980, the Academy for Tertiary Education was established by the South African government, and classes in teacher training and secretarial courses were offered in Namibia. The occupation of South West Africa by South Africa meant that the first institutions of higher education were conditioned by South African models which, themselves, were conditioned by colonialism. Act 9 of 1985 of the South African administration defined three types of institutions in the higher education system: universities, Colleges for Out-of-School Training (COST) offering vocational training, and

technikons. The COST offered certificates in technical and commerce in general areas including pre-tertiary teacher training. The other two types of institution offered diplomas and certificates in agriculture and nature conservation, personnel management, public management, cost accounting, and communicative and legal training. It is evident from the courses offered that the purpose of post-school education at this point was to provide a colonial administration, in this case South Africa, with the public servants it needed.

Kraak (2001 in Quinn, 2006) argues that the “high skills discourse” constructing a nation’s economic success as dependent on the availability of high skills in its workforce, shifts universities away from their origins as places of knowledge focused on disciplinary research and teaching and unhindered by the interest of business or government. In Section 5.4.1, I explore whether and how Namibian universities have been conditioned by the “high skills” discourse.

After independence, the newly elected president, Dr Sam Nujoma established a commission on higher education, which resolved to restructure the three components (technikons, COST and universities) in order to meet the needs of the newly independent nation. Both local and international scholars were appointed to the commission, which resulted in a series of recommendations. The appointment of international scholars increased the risk of ideologies and practices emanating from the Global North being strengthened in the Namibian system.

The Academy for Tertiary Education was eventually dissolved, and its three components were transformed into two independent higher education institutions; a university, the University of Namibia (UNAM), established in 1992; and a polytechnic, the Polytechnic of Namibia, established in 1994. For the first twenty years of its existence, the Polytechnic offered both high-level vocational training and academic degrees in technical subjects and the applied sciences. After years of growth, Act No. 7 of 2015 led to the Polytechnic being renamed the Namibian University of Science and Technology (NUST) (Kadhila, 2017; Republic of Namibia, 2015). Schools in NUST became faculties and directors became professors, signalling the identity of the new institution as “academic”. The first private

university, the International University of Management emerged in 1994, but was only officially launched in 2002.

As already indicated, Namibia identifies higher education in its national development plan, Vision 2030, as playing a significant role in capacity-building, professional training and socio-economic development. It is argued that Namibia can attain the standards of economic development which are comparable to developed countries in the Global North (Kadhila et al., 2013). Vision 2030 further identifies the need for an integrated, unified and flexible high-quality education and training system that will prepare Namibian students to take advantage of a rapidly changing global environment, including developments in science and technology, and who will contribute to transforming Namibia into a knowledge-based society.

5.4.1 The emergence of quality assurance in Namibia

Given that quality assurance has become a feature of higher education worldwide, it is not surprising that Namibia followed suit, given social and cultural conditioning at a global level through the Namibian Higher Education Act. The Act identified the need for a National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), which was established in 2005, and the development of policies on quality assurance (Republic of Namibia, 2003). The NCHE is the umbrella body for all higher education institutions in Namibia. According to the Higher Education Act, the objectives of the NCHE are, amongst others, to promote the establishment of a coordinated higher education system, to promote access for students to higher education institutions and to assure quality in higher education.

The development of the NCHE's quality assurance system has been conditioned by international systems, in particular by features of the accreditation frameworks of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO); the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and the quality assurance system of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa (NCHE, 2009). In

essence, this means that the quality assurance systems in the three Namibian institutions studied were conditioned by European and South African models.

In common with other universities across the world, the three Namibian institutions had always assured quality through traditional practices such as external examining. The requirements of the Higher Education Act meant, however, that they needed to establish formal internal structures focused on quality assurance. Quality assurance units at the University of Namibia, the Namibia University of Science and Technology, and the International University of Management emerged in 2010, 2007 and 2015, respectively. I now take a closer look at each of the three universities in the study on which this thesis is based.

5.4.1.1 The University of Namibia

In recent years, most countries in the world have undergone or are undergoing transformational processes that are strongly influenced by global trends and pressures and these in turn have influenced and are influencing higher education systems all over the world (Kadhila et al., 2013). In post-apartheid Namibia, higher education has been required to undergo a process of transformation not only in response to global economic trends, but also in response to the economic and social needs of the African continent and Namibia itself. This is evident in the Vision of the University of Namibia, in which it aims to provide higher education, undertake research, advance and disseminate knowledge, encourage the growth and nurturing of cultural expressions in Namibian. The University also aims to further train and contribute to social and economic development as well as foster relationships with any person or institution both nationally and internationally (UNAM, 2022). Additionally, the institution aims to be a centre of excellence and innovation in teaching, research and extension services. The university is thus trying to compete globally while, at the same time, responding to local needs.

The Vision of UNAM is an indication that higher education institutions all over the world are increasingly shaped by market-driven demands that emphasise research and teaching quality for the sake of institutional competitiveness (Allen, 2011; Carey, 2013). As already indicated, the increase in the demand for quality higher education has put pressure on universities to adopt business-like models. The marketisation of higher education has been

prompted by cuts to public funding and the introduction of policy regimes that support greater competition, and increasing regulation of university practices (Klemenčič, 2014). Universities globally, Namibia included, are expected to create knowledge; produce critical thinkers; improve equity; produce research, respond to student needs and to do so more efficiently. This neoliberal reform in higher education has changed the public good ethos to one of private enterprise. Naidoo and Williams (2015:212) argue that lately, education has developed into a product and process specifically for its “exchange” rather than for its intrinsic “use value”, positioning students as consumers of higher education. Discourses constructing students as “consumers” have been challenged with scholars noting that higher education is not a business. Therefore, universities need to define their academic values, especially in the context of competing in higher education markets. This would help in constructing the meaning of higher education in order to retain its moral and traditional values.

Although UNAM is a relatively young university, it had grown to support a student population of over 30,144 in 2020. Figure 10 shows the enrolment rate from 1992 to 2021.

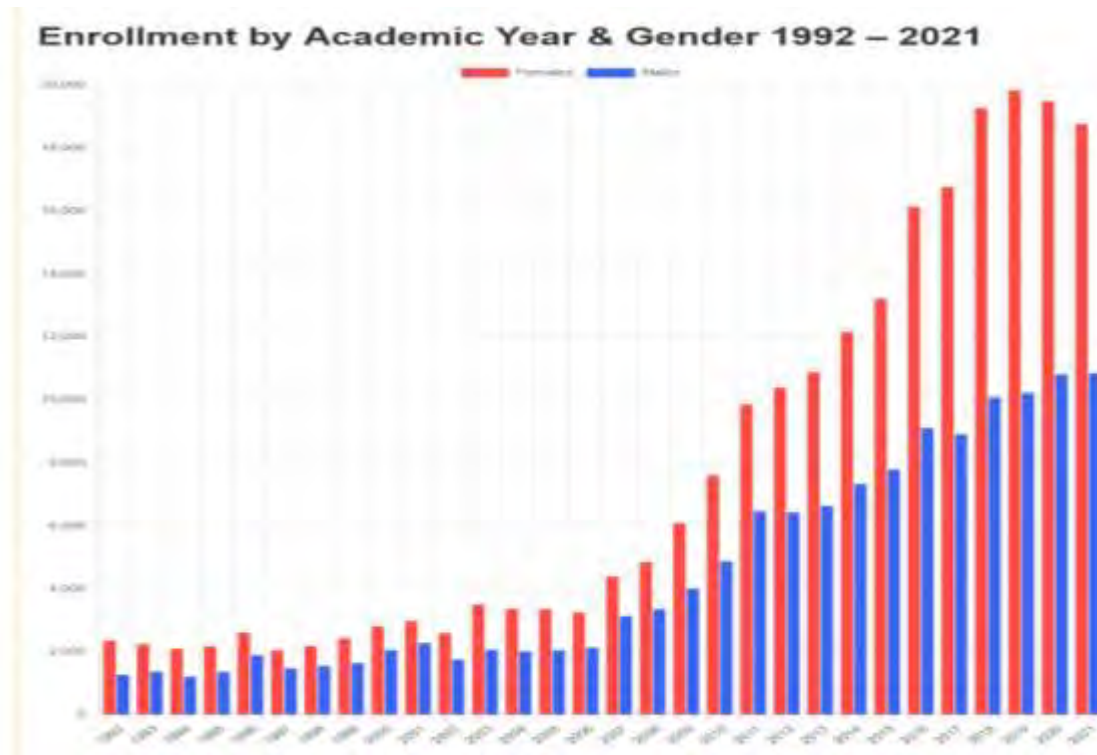


Figure 10: UNAM enrolments by academic year and gender 1992 - 2021 (UNAM, 2023)

Figure 10 shows that the enrolment figures over the years have increased for both genders.

Following independence, many African countries, Namibia being one, aimed to “decolonise” their education system in order to avoid the repression of beliefs, ideas, images, symbols and knowledge of the indigenous peoples (Young, 1971). As a result, a discourse promoting the “democratisation” of education emerged in many countries (Altbach, 1992). Namibia introduced the policy “towards education for all” in 1993, with assistance from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). This policy aims to transform school education by promoting the goals of democracy, equity, access and quality (Kandumbu, 2005). The effect of these efforts is evident beyond a pure increase in student numbers, as evident in Figure 10, which shows the number of women benefiting from higher education.

Massification has led to UNAM developing structurally, in that it has established twelve campuses and eleven regional centres across the country. Regional centres are managed by the Centre for External Studies, the distance education unit of the University. Academic programmes at the University are housed in eight faculties and eight schools: the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Science, the School of Veterinary Science, the School of Medicine, the School of Nursing, the School of Pharmacy, the School of Dentistry, the School of Computing and the School of Military Science. As these structural arrangements show, UNAM offers programmes in a wide range of knowledge areas, both pure and applied.

The Quality Assurance Unit at UNAM was established in 2010. The university also houses a Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, which supports the enhancement of quality. The institution has a Quality Assurance Policy, the purpose of which is to “ensure the delivery and maintenance of excellence in instruction, learning, acquisition, research, academic and administrative and support services, student welfare, governance and community service” (UNAM, 2015:4). The key leadership roles include those of the vice chancellor, executive deans and academic directors. In common with other universities,

students also serve in a number of positions. Student Representative Council (SRC) members are elected annually and serve on a number of institutional committees. In addition, each SRC member has a portfolio for which they are responsible.

Following Archer (1988), students enter the University as primary agents who may regroup and become corporate agents (the SRC, for example) or social actors (for example, SRC President), thereby, could contribute to the quality of education. Social actors can exercise some influence by attempting to transform the roles that they fulfil. They can reflect upon their boundaries that govern expectations about their roles. They may decide whether to reproduce or transform the social and cultural conditions in which they find themselves. In the study on which this thesis is based, I interviewed members of the SRC regarding their involvement in the quality of education of their institution. I have also reviewed documents such as the SRC Constitution and quality assurance policies, in an attempt to understand student involvement in the quality of teaching and learning. I discuss this in Chapter Seven.

5.4.1.2 Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST)

In terms of organisational structure and growth in terms of enrolment figures, the Namibia University of Science and Technology is no different from the University of Namibia. Tables 3 and 4 show the enrolment figures for 2017 and 2023.

Table 3: Enrolment figures for 2017 (NUST, 2017b:3)

Faculty School Name	Number			Percent		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Computing and Informatics	312	783	1095	5.5%	14.0%	9.8%
Engineering	326	972	1298	5.8%	17.4%	11.6%
Health and Applied Sciences	450	368	818	8.0%	6.6%	7.3%
Human Sciences	825	707	1532	14.6%	12.7%	13.6%
Management Sciences	3278	2162	5440	58.1%	38.7%	48.5%
Natural Resources & Spatial Sciences	452	591	1043	8.0%	10.6%	9.3%
Grand Total	5643	5583	11226	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4: Enrolment figures for 2023 (NUST, 2023)

Faculty Name	Number			Percentage		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Commerce, Human Sciences & Edu	4711	3829	8540	63.8%	46.6%	54.7%
Computing & Informatics	645	1620	2265	8.7%	19.7%	14.5%
Engineering & Built Environ	930	1917	2847	12.6%	23.3%	18.2%
Health, Nat Res & Applied Scien.	1093	857	1950	14.8%	10.4%	12.5%
Grand Total	7379	8223	15602	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Tables 3 and 4 show that, enrolment at NUST has increased over the given years. Globally, growing student numbers have led to higher education institutions devising quality assurance structures in order to help cope with the growing numbers and to enhance the quality standards (Cockburn, 2006). NUST established a quality assurance unit in 2007. The main functions of the unit are to establish and monitor quality standards and practices and promote a quality culture and quality assurance systems. The institution also has a teaching and learning unit aimed at enhancing the teaching and learning of faculty and students. The Polytechnic of Namibia Quality Assurance Policy (2009) notes that students are “stakeholders” in the institution.

Since gaining university status in 2015, several master’s and doctoral programmes have been developed, and programmes leading to short, entry-level certificates have been phased out. NUST comprises now of four faculties and offers undergraduate as well as postgraduate degrees in areas such as Business and Management, Engineering, Information Technology, Journalism, Hospitality, Natural resource Management, and Health (NUST, 2024). With its eleven regional centres which are run by the Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning (COLL), its mission is to meet the needs of students, society and the economy through various means for excellent education, applied research, innovation and service in collaboration with stakeholders.

As in other universities, NUST has an SRC to which members are elected annually. The SRC is governed by rules and regulations and the NUST Act. These formulate terms of reference for members, committees and subcommittees. SRC members have representation on the council, centre and board of studies (NUST, 2017a).

5.4.1.3 The International University of Management

A private university, the International University of Management (IUM), joined UNAM and NUST in offering higher education programmes in 1993. The IUM offers programmes in Business Administration, Education, Health Sciences, Information Communication and Technology, Strategic Management, Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Postgraduate students are housed in a School of Postgraduate Studies. The enrolment (Tables 5 and 6) shows that, the total number of students increased to a high of 10,396 in 2020/2021.

Table 5: IUM student enrolments for the year 2020-2021 (NCHE, 2021:5)

Higher Education Institution	Number			Per Cent		
	Sex		Total	Sex		Total
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
NAMCOL	517	4,422	4,939	10.5%	89.5%	100.0%
NUST	6,057	6,140	12,197	49.7%	50.3%	100.0%
UNAM	10,787	19,429	30,216	35.7%	64.3%	100.0%
Total Public HEIs	17,361	29,991	47,352	36.7%	63.3%	100.0%
ALI	8	22	30	26.7%	73.3%	100.0%
Botho	17	4	21	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%
Headstart Montessori	4	444	448	0.9%	99.1%	100.0%
IOL	760	3,713	4,473	17.0%	83.0%	100.0%
IUM	3,218	7,178	10,396	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%
ITC-LINGUA	247	503	750	32.9%	67.1%	100.0%
Monitronic	253	258	511	49.5%	50.5%	100.0%
NETS	25	8	33	75.8%	24.2%	100.0%
Philippi Trust	1	10	11	9.1%	90.9%	100.0%
St. Charles Lwanga	49	1	50	98.0%	2.0%	100.0%
Triumphant	463	415	878	52.7%	47.3%	100.0%
Tulipohamba TAI	17	74	91	18.7%	81.3%	100.0%
Welwitichia HTC	292	1,320	1,612	18.1%	81.9%	100.0%
Total Private HEIs	5,354	13,950	19,304	27.7%	72.3%	100.0%
Grand Total	22,715	43,941	66,656	34.1%	65.9%	100.0%

Growth in enrolments between 2013/2014 and 2020/2021 can be seen by comparing Tables 5 and 6.

Table 6: IUM student enrolment for the year 2013- 2014 (NCHE, 2016)

HEI		2013		2014		Change	
		Number of Students	%	Number of Students	%	Number	%
UNAM	University of Namibia	17,307	39.50%	19,202	41.0%	1,895	10.9%
PON	Polytechnic of Namibia	12,653	28.90%	12,447	26.6%	-206	-1.6%
NAMCOL	Namibian College of Open Learning	883	2.00%	1,689	3.6%	806	91.3%
Total Public HEIs		30,843	70.5%	33,338	71.0%	2,495	8.1%
IUM	International University of Management	6,800	15.50%	7,511	16.0%	711	10.5%
LINGUA	International Training College LINGUA	516	1.20%	472	1.0%	-44	-8.5%
HEADSTART	Headstart Montessori Teacher Training College	90	0.20%	224	0.5%	134	148.9%

The institution aims to encourage and develop a cadre of African men and women who can operate at international standards in business. Its goal is to train innovative managers for both the public and the private sectors in Namibia and other countries in the world. It also aims to provide state-of-the-art Internet-based training programmes and promote national and international unity, cultural understanding and peace as the cornerstones of the global village (IUM, 2024:3). These goals draw on the discourse of knowledge economy and the need to compete in the global market (Altbach, 2016).

The institution has a governing council, where an SRC member serves. The Quality Assurance Office, established in 2015, plays a significant role in the development, monitoring and reporting of quality across the university. The IUM Quality Assurance and Management Policy (IUM, n.d.:8) notes that students are stakeholders and share a sense of commitment to excellence in the design, and implementation of all aspects of its academic and training programmes, management practices, and administrative activities.

The mission statements and vision for UNAM, MUST and IUM show that the institutions' mission, vision and value statements are directly framed around the concept of excellence. As many commentators have pointed out (see for example, Barnett, 2004; Berthold et al., 2007; Readings, 1986), the conception of this term in higher education is problematic, not least as it is not clear who determines excellence, how excellence can be measured, and so

on (see also Harvey & Green, 1993). However, it is likely that conceptions of “excellence” are guided by discourses emanating from the Global North and systems such as the Times Higher Education World Rankings.

The dangers of adopting quality assurance policies in higher education institutions that are not contextualised, mean that quality concerns experienced by the given country may not be addressed, or institutions are left striving for goals that are unattainable because of a lack of funding and other structural conditions. Although the global standards for quality assurance in higher education aim for comparable outcomes, there is a need to acknowledge localised differences so that quality assurance frameworks are compatible with their contexts.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the cultural and structural conditions that led to the emergence of quality assurance in the higher education sector. Bhaskar’s (1998) philosophy of a layered ontology and Archer’s (1995; 1996; 2000) social realism allowed me to understand the cultural and structural conditions that led to the emergence of quality assurance and calls for student involvement in the quality of education. In doing this, I looked at the global context, the African context and the Namibian context. Literature pertaining to quality assurance in the Namibian context is not extensive. The chapter argues that the global conditioning has led to Namibian universities drawing on discourses constructing higher education in the Global North. As Archer (1995) states, structures are products of past interactions and serve as the context for present interaction, providing both enablements and constraints. I discuss the enablements and constraints in Chapter Five. The next chapter discusses key concepts in quality assurance.

CHAPTER Six: Student involvement in the quality of education

6.1 Introduction

The study on which this thesis is based sought to explore ways in which students are or are not involved as stakeholders in the quality of education. It also aimed to identify the enablements and constraints for student involvement and to find ways in which student involvement does or does not enhance the quality of teaching at higher education institutions in Namibia. Archer (1995) argues that structures are products of past interactions, therefore, they serve as the context for present interactions, creating enablements and constraints for people's interactions resulting in either change or continuity. At any given moment of time, people confront social structures, which are "ready-made" for the current generation of agents. Agents coming in to a new context may reproduce or transform society but always on the basis of something that was already there, the result of "the activities of the long dead" (Archer 1995:143).

As explained in Chapter Two, Archer (1995) identifies three forms of agency; primary agents, corporate agents and social actors, all with particular institutional roles and positions. Primary agents occupy similar involuntary social positions associated with shared structures and pre-existing patterns of advantage or disadvantage in natural, practical and social circumstances. Corporate agents are collectivities of individuals who have access to relevant resources, which enable them to articulate interests, organise or engage in action, whereas social actors have found roles in which they feel they can invest, and their social identity is expressive of who they are as persons in society.

Archer's (1995) classification of agency allows us to see that, although people are born into social positions shared with others, this may change over time. For instance, students enter university as primary agents, but their agency can transform. For instance, the student representatives (SRC members) exercise corporate agency whilst the SRC president is a social actor. In this chapter, I look at the mechanisms that led to the emergence of students as a group of corporate agents involved in assuring the quality of teaching and learning in

higher education. This chapter therefore contributes to the exploration of the first phase of Archer's morphogenetic framework, T1, begun in the last chapter. In line with my exploration of mechanisms leading to the emergence of quality assurance in higher education in Chapter Four, I begin by exploring those conditioning student engagement at a global level.

6.2 Global-level conditioning

In common with the approach used throughout this thesis, which draws on Archer's (1995, 1996, 2000) insistence on "analytical dualism", I analyse mechanisms in the domain of culture and the domain of structure independently.

6.2.1 Cultural conditioning

In my discussion below, I once again draw on the idea that the domain of culture is constituted discursively. Any socio-cultural action is situated historically in the contexts of theories, beliefs and ideas, which were developed prior and will exert conditional influence (Archer, 1995). As I have indicated in Chapter Three, institutions of higher education have all been conditioned by discourses promoting the knowledge economy, massification and neoliberalism, with the result that they have had to adjust their practices and adopt new languages, some of which are related to quality assurance (Westerheijden, 1999). Mobility across national borders to seek higher education is arguably linked to university ranking systems (Sánchez-Barrioluengo & Flisi, 2017), with many higher education systems, including those of the United Kingdom and Australia, now heavily reliant on the fees of international students. One result of these discourses is that students are constructed as consumers of higher education and this leads to the concept of "customer satisfaction" which, arguably, informs one of the most common means of involving students in quality assurance in the form of the elicitation of their feedback on teaching and course design.

Discourses constructing students as consumers effectively exclude students from academic communities. They are "outsiders" purchasing goods from a "company" and are thus not included in a community intent on knowledge-making. One result is that "good" teaching is constructed as value for money and as providing what students expect regardless of its

origins in the academic disciplines. This can foster a sense of entitlement with regard to the acquisition of a qualification.

Mathew and Dollinger (2022) identify two main discourses constructing student involvement in quality assurance in higher education: the “students as representatives” discourse, and the “students as partners” discourse. The students as representatives discourse has been strengthened, attributable to states and the governing bodies of universities constructing the allocation of representation as democratic (Klemenčič, 2012; Naylor et al., 2021) with Flint and Goddard (2021) using the term “student academic representation systems” to describe models that allocate seats on governance structures to students. However, the students as representatives discourse is also fuelled by rises in tuition fees and the construction of students as consumers of higher education. In a context where a higher education comes at a high personal financial cost, it is reasonable for students to be represented in the governance systems of the universities to which they are paying fees. Arguably, the establishment of the national Office for Students (OFS, 2024), by the United Kingdom government, is related to the huge increase in tuition fees introduced in 2012 to a cap of £9,250 per annum. Discourses promoting student representation cite its benefits, including the ideas that it allows students to prepare themselves to participate in democratic societies (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013), that it enhances the quality of education (Douglas et al., 2008) and that it enhances their own capabilities and skills (Flint et al., 2017).

In contrast to student representation, students as partners discourses draw on ideas prevalent in teaching and learning that see the process as relational (Mathews & Dollinger, 2022). Students have relationships with teachers, with disciplinary knowledge and with fellow students. All partnerships rely on values related to shared responsibility, respect and reciprocity. Bovill et al. (2011) identify the responsibility that falls to students when they contribute their perspectives on teaching and course design, not only because of the impact of those perspectives on academic teachers who want to provide more meaningful learning experiences to their students, but also because of the potential impact of the voices of others on the experiences of other students as courses are revised or pedagogical approaches are amended. In a systematic review, Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) identify benefits accruing from the construction of students as partners as encompassing an

increased sense of belonging in an institution, enhanced perceptions of learning, enhanced senses of identity and improved staff-student relationships. Marquis et al. (2018) also note that students experience student partnerships as providing a greater sense of inclusion. Involving students as partners has the potential to make staff, who see themselves as experts, uncomfortable, as it would involve relinquishing control over, say, the curriculum. In many respects, the wider institutional culture comes into play here, particularly in contexts where hierarchy is emphasised. This is often the case in African institutions where, for example, academics maintain a strong sense of their own positions vis-à-vis students. Delpish et al. (2010) also caution that collaborative tasks in teaching and learning might not be appropriate in all contexts depending on an institution's mission statement.

Healey et al. (2014:25) offer the following framework to map ways of engaging with students in teaching and learning (see Figure 11). The horizontal axis in the model is intended to depict a shift in emphasis from teaching and research to quality enhancement, while the vertical axis shows a shift in emphasis from co-researching and co-inquiring to co-learning, co-designing and co-developing. The complex ways in which students engage as partners is shown by four overlapping circles focusing on: learning, teaching and assessment; subject-based research and inquiry; the scholarship of teaching and learning; and curriculum design and pedagogic advice and consultancy. At the heart of the model is developing student partnership learning communities, the processes by which the four forms of partnership are achieved. All this is understood to take place within national and institutional contexts.



Figure 11: Engaging with students (Healey et al., 2014:15)

Further, Healey et al. (2014) offer the following depiction of settings (see Figure 12) in which student partnership can take place and levels of partnership.

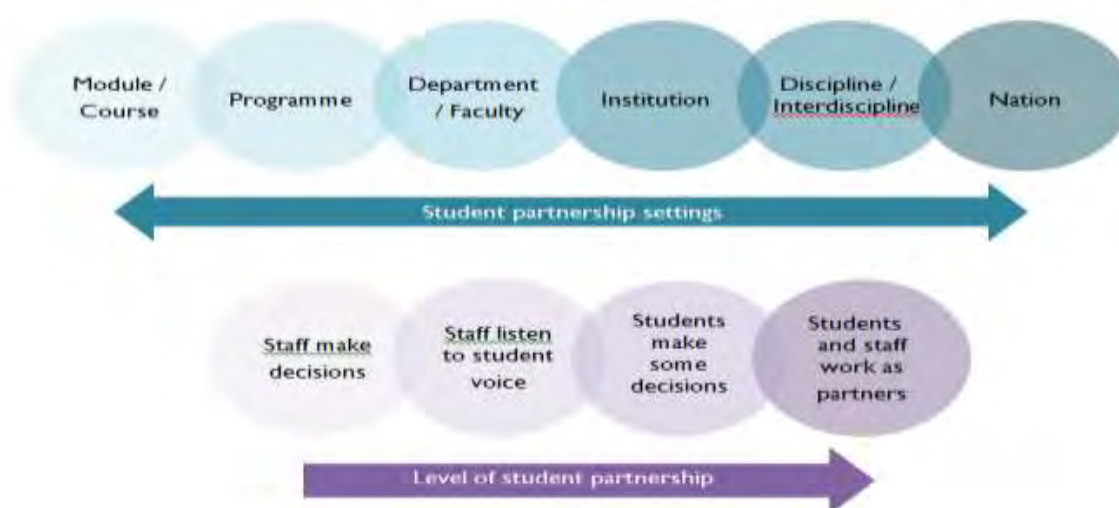


Figure 12: Student partnership settings and levels of partnership (Healey et al., 2014)

Echoing Healey et al. (2014), Vuori (2014) argues that student involvement in a particular context may change over time and differ amongst institutions, depending on the educational needs with regard to the quality of teaching and learning that might arise.

As noted by Fairclough (2003), discourses change as they are enacted as conditions in different contexts impact on them. Calls for student involvement in dominant discourses will therefore not lead to the same kinds of emergence, depending on conditions. An institutional culture that does not support student involvement may result in protests, whereas a positive campus climate will enable students to voice their concerns on quality-related matters (Garwe, 2015; Phakeng, 2019). Batchelor (2008) conceptualises student voice as threefold: an epistemological voice, or a voice focused on knowing; a practical voice or voice of doing; and an ontological voice, or voice of being and becoming. In the student protests of 2015 and 2016 in South Africa, the epistemological and ontological voices emerged in calls for decolonisation of the curriculum, as students complained that the forms of knowledge and ways of knowing privileged in the universities alienated them from their being.

Canning (2017:526) notes,

Some voices are totally unheard; others are not heard in the places where they may inform universities' practices. Others are misunderstood or misinterpreted. And just because a sound is being made does not mean it is of value to the hearer whether the hearer seeks the student voice for viewpoint, marketing, enhancing the quality of teaching and learning or listening to the student voice because it is the right thing to do according to procedures.

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) point out that some voices might be heard while privileging others. This leads to questions about whose voices are amplified, whose are privileged - and whose are muffled or silenced.

Another problem identified by Rudduck and Fielding (2006:228) notes the popularity of student voice and the pressure this puts on institutions,

Student voice is currently popular but one of the perils of popularity is surface compliance. Schools may well feel obliged to be seen to be "doing it" -taking it on board without having the time to think through why they want to do it, how it fits with other initiatives within the institution's development plan and scheme of values, and what the personal and institutional risks are.

Cooper-Hind and Taylor (2012) note that student complaints which, in critical realist terms, can be conceptualised as observations at the level of the Empirical, can be attributed to poor quality and low standards in a university. However, it could equally be the case that students' complaints about, for example, a course or assessment in a course could arise from experiences of unfamiliarity. Bernstein's (2000) distinction between horizontal and vertical discourse has already been noted along with the fact that students enter higher education having experienced varying levels of exposure to vertical discourse. A course or assessment drawing on abstract, complex ways of looking at the world could thus be experienced as inordinately difficult by some students, who then complain. The question

becomes one of pedagogy and questions about how the complex theory and means of applying it had been introduced in the course and not the course itself. Nonetheless, Cooper-Hind and Taylor (2012) note that a failure to respond to students' complaints about, for example, rigid curriculum frameworks, content, pedagogy or examination systems, can lead to experiences of frustration on the part of students, who then protest. The point to be made here is that regardless of what an institution or social actor thinks of complaints raised by students, they need a response explaining why they cannot be accommodated. Badat (2015) states that student protests serve as an important tool in transformation of any institution; thus, they should not be viewed negatively. One reason for protests leading to transformation is that they offer an opportunity for an institution to reflect upon itself, its culture and its practices.

A scholar such as Zepke (2014) notes that the discourse of "student involvement" is vague, lacking a clear definition. The definition depends on how students are conditioned to exercise their agency, either as partners or representatives in matters relating to teaching and learning (Flint & Goddard, 2021; Mathews & Dollinger, 2022). If universities are to empower all students to be effective social change agents, they should instil in them attitudes and values pertaining to their involvement. If higher education institutions expect students to develop the skills and attitudes of effective citizenship, then it is pertinent to exemplify and support these through structures such as policies and practices. In the next section, I discuss the structural enablements pertaining to student involvement.

6.2.2 Structural conditioning

Given that structures are a product of past interactions, they have the potential to enable or constrain the interaction of the present agents (Archer, 1995). For advocates of student engagement, this means that underlying social structures that constrain student involvement must be dismantled and replaced.

Arnstein (1969) notes that involvement without a redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless, as it maintains the status quo. The literature indicates that most universities acknowledge that students should be involved in making decisions about teaching and learning (McCulloch, 2009). However, there is a need to interrogate the

extent to which their involvement is meaningful, to the extent that they are allocated some power in making decisions. One of the problems with student involvement relates to the fact that they are “transients” in higher education institutions, often there only for a few years. At undergraduate level, they have not been inducted into values about what can constitute knowledge and how it can be known, and therefore, are not fully acquainted with the knowledge-based values that sustain a university and inform their education. Global discourses privileging higher education as a means to employment mean that students often call for skills regardless of the fact that, as Wheelahan (2010) cautions, skills without adequate underpinning knowledge can effectively “deskill” them in the rapidly changing workplace. This is all the more the case, given the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), with many pundits predicting that thousands of jobs will soon become redundant.

Student involvement, as already noted, differs from context to context depending on how students are viewed in a given cultural setting of a higher education institution. Student involvement in the quality of education in Europe for instance, is enshrined in structures such as student bodies and national policies. For instance, the European Students' Union (ESU) is an umbrella body of 50 national unions from 37 countries. The European Student Information Bureau's (ESIB) European Student Handbook on Quality Assurance in Higher education (ESIB, 2003:5) states that, “students are one of the key partners within higher education and should be involved in the quality mechanisms”.

Structures such as the quality assurance policies may for instance, condition quality assurance officers and students to adopt specific identities and engage in particular activities. For students to be actively involved in enhancing the quality of education they should be given sufficient opportunities. As a body with the power to lobby for and support student engagement, the ESIB represents a significant structure in the European context. The *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*, published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (ENQA, 2015) emphasises the need for the involvement of students as stakeholders in areas such as the development of policy and procedures for quality assurance, the approval, monitoring and periodic reviewing of programmes and awards, the quality assurance of teaching, learning resources and student support, information systems, assessment of students as well as in governance

structures (see also Flint & Goddard, 2021). The Standards and Guidelines also construct students as full members of programme or curriculum review teams, as consultative partners providing feedback via surveys and other instruments on different aspects of learning and teaching, as participants in meetings, contributors to policies and as reports, and as members of teams analysing feedback on internal structures and drafting new courses (ESU, 2014).

Although formal structures can pave the way for student involvement, they can also constrain students and the way they behave, and thus, result in students adopting a passive attitude. Mann (2008 in Dunne & Owen, 2013) argues that passivity constrains students' autonomy and the ability to take responsibility. Students may also be uniformed and thus not appreciate the power that has been allocated to them. Institutions should thus activate mechanisms for support and guidance to help students and staff understand student involvement, and their expectations (Mann, 2008 in Dunne & Owen, 2013).

Structures promoting student involvement are not only a European phenomenon. In Australia, students are recognised as having an interest in and as contributing to the governance of the university (Prasad & Patil, 2006). In some institutions of higher education in China, India, Russia and Japan, students are actively involved in structures focused on curriculum design and review, and institutional governance. Students are also involved in academic planning through representation of academic decision-making structures and students form part of the expert team for the assessment of institutions. However, Cheng (2019) adds that in China, student representatives are at times "event hosts" or errand-runners to fulfil administration duties, which I would classify as superficial involvement.

Most Australian universities have at least one student representative in the senate. In some institutions, student representatives are elected to the governing body, while in the others they are appointed from the students' association. All institutions have student representation on the next level of decision-making through bodies such as academic boards, faculty boards, and various advisory committees. As in the case of the governing body, in some cases the student representatives are elected to these committees, while in others the student unions or guilds appoint them (Prasad & Patil, 2006). Table 7 further provides examples of structures in which students are involved in some European countries.

Table 7: Student involvement in structures in European countries (adapted from European Students' Union (ESU), 2014)

Country	Student involvement (Yes/No)	Level of engagement (Role)	Structures where students are involved
Portugal	Yes. Takes students' voice into account but range of involvement is limited.	Informants in internal quality assurance.	Meetings, student associations, evaluation of teaching and courses, external evaluations. Government Decree (369/2007, Article 15) mandates two student representatives in the A3ES Advisory Council. Students are also involved in elections for student associations and with accreditation agencies.
Romania	Yes	Student representatives are members of the quality assessment and assurance commissions at the senate and faculty levels.	Policies allocate roles to students assessing teaching staff, courses and institutional environments.
Serbia	Yes	Students are informants in internal quality assurance procedures, governance, decision-making. Student representatives have roles in professional bodies and associated committees.	Internal quality assurance structures
Spain	Yes	Observer members of external evaluation committees for formal programmes.	QA Agency's Advisory Council and Working Group for Student Participation in quality.
Armenia	Yes	Students are involved in governance structures of	Structures preparing self-evaluation reports. Policies allocate roles to

		National Quality Assurance agencies, are members of external review teams, informants in internal quality assurance and accreditation processes.	students in the evaluation of teaching, learning and estimation of efficiency through surveys, in follow-up procedures and decision-making process for external reviews.
Belarus, Latvia and Luxembourg	No	None	None
Moldova	Yes	Students are involved in governance structures of the National Quality Assurance agencies (full members) and as observers in external review teams.	Internal quality assurance structures. Structures involved in preparation of self-evaluation reports and follow-up procedures.
Ukraine	Yes	Involved in external quality assurance as sector-based experts.	Internal quality assurance structures through policies on evaluation.
Catalunya	Yes	Involved in internal quality assurance	Quality Assurance Agencies, Student Advisory Committees, Research structures producing studies of use and interest to students.

The literature I have reviewed shows that the most common form of student involvement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning is in the evaluation of teaching and course design through the completion of surveys (Naylor et al., 2021; Kember et al., 2002; ENQA, 2005). Although feedback can be a useful tool in providing insights that could help improve the teaching and learning, this mechanism has been criticised, as it raises questions regarding its scientific validity and reliability of the methods and approaches of eliciting feedback (Boughey, 2021). This is because there is no clear indication as to what student feedback seeks to inform, whether it constitutes a form of research, or whether it is for

more instrumental purposes including personal promotion procedures. In addition, the rigour of academic research is not always evident in methods used to gather and analyse student feedback. This may be because the elicitation and analysis of students' feedback is perceived simply as a quality assurance mechanism rather than as a means of producing evidence to inform teaching and learning. Often, questions eliciting students' feedback are based on minimum standards and best practices that draw on the discourse of constructing "good teaching" or "quality teaching" developed as a result of research and thinking in the Global North (Boughey, 2021). Best practice can also draw on discourses constructing universities as "world class", an idea inspired by global ranking systems (Boughey & McKenna, 2021b). This idea has been contested as contexts are differentiated and thus might not apply to the Global South. As a result, innovation may be stifled,

. . . standardised questions can have the potential to "flatten" practice into a globalised set of norms which fail to acknowledge innovation and, thus, can constrain the transformation to which the system claims to aspire (Boughey, 2021:6).

Although the elicitation of student feedback is intended to assure quality, its rationale, efficacy and the rigour with which it is conducted need to be interrogated. Brus et al. (2007) are of the view that involving students in quality assurance puts a lot of strain on students as the workload is increased. This is because students have to balance between their studies with the need to attend training, workshops or seminars on quality assurance. Alaniska et al. (2006) add that students are adults, and many are studying part-time and have other responsibilities including work and families. Interestingly, the European Students' Union (ESU, 2012) has stipulated that student involvement in institutional structures may result in issues of labour and may require payment, as it puts pressure on students' academic studies.

The type of institutional structures in which students are involved can also hinder their meaningful participation (Mwiria et al., 2007). Historical structures may marginalise certain students and privilege those from particular socio-cultural contexts.

Business-like models adopted by many higher education institutions have layers of hierarchy including committees, faculty boards and so on, but nonetheless, decisions are made by members of an “executive management team” located at the top of the structure. Increasingly vice-chancellors are constructed, and even named, as chief executive officers (CEOs) and assume the power to go with that position in business, although historically, they were *primus inter pares* and needed to win the support of those on the senate through logic and argument. These moves to executive styles of management open the way for questions about student involvement in institutional structures if decisions are going to be made at “the top”. The spread of private higher education also involves the appointment of a board of directors who hold the purse strings and who, as a result, often have the final say on what can be done, especially if costs are involved. The appointment of students and others such as representatives of unions to bodies such as senates raises questions about whether this is simply a nod to democracy and widening participation or whether it is meaningful.

Bergan (2004) advances three reasons why students should be involved in university governance. The first reason is that students are the main stakeholders in higher education institutions, therefore they have to be included in key decision-making which affects them. The second reason is that, as members of the academic community, students share a responsibility for their education. The third reason is that if people believe that higher education has a role in developing the democratic culture, without which democratic institutions cannot function and democratic societies cannot exist, then students must be encouraged to be involved in governance. Clearly, all these reasons only stand if engagement in governance and management structures is meaningful. Given the corporatisation of universities, students’ roles as stakeholders are increasingly related to their status as customers. If students see that their involvement does not bring results, they may well become wary of participating in democratic decision-making processes such as elections in the future, thus negating the idea of engagement as training for democratic citizenship.

A lack of training and awareness on programmes on quality assurance, and quality assurance in general, can lead to limited involvement in meetings, workshops, committees

on teaching and learning or in any government structures, as students do not know what is expected of them (Moyo & Boti, 2020). What an analysis of structures allowing for student engagement shows, therefore, is that involvement must be meaningful and be shown to have impact.

Menon (2014) argues that involvement in university governance motivates students by contributing to them having a sense of belonging and a greater sense of self-direction. Once again, this observation only holds true if they are meaningfully engaged.

6.3 Regional conditioning

Student involvement in Africa emerged in the early 1990s, as higher education institutions, particularly those in South Africa, moved towards democracy in order to redress the effects of colonialism and apartheid. In the schooling sector, early reforms drew heavily on Young's (1971) "*New Sociology of Education*" (NSoE) from the book "*Knowledge and Control*", which provided an account of why schooling served to reproduce existing social structures. For Young, the problem lay in working-class children having the meanings of the world imposed upon them. In South Africa, the first set of curriculum reforms, known as "Curriculum 2005", drew heavily on learners' own knowledge and experiences of the world. Critiques of Curriculum 2005 abounded (see for example, Jansen, 1999; Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999) and raised questions about the extent to which learners were in a position to "co-create" the curriculum, as bringing their everyday experiences of the world into classrooms would run the risk of limiting their exposure to "powerful" knowledge in the form of Bernstein's (2000) vertical discourse. As Boughey (2021) points out, however, the idea of learners as "co-creators" of the curriculum has prevailed and can be seen to inform discourses privileging student engagement in teaching and learning.

Discourses promoting student engagement have been noted at other institutions on the continent (Tamrat, 2019; Amoako & Asamoah-Gyimah, 2020; Quansah, 2020; Nyenga & Rupande, 2014), showing how thinking has been informed by that in the Global North. As a result, models of student engagement draw heavily on those developed in Europe and Australia. Given that formalised quality assurance systems in Africa are a relatively new

phenomenon in comparison to those of the Global North, African countries sought assistance from Europe in order to set up similar quality assurance systems as those in Europe. European quality assurance systems view students as important stakeholders in the quality assurance of their education; thus; institutions should involve students in various governance structures of their institutions (Klemenčič, 2015; Elassy, 2015; Cockburn, 2006).

In order to cope with the pressures of the need to be a knowledge economy, the effects of massification, and internationalisation, African countries found it better to adopt quality assurance practices with the idea of competing on the global stage (LeMaitre, 2002). The practice of “adoption” led to Africa being seen as inferior and as lacking the necessary skills to set up their own systems (Woldegiogis, 2018). However, the influence of the Global North has arguably resulted in the systems developed for use in African countries not being contextualised to reflect local realities. The situation has not been improved by the fact that funding or grants to set up quality assurance systems in the name of “aid” inevitably favour Global North influences (see for example, Boughey & McKenna, 2021b).

The strength of hierarchical arrangements in many African universities has already been noted earlier in this chapter, with many staff members guarding their positions closely. As also noted, models of the university were “imported” from Europe by colonial powers who initially established institutions of higher education to train bureaucrats for their own administrations. Staff at early African institutions were European, and given the history of colonialism and racism, African academics were unlikely to have been able to exercise their agency to the same extent as their European peers. In this context, the desire of African academics to maintain hierarchies and insist on acknowledgement of their status is understandable.

In spite of this, structures in the form of policies and guidelines informing quality assurance were also heavily informed by European models and thus make a space for students in governance and decision-making. The ASG-QA (2015:14), for example, stipulate that institutions should “enable students to participate in decision-making, and relevant governance bodies.” As a result, students have access to representation on governance

structures at many African universities, with Tamrat (2019) pointing out for example, that, in Ethiopia, students are involved in student unions and student councils.

Luescher-Mamashela (2013) identifies a number of areas in which students can be involved, including the governance of teaching, learning and research, though the nature and extent of their involvement varies according to the setting, the nature of issues under consideration and the seniority of students who are affected by the decision. Commitment to democratic and participatory pedagogies might, however, influence the extent to which students are involved in determining the methods and content of teaching, learning and research. The second area identified by Luescher-Mamashela (2013) is the governance of student affairs, especially regarding co- and extra-curricular activities including sport and recreation and matters related to halls of residence. For Luescher-Mamashela (2013), students' acceptance of, and support for decisions taken in this domain of governance is particularly crucial, and students' collective power to demand or reject certain decisions must be taken seriously into consideration by the management of the universities. The final area in which Luescher-Mamashela (2013) identifies a role for students is in relation to institutional finances' policy and strategy. However, their involvement in this area is curtailed by perceptions of as transients and as consumers, which means that such a high level of participation could be minimal. Planas et al. (2011) and Tierney (1999) concur that the construction of students as consumers limits the involvement of students in university governance. On the African continent, however, there is little research which shows the extent to which students are involved in any of these areas. Nyenga and Rupande (2014) note students' involvement in feedback mechanisms, while others (Amoako & Asamoah-Gyimah, 2020; Botha & Steyn, 2020; Quansah, 2020; Moyo & Boti, 2020) acknowledge their involvement in curriculum design and the evaluation of the teaching.

The nature of student participation in university governance can be viewed from the hierarchical levels of representation that show how students' involvement is encouraged in different contexts (Acharya, 2015 in Tamrat, 2019). The governing and advisory bodies of public universities in Ethiopia comprise various councils, departments, and advisory or specialised committees or councils that might be established by the board or senate. Amongst these structures, the board of a public university may, however, exclude students,

as their representation should only occur at the lower levels. Most university legislations stipulate that students shall be represented in the governance structures of the university, including the senate, its various committees, college or institute academic councils, department academic councils, other academic decision-making bodies and committees engaged in the delivery of services to students (Tamrat, 2019). Using these prescribed channels, it is assumed that the students are able to engage with university authorities.

Literature regarding student involvement in the quality of teaching and learning in Namibia is less extensive. Of the known studies are those conducted by Möwes (2005) and lipinge et al. (2013) on student evaluations as tools for enabling the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. lipinge et al. (2013) explored the pros and cons of using student evaluations as a structure to measure the teaching effectiveness of academic staff. The findings show that evaluations may not be reliable. Other studies show that student evaluations are used in the promotions process and disciplinary procedures (Gold, 2001). This is confirmed by Kadhila (2017) and Read et al. (2001), whose observations and findings point out that student evaluations are commonly used by institutions when it comes to making decisions on staff promotions.

Although the literature on student involvement is minimal in Africa, the literature shows that some higher institutions do make provision by setting up structures for student involvement in quality matters. Tamrat (2019) concludes in his study that higher education institutions in Africa still seem unconvinced about the value that student involvement can bring, thus there is little support towards its realisation. The limited number of studies on student participation could be attributed to the role that students occupy in relation to learning in specific institutions. Also, the formalisation of quality assurance in Africa in comparison to Europe is relatively new.

Moyo and Boti (2020) conducted a survey in selected South African institutions and found that students are constrained by the lack of understanding of quality assurance. Also, students had no idea of the existence of a quality assurance unit; had no knowledge about quality assurance policies and what role they could play in ensuring the quality of their education. From a South African perspective, Luescher-Mamashela (2013) notes that one of

the useful indicators of student involvement is the way that they are viewed by universities. The construction of students as minors may be indicated by *in loco parentis* rules and other paternalistic student regulations. This is typically extended into formal governance as an exclusion of student representatives from formal decision-making forums or their treatment as mere observers only. Conversely, students may be treated as adults and citizens with all the rights and responsibilities. Students may be conceived collectively as a legitimate higher education constituency, an important stakeholder who has an interest in the development of higher education and experiences and expertise relevant in the making of decisions, or perhaps as mere troublemakers whose youthfulness must be contained and who must either be excluded from formal governing bodies or be included in a manner so as to tame or “domesticate” the student voice (Brooks et al., 2015).

Luescher-Mamashela (2013) points out that, conceptions of students in public policy discourse typically coincide with the manner in which student representatives are formally included in decision-making in different domains of governance. Thus, in academic governance, a widespread discursive construction of students as mere pupils would typically exclude them from decisions on curricula, timetabling, or assessment, while a consumerist conception of students might introduce student representation in new areas such as quality assurance.

From a South African perspective, Wolpe (1991 in Badat, 1999) observed that the core structural conditions of apartheid would, over time, continue to constrain the pace and possibilities of any reform pursued by a new government to reduce inequalities. He argued that the economic and other resources that may be needed to redress the effects of the apartheid system in all spheres of education and training are not immediately available and are highly unlikely to be available, except in the very long term. Therefore, great care and creativity would be needed in framing policies for the purpose of transformation. He warned that unless this happened, higher education policies could simply reproduce powerfully entrenched structures generated by apartheid other than serving as instruments of social transformation. What appears to be the case, in South Africa at least, is that far from institutions transforming to allow for enhanced democracy, they have “reformed” along the lines of NPM to allow for greater control from an executive. Finances do not

appear to have interfered in this process, with many executive managers in higher education institutions earning lucrative salaries.

6.4 Conclusion

The effects of globalisation and the massification of higher education have led to the need for institutions to develop or review their quality assurance systems. Students all the world over are viewed as important key stakeholders of higher education institutions; thus, their involvement in the quality of education has been noted as crucial for quality enhancement and improvement. This chapter reviewed literature on student involvement at both international and African contexts. In doing so, it concludes my analysis of structural and cultural conditioning in the first phase of Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) morphogenetic framework. The next chapters move to the second phase.

Chapter Seven: Social and cultural interaction from T2 to T3

7.1 Introduction

In keeping with Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) morphogenetic framework, and having analysed the first phase in the cycle of change, or non-change, involving the social and cultural conditioning of agents in Chapters Five and Six, I now move to explore the second phase, T2 to T3.

As already explained, T2 to T3 is the phase of social and cultural interaction as agents go about pursuing the projects that they have identified for themselves. In the case of this study, the project for institutional managers is understood to involve making space for students to become involved in assuring the quality of teaching and learning. For students, the project is understood to involve taking up the opportunities made available to them by participating meaningfully in the quality assurance of their education. As agents pursue the projects that they have identified, they exercise their personal emergent powers and properties (PEPs) in relation to the emergent properties in the domains of structure and culture (SEPs and CEPs). Some SEPs are enabling, others are constraining. It is this interaction that this chapter aims to explore.

The literature abounds with calls for students to be involved in assuring the quality of teaching and learning (see for example, Okogbaa, 2016; Garwe, 2015; Klemenčič, 2015; Elassy, 2015). Despite this, studies on student involvement in the quality of teaching and learning are non-existent in the Namibian context. I thus analysed data from interviews with members of management, students - particularly the student leaders (SRC members), and also analysed documents in order to understand the structural and cultural systems at the three Namibian universities that enable or constrain student involvement in the quality of their education.

In order to present my analysis of the second phase of Archer's (1995; 1996; 2000) morphogenetic cycle, I draw on the critical realism that underpins her work by beginning

with a description of ways in which students are, or are not, involved in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning. In critical realist terms, these are conceptualised as events at the level of the Actual. In doing this, I address my first research question,

In what ways are students involved, or not involved, as stakeholders in internal quality assurance processes at higher education institutions in Namibia?

7.2 Student involvement in assuring the quality of higher education

Although students other than SRC members were interviewed, their responses to my questions tended to be limited. In this chapter, therefore, I draw heavily on responses from SRC members elected to be the voices of other students. In my discussion, I refer to quality assurance directors, teaching and learning unit directors, deans, and vice chancellors as “members of management”. I have indented and italicised all quotations from interviews.

7.2.1 Events indicating student involvement in the quality of education

The NCHE director, quality assurance directors, teaching and learning directors, deans, vice chancellors and members of the student representative council (SRC members) were asked if students were involved in the quality of teaching and learning in their institution. These social actors are assigned different institutional roles in order to provide overall leadership, supervision and guidance on matters relating to teaching and learning. The analysis of the data revealed that students are involved in various structures of the institutions, such as boards of studies, councils and senate, and in other structures such as programme or curriculum review panels and programme advisory committees. Students were also widely involved in structures developed to elicit their feedback on teaching and course design.

For example, one member of management noted:

We believe that we should have student involvement and that is why we have them involved, sitting on the board of studies of each and every faculty to ensure involvement. Ok! It's the board of studies, senate, and review panels (MM1).

They later added that:

We also have student representatives in each and every department. And then on council we have a student representative. OK, so then it's the board of studies, then it's the Programme Advisory Committee, and then of course the curriculum is also going to the Academic Planning Committee.

Comments from members of the SRC also confirmed that they served in different structures of the university. One SRC member noted, for example that,

The SRC office is representing the office in the senate and in the governing council

and that the role of the SRC was to,

Communicate between the students and the board to ensure that they submit quality work.

Interestingly, this respondent sees the SRC as involved in the enhancement of quality and cite a role of the SRC as being to “ensure that [students] submit quality work”. This indicates a general lack of understanding of the concept of quality in relation to quality assurance discussed later in this chapter.

The same SRC member also noted that

In the Academic Committee there is a Student Representative Council, I just assist with day to day administration and policy seeking, especially with campus academic issues.

Cheng (2019) notes that student representatives are at times “event hosts” or errand runners with the purpose of simply fulfilling administration duties. It would appear that this particular student’s experience is similar to that noted by Cheng.

The responses from members of both management and the SRC show that Namibian higher education institutions, in common with other higher education institutions in the Global North (see Chapter Five) and the rest of Africa, involve students, particularly SRC members, in various university governance structures and academic processes. Discourses constructing student involvement in Namibian higher education institutions draw on globalisation, a structure at the level of the Real. Globalisation conditions institutions to introduce practices developed in the Global North (LeMaitre, 2002). Quality assurance thus spreads beyond the borders of the Global North and calls for student involvement (Klemenčič, 2015; Song & Song, 2006) were incorporated. As a result, quality assurance structures were established in the three Namibian institutions I studied. The quality assurance units at the three Namibian higher education institutions and bodies (for, example, the NCHE) all take up the call for students to be involved in quality assurance.

Possibly the most significant way that students were identified as being involved in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning, however, relates to the provision of feedback on teaching,

They evaluate their lectures; they do it at the end of the semester. If it's a year course they have to do it at the end of the year.

One of the management members interviewed for the purpose of this study also commented on the use of student feedback in the enhancement of teaching and learning,

Yeah, assist the lecturer or whoever is involved in that subject, assist them as to how they can improve for the next group of students who will be doing the same course.

Both of these statements indicate the potential of student involvement to lead to change, although it is important to note that compiling a list of “problems” and presenting those “problems” to the institution does not necessarily mean that efforts to address them will result. All this indicates is yet another step in the quality assurance processes and procedures. It is also interesting to note that, once a problem has been identified, considerable agency is attributed to academic teachers to address it, a problem also noted

by Behari-Leak (2017), who shows how academics who had completed a course on teaching were constrained in implementing what they had learned by mechanisms in the contexts in which they worked. The attribution of agency to academic teachers to address complaints and observations from students on the part of management is indicative of a failure to understand, or even acknowledge, that wider structural and cultural conditions can impact on what students consider to be “good”. Rather, academic teachers are accorded the power to enhance their teaching and thus address the “problem”.

The development of the NCHE’s quality assurance system has been conditioned by international systems, particularly by features of the accreditation frameworks of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and the quality assurance system of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa (NCHE, 2009). This means that the three universities studied were conditioned by European and South African models, and therefore the discourses constructing student involvement did not emanate in Namibia, but globally, and Namibia is taking them up. Although there are partnerships and negotiations in the development of the quality assurance systems and bodies, Woldegiorgis (2018) and Mohamedbhai (2011) caution that the Global North, with its power as a result of technical might, have a comparative advantage to impose interests.

In the context of Woldegiorgis’ (2018) and Mohamedbhai’s (2011) observations, it is necessary to ask the question “Which interests?”. One interest could be in seeing the consolidation of democracy in newly independent African states by cascading participation from national elections to the governance of higher education institutions. Africa has a history of “big men” presidents (for example, Idi Amin in Uganda and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe) and clearly the Global North has an interest in seeing more participative forms of democracy, such as those drawn on in Europe and the United States. In the context of global mobility, with people crossing borders to secure employment, along with mass migration such as that seen from South to North America and from the Middle East and many African nations to Europe, another interest could be in seeing that the quality of any education economic migrants and asylum-seekers bring with them is assured.

Below, I offer a graphical representation of responses obtained from the members of management of the ways in which students are involved in the assurance of quality. Other graphical representations appear as Appendix 9. As already indicated, the qualitative analysis tool Atlas.ti8 was used to identify instances of involvement. Figure 13 draws on interview data to identify events. Figures 13 and 14 go further in identifying mechanisms at the level of the Real, leading to the emergence of events.

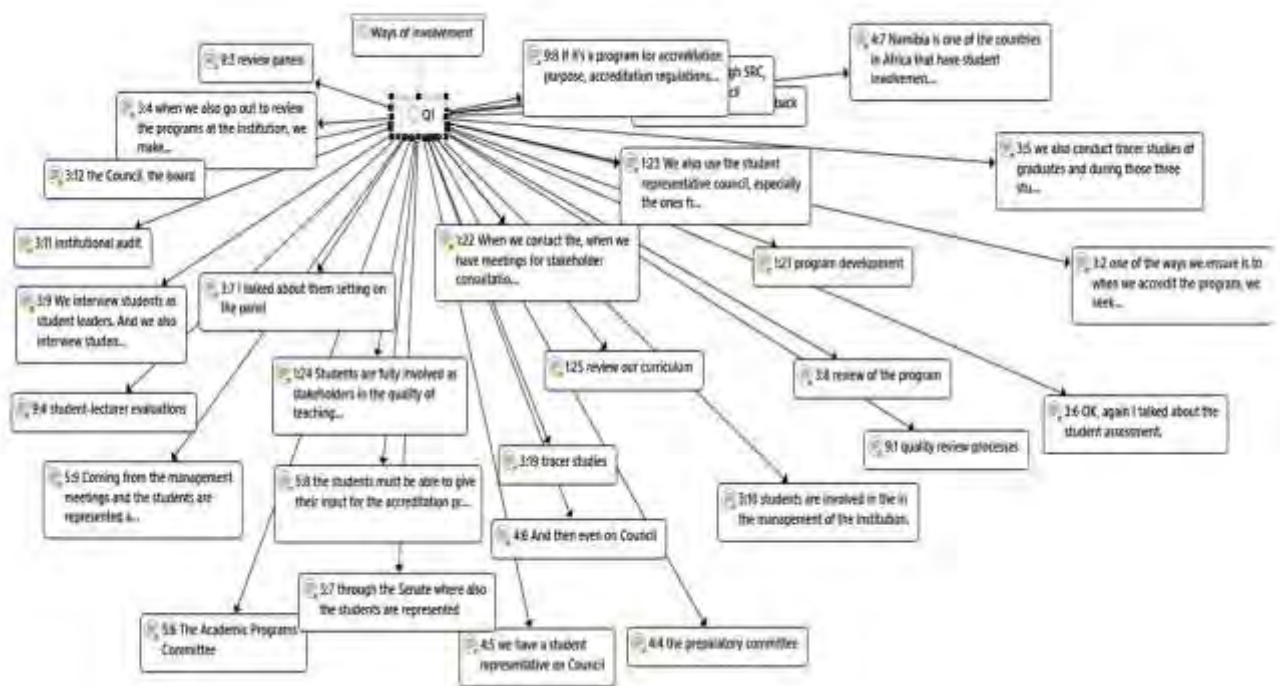


Figure 13: Events involving students

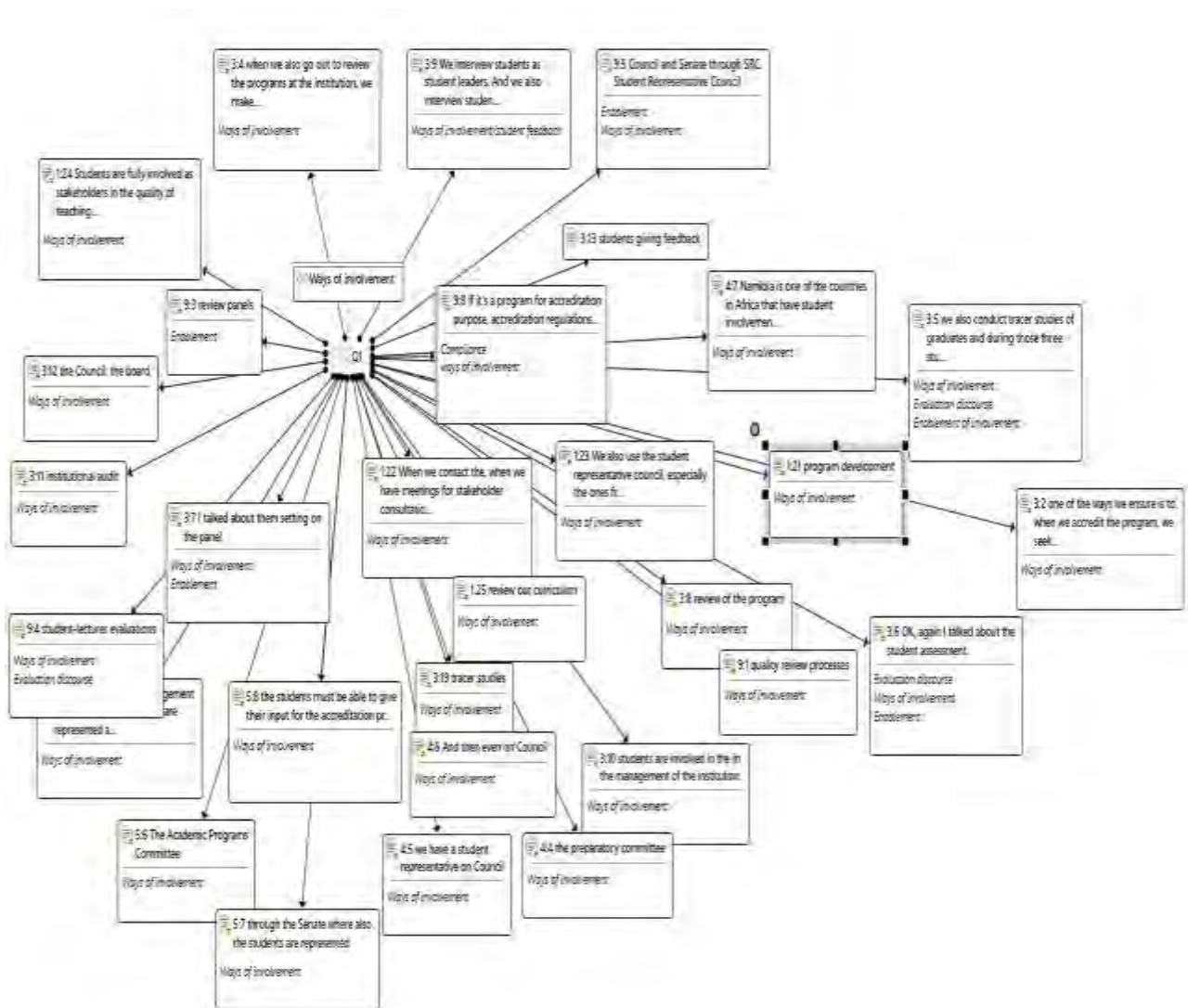


Figure 14: Further coding of events involving students

In the next section, I discuss how the members of management and the student leaders experience student involvement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning. From my identification of student involvement in the form of events at the level of the Actual, it would appear that “involvement” is limited to granting students representation on formal structures. The extent to which this representation is meaningful will be explored as this chapter proceeds.

7.2.2 Participants' experience of student involvement

The interviewees were asked why the students are involved in the various structures of the institutions and also in the academic matters of the institution. Members of management claimed that students are involved because their input in the quality of their education was valued. One member of management commented that,

We have established an online implementation committee and we also have student representatives on this committee. Because I mean, this is how much we value student involvement to make sure that, you know, they are included in our structures as far as possible. And also making sure that students, you know, bring their side and give their input and let them you know speak up and make sure that their voices are heard.

The idea that students' perspectives on the curriculum were valued was also noted,

Revisions to the programmes our students are involved, so we also make sure that we have a student voice in the crafting of the curriculum. We also had a student representatives, so the curriculum is better interrogated and we also take into account the comments of the students at that level.

This final comment from the same interviewee draws on the idea of students as beneficiaries of the curriculum:

Yes, it's good to actually include students, because these qualifications are designed for them at the end of the day.

Discourses promoting student involvement in quality assurance were identified in Chapter Five. These discourses construct students as important stakeholders in higher education and as agents who bring the experience of being taught and learning to the process of assuring quality (Mathew & Dollinger, 2022; Trowler, 2018; Klemenčič, 2015; Elassy, 2015; Garwe, 2015). In spite of this discursive construction of students' roles, responses from SRC

members indicated an undermining of this construction, in that they claimed that their voices were not always heard. In this context, doubts need to be raised about claims that student input is valued, and questions need to be asked about whether or not Namibia has simply subscribed to dominant discourses constructing student involvement as necessary without following through on the implications of this.

One SRC member noted, for example,

OK, so what we would like as Student Representative Council the institution should begin to realise the efforts of this voice. The voice that the SRC office hold is equivalent to any other office as long as a member of the SRC office is representing the office in the senate and in the governing council. Then once that is realised and the relevance is added to this office.

The same person went on to suggest that the attendance of senior SRC members at senate meetings was symbolic only:

We are informed when the president or the vice president is going into the senate. But I haven't really seen to be honest, I haven't seen our views taken.

They went on to elaborate,

In Senate, you just vote for a point being debated on, then after that point is debated on, then it disappeared. Then the council is the one now that makes the decision. So normal cases, student in our debates they are usually defeated and not heard.

The idea of students' voices not being heard is interesting to contemplate. It is difficult to know from the responses quoted above why the respondent thought students' voices were not heard. Although students have seats on bodies such as the senate, decisions are made democratically. Students provide insights into a matter being debated, but ideally, these are weighed against other considerations as the body comes to a decision or conclusion. It is also important to remember that students are transients in institutions of higher education,

often only studying for three years. Academics are likely to have much more experience to bring to debates, and thus, make more informed comments. Students are also young, often living away from home for the first time. Other stakeholders in bodies such as senates, including union members, have much more experience of life in general. This is not to say that students' opinions should not count, but only that what they have to say needs to be balanced against the positions taken by others. The fact that students are represented on bodies such as the senate and the fact that they do voice opinions on institutional matters does not mean that their opinions will carry. In the context of the comments from students noted above, it appears that some, at least, thought that the fact that they had a seat on a decision-making body and spoke, meant that their opinion should carry. This indicates the need for more education about the way governance structures work in an institution of higher education.

As Rudduck and Fielding (2006:228) note, institutions might feel obliged to be seen to be allowing students a voice, given the dominance of discourses calling for this to happen. Being allowed representation on formal institutional structures is one thing, and having a voice is another. Some SRC members indicated that sometimes their voices are heard, and they see changes made if the points made are perceived to be valid:

I think they only, OK it depends on the views, if we have. Like valid points, if we have the right points and if we have our facts straight. And I think sometimes they are taken into consideration.

This respondent at least appears to understand the need for points raised in bodies such as the senate to be well-argued and backed by evidence.

However, another SRC member noted that sometimes the institution only acts when students protest,

...we had a dilemma with the whole students were promised something by the university and the university took the thing away from us. So what we did is, we decided to like threatened to have a protest. We had a press conference and only

then did we hear like we get hearing from management, only then did they start like engaging us on that particular matter up until we came to a common ground. So in that sense, I believe that some of our views or some of our demands are met in a way.

Student protests can be understood as cultural practices used to effect pressure on institutions. In the South African context, Mpofu (2017) sees protests as a “communicative strategy” used by poor black people who continue to be marginalised post-democracy. There is no reason why this should not be true of students in other post-colonial contexts.

Although the complaints behind protests from students could be taken to indicate problems with quality, this is not necessarily the case. Rapatsa (2017) sees protests in South Africa as emanating from a lack of understanding of the political compromises made to end apartheid in 1994, which resulted in the State being deprived of the economic capital necessary to fulfil promises made in the constitution, such as access to high-quality education. In a similar fashion, students in Namibia are often unaware of the economic cost of demands they make. Nonetheless, protests can lead to positive change and should therefore not necessarily be viewed as negative.

In the context of global discourses drawing on neo-liberalism, it is not surprising that members of the SRC who participated in my study constructed themselves as customers. As already indicated, the notion of being a customer comes from the understanding that knowledge is a commodity that can be bought and sold and from the idea that a higher education is a “private good” leading to more highly paid employment in the knowledge economy. This sort of thinking has contributed to cuts in funding for higher education at a global level and the raising of tuition costs to cover shortfalls (Zepke, 2015; Natale & Doran, 2012; Giroux, 2002). The construction of students as “consumers” who have a right to comment on the quality of the product they are “buying”, can then be seen to lead to student involvement.

The following comment from a member of the SRC shows that students view themselves as customers,

Yeah, I would say if it's done properly, it has a potential to enhance quality because students are the primary customers of high education. They are the ones who experience learning, therefore, if they provide genuine and the university takes that feedback seriously.

The conception of students as customers has the potential for misinterpretation of the relationship between their universities and themselves. As Tierney (1999:126) states,

A customer driven focus certainly runs the risk of destroying standards if the definition of such a focus is to blindly adapt to the marketplace and merely meet the whims of whoever comes to classes. The whole sector needs to reconsider its apparent myopic commitment to this “customer” focus and to adopt a focus based on the “citizen” concept.

Students who believe that they are customers, as is the case in this study, may, in the long run, transfer the dominant marketplace “customer” model to their perceived relationship with the university (Goran & Wood, 2007). The student-customer relationship is not appropriate in the higher education context, because the relationship between universities and their students is not just predicated on the purchase and use of a product, but on a level of *interaction* between the product, the consumer and the supplier. This is, however, not the norm in the marketing relationship. Ideally, students should engage with the courses in which they are enrolled in order to develop their learning and themselves as knowledgeable individuals and not simply understand themselves as purchasing some form of certification that will allow them to enter the job market. Arguably, this sort of understanding would then constrain students from exercising their agency (Archer, 1995) as learners in pursuit of personal change.

Apart from perceiving themselves as customers, students also construct the university as a business with a brand. One member of the SRC for instance, stated,

Apart from that, it's just to defend the institution and to represent it in a positive manner. As if to sell an attractive brand, bringing more customers and those that bring you know, wealth to it.

Although institutional reputation has always been important, the competition associated with neo-liberalism is not necessarily a good thing. Increasingly, institutions compete with each other for places on global ranking systems. As Badat (2010b), points out, however, international ranking systems favour research-intensive universities. The race to achieve a global ranking can result in less differentiation in a higher education system, as all universities privilege research over teaching and learning and other core functions. Again, the comment from the student quoted above is indicative of the need for students' understanding of higher education to be enhanced if they are not to draw on discourses that can ultimately be detrimental to their interests in receiving an education that is fit for purpose.

Although students are involved in the quality assurance of their education through their representation on formal structures and through evaluations, it would seem that their experience is that this participation is not always valued or meaningful, although, as I have tried to point out, this could be because of an overall lack of understanding of higher education in itself.

In the next section, and following the critical realist underpinnings of my study, I move to discuss the interplay of mechanisms located at the level of the Real that lead to the emergence of events related to student involvement at the level of the Actual and their experiences of it at the level of the Empirical. In doing this, I contribute to answering my second research question,

What are the enablements and constraints for student involvement in internal quality assurance matters?

7.3 Mechanisms at the level of the Real leading to the emergence of student involvement

In this section, I identify the mechanisms leading to the emergence of student involvement in the assurance of quality of teaching and learning, and particularly, the extent to which they enable or constrain meaningful involvement. I analysed data from interviews as well as documents in order to do this and used the inferential processes of abduction and retroduction to move from participants' observations and experiences located at Bhaskar's (1978; 1989) level of the Empirical to identify mechanisms at the level of the Real. Following Archer (1995; 1996; 2000), I drew on the concept of "analytical dualism" to separately explore the domains of structure, culture and agency.

I begin with an analysis of the domain of structure.

7.3.1 The domain of structure

I identified hierarchy as structure at the domain of the Real (Bhaskar, 1978; 1989) which, in my study, functions to regulate student involvement. As I have already indicated, structures distribute access to the "goods" of the world. For students, a "good" is a qualification from an institution of higher education, as this will allow them to gain better-paid and more status-worthy employment. This is, of course, not the only "good" to be obtained from a higher education but it is nonetheless the most dominant understanding of the purpose of study at this level, given the role assigned to higher education in the knowledge economy. In being involved in assuring the quality of teaching and learning, students can be understood to be pursuing a project to obtain a qualification.

In this study, hierarchy refers to organisational structures which, in institutions of higher education, span several layers. Figure 15 offers an example of the coding that allowed me to identify hierarchy as a structure.

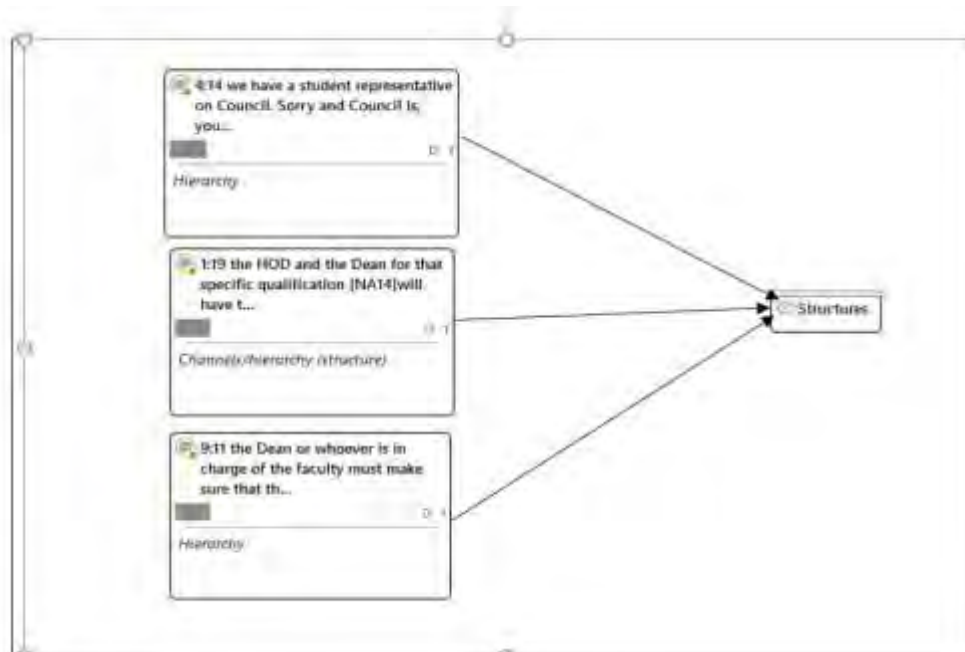


Figure 15: Hierarchy as a structure

Interviews with members of the SRC and members of management show that these social actors are placed within the different ranks of the institution and perform different roles. Archer (1995) notes that we enter structures and cultures that pre-exist us. The structural and cultural conditions in the contexts into which we are born can then serve to enable or constrain our agency. An individual entering a university as a student is placed in an inferior position in the organisational hierarchy to academics and members of management. As a result, the structure of hierarchy can be seen to constrain their involvement in the assurance of quality.

In their responses, interviewees identified institutional structures, such as academic boards, senates, councils, academic planning committees and programme advisory committees. SRC members are placed in these various structures in order to exercise their agency on matters relating to the quality assurance of teaching and learning. These structures themselves are hierarchical. For instance, the council is the top governing body and then follows the senate. In the institutions in my study, students had access to seats on senates but not on councils and were thus denied a voice in the supreme structure. In addition, within each structure, students, because of their status, occupy an inferior position. In many respects, this position

is constructed discursively as, in principle, anyone occupying a seat on an institutional structure is equal to other members. However, and as already indicated in Section 7.2.2, students' experiences were that their voices and opinions did not hold weight equal to those of others.

Institutional hierarchies can also regulate who can access resources such as documents. For instance, a member of management noted that for an "outsider" (referring to me as a researcher) to gain access to documents such as policies, a letter should be written to the vice chancellor,

Very difficult to get because our policies and you know guidelines are only available on the intranet, the staff intranet. So that is not for the public. I mean if you want it then you have to write you know through the vice chancellor's Office and so on to get permission.

Although many universities openly post policies and guidelines, this was not the case in this instance. Although students serving before the various bodies on which they were represented, would have had access to documentation, it is questionable whether they had the time to engage with this at the level needed, and also, whether they had the background knowledge or knowledge of documental genres to be able to read it efficiently. Students would also not have had access to discussions at staff meetings and less formal spaces where institutional matters are often debated, and thus, will not necessarily have been aware of perspectives other than their own. This, arguably, would have put them at a disadvantage in meetings.

Another indication of the way institutional hierarchies function relates to the way student-lecturer evaluation feedback is handled, as illustrated in the following extract from an interview with a member of management,

They evaluate their lectures; they do it at the end of the semester. If it's a year course they have to do it at the end of the year. Then that goes to the HOD and the Deans, so they are actually responsible for that. For us, it's just to make sure that the

students do evaluation at the end of the course, and then whatever feedback they get, then the HOD and the Dean for that specific qualification.

Student feedback surveys can function as a form of surveillance (Foucault, 1977) over academics. Although they are usually constructed as a means of assuring quality, student feedback surveys can “police” (Boughey, 2021) academics as teachers, and in doing so, serve to constrain innovation and change. This is especially the case when survey results are scrutinised by “managers” located higher in institutional hierarchies. The extent to which students are aware of the way their feedback was used is not clear. Boughey (2021) also points to the problems associated with the routine use of feedback, in that students may come to engage with frequent surveys in a superficial manner. All this points to the observation that students may not, in fact, be aware of the power that they can exercise when they provide feedback, although their most frequent complaint was that their observations were ignored.

Hierarchies also appear to constrain students in other ways. In my study, SRC members expressed their concern regarding the channels that they have to follow within the institution when raising complaints or making observations. One member of the SRC commented,

... so our university required the institution, which means that there are channels to follow and this really slows down the decision making. So, again to give a practical example; you probably want to escalate the matter to your team, your faculty but because of the bureaucracy that exists, you first have to go through your class rep, your class rep goes through the faculty rep, through the lecturer, your lecturer to someone else before going to the Dean. And by the time it gets there, the situation has deteriorated way long. So it makes it impossible to take action now because it's way too late. Bureaucracy of channels, channels, channels, channels.

It would therefore appear that institutional hierarchies regulate students' voices, thus the claims they can make to the “goods” the university distributes.

Hierarchy as a structure can also be associated with discourses privileging managerialism. As Archer (1995) states, culture and structure overlap and are intertwined, since they both condition agents, but it is best to analyse each individually in order to examine the interplay between them. Managerialism is associated with NPM discourses advocating the adoption of private sector performance criteria and practices in public institutions (Mendoza & Dorner, 2020). The student who made the last comment appeared to pick up on this with the comment about “bureaucracy of channels, channels, channels, channels”.

The introduction of NPM-related practices means that traditional academic structures such as faculty boards and senates have been supplemented by directorates and offices responsible for various areas of institutional functioning. NPM practices encourage social actors to focus on outcomes that are aimed at improving institutional performance in areas such as teaching and learning through quality assurance (Christensen, 2001). Namibian universities, in common with universities in the Global North and the rest of Africa, have governance structures such as councils, senates, faculty boards, committees and so on. Namibian universities have also introduced management structures including divisions headed by directors responsible for different areas of institutional functioning. Bureaucratic structures are often so cumbersome, because a complaint or issue can be referred to an office or division which then considers it in its own time, before reporting to the committee or body that referred it. In this context it is important to remember that students often spend only three years in a university, and if elected to a position of responsibility, often occupy that position for a single academic year. In academic life, it is not unusual for decision-making processes to take an entire academic year or more to come to conclusion. As a result, a student representative may have left office before a matter is concluded, and thus, come to the impression that educational concerns do not receive prompt attention (Mann, 2008 in Dunne & Owen, 2013).

Social structures, in this case, hierarchy, also result in processes being organised in ways that constrain employees and students in what they can do and how they can behave, which can result in the adoption of a passive role. The rules and conventions of, for example, a senate, may require a matter to be raised at a lower level before being considered by the more senior body. Attempts to table matters at more senior levels can thus be rebuffed.

One possible response to such procedures is that students begin to feel that they are denied a voice, and thus, adopt a more passive role simply because they have not been informed about the way processes work. Structures, in this case, hierarchy, can condition who can do what in a social system. As institutional hierarchies pre-exist the appointment of agents to positions and the enrolment of students in an institution, individuals encounter the constraints associated with hierarchies as soon as they accept a position or enrol. Although Archer (1995; 1996; 2000) sees all agents as socially and culturally conditioned, they are, nonetheless, accorded the personal powers and properties that will allow them to pursue projects and concerns. However, without the knowledge and skills to be able to operate within a hierarchy, students are constrained. All this indicates the need for extensive training for those students elected to represent their peers.

Hierarchy constrains students, not only in the domain of structure, but also culturally, in that institutional discourses tend to construct students as having views that are less valuable than those of the academics, often because of their youth and inexperience. I will return to this point in my exploration of the domain of culture below.

As Houston and Paewai (2013:277) note, “quality assurance processes are value laden. The application of methods and measures does not, in and of itself assure quality”. My argument therefore, is that structurally and culturally, students are constrained by their place in institutional hierarchies, and thus, their ability to contribute to quality is also constrained.

Policies are “micro-structures” that can enable or constrain student involvement. Members of management were very quickly able to identify policies pertaining to student involvement when interviewed,

The quality assurance policy. I articulate that I can share with you our quality assurance policy. This policy applies to all members of the university constituency including students

and

We have that overarching quality assurance system. In essence the quality assurance policy. There is a policy but however it's not just about student involvement, it's in the framework of the comprehensive program for accreditation process.

In contrast, responses obtained from the members of the SRC seemed to indicate that they were not fully aware of the policies, rather understanding their involvement as stemming from the SRC Constitution. For example, one student noted,

I don't have all of the policies, but most of them are on online on our website you can probably just go check there. We have like a general Constitution.

It is clear from this response that knowledge of policies on the part of this respondent at least, was fairly weak.

An analysis of the quality assurance policies from the three Namibian institutions studied, shows that students are constructed as stakeholders of the institution. However, their involvement seems to be constructed as obeying rules and regulations. For example, the International University of Management Quality Assurance and Management Policy (IUM, n.d.:16) notes,

All IUM students have a quality assurance responsibility in their academic activities and community engagements. Students will participate in quality by adhering to all IUM policies and regulations, and they shall express their quality related concerns through their SRC representative on the Quality Assurance Council and other quality assurance-related structures at IUM.

The UNAM Quality Assurance and Management Policy (UNAM, 2015:13) states that,

All UNAM students should embrace a culture of quality assurance in their academic activities and community engagements. Students will participate in quality assurance by adhering to all UNAM policies and regulations and they shall express their Quality

related concerns through the SRC representation on the Quality Assurance Committee and other quality assurance-related structures.

These extracts clearly show that the quality assurance policies structure the exercise of students' agency. As Archer (1995) notes, agency is always structured, in that social structures always precede the agential disposition, as it is within these contexts that agency will emerge. Upon joining the university, students must deliberate on the new context and adopt new habits, values and behaviours. This idea is central to this study, as students must conform to the policies that they themselves were not necessarily socialised into. This limits the exercise of student agency because the policies state how and when, and how it can be exercised. This observation suggests that student involvement leans more towards compliance than meaningful engagement. Student involvement is written into policies because the two national bodies (NCHE and NQA) require it, but that this involvement is symbolic and not meaningful because of the way institutional hierarchies (which position students discursively as less important than staff, in spite of other discourses that construct them as "stakeholders") and policies constrain their actual involvement.

In addition to the student involvement noted in the quality assurance policies at the three Namibian universities, the NCHE's Programme Accreditation Trainer Manual (NCHE, n.d.:6) makes mention of student involvement in accreditation processes,

Students should be given the opportunity to engage with the proposed programme in an appropriate forum prior to the review process. This forum could be a Teaching and Learning Committee (if such exists) or a consultative meeting with selected members of the student body for the purposes of obtaining feedback. Student input to the programme is imperative.

I have already noted the way that institutional hierarchies constrain involvement. The statement on the part of the NCHE that students should participate in an "appropriate forum" does not appear to take account of any of the points made in the preceding section about hierarchies.

Nonetheless, the quality assurance policies as discussed in this Chapter, show that policies are central in constructing the involvement of students in decision-making. The QA policies do not always explicitly indicate ways in which students may be involved, however, despite the importance placed on their involvement. Also in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning of their own education, policies should enable active student involvement and not constrain them. Explicit guidelines on student involvement would provide the university authorities on students' rights and responsibilities in governance arrangements. This means that the policies on student involvement need to indicate what students should be involved in and how they will work together with other stakeholders in order to enhance the quality of education (Klemenčič, 2015; Elassy, 2015; Cockburn, 2006). However, as I have already indicated, the policies I have examined for the purpose of this study largely construct student engagement as a matter of compliance with rules and regulations.

In the next section, I move on to explore the domain of culture, in keeping with the analytical dualism espoused by Archer (1995; 1996; 2000).

7.4 The domain of culture

As I have indicated throughout this thesis, the domain of culture is understood to be discursively constituted. Discourses, or sets of ideas that cluster together, have causal powers and can affect what events or experiences emerge at the levels of the Actual and the Empirical (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Discourses possess cultural emergent properties (CEPs) that are activated when agents exercise their own personal emergent properties (PEPs) to draw on them. Discourses are more than words or other signs, since they also encompass discourse practices at the level of the Actual. Discourses identified may overlap and at times contradict each other.

7.4.1 Training

Evident in the data I analysed was a discourse identifying the need for students to receive training for their roles in the institution. Figure 16 illustrates my coding of the training discourse in my data.

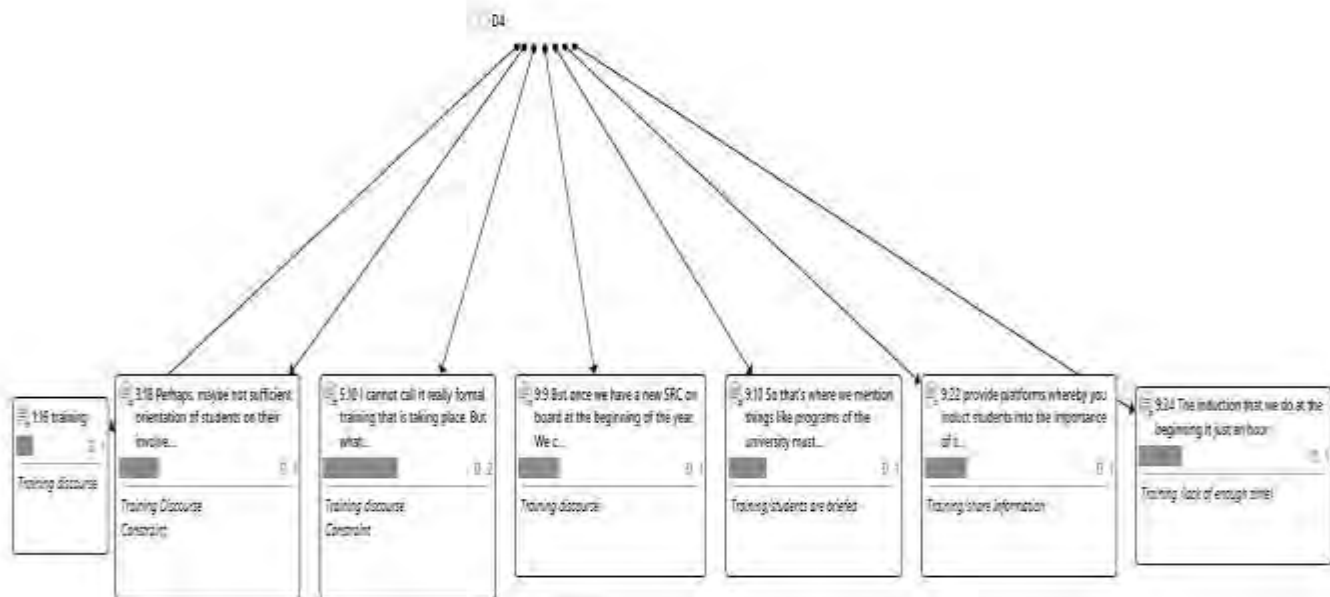


Figure 16: Coding of the D4 (training) discourse

In many cases, this training was provided by previous incumbents of the positions to which SRC members were elected,

After you were elected into power before you started getting your term, you receive, like, some sort of like a run through by the previous person who served under your position.

However, members of management also noted that members of the SRC were trained about the function of various entities in the university,

The induction that we do at the beginning it just an hour. Just to present to them what this office is there for and what are the expectation of this office from the students and how can they be involved.

While students may have been informed about the functions of a particular office or institutional entity, there is nothing in the data to indicate the provision of any form of training on institutional governance more broadly or, even, procedures used in meetings and genres of documents that serve before them. While training was constructed as

important, the extent to which it was effective in preparing students for their roles in governance structures is open to question.

Other participants described the training given overall to students about how to complete student feedback forms. For example,

They are brought to a lecture venue and students are asked to complete but before the students complete the form, the staff member explains the questions, explains the forms and the staff member also hangs around.

However, time appears to constrain training on providing feedback on teaching and learning with, for example, information about how to “complete the form” limited to a short time before the survey is administered. In the extract above, there is no indication of any explanation of the purpose of the evaluation, how it will be analysed and whether or not students will be informed of the results and any actions taken in relation to them.

The lack of information and explanation on quality assurance and arrangements for governance and management appeared to extend to at least one member of the SRC being unsure whether or not policies actually exist,

I think the policies will exist. I think the policies you are referring to, otherwise, they don't exist.

Although the lack of training might constrain effective involvement, as students might not be familiar of the quality assurance processes and purposes, the need to be trained and to engage with quality assurance processes can also impact on students’ time. Alaniska et al. (2006) and Brus et al. (2007) noted that student involvement in quality assurance increases their workload. In addition, students are adults, and many are employed or have other responsibilities, and involving them in training and quality assurance processes further burdens them (Alaniska et al., 2006). The efficacy of training is also constrained by the fact that SRC members are elected on a yearly basis, with the result that members take the

knowledge they have gained about institutional policies and processes with them as their term of office expires.

The data I analysed indicates that the universities try to help students understand what is expected of them. However, they do not appear to expend effort on engaging students around the purposes of quality assurance and how their input will be handled. Rather, the training appears to focus on what students need to do. It would therefore appear that the Namibian institutions could do more in respect of training. The following extract from an interview with a member of the management confirmed this,

But I think this is maybe one aspect in which we also lack a bit, you know to bring out that quality message so that students can understand it better. One of the strategies you know to reach out to the students and to inform them about the quality issues and what their responsibilities are. And for instance, the student evaluations. You know that is the responsibility of the student to complete those surveys and to make them more aware why they should do it. We have proposed that we also want to may be just giving presentation.

Lack of understanding of the purposes of quality assurance and the processes associated with it has the potential to constrain students' engagement (ESU, 2012). Although dominant discourses construct the need for training, in the cases I have studied, the interplay of these discourses with other mechanisms at the level of the real discussed earlier in this section, arguably mean that the training events that occur constrain meaningful engagement and do not enable the exercise of agency on the part of students.

7.4.2 Student feedback surveys

Another discourse identified in my data constructed student involvement as relating to the completion of surveys providing feedback to staff on teaching and course design.

Members of management noted that students are involved in the evaluations of lecturers and courses (see Appendix 10) and also, that tracer studies (also known as cohort studies) are conducted. For example, one member of management noted,

One of the most popular ways in which students are involved in the quality, in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, is the student-lecturer evaluation, which students conduct end of each semester. If it's a year course they have to do it at the end of the year.

As already indicated, the routine nature of the elicitation of feedback at the end of every course has the potential to impact on the gravity with which students approach the task. This is especially the case if they are not informed about the purposes of evaluation, or are given a one-sided view of the purpose, and of the way their feedback will be handled. As I will explain later, a lot of feedback at the three institutions is used for instrumental purposes in procedures such as those leading to personal promotion and not to enhance teaching more meaningfully.

Another management member explained that,

Lecturer evaluations and course evaluations is being done by the Teaching and Learning Unit. I know the report goes to the lecturer. They get feedback report and, of course, if there are gaps identified by the students then the Teaching and Learning Unit, you know the unit will provide training course to the lecturers to improve the teaching.

Managers of teaching and learning units indicated that they receive feedback from students then, based on the outcome, design necessary training or programmes for lecturers. The stated purpose is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, and as I have already noted, it also serves as a form of surveillance. Student evaluation tools often involve a set of standard questions. One member of the management noted,

It addresses a variety of aspects, but the main purpose is to find out the students' experiences of learning and teaching. How did they experience the teaching process? In terms of its facilitation, how was it facilitated? Was it satisfactory? Did it help them learn anything? How was the content approached? Was there any role on their

side in terms of contribution to content? And, also, generally how the lecturer conducted himself or herself.

This extract, although blending quality assurance and quality enhancement functions, shows that the evaluations seek certain forms of responses from students, depending on whether they are for research purposes or for improvement and enhancement of the quality of education. The questions are often based on standards and best practices in the Global North. Boughey (2021) cautions that standardised questionnaires might result in a globalised set of norms that neglect innovation, and thus have the potential to constrain the transformation of teaching and learning that is so often sought. Given that higher education institutions are different, evaluation tools need to respect this difference, especially as the definition of “quality” used by most quality assurance agencies is “fit for purpose” (see also Boughey, 2011). Quality teaching is thus teaching that is fit for the purpose of teaching particular students in a particular course in a particular university. Students also need to know in advance what the evaluations seek and what is expected of them. The short time allocated to explain to students the purpose of evaluations and the way the information they provide will be used, has the potential to constrain their full involvement, as they run the risk of simply resorting to completing the exercise without careful thought.

Although the three Namibian HEIs claim to encourage students’ involvement in evaluations, concern was raised that not all students participate in these exercises. This could be because students do not receive feedback on the insights that they have provided, as the information is mostly used for instrumental purposes such as personal promotion. For example, two members of management noted,

These lecturer evaluation reports tended to be used for academic promotions

and

When someone wants to become a senior lecturer or professor that's when they want these evaluations and attach them to the application. And that has somehow

shadowed the evaluations' purpose, which is enhancing the quality of learning and teaching.

The dominant use of student feedback for instrumental purposes such as personal promotion is widely reported in the literature (see for example, Naylor et al., 2021; Lipinge et al., 2013; Möwes, 2005; Kahu, 2013; Kadhila, 2017; Read et al., 2001). In this respect, practices at the three Namibian institutions do not differ from those elsewhere in the world.

Nonetheless, as the following extract from an interview with a member of management indicates, student evaluations are understood as a means of hearing students' voices,

We have been holding meetings with the student representative body trying to tell them or to share with them the essence of their participation in the evaluations. It's more of encouraging students and also making them see the purpose of the evaluation and how it benefits them. So those are the means that we have been trying to make sure that their voices are heard.

The response above echoes Boughey's (2021) sentiments that the purposes of student evaluations are often not clearly stipulated, in that it is not often made clear to students that one of the main functions of their feedback is to inform institutional processes such as personal promotion. Rather, as the extract above shows, managers are keen to construct the purpose of evaluations as a means of allowing students to share their opinions, and ultimately, of allowing them to derive benefit from improved teaching.

It would also seem that feedback from students does not always enable quality enhancement. Students often believe that their input will have the power to effect very concrete results and are disappointed when this is not the case. As one member of management noted,

The only concern on the student side, especially with the evaluations, because you know it's a different ... [students] see evaluations from a different interest point of view. So, for the students, they think that when they say the lecturer is a bad lecturer,

the lecture doesn't teach well, they believe that that information should lead to the lecturer to be fired. Come next semester, they see the same lecturer again and they are asked to evaluate the same lecturer then they start losing interest and their participation in meetings and these activities also.

Disillusionment on the part of students could result in fewer bothering to complete an evaluation form the next time one is offered or, alternatively, not thinking carefully as they do so. This point once again indicates students' lack of understanding of institutional life and of the rights of academic teachers as employees governed by labour laws. In many respects, this is due to their lack of experience and youth more generally, but it also indicates the need for more training on the way tools such as evaluations are used, and arguably, for more honesty in making it clear that they are used for instrumental purposes and not only to enhance teaching.

Given that evaluations are identified as a key means of allowing students a voice at the three Namibian institutions, my analysis of the evaluation in practice in this section has shown that this is not necessarily the case. As Boughey (2021) points out, evaluations of teaching and course design need to be understood as a form of research with the result that evaluation tools need to be carefully considered and designed and that inputs from different groups of stakeholders need to be triangulated against each other. The extent to which this is happening at the three institutions in the study requires more research, but at this point, it is probably fair to say that the claims made about students' input into evaluations, allowing them a "voice", are open to question. More openness and transparency are needed regarding the purpose of evaluations alongside more rigour in their design and implementation.

Before moving to the next section, I offer a graphical illustration of my analysis of the data, which allowed me to identify the discourse I have identified in this section.

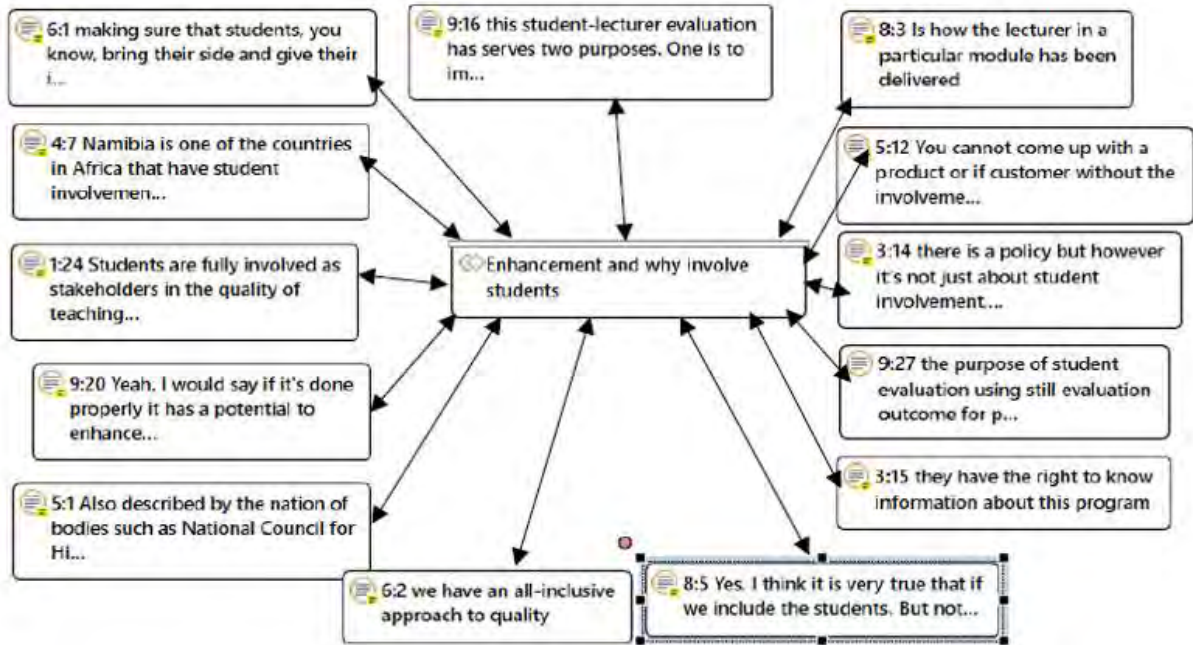


Figure 17: Purposes of evaluation

Figure 18 shows more detailed analysis and coding.

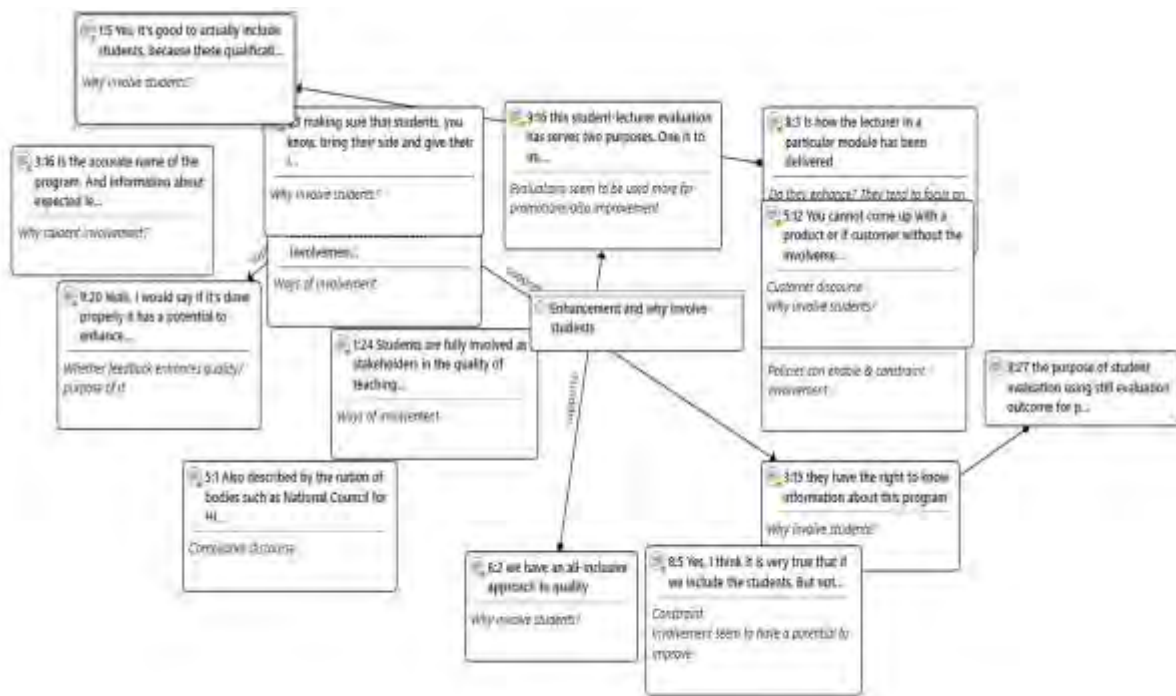


Figure 18: More detailed analysis and coding

7.4.3 Quality

One of the most important discourses to emerge from my analysis related to the construct of quality itself. In interviews, members of management were asked how they understood the concept of “quality”. I was referred to the quality assurance policies for the definition. One member of management explained,

You will see in our quality assurance policy which sets the legal way of defining it is that, we have provided for those various definitions according to different perspectives of different stakeholders. Where we say quality is defined fitness for and of purpose. In that with this in mind, we view it as, the university has a purpose as defined in vision. The university meets that purpose, then there's quality. Then we also provide for another dimension which says quality is transformation. In this way, we focus on the students to say each transformation is a change with added value. If students are like the system, the quality education that is provided to students is able to transform them. To become better, to become useful members of the society then we say this quality. Yeah, so we also provide for quality as value for money. Particularly, funders and government, they want to see whether there is return in

their investment when they provide bursaries to students as students failing towards their passing. If they see that there's good numbers of students that are going through the system so those stakeholders, they may conclude that yes there is value in our investment there for there is quality. Yeah, they also added dimensions like excellence... I will share our policy with you and you will see how we have articulated to those.

As noted by the interviewee, “on the ground” definitions of quality are complex and multi-dimensional, as different stakeholders define the concept differently.

An analysis of the quality assurance policies at the three universities studied also shows conflicting definitions of the concept of quality. The University of Namibia Quality Assurance and Management Policy (UNAM, 2015:5) views quality as,

“Excellence - exceptional or reaching high standards; b) Fitness for purpose - meeting stated purpose; Fitness of purpose - adequacy of quality-related intentions of a higher education institution as aligned to the national goals of higher education; c) Transformation - enhancing the performance of students, regardless of their initial level of competence and; d) Value for money - return on investment in high education”.

Harvey and Green (1993:11) provide a strong argument against understandings of quality as “excellence”, noting that understandings of quality as “exceptional” or “distinctive”, in some way (as in the University of Namibia policy above) underpin an elitist view of the high quality of an Oxbridge education. Quality is not determined through an assessment of what is provided but is based on an assumption that the distinctiveness and inaccessibility of an Oxbridge education is of itself “quality”. This is not quality to be judged against a set of criteria but the quality, separate and unattainable for most people. Harvey and Green (1993:11) go on to note that definitions of quality as “excellence” are “apodictic”, in the sense that they rely on users instinctively knowing quality when they perceive it.

Barnett (2004) and Readings (1996) add to the critique of the notion of excellence made by Harvey and Green (1993). Readings (1996:32) notes that,

“Excellence is invoked ... as always, to say precisely nothing at all: it deflects attention from the questions of what quality and pertinence might be, who actually are the judges of a relevant or a good University, and by what authority they become those judges”.

Barnett (2004:64, citing Readings, 1996) describes the concept of excellence as standing for “no purpose, no ideal and no concept in particular”.

Harvey and Green’s (1993) argument against understandings of quality as inter alia, “excellence”, “perfection” and their claim that the only workable definition of the concept in higher education is that of “fitness for purpose”, has informed quality assurance work across the world. In spite of this, the Polytechnic of Namibia Quality Assurance Policy (Polytechnic of Namibia, 2009:6) also invokes understandings of quality as excellence:

Excellence - attainment of exceptionally high standards; b) Fitness for purpose/
Fitness of purpose - meeting stated requirements of all stakeholders; c)
Transformation - from one state to another with value-added and; d) Value for
money - return on investment in higher education.

The International University of Management Quality Assurance and Management Policy (IUM, n.d.:3) continues in the same vein, explaining that quality refers to several aspects such as:

a) “perceived / identified exceptional or high standards; b) compliance with a set of standards; c) fitness for purpose (i.e. the stated goals and aims of a programme are in accordance with the overall purpose of the institution); d) effectiveness in achieving institutional goals and; e) meeting customers’ stated or implied needs”.

The body responsible for quality assurance in South Africa, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), a standing committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) adds

understandings of quality as “transformation” and “value for money” to the definition of the concept as “fitness of and for purpose” (CHE, 2001). The definitions of quality developed in South Africa were intended to try to address the nature of the fractured higher education system resulting from apartheid. Delfino (2019) states that quality as transformation includes behavioural, emotional and cognitive change and thus follows others in understanding the experience of engaging with higher education as relating to identity. If higher education is indeed intended to impact on students’ identities, an even stronger argument can be made for the need to include their voices as stakeholders in an endeavour which will impact upon them at deeply personal levels.

The quality assurance policies, as quoted in the extracts above, conceptualise the dimension of quality as value for money as a “return on investment”, though the notion of “investment” is not explained. In South Africa, the value for money dimension is seen to relate to the way higher education contributes to:

- i) meeting the learning needs and aspirations of individuals, ii) the creation of critical citizenry development needs of society and; iii) the creation and sharing of knowledge as well as to iv) the development of skilled labour force (Republic of Namibia, 1997, para.1.3).

Students can all be assumed to have learning needs and aspirations, otherwise, they would not have pursued a higher education. The construction of students as consumers, discussed earlier in this chapter, needs to be seen in relation to dominant discourses constructing higher education as a means to more prestigious and highly paid employment in the global knowledge economy and the notion of credentialism (Tomlinson & Watermeyer, 2002).

The construct of “fitness for purpose” is as stated in the policy extracts above are explained as “meeting stated purpose” (Polytechnic of Namibia, 2009:6), “meeting the stakeholders’ educational needs and aligning to the national goals of higher education” (UNAM, 2015:5) and ensuring that “the stated goals and aims of a programme are in accordance with the overall purpose of the institution” (IUM, n.d.:3).

Harvey and Green (1993) distinguish between an understanding of fitness for purpose as i) involving meeting the requirements, needs or desires of a customer and ii) an institution meeting its own stated purposes. If students are constructed as consumers, an understanding of fitness for purpose as meeting their requirements could be understood to be appropriate and therefore leading to the need to allow them to voice what they require, need or desire. However, as Harvey and Green (1993) point out, students are not always in a position to say what they require. Students often enrol in an institution of higher education, as it is the only option available to them in the face of potential unemployment, or because they are under pressure from families. In addition, they lack knowledge about the purposes higher education can fulfil and the nature of the disciplines, and therefore, the different programmes on offer.

Work in the area known as the sociology of knowledge becomes pertinent here. Bernstein (2000) distinguished between two ways of describing the world around us: horizontal discourse and vertical discourse. Horizontal discourse draws on experience and is context-dependent. Vertical discourse, on the other hand, draws on abstractions and theorised accounts of the world to account for what is happening in any context now and into the future. Many students encounter vertical discourse for the first time in formal education, and depending on the quality of that education, have more or less developed understandings of the abstract, systematised accounts of the world taught there. In higher education, their encounters with vertical discourse are intensified, and often, are rejected in favour of a call for an education that equips them with skills for the world of work. As Wheelahan (2010) points out, however, vertical discourse is powerful, in that it allows us to make sense of multiple contexts across time. Skills-based approaches typified by the use of learning outcomes as a guiding principle in curriculum design select only as much of the abstract, systematised “knowledge structure” as is needed for the outcome to be performed. Problems may then arise in a rapidly changing world of work when skills in which students have been trained become obsolete. The argument of social realists such as Young (2007) and Muller (2000) is for knowledge to be “brought back” into curriculum design. All this can lead to the conclusion that students may not actually know what they require or need for the future, and therefore, that privileging their voices in an understanding of quality as meeting their needs is problematic.

Harvey and Green (1993) therefore argue for an understanding of fitness of purpose as involving a university stating its own purpose, mission and values (see also Stensaker, 2007). Purposes may change over time; therefore, constant re-evaluation of the appropriateness of mission and value statements is required.

The implications of definitions of quality as involving fitness for and of purpose have implications for the student voice. One involves the need for more engagement with students about the purpose of higher education and the purpose of a particular institution within a higher education system. Ideally this engagement would begin as soon as the students have registered. Better-informed students could be expected to lead to better quality input. Another implication involves the need to provide feedback to students on the results of the surveys they complete. Sometimes, calls from students for changes cannot be met because of the nature of the university, or because they are simply uninformed. Feeding back by acknowledging what students said and explaining what can, and what cannot, be changed is important, not only because the process leads to better-informed students, but would also encourage meaningful participation in the future. Without these actions, the extent to which students are indeed considered to be important stakeholders in assuring and enhancing quality (McDowell & Sambell, 1999), is open to question.

The fact that dominant institutional discourses construct “quality” in such diverse and potentially problematic ways has implications for the involvement of students in quality assurance. If students hear mixed messages about what constitutes quality, how can they contribute to its assurance? This also indicates the need for training for students.

7.4.4 Roles and responsibilities

I have already identified the structure of hierarchy as a mechanism constraining students’ meaningful involvement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning. Associated with this structure is, arguably, a discourse of “roles and responsibilities” in the three quality assurance policies analysed, which I view as both a constraint and an enablement for student involvement, in that staff, council, senate, board, SRC members and students are constructed as having responsibility in matters pertaining to the quality of learning.

The University of Namibia Quality Assurance and Management Policy (UNAM, 2015:12-13) notes that,

“Responsibility and accountability for quality and quality assurance is vested in the vice chancellor”, line management of this function resides with the pro-vice chancellor: Academic Affairs and Research. Senate has formal responsibility for the oversight of all matters pertaining to the quality of learning and its provision. This responsibility is discharged, in part, by consideration of reports generated through various processes and by the regular monitoring of the effectiveness of these processes. The council of UNAM has formal responsibility for final approval of all policies.

The Directors of academic and administrative/support divisions, Deans and Heads of Departments, and senior staff members and programme team leaders are responsible and accountable for monitoring quality and quality assurance within their areas of jurisdiction in concurrence with propositions of Centre for Quality Assurance and Management (CEQUAM).

The faculty boards have quality assurance oversight with regard to maintaining and enhancing the academic standards and the quality of provision within the faculty. All staff members of UNAM at all levels have a professional commitment for ensuring quality implementation in their areas of jurisdiction and they are accountable to their line Managers.

All UNAM students should embrace a culture of quality assurance in their academic activities and community engagements... they shall express their Quality related concerns through the SRC representation on the Quality Assurance Committee and other quality assurance-related structures”.

As the extract above shows, the UNAM QA policy identifies roles for different stakeholders in the institutional hierarchy. Occupying a social position or role means that individuals are

able to draw on structural powers and properties inherent to the role, as well as their own personal powers and properties to exercise their agency (Archer, 1995; 1996; 2000). The agents interviewed for the purpose of this study all draw on these SEPs in order to conduct quality assurance activities.

My analysis of the roles and responsibilities allocated to various social actors in the policies therefore suggests that individuals are constrained in relation to what they can and cannot do in relation to the assurance of quality. The policy cited above states that “students should embrace a culture of quality assurance in their academic activities and community engagements”, though what this means is not explained. It is highly unlikely, however, that students will be able to “embrace a culture of quality assurance”, however it is conceptualised, if they are not informed about what this could involve and allowed to discuss what this might practically mean. Students are allocated a role and associated responsibilities in the policy, but the extent to which this is symbolic is open to question, given the lack of support for them to take up that role.

According to the Constitution of the SRC of the University of Namibia (2010:3),

The SRC shall:

- i. Be the executive organ of the entire student body.
- ii. Represent the student body on structures or fora such as: (i) The University council
- iii. National and international student bodies / fora
- iv. General public fora
- v. Any structure of the University that makes provision for student representation...

The Constitution, in common with other documents of this nature, also sets down rules for meetings.

Although all members of the SRC are elected to specific portfolios, there is nonetheless a hierarchy in place, in that substantial powers are invested in the president and vice-president. While the SRC Constitution may enable student involvement, as it outlines their functions and powers they have within the institution, they can only exercise agency within the hierarchical structure of the SRC itself and the institution more broadly. The construction of roles within a hierarchy in the Constitution can therefore be seen to function as a constraint.

SRC constitutions also make provision for members to be disciplined. For example, the Constitution of the NUST SRC (NUST, 2017a:8) states that,

A member of the SRC may be suspended if a motion of censure is passed on him/her on the grounds of an infringement or of such gross ineptitudes as to render him/her unfit to hold office with dignity.

All this points to a discourse of “roles and responsibilities” which limits the agency of students, particularly when understood in combination with the hierarchical structure of institutions more generally.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the interplay of mechanisms in the domains of agency, structure and culture in relation to the involvement of students in the assurance of quality in teaching and learning at three Namibian universities. In doing so, I have contributed to answering the first two research questions guiding my study.

The first question asked,

In what ways are students involved, or not involved, as stakeholders in internal quality assurance processes at higher education institutions in Namibia?

In response to this question, I have shown that, drawing on global discourses, students are involved as representatives in formal institutional structures such as senates, academic boards and committees. While students have formal representation, the extent to which this representation is meaningful is open to question, given the way institutional hierarchies, policies and dominant discourses construct, and thus limit, their roles. In addition, students are arguably constrained in the way that they can exercise their roles by their overall lack of awareness and understanding of governance of a higher education institution and of the way that governance processes and procedures function. My overall assessment of students' involvement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning, therefore, is that it tends towards the symbolic rather than the meaningful.

The second question asked,

What are the enablements and constraints for student involvement in internal quality assurance matters?

In many respects, it is difficult to disentangle enablements and constraints. For example, students' participation in the quality assurance of teaching and learning is both enabled and constrained by policies. Policies allocate seats on governance structures to students, but at the same time, and in conjunction with hierarchical structures and discourses privileging hierarchies, limit the roles they can play. Discourses and policies privilege the need for training, but the training that is provided is not sufficient to allow students to understand governance structures and the procedures associated with them. The provision of feedback by students on teaching and course design is privileged discursively, but the extent to which that feedback is used for instrumental purposes rather than to enhance teaching and course design in more meaningful ways, is open to question. Rather, what appears to happen is that feedback is used in a way which places the responsibility for improving teaching and course design on individual academic teachers exercising their agency to engage with and learn from training provided by teaching and learning centres, whilst structural and cultural conditions constraining that agency are ignored.

As a result and overall, my assessment is that student involvement is constrained rather than enabled. It may be enabled formally, but it is constrained in attempts to be meaningful. I will take up this point in more detail in my concluding chapter.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Introduction

As I indicated in Chapter Four of this thesis, in the last half-century, concern about the quality of higher education has been heightened as a result of the interplay of mechanisms such as massification, internationalisation and globalisation located in the domain of the Real (Archer, 1995). Following the introduction of New Public Management in an attempt to make higher education more efficient by drawing on practices used in business and commerce (Hood & Jackson, 1991), higher education institutions implemented quality assurance models to cope with increased access, cuts in public funding, demands for consistency in standard-setting, and for accountability (Allais, 2009; OECD, 2008). The introduction of quality assurance to higher education has led to the establishment of national bodies or offices responsible for this area and to the appointment of individuals to work with quality assurance at institutional levels. Discourses privileging accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, and management, and constructing students as customers provided a rationale for student involvement in quality assurance activities (Klemenčič, 2015).

In this thesis, I investigated the role played by students in ensuring the quality of education at three Namibian higher education institutions namely, the University of Namibia (UNAM), the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), and the International University of Management (IUM). The study employed interviews and document analysis. The thesis draws on a theoretical framework consisting of Bhaskar's (1978) critical realism, and Archer's (1995, 1996, 2000) social realism. Literature pertaining to the involvement of students in the quality of education in their institutions in Africa, and Namibia in particular, is limited, and this thesis has attempted to fill that gap.

In the conclusion to the preceding chapter, I provided responses to the first two questions informing my study,

- In what ways are students involved, or not involved, as stakeholders in the quality assurance of teaching and learning at higher education institutions in Namibia?
- What are the enablements and constraints for student involvement in the quality of teaching and learning?

In this chapter, I draw on these responses to answer the final question

- In what ways does student participation enhance, or not enhance, the quality of teaching and learning at higher education institutions in Namibia?

I will begin the chapter, however, by summarising the main insights gained in response to the first two questions.

8.2 The involvement of students in the quality assurance of teaching and learning in Namibia

In many respects, Namibia has followed in the steps of other countries across the world in involving students in the quality assurance of teaching and learning. Having gained its independence in 1990, the new nation began to overhaul its higher education system in a global context, which increasingly saw higher education being constructed as a means to economic success at both national and personal levels, with the result that its other purposes were sidelined.

In order to better compete in the global arena, the newly democratic nation was forced to pay attention to the quality of its qualifications that its graduates drew upon to find work and, also, to fuel its own development. The Namibian Higher Education Act led to the establishment of the Namibian Qualification Authority (NQA), the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), and the development of policies on quality assurance (NCHE, 2003).

The NCHE, the body responsible for quality assurance in higher education, followed practices elsewhere in the world in focusing on activities such as institutional audit and programme review and accreditation. This led to the three institutions in the study underpinning this thesis, the University of Namibia (UNAM), the Namibia University of

Science and Technology (NUST), and the International University of Management (IUM), setting up their own quality assurance units. Along with the NCHE, the three institutions followed global convention in setting up quality assurance processes and procedures by citing students as important stakeholders in higher education and making way for their representation in governance structures. As in other countries, Namibian universities have Student Representative Councils (SRCs), whose members are elected annually. Representation in governance was achieved via SRCs, whose members were also invited to join programme or curriculum review panels and programme advisory committees, as well as to sit on senates and academic boards. More generally, students were also invited to provide feedback on teaching and course design.

In taking these steps, Namibia was following other countries across a globalised world in developing its universities to meet what were increasingly global norms. As LeMaitre (2002:34) points out,

What is really being imposed on all of us, and not only on developing countries, is an ideological definition of universities, emerging from a globalised view of the world. In this sense, what we see is not the imposition of certain definitions of quality by developed countries on developing ones but rather the “colonisation” of universities by a foreign ideology, imposed by a globalised economy on higher education systems throughout the world.

Although the three Namibian universities studied followed global practice in making space for students to be represented on formal structures within them, the question is whether this representation is meaningful, in the sense that it has the potential to enhance quality, or to be merely “symbolic”.

My investigation showed that university managers constructed students’ formal representation on institutional structures as “valuable”. This discursive construction of students as key stakeholders in higher education and drivers of quality is evident in the literature (Mathew & Dollinger, 2022; Trowler, 2018; Klemenčič, 2015; Elassy, 2015; Garwe,

2015). Quality assurance policies at the three institutions studied also identify students as key institutional stakeholders.

In spite of this, members of the SRC interviewed for the purposes of this study claimed that they were often not heard when they tried to raise issues at, for example, a senate. In Chapter Seven, I discussed problems with the students' understandings of representation, which, following the theoretical framing of my study, would be understood to be discursive in origin. One understanding was that because they had been accorded a voice, that voice should carry, in spite of the fact that students were representatives of just one group on a governance body. Councils are the highest decision-making bodies, whereas senates are responsible for academic matters. Both bodies operate on a democratic principle, which means that the majority opinion or vote counts. The study showed that SRC members needed to be made aware that, although provided input on the structures on which they enjoyed representation, this did not mean that action would necessarily result.

The study also showed that students overwhelmingly constructed themselves as customers, a position critiqued in earlier chapters, as the notion is related to the construction of knowledge as a commodity that can be bought and sold. The student-customer metaphor is not ideal in describing the relationship between students and the university in which they are enrolled. This is because the relationship is simply based on the purchase and use of a product, but on a level of interaction between students as learners, those who teach them and the institution responsible for providing learning resources. Contemporary learning theory does not understand learning as a process of "transmitting" knowledge from a teacher to a learner. Rather, learners need to actively involve themselves in constructing meaning for themselves. Learning results from interaction, and the knowledge resulting from it is not simply sold in response to the payment of fees.

In spite of all these problems in the way that students understood governance and their own roles within it, there is also evidence that institutional hierarchies and discourses constructing particular roles for stakeholders in quality assurance processes meant that students' voices were not perceived as being as valuable as those of others. Evidence to support this observation lies in the subservient role allocated to students of following and

obeying rules in policies. Yet more evidence that students' voices were not valued as much as those of others is found in their roles as "administrative assistants" and "event hosts" or "errand runners" (Cheng, 2019).

Yet another constraint on the valuing of students' voices was their construction as immature, with one member of management noting that,

Maturity in them is needed so that they can be actively involved; so that they can meaningfully participate.

Although this may well be the case, the institutions in the study provided very little in the way of training and guidance to prepare students for their roles in governance structures.

As already indicated, a major aim of the study was the identification of enablements and constraints to the involvement of students in the assurance of quality of teaching and learning. Following Bhaskar (1978) and Archer (1995; 1996; 2000), my assumption was that students were concerned about the quality of their education and therefore, were willing to exercise their agency in its assurance. Another assumption was that institutional managers, on the basis of their claim that students were valuable stakeholders, would also exercise their agency to involve students in quality assurance. However, the exercise of agency would always be enabled or constrained by mechanisms located at Bhaskar's level of the Real. In my analysis, I distinguished between structures, which I understood as regulating access to the "goods" of the world, which in this case, was meaningful engagement in quality assurance, and mechanisms, which were understood as discourses.

My analysis revealed hierarchy as a structure constraining the meaningful engagement of students. Positions in a hierarchical structure enabled some agents and constrained others, most notably students. Members of the SRC noted particular concerns regarding the channels that they were required to follow in order to make their views known or to raise issues identified by fellow students. Although SRC members were represented on the senates of the institutions, their position in institutional hierarchies meant that their opinions were often downplayed in discussion. My analysis also showed that student

feedback intended to contribute to the evaluation of teaching and course design was subject to hierarchical constraints, as were complaints which needed to progress through hierarchical channels.

In principle, institutional policies should have enabled student involvement, especially since they constructed students as stakeholders in the three institutions, and as both students and managers interviewed for the purpose of the study saw policies as guiding tools. However, their involvement was then constructed as following rules and regulations. As newcomers to academic life, students did not always understand the new context in which they were immersed, and as a result, found the values and behaviours they were required to adopt, alien. Their lack of familiarity with institutional life and the need to conform to rules and regulations constrained the exercise of their agency. At an institutional level, this meant that their involvement could be seen as the result of the need to conform with more encompassing national policies. This meant that student involvement was appeared to emerge from the need to conform to more encompassing national policies, with the result that it was not always meaningful. The fact that students needed to conform to rules and regulations in order for the policies allowing them to contribute to quality assurance, was exacerbated by their position in institutional hierarchies. A lack of meaningful engagement can thus be seen to emerge from the interplay of policy and hierarchy.

My analysis of the domain of culture identified a number of discourses enabling and constraining meaningful engagement. What I have termed the “training” discourse, for example, identified the need for students to be inducted into the processes associated with quality assurance and the thinking behind them. The practices associated with that discourse, however, were such that they constrained meaningful engagement, as training appeared to consist largely of an introduction to the roles of different offices and entities and instructions on the way to complete a feedback survey. Additionally, the efficacy of training provided to those with specific roles is constrained by the yearly election of SRC members and class representatives, who take the knowledge they have acquired with them when their term of office ends.

Overall, the main role allocated to students was in the provision of feedback on teaching and course design. Discourses constructing students as providers of feedback drew on other discourses related to quality education, professional development, improvement and enhancement. Although students were provided with opportunities to provide feedback, they were not informed of why the institution had, or had not, responded to it; a process which had the potential to undermine their approaches to providing it.

In many respects my study showed that the claim that students were called upon to provide feedback meant that they were involved in assuring quality in teaching and learning were disingenuous, as, for most of the time, the main purpose of eliciting it was to support applications for personal promotion and other instrumental ends (see also Naylor et al., 2021; lipinge et al., 2013; Möwes, 2005; Kahu, 2013; Kadhila, 2017; Read et al., 2001).

8.3 The “big” question

The third question informing my study,

In what ways does student participation enhance, or not enhance, the quality of teaching and learning at higher education institutions in Namibia?

was arguably the most important, as it requires an overall evaluation of claims about student involvement and attempts to involve them in the quality assurance of teaching and learning. As I hope the previous section has shown, claims made by members of management that students are important stakeholders are not evidenced by students’ experiences or, indeed, by the practices introduced by universities.

In many respects, my study revealed an overall failure to grasp the nature of quality assurance and enhancement, underpinned by confused views about the definition of quality. Various, the universities in the study drew on understandings of quality as involving excellence, fitness for purpose, transformation, and value for money, all concepts discussed in Harvey and Green’s (1993) seminal paper, as well as institutionally based understandings that quality involves students following rules and regulations.

Surprisingly, policies at the three universities all drew on constructions of quality as “excellence”, in spite of many critiques in the literature, which argue that it is problematic as it implies “exceptional” or “distinctive” in some way. In higher education, universities are different and have different missions and contexts, and indicators of “excellence” would be weighed differently as a result. When looking at criteria used to judge or measure excellence, it is necessary to ask about whose standards are being used, who defines and sets the criteria. Harvey and Green (1993:11) note that definitions of quality as “excellence” tend to rely on users instinctively knowing quality when they perceive it. Barnett (2004), citing Readings (1996), also criticised the construction of quality as excellence. Harvey and Green’s (1993) conclusion that the most appropriate definition of quality in higher education is that of “fitness for purpose” has informed quality assurance work across the world, but this is not fully taken up by the policies examined for the purposes of my study or by the social actors mandated to drive quality-related work.

Quality as “transformation” and “value for money”, was added to the definition of the concept of “fitness of and for purpose” in South Africa because of its own particular context (CHE, 2001). The Namibian quality assurance policies conceptualise quality as “value for money” and as a “return on investment”, though the notion of “investment” is not explained. Arguably, this concept relates to the idea of knowledge as a commodity that can be bought and sold, and of students as consumers of knowledge. In South Africa the concept of “value for money” can be seen to relate to the four purposes of higher education defined in the White Paper that laid out a path to the transformation of the higher education system following the first democratic election (CHE, 1997):

- i) meeting the learning needs and aspirations of individuals; ii) the creation of a critical citizenry to contribute to development needs of society; iii) the creation and sharing of knowledge; and iv) development of a skilled labour force.

Given this guidance at policy level, in the South African context, the concept of value for money can be seen to relate to the national investment in higher education through state funding. In the definition of quality used in South Africa, the addition of the term “value for

money” aimed to capture “the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper, South Africa” (CHE, 1997) and was understood not to be applicable to the labour market.

Transformation is understood to include behavioural, emotional and cognitive change, therefore, viewed as the experience of engaging with higher education in relation to identity (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008). If higher education aims to impact on students’ identities, an even stronger argument can be made for the need to include their voices as stakeholders in striving to impact on them at deeply personal levels.

My analysis of the policies of the three universities in my study arguably reveals a less than clear understanding of quality; a point that was confirmed by responses from key institutional actors elicited in interviews. Internationally, the definition of quality as “fitness for purpose” dominates quality-related work. In South Africa, the definitions of “fitness of purpose”, “transformation” and “value for money” were added for carefully considered reasons pertinent to the context. The Namibian policies arguably do not demonstrate the same rigour of thinking, with the result that it is hardly surprising that the involvement of students in quality assurance has also not been rigorously interrogated.

Overall, my conclusion is that student involvement in quality assurance in the three Namibian universities leans towards being symbolic. The most significant involvement was in providing feedback on teaching and course design, though this appeared to be used more for instrumental purposes than to effect actual change, even though the teaching and learning centres at the three institutions used results from surveys to plan training for academic teachers. In spite of performing this, no attention appeared to be paid to wider structural and cultural constraints on the enhancement of teaching and course design. Rather, individual academic teachers were assigned the agency to effect change, which, as Behari-Leak (2017) shows, can be problematic.

Apart from being involved in the evaluation of teaching and course design, student representatives were allocated seats on governance bodies. While they occupied seats on senates, academic boards and various committees, there is evidence that students did not understand how these governance structures worked, either in a hierarchical arrangement,

or in actual meetings. In addition, the universities studied did not provide very much in the way of guidance or training in governance to allow students to understand the way that governance structures worked. Had this happened, students may have been able to exercise their agency more meaningfully. There is also evidence that students' contributions to meetings were considered "immature" and that, in any case, their positions as transients in institutions meant that they occupied a lower role in hierarchical arrangements.

8.4 Recommendations

Given my responses to the three questions above, my study allows me to make a number of recommendations.

8.4.1 Policies and manuals on students' involvement

Documents such as policies are tools of power by which people organise and justify their everyday practices (May, 2001). Given that the institutions studied do not have a policy or manual on student involvement, it is appropriate that both should be developed to guide students and staff on what is expected of students and how they should be involved. Existing policies and manuals are important, because they cite the involvement of students in decision-making and affirm the three institutions' commitment to the principle of student involvement in academic governance and administration. More explicit guidelines for student involvement would clarify roles and responsibilities and would contribute to good governance.

Although the study noted that university policies and the SRC Constitution include roles and responsibilities, the study shows that student involvement leans more towards compliance with quality assurance bodies such as the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and the Namibia Qualification Authority (NQA). The need to re-examine the status of student involvement in order to determine their status on this subject is key for the future in the transformation of governance (Mwiria et al., 2007), as well as to ensuring that students' input counts and is not merely symbolic. Manuals would serve as reference points, given that students often only serve in representative positions for a year. It would also save costs that might be incurred during training. Manuals could also contribute to training activities.

8.4.2 Training

Insights from the study show that students are not adequately trained to know what is expected of them. Often, they are informed of the purpose of what they are being asked to do, a few minutes before completing a survey or form to elicit feedback on teaching or course design. Although SRC members brief the incoming SRC members before taking up office, the extent to which briefings are accurate or sufficient is questionable. Students' involvement in quality assurance should be a priority for all higher education institutions. Therefore, in order to be more transparent and less bureaucratic from the onset, students require more training and guidance.

8.4.3 Interrogation of student involvement beliefs and practices

As already noted, the NCHE is the umbrella body for higher education in Namibia. Its vision is to be “a valued leader and partner in coordinating higher education in pursuit of a knowledge-based society”, and its mission is to “ensure a coordinated and responsive higher education through equitable access and quality service delivery” (NCHE, 2023:v). Given these goals, it would be appropriate, given the observations made in this thesis, for the NCHE to lead a process which involved discussion and interrogation of beliefs about student involvement and the practices associated with it.

Overwhelmingly, the study revealed students' perceptions that they “were not heard” when they raised issues. This observation calls for the need to clarify claims regarding the value of students' input and to ask questions about whether institutions are simply ascribing to a discourse privileging involvement without ensuring it is meaningful. There is a need to develop report-feedback systems for both students and lecturers in order to make student feedback more meaningful. More meaningful involvement would also be achieved by ensuring that students were adequately trained and supported as they exercised the responsibilities allocated to them. Student involvement needs to be genuine, not symbolic, and integral to institutional culture.

8.5 Areas for future research

This study discussed what constitutes student involvement in quality assurance in higher education, particularly as institutions battle to assume leading roles in involving students in order to enhance and improve quality education. Based on the findings and recommendations, a few questions emerge and present opportunities for further research.

The lack of extensive studies on student involvement in quality assurance in Africa and in Namibia, calls for more studies on the practices involved, especially related to governance. One particular point of interest relates to the purposes of student-lecturer evaluations. As Boughey (2021) has pointed out, evaluations of teaching and course design need to be clearly understood as a form of research, with the result that evaluation tools need to be carefully considered and designed, and that the inputs received from different stakeholders should be triangulated against each other. Research on how institutions understand evaluation as a form of research-based practice and the role of student feedback within it, would illuminate current practices and identify problematic assumptions.

Another area for potentially fruitful research would be students' understandings of governance in higher education. This would be particularly important, given the introduction of New Public Management and the construction of vice-chancellors, pro vice-chancellors, deans and others as "management". Historically, vice-chancellors were leaders who needed the support of academics in the senate and who did not have executive powers. This is often no longer the case, given their current understandings and their colleagues', roles. Students often want to "push upwards" with complaints, thinking that those in positions at the top of the hierarchy will have the power to address them, when this may not be the case. In my study, students also appeared to believe that, if they raised an issue at a meeting, it would be addressed, and that, when it failed to be resolved, that they had been ignored. They also complained of "channels", by which they referred to the hierarchical nature of institutional organisations. A study involving a discourse analysis of their understandings of governance could be illuminating and could inform training activities and the preparation of manuals and the development of policies.

8.6 Conclusion

My hope in completing the study underpinning this thesis was that it would better allow students to participate in assuring the quality of their own education, something which is particularly important given high tuition costs and the sacrifices made by individuals and families to allow young people to learn at the highest levels. I believe that my study has revealed much that is problematic in the way the three institutions I studied understood student involvement and the practices developed to allow it. My task now is to disseminate my findings as widely as possible.

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Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Letter



Human Ethics subcommittee
Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee
PO Box 94 Grahamstown, 6161, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 9353
f: +27 (0) 46 625 0321
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za

www.ru.ac.za/research/ethics
NHRRC Registration no. REC-241119-005

4 August 2020

Anneli NGHIKEMBUA

Email: g07N9069@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2020-0354-3231

Dear Prof Quinn

Title: THE ROLE OF STUDENTS IN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (IQA): A CASE STUDY OF NAMIBIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Principal Investigator: Prof Lym Quinn

Collaborators: Ms. Anneli Nghikembua.

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) – Human Ethics (HE) sub-committee.

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloging number allocated.

Sincerely,

Prof Arthur Webb

Chair: Human Ethics Sub-Committee, RUESC- HE

Appendix 2: Permission Letter



**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

11 Jackson Kaputura Street
Private Bag 13198
Windhoek
NAMIBIA

T: +264 61 207 2119
F: +264 61 207 9719
E: registrar@nust.na
W: www.nust.na

Office of the Registrar

26 May 2020

Anneli Nghikembua
Email:
Windhoek
Namibia

Dear Ms Nghikembua

RE: CONSENT TO CONDUCT YOUR RESEARCH WITH THE NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STAFF AND STUDENT

The email dated 22 May 2020, has reference:

Approval is hereby granted for you to conduct a research on *"The Role of Students in Internal Quality Assurance (iqa): A case study of Namibian Institutions of Higher Education"* at the Namibia University of Science and Technology. Any information gathered during the research is to be used for the purpose of the study only and must be treated as confidential. The results of the study should be shared with the University. Individual information of staff and students will not be made available, nor will biographical information of students be made available in such a way that individual students can be identified.

You are advised to contact the Acting Director of Quality Assurance: Ms Anneley Willemse to compile a list of possible respondents to your data collection instrument.

I wish you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely,

**Mr Maurice Garde
REGISTRAR**

CC: Director: QA
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation
Assistant Registrar

Appendix 3: Permission Letter

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor: Research Innovation and Development

UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA, Private Bag, 13301 Windhoek, Namibia

340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneers Park, Office D090 ☎ +264-61-2064624 ✉ research@unam.na Fax +264-61-206 4624



22 June 2020

Dear Ms Anneli Nghikembua,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA (UNAM)

Your application to conduct research at UNAM entitled: **'The role of students in Internal Quality Assurance (IQA): A case study of Namibian Institutions of Higher Education'** was considered based on ethical evaluation from your institution. Hence, permission is hereby granted with the following conditions:

1. During the course of your research activities at UNAM, you will observe the required procedures, norms and ethical conduct in accordance with the relevant Research Policies and Guidelines. If unsure, please consult the *Centre for Research and Publications* at UNAM for guidance. Any deviations and amendments to the original documents submitted (i.e. research proposal, interview guide, consent forms, etc.) must be submitted again for approval, before the research activities can commence.
2. The results of the findings will be shared with the PVC: Research, Innovation and Development, and the Centre for Research and Publications, before they are disseminated or published in the public domain.
3. Upon completion, a copy of the Research Report must be lodged with the UNAM Library for our records.
4. Proper, full acknowledgements of the University of Namibia and all participants /respondents shall be done in the Research Report and any subsequent publications arising from this research.

If you are agreeable to the above conditions, please sign and date a copy of this letter and return it to the Centre for Research and Publications (Email: research@unam.na). If you have any queries, do not hesitate to contact the Centre for Research and Publications.

Wishing you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hileni M. Kapenda', is written over a horizontal dotted line.

Dr. Hileni M. Kapenda

I accept and agree to all the conditions

.....
Full Name and Surname

.....
Signature

.....
Date

Appendix 4: Permission Letter



IUM
GLOBAL HUB FOR MANAGEMENT SCIENCE
AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Dear Ms A Nghikembua

Date 4.3.2020

RE: Research Permission

This letter confirms the approval of your request at a meeting of the Research Ethics Committee which was held on the 3.3.2020.

The proposal demonstrates an awareness of ethical responsibilities and a commitment to ethical research processes. The approval of the proposal by the committee thus constitutes ethical clearance.

In order to acquire the information from different sources that you have requested the following Offices of the International University of Management needed to be contacted;

Prof O Arowolo (Acting Vice Chancellor) for any policies or documents of the university.

Email address: o.arowolo@ium.edu.na

Mr S Naruseb (Human Resource Director) data or interviews/questionnaires from staff members.

Email address: s.naruseb@ium.edu.na


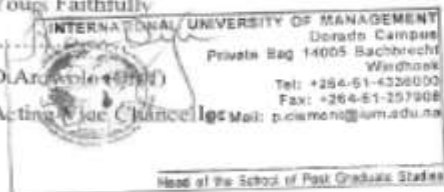
Mr A Nashilundo (Registrar) for entering the data base and information from students interviews/questionnaires.

Email address: a.nashilundo@ium.edu.na

All information released are subjected to policies of the International University of Management.

However, because of our own interest in research we expect you to share your findings with us on completion of your research study.

Yours Faithfully

Appendix 5: Invitation to participate in a research study

{Participant's Name}

{Name of institution}

Dear {participant's name}

Re: Invitation to participate in a research study

My name is Anneli Nghikembua and I am a PHD student at Rhodes University. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Prof. Lynn Quinn. I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study entitled "The role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia". This includes looking at the current systems in place as well as identifying any challenges experienced in order to find better ways in which students can be actively and effectively involved in the teaching and learning of the institution. The findings of this study may contribute to informing higher education institutions in Namibia on ways in which to develop quality assurance systems that enable students to be active participants in the education they receive.

This study involves one 60 minutes interview that will take place in a mutually convenient, safe location on your campus. With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed, the audio-recording will be destroyed. While this research does involve some professional and emotional risks, care will be taken to protect your identity. This will be done by keeping all responses anonymous and allowing you to request that certain responses not be included in the final project.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher and the research supervisor.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by Rhodes University Ethics Committee, which provided approval {2020-0354-3231} for undertaking this research.

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

Sincerely,

Anneli Nghikembua

Should you have any questions or queries regarding ethical issues of this study kindly contact Rhodes University Ethics Coordinator, at the contact details provided below:

Mr. Siyanda Manqele

Email: s.manqelere@ru.ac.za

Tel: 0866167707

Appendix 6: Recruitment email inviting participation

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research project on the role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia.

Dear Sir/Madam

I am pleased to invite you to participate in a study on the role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia. The study aims to investigate: a) the current systems, b) active students' participation in the quality of teaching of their institution and c) identify any challenges experienced. The outcome of this study will strengthen active and effective participation in the teaching and learning of the institution supported by student input.

Your participation is important as it will help inform higher education institutions in Namibia on ways in which to develop quality assurance systems geared towards students and the education they receive.

Please find the following documents attached:

- Rhodes University ethical clearance letter
- (insert institutions name) ethical clearance letter/ letter of approval to conduct research
- Formal letter of invitation to the study, which details purpose of the study, issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and duration of the interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. For any further enquiries, please contact me by cell: 0812876581, email: annelienghikembua@gmail.com. Further, the suitable times for the interview, venue and issues of consent can be discussed.

Sincerely,

Anneli Nghikembua (Ms)

PHD Student, CHERTL, Rhodes University, South Africa

Appendix 7: Informed consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study	The role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia
Researcher's Name	Anneli Nghikembua
Institution	Rhodes University
Department	Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)
Supervisor	Prof Lynn Quinn
Researcher's contact details	Cell: 0812876581 Email: annelienghikembua@gmail.com
Rhodes EHDC approval reference number	2020-0354-3231
Institution's approval reference number	

Background:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the information contained herein carefully. Do ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. This study seeks to critically analyse current systems in place that enable/ constraint students' active involvement in quality of the teaching and learning of the institution. The findings of this study may contribute to informing higher education institutions in Namibia on ways in which to develop quality assurance and enhancement systems that enable students to be active participants in the education they receive.

Please do not use any identifying information in your responses. If you do, my mistake I will have them removed from the transcript. Your responses will be used anonymously. You may

request that all or part of your responses be kept anonymous at any time. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all researcher notes and documents. Notes, interview transcriptions, and transcribed notes and any other identifying participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher. When no longer necessary for research, all materials will be destroyed after 5 years. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. Each participant has the opportunity to obtain a transcribed copy of their interview. Participants should tell the researcher if a copy of the interview is desired. There is no monetary compensation to you for your participation in this study.

Consent:

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that this interview will be recorded. I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Signature:

Date:

Research participant

Signature:

Date:

Interviewer

Appendix 8: Interview guides

Title of the Study	The role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia
Researcher's Name	Anneli Nghikembua
Institution	Rhodes University
Department	Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)
Supervisor	Prof Lynn Quinn
Researcher's contact details	-
Rhodes University EHDC approval reference number	2020-0354-3231
Institution's approval reference number	REC-241134-043

Date: Interviewee & Category:

Institution & Venue: Starting time:

Time ended:

Introductory remarks

Good day and welcome to our session

Thanks for accepting and taking time to be interviewed for my study. The study aims to critically investigate the role played by students in the quality of their education. This includes looking at the current systems in place as well as identifying any challenges experienced by students in order to find better ways in which students can be actively and effectively involved in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning of their institutions. Any critiques that may be arise from this exercise will be used constructively to help improve the status quo pertaining to the quality of teaching and learning in the institution. The findings of this study may contribute to informing higher education institutions in

Namibia of ways in which to develop quality assurance systems that enable students to be active participants in the education they receive.

Please feel free to express your views, as there are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. You have probably noticed the recorder, with your permission the session will be recorded in order to capture accurately your responses and to validate my research. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. Your confidentiality will be assured thus names are not required. The interview is for research purposes only. You will have access to the recording and transcription should you wish. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any given time during the study. I have prepared an informed consent where I have outlined the confidentiality details and ethical consideration matters of this study. Please sign before we begin with the interview.

The following questions will be used to guide the interview

Quality assurance of teaching & learning at	
Question	Response/Comment
In what ways are students involved or not involved as stakeholder in the quality of teaching & learning of the institution?	
Do you think students should be involved in assuring/enhancing the quality of teaching and learning of the institution? Why?	

Structures and Student involvement	
What structures are in place to ensure that you are actively involved in the quality of teaching and learning and that your voices are heard?	
What policies/regulations do you know of that exist at the institution to help you participate in assuring quality in teaching & learning? In your view, do you think these policies/regulations help you be active participants in matters relating to quality of teaching & learning? Explain	

Quality enhancement & Student involvement	
If you participate in the teaching and learning aspects of your institution, what contribution would that make to quality education?	

Values & beliefs of student involvement	
In what ways could your participation bring about changes in the quality of teaching and learning at your institution?	
Explain briefly. In what ways have you noted that your views are taken into consideration?	

Enablers/ Constraints	
Considering your role in the institution, what enables or constraints you from being effectively/ actively involved in the quality of teaching and learning?	

Recommendations for effective / active student participation [if appropriate]	
What recommendations would you make to your institution to ensure that students are more actively involved in the quality of your education and that your voices are heard?	
What other comments do you want to add?	

B: focus group Interview guide for DVC: Academic and faculty deans

Title of the Study	The role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia
Researcher's Name	Anneli Nghikembua
Institution	Rhodes University
Department	Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)
Supervisor	Prof Lynn Quinn
Researcher's contact details	-
Rhodes University EHDC approval reference number	2020-0354-3231
Institution's approval reference number	REC-241134-043

Date: Interviewee & Category:

Institution & Venue: Starting time:

Time ended:

Introductory remarks

Good day and welcome to our session

Thanks for accepting and taking time to be interviewed for my study. The study aims to critically investigate the role played by students in the quality of their education. This includes looking at the current systems in place as well as identifying any challenges experienced by the quality assurance unit in order to find better ways in which students can be actively and effectively involved in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in their institutions. Any critiques that may arise from this exercise will be used constructively to help improve the status quo pertaining to the quality of teaching and learning in the institution. The findings of this study may contribute to informing higher education

institutions in Namibia of ways in which to develop quality assurance systems that enable students to be active participants in the education they receive.

Please feel free to express your views as there are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. You have probably noticed the recorder, with your permission the session will be recorded in order to capture accurately your responses and to validate my research. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. Your confidentiality will be assured thus names are not required. The interview is for research purposes only. You will have access to the recording and transcription should you wish. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any given time during the study.

I have prepared an informed consent where I have outlined the confidentiality details and ethical consideration matters of this study. Please sign before we begin with the interview.

The following questions will be used to guide the interviews of deputy vice chancellor (DVC):
Academic and Faculty Deans

Quality assurance and student involvement in teaching & learning at	
Question	Response/Comment
As the DVC for Academic/ Faculty Dean, in what ways are students involved or not involved as stakeholder in the quality of teaching & learning of the institution?	
What role does the DVC's office/ faculty play in ensuring that students play an active role in the teaching & learning of the institution? And that their voices are heard?	

Structures and Student involvement	
What structures are in place to ensure that students actively participate in the quality of teaching and learning? Are there any monitoring systems? Explain	
Does the institution/ faculty have a policy/ (ies) in place to ensure that students are involved in the quality matters relating to teaching & learning? Why/why not?	
How would you describe the effectiveness of these structures or policies in enabling / constraining student participation in teaching and learning?	

Quality enhancement & Student involvement	
In what ways does student participation enhance or not enhance the quality of teaching and learning? Explain	
How does the institution/ faculty ensure that students continue to actively participate in matters related to the quality of teaching and learning?	

Values & beliefs of student involvement	
What rights do students have in the institution/ faculty that relate to quality assurance and teaching and learning?	

Enablers/ Constraints	
Considering your role and that of the institution/ faculty, what enables or constraints your unit to effectively/ actively involve students in the quality of teaching and learning.	

Recommendations for effective / active student participation	
If you think students should be more involved in quality matters related to teaching and learning, how do you suggest this could be effected?	
Any other comments you would like to add?	

c. individual Interview guide for quality assurance officers/directors

Title of the Study	The role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia
Researcher's Name	Anneli Nghikembua
Institution	Rhodes University
Department	Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)
Supervisor	Prof Lynn Quinn
Researcher's contact details	-
Rhodes University EHDC approval reference number	2020-0354-3231
Institution's approval reference number	REC-241134-043

Date: Interviewee & Category:

Institution & Venue: Starting time:

Time ended:

Introductory remarks

Good day and welcome to our session

Thanks for accepting and taking time to be interviewed for my study. The study aims to critically investigate the role played by students in the quality of their education. This includes looking at the current systems in place as well as identifying any challenges experienced by the quality assurance unit in order to find better ways in which students can be actively and effectively involved in enhancing the quality teaching and learning in their institutions. Any critiques that may be raised in this exercise will be used constructively to help improve the status quo pertaining to the quality of teaching and learning in the institution. The findings of this study may contribute to informing higher education

institutions in Namibia of ways in which to develop quality assurance systems that enable students to be active participants in the education they receive.

Please feel free to express your views as there are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. You have probably noticed the recorder, with your permission the session will be recorded in order to capture accurately your responses and to validate my research. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. Your confidentiality will be assured thus names are not required. The interview is for research purposes only. You will have access to the recording and transcription should you wish. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any given time during the study. I have prepared an informed consent where I have outlined the confidentiality details and ethical consideration matters of this study. Please sign before we begin with the interview.

The following questions will be used to guide the interviews of quality assurance officers

Quality assurance and student involvement in teaching & learning at	
Question	Response/Comment
As a quality assurance body of the institution, in what ways are students involved or not involved as stakeholder in the quality of teaching & learning of the institution?	
What role does the unit/ unit/ centre/ department/ faculty play in ensuring that students play an active role in the teaching & learning of the institution? And that their voices are heard?	

Structures and Student involvement	
What structures are in place to ensure that students actively participate in the quality of teaching and learning? Are there any monitoring systems? Explain	
Does the unit have a policy (ies) in place to ensure that students are involved in the quality matters relating to teaching & learning? Why/why not?	
How would you describe the effectiveness of these structures or policies in enabling / constraining student participation in teaching and learning?	

Quality enhancement & Student involvement	
In what ways does student participation enhance or not enhance the quality of teaching and learning? Explain	
How does the quality assurance unit ensure that students continue to actively participate in matters related to the quality of teaching and learning?	

Values & beliefs of student involvement	
What rights do students have in the institution that relate to quality assurance and teaching and learning?	

Enablers/ Constraints	
Considering your role and that of the unit, what enables or constraints your unit to effectively/ actively involve students in the quality of teaching and learning.	

Recommendations for effective / active student participation	
If you think students should be more involved in quality matters related to T&L, how do you suggest this could be effected?	
Any other comments you would like to add?	

Individual Interview guide for directors of teaching & learning unit/ centre

Title of the Study	The role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia
Researcher's Name	Anneli Nghikembua
Institution	Rhodes University
Department	Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)
Supervisor	Prof Lynn Quinn
Researcher's contact details	Cell: 0812876581 Email: annelienghikembua@gmail.com
Rhodes University EHDC approval reference number	2020-0354-3231
Institution's approval reference number	REC-241134-043

Date: Interviewee & Category:

Institution & Venue: Starting time:

Time ended:

Introductory remarks

Good day and welcome to our session

Thanks for accepting and taking time to be interviewed for my study. The study aims to critically investigate the role played by students in the quality of their education. This includes looking at the current systems in place as well as identifying any challenges experienced by the teaching and learning unit/center in order to find better ways in which students can be actively and effectively involved in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in their institutions. Any critiques that may be raised through this exercise will be used constructively to help improve the status quo pertaining to the quality of teaching and

learning in the institution. The findings of this study may contribute to informing higher education institutions in Namibia of ways in which to develop quality assurance systems that enable students to be active participants in the education they receive. Please feel free to express your views as there are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. You have probably noticed the recorder, with your permission the session will be recorded in order to capture accurately your responses and to validate my research. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. Your confidentiality will be assured thus names are not required. The interview is for research purposes only. You will have access to the recording and transcription should you wish. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any given time during the study.

I have prepared an informed consent where I have outlined the confidentiality details and ethical consideration matters of this study. Please sign before we begin with the interview.

The following questions will be used to guide the interview of directors of the teaching & learning units/centre.

Quality assurance and student involvement in teaching & learning at	
Question	Response/Comment
As a unit responsible for the quality of teaching and learning of the institution, in what ways are students involved or not involved as stakeholder in the quality of teaching & learning of the institution?	
What role does the unit play in ensuring that students play an active role in the teaching & learning of the institution? And that their voices are heard?	

Structures and Student involvement	
What structures did the unit devise to ensure that students actively participate in the quality of teaching and learning? Are there any monitoring systems? Explain	
What is the role of student evaluation/ feedback in assuring the quality of teaching and learning?	
Does the unit have a policy (ies) in place to ensure that students are involved in the quality matters relating to teaching and learning? Why/why not?	
How would you describe the effectiveness of these structures or policies in enabling / constraining student participation in teaching and learning?	

Quality enhancement and Student involvement	
In what ways does student participation enhance or not enhance the quality of teaching and learning? Explain	
How does the teaching and learning unit ensure that students continue to actively participate in matters related to the quality of teaching and learning?	

Values and beliefs of student involvement	
What rights do they have in the institution that relates to quality assurance and teaching and learning?	
What is the value of student evaluation/ feedback in the quality of education?	

Enablers/ Constraints	
Considering your role and that of the unit, what enables or constraints your unit from effectively/ actively involving students in the quality of teaching and learning.	

Recommendations for effective / active student participation	
If you think students should be more involved in quality matters related to T&L, how do you suggest this could be effected?	
Any other comments you would like to add?	

Individual Interview guide for the director of the NCHE

Title of the Study	The role of students in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions in Namibia
Researcher's Name	Anneli Nghikembua
Institution	Rhodes University
Department	Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)
Supervisor	Prof Lynn Quinn
Researcher's contact details	Cell: 0812876581 Email: annelienghikembua@gmail.com
Rhodes University EHDC approval reference number	2020-0354-3231
Institution's approval reference number	REC-241134-043

Date: Interviewee & Category:

Institution & Venue:Starting time:

Time ended:

Introductory remarks

Good day and welcome to our session

Thanks for accepting and taking time to be interviewed for my study. The study aims to critically investigate the role played by students in the quality of their education. This includes looking at the current systems in place as well as identifying any challenges experienced by the teaching and learning unit/center in order to find better ways in which students can be actively and effectively involved in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in their institutions. Any critiques that may be raised through this exercise will be used constructively to help improve the status quo pertaining to the quality of teaching and learning in the institution. The findings of this study may contribute to informing higher education institutions in Namibia of ways in which to develop quality assurance systems that enable students to be active participants in the education they receive.

Please feel free to express your views as there are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. You have probably noticed the recorder, with your permission the session will be recorded in order to capture accurately your responses and to validate my research. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. Your confidentiality will be assured thus names are not required. The interview is for research purposes only. You will have access to the recording and transcription should you wish. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any given time during the study.

I have prepared an informed consent where I have outlined the confidentiality details and ethical consideration matters of this study. Please sign before we begin with the interview.

The following questions will be used to guide the interview of the director of the National Council for Higher Education.

Quality assurance and student involvement	
Question	Response/Comment
As the umbrella body for all higher education institutions and custodian of quality assurance, in what ways do you/ do not ensure that institutions involve students in matters relating to the quality of teaching and learning.	
What role does the NCHE play in ensuring that students play an active role in the teaching and learning of the institution? And that their voices are heard?	

Structures and Student involvement	
What structures did NCHE devise to ensure that institutions actively involve students in the quality of teaching and learning? Are there any monitoring systems? Explain	
Institutions often use evaluations/ feedback forms, what is the role of these in assuring the quality of teaching and learning?	
Does NCHE have a policy(ies) in place to ensure that institutions involve students in the quality matters relating to teaching and learning? Why/why not?	
How would you describe the effectiveness of these structures or policies in enabling / constraining student participation in teaching and learning?	

Quality enhancement and Student involvement	
In what ways does student participation enhance or not enhance the quality of teaching and learning? Explain	
How does NCHE ensure that students continue to actively participate in matters related to the quality of teaching and learning?	

Values and beliefs of student involvement	
What rights do students have in the institution that relates to quality assurance and teaching and learning?	
What is the value of student evaluation/ feedback in the quality of education?	

Enablers/ Constraints	
Considering your role and that of NCHE, what enables or constraints your the council from effectively/ actively ensuring that students are involved in the quality of teaching and learning of the institution.	

Recommendations for effective / active student participation	
If you think students should be more involved in quality matters related to T&L, how do you suggest this could be effected?	
Any other comments you would like to add?	

Appendix 9: Examples of data analysis

Figures 19-28 present the coding of data obtained from the analysis tool Atlas.ti8 software.

Evaluation discourse

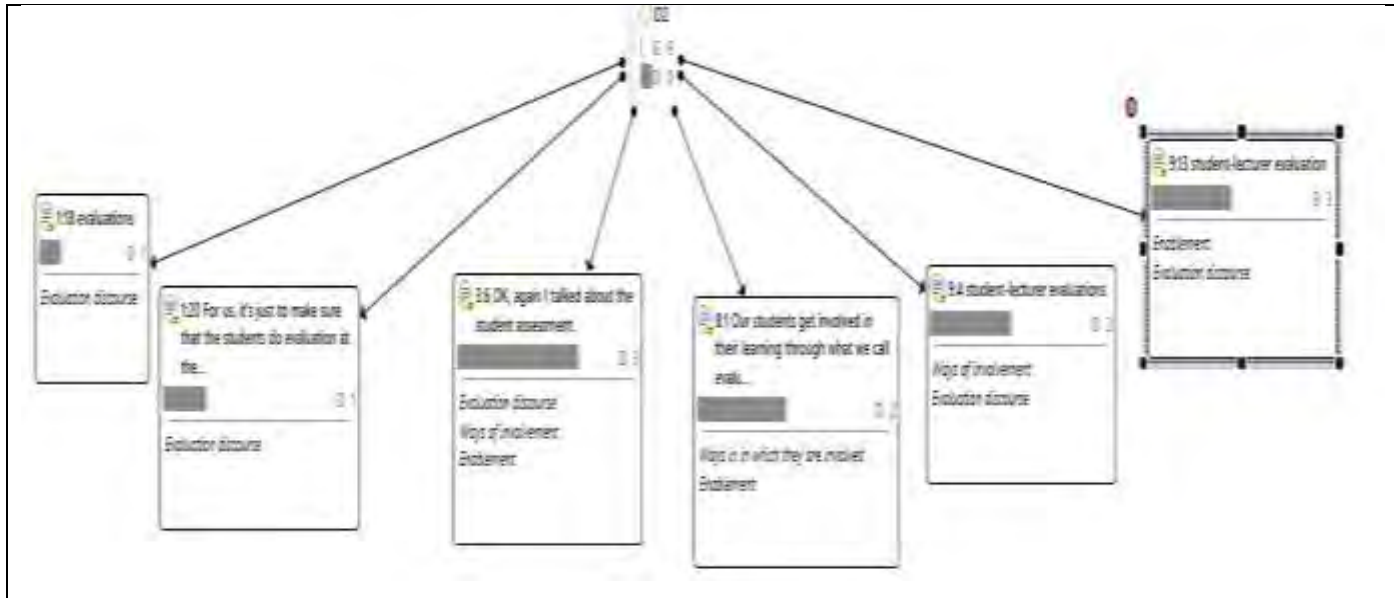


Figure 19: Coding of the Evaluation discourse

Compliance discourse

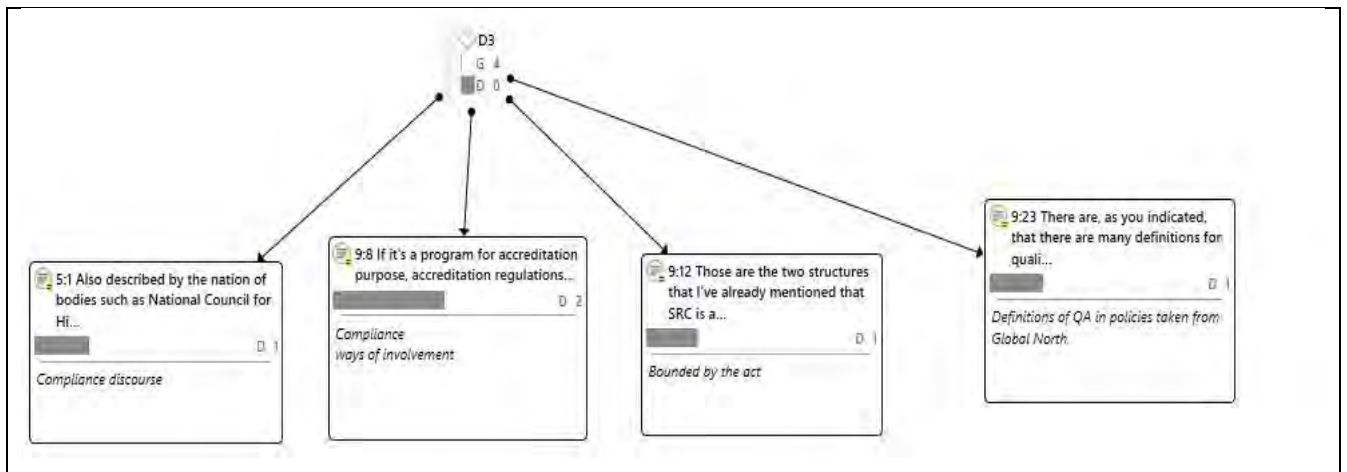


Figure 20: Coding of the Compliance discourse

Consumer discourse

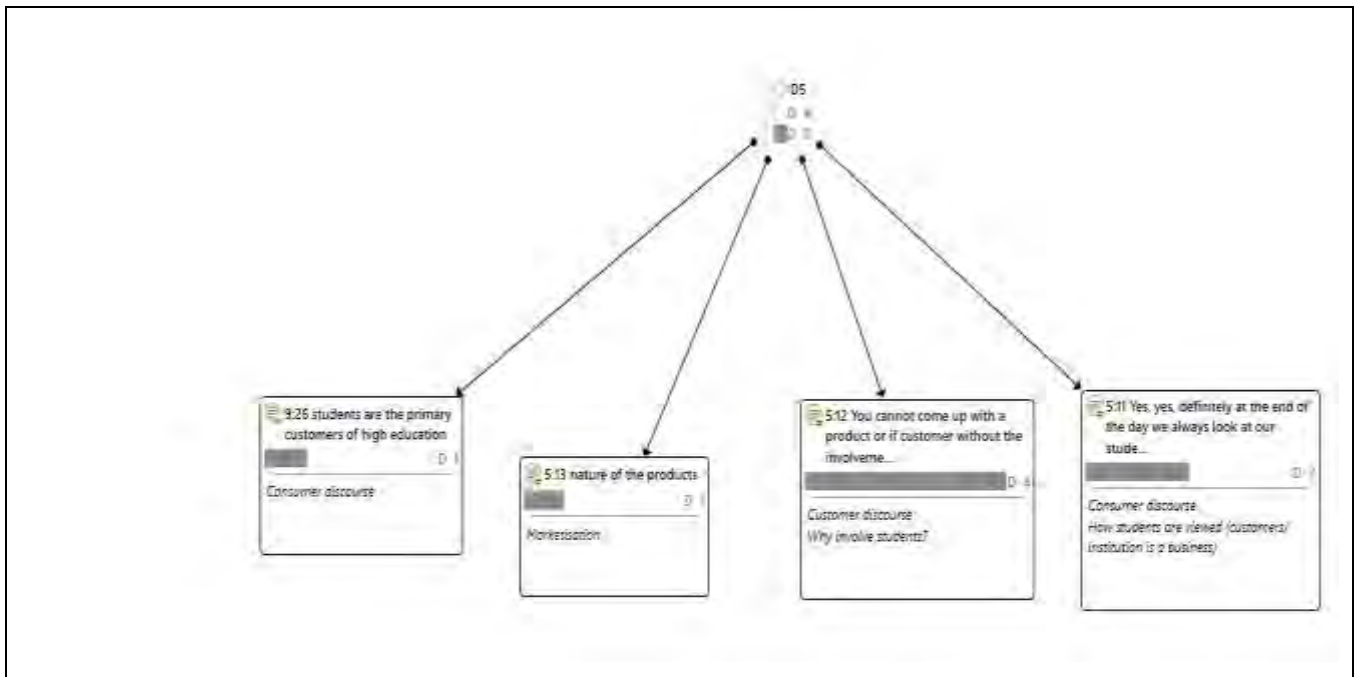


Figure 21: Coding of the Consumer discourse

Enablement and constraints

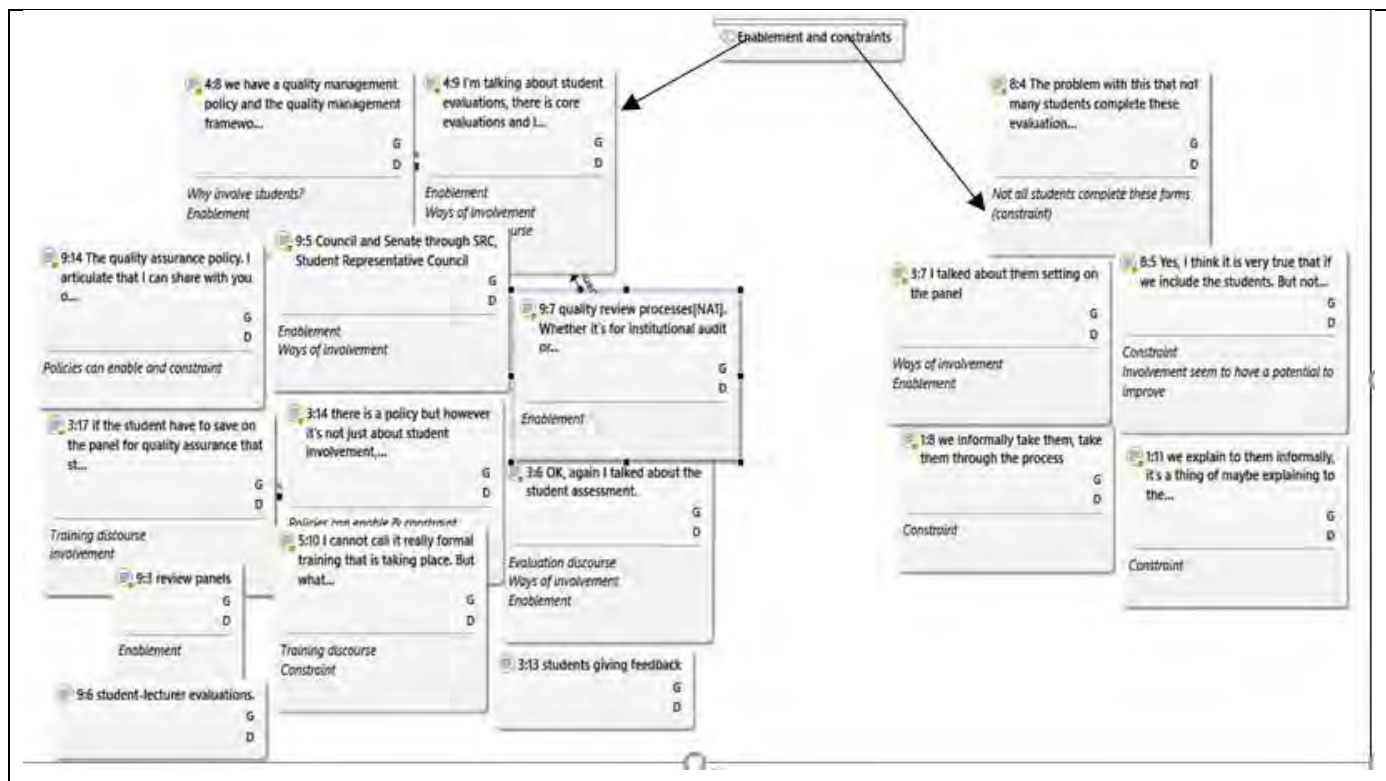


Figure 22: Coding of the Enablement and Constraints

SRC members' ways of involvement in the quality of teaching and learning

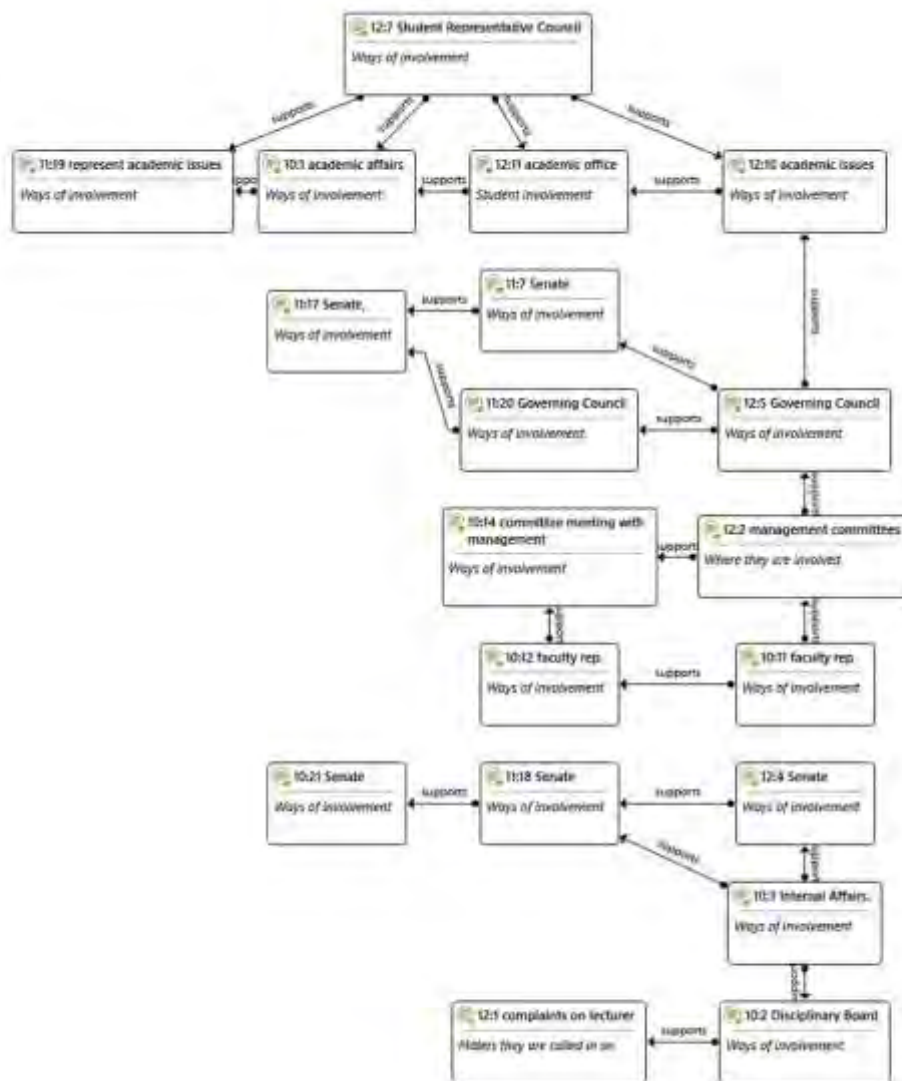


Figure 23: Coding on ways of student involvement (SRC members)

SRC members' perceptions on their involvement

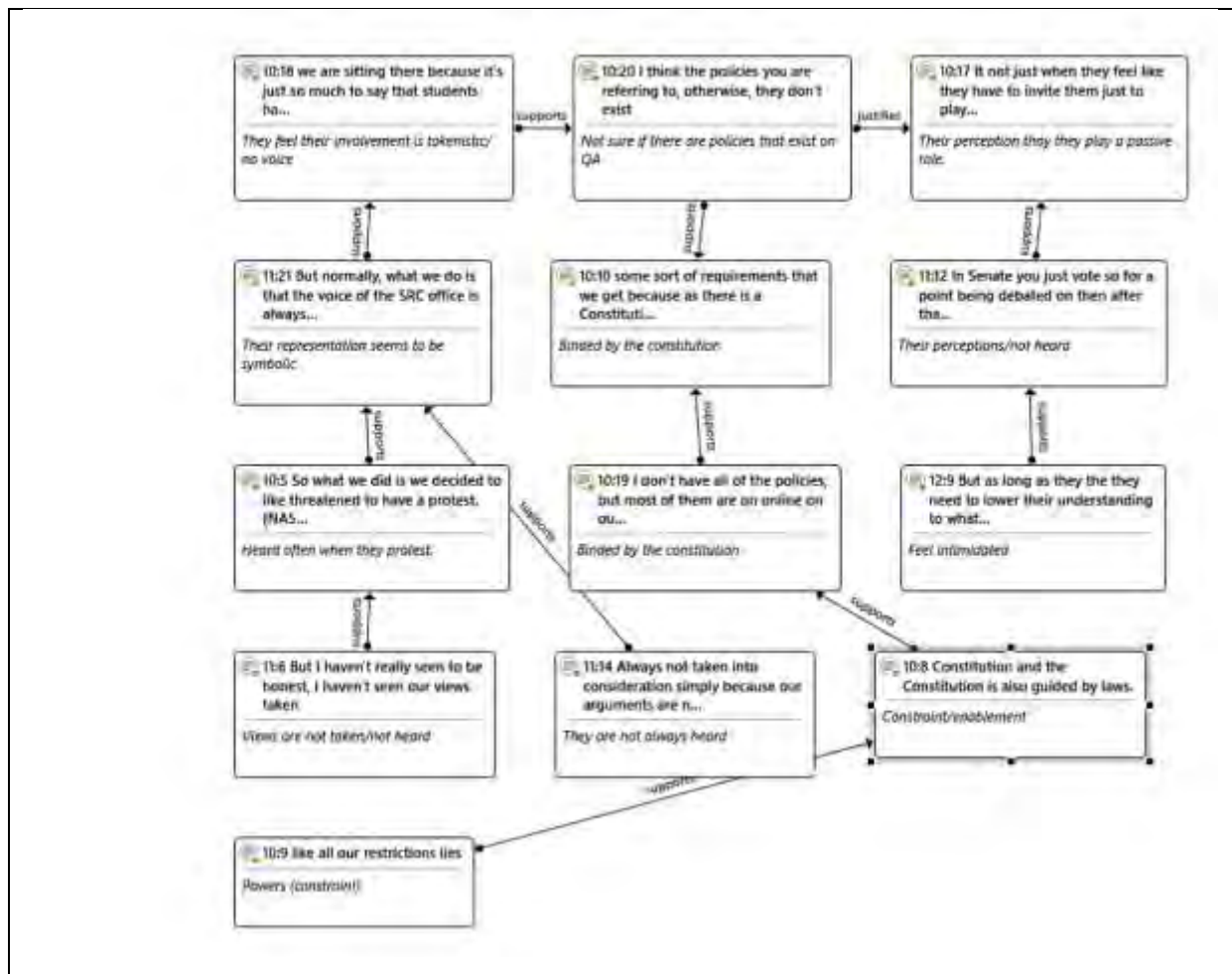


Figure 24: Perceptions of their involvement and Binding documents of their involvement

Hierarchy: structure

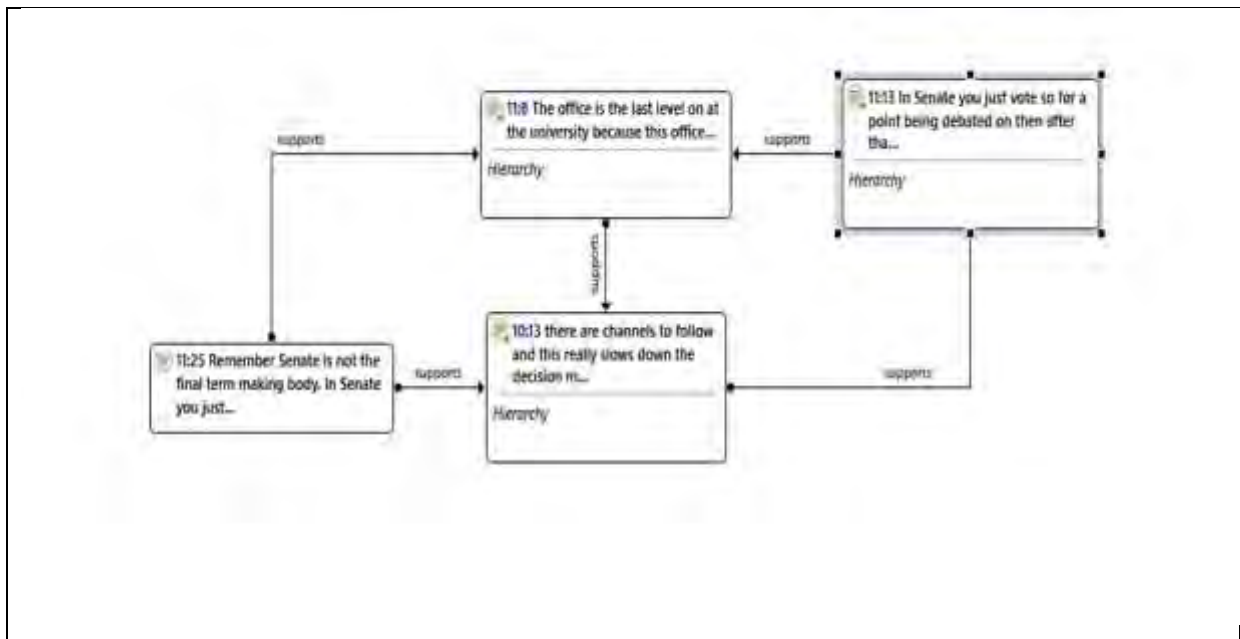


Figure 25: Coding of hierarchy structure

Customer discourse

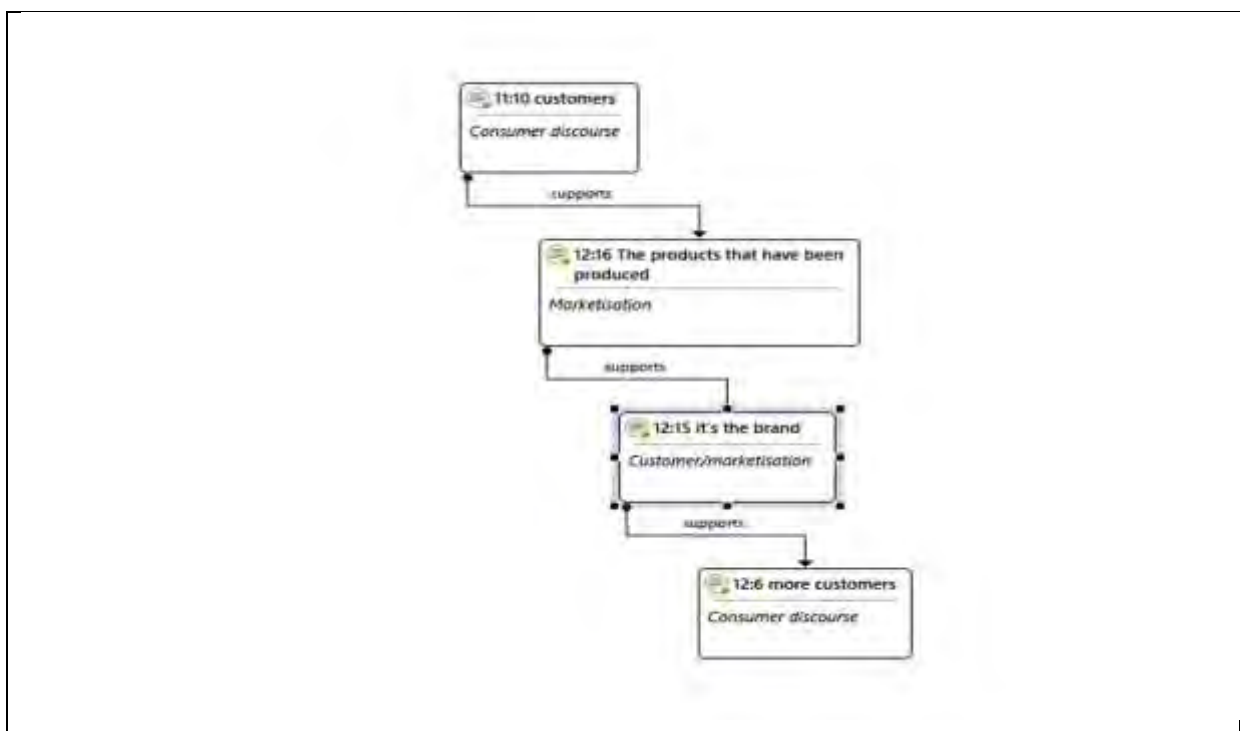


Figure 26: Coding of the Customer discourse

Appendix 10: Sample responses from institutions

This appendix presents sample responses obtained from interviews at the three Namibian HE institutions and from NCHE. The data per institution is presented in accordance of the research questions and the purpose of the study, hence only the responses that satisfy the research questions have been chosen. The responses obtained show that the institutions have been conditioned in the same way.

Institution 1

Ways in which students (particularly, SRC members) are involved

Table 8 presents information obtained from members of the management on institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved.

Table 8: Data from members of management

Institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved	
Curriculum review	Board of studies
Quality review processes	Review panels
Curriculum development	Accreditation of programmes
Student lecturer forums	Senate
Institutional audit or program accreditation	Preparatory Committee (SRC and final year student/s)
Student-lecturer evaluations	Council
Student representatives (departmental level per course)	SRC members in different statutory structures

Ways in which students are involved

Table 9: ways of involvement

Institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved	
Curriculum review	Academic affairs Academic committee
Curriculum development	Board of studies
Writing letters e.g. to Deans on dissatisfaction of a course	Senate
Preparatory process relating to teaching and Learning	Disciplinary board
Student evaluations	Council
Lecturer evaluations	Faculty Representatives Class representatives

Table 9 presents information obtained from students (SRC members) on institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved. Table 10 shows sample responses from which Tables 8 and 9 are extracted.

Table 10: ways of involvement

Responses obtained from the members of management	Responses obtained from members of the SRCs
The third way is through their representation in the university statutory structures like council and senate through SRC, Student Representative Council because SRCs are provided for in the Act, which established the university. They evaluate their lectures; they do it at the end of	The SRC office is representing the office in the senate and in the governing council. We communicate between the students and the Board to ensure that they submit quality work. In the Academic Committee there is Student Representative Council, I just assist with day to day

<p>the semester. If it's a year course they have to do it at the end of the year.</p> <p>If it's a program for accreditation purpose, accreditation regulations provide that it must be a third year student in that particular program. Therefore, when we put together partners, for example, when NCHE asked us to give their names.</p> <p>The lecturers are participating in that forum with their students. Where students are raising their experience or their expressing their experience about their faculties and they also air their concerns. Our students get involved in their learning through what we call evaluation forms. Evaluation forms which are done, the exercise is done at the end of the semester after that is where we have the problem that it is done. So that is one method, evaluation forms.</p>	<p>administration and policy seeking, especially with campus academic issues.</p> <p>A student-lecture evaluation exercise, which students conduct.</p> <p>Faculty representative. So primarily the role of faculty represent the academic interest of students in that specific faculty and also coordinate all the class reps within that faculty.</p> <p>OK, let me go first, I. I won't bother saying my name because I know it won't be transcribed, but I do serve as the student representative over academic affairs for the campus of [...] for all campuses actually.</p> <p>I also sit part of the disciplinary board where students are or may be subjected to as like appear.</p>
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Table 11: ways of involvement Responses from management on why students are involved

Responses from members of management on their involvement	Responses from members of SRC on their involvement
<p>We have established an online implementation committee and we also have student representatives on this committee. Because I mean, this is how much we value student involvement to make sure that you know they are included in our structures as far as possible. And also making sure that students, you know, bring their side and give their input and let them you know speak up and make sure that their voices are heard.</p>	<p>Ok, as SRCs we are guided by the SRC Constitution and the Constitution is also guided by the university regulations. So that's where all our functions and duties like our restrictions lies, so that is our guiding principle.</p> <p>OK, so what we would like as Student Representative Council the institution should begin to realise the efforts of this voice. The voice that the SRC office hold is equivalent to any other office as long as a member</p>

<p>Revisions to the programs our students are involved, so we also make sure that we have a student voice in the crafting of the curriculum. We also had a student representatives, so the curriculum is better interrogated and we also take into account the comments of the students at that level.</p> <p>Yes, it's good to actually include students, because these qualifications are designed for them at the end of the day.</p> <p>Students are represented like in council and senate through the student representative council because SRCs are provided for in the Act which established the university.</p> <p>Quality assurance and student involvement is based on the Namibia qualification Authority (NQA) and the NCHE. Students are placed in these structures because of the two bodies.</p>	<p>of the SRC office is representing the office in the senate and in the governing council. Then once that is realised and the relevance is added to this office.</p> <p>We are informed when the president or the vice president is going into the senate. But I haven't really seen to be honest, I haven't seen our views taken.</p> <p>In senate, you just vote for a point being debated on, then after that point is debated on, then it disappeared. Then the council is the one now that makes the decision. So normal cases, student in our debates they are usually defeated and not heard.</p>
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Table 12: Does student involvement enhances the quality of teaching and learning?

<p>Responses from members of management</p> <p>When someone wants to become a senior lecturer or professor that's when they want these evaluations and attach them to the application. And that has somehow shadowed the evaluations purpose, which is enhancing the quality of learning and teaching. So to some extent, the proposal has been lost. Moving more in the direction of academic promotion.</p> <p>My experience with that at the university is that, this student-lecturer evaluation serves two purposes. One is to improve quality; two is to assess a teacher, a lecturer to use this assessment or feedback for promotion purposes, so that when you promote the lecturer.</p> <p>So the focus is too much on promotion so that the lecturer has a clean sheet that will help them to be promoted, so therefore lecturers will try by all means to present themselves in a way that students who evaluate them in their favour, but not necessarily to good quality, but to boost their profile for evaluation for promotion purposes.</p>

Yeah, I would say if it's done properly, it has a potential to enhance quality because students are the primary customers of high education. They are the ones who experience learning, therefore, if they provide genuine and the university takes that feedback seriously.

I think I will just emphasise that although we have because, uh, it's still lecturer evaluation. I think it's regarded as the biggest formal way of involving students at the university, solicit feedback from the students, use that feedback, analyse the feedback. Use that feedback to improve.

I think I will just emphasise that although we have because, uh, it's still lecturer evaluation. I think it's regarded as the biggest formal way of involving students at the university, solicit feedback from the students, use that feedback, analyse the feedback. Use that feedback to improve.

Yes, I think it is very true that if we include the students. But not 100% of course, but if we to some extent involve them in their learning the quality of learning, teaching will improve.

Table 13: Student voice

Response from members of the Management	Response from SRC members
<p>So, so that is how we ensure student involvement when it comes to the academic matters of the institution. And also making sure that students, you know, bring their side and give their input and let them you know, speak up and make sure that their voices are heard.</p> <p>So when issues about quality are deliberated at senate for example, the students have their representation in there. Therefore their voice is heard.</p>	<p>I think they only, OK it depends on the views, if we have. Like valid points, if we have the right points and if we have our facts straight. And I think sometimes they are taken into consideration.</p> <p>...we had a dilemma with the whole students were promised something by the university and the university took the thing away from us. So what we did is, we decided to like threatened to have a protest. We had a press conference and only then did we hear like we get hearing from management, only then did they start like engaging us on that particular matter up until we came to a common ground. So in that sense, I believe that some of our views or some of our demands are met in a way.</p>

Table 14: Constraints of student involvement

Responses obtained from members of management	Responses obtained from members of SRC
<p>The evaluation loop is not closed. For instance, students provide the data, collect, we collect data. But we hardly come back to them to share with them how that data has been used and what improvements it has brought about.</p> <p>Nothing happens, so when the next evaluation comes, students are hesitant to participate. So that's one of the problems. So in other words, there are no monitoring systems. Students should be compelled to evaluate.</p> <p>Then suppose these evaluations were supposed to be sent back to the teachers or lecturers through their Deans and heads of departments for improvement, then heads of departments whoever these professors are supposed to monitor how those their feedback has been put to use, but many it doesn't happen. Those are the challenges.</p> <p>The problem with this that not many students complete these evaluation forms.</p>	<p>So, again to give a practical example, you probably want to escalate the matter to your team, your faculty but because of the bureaucracy that exists, you first have to go through your class rep, your class rep goes through the faculty rep, through the lecturer, your lecturer to someone else before going to the Dean and by the time it gets there, the situation has deteriorated way long. So it makes it impossible to take action now because it's way too late. Bureaucracy of channels, channels, channels, channels.</p>

Responses relating to training

Table 15: Training

Responses obtained from members of management	Responses obtained from members of SRC
<p>They are brought to a lecture value and students are asked to complete but before the students complete the form, the staff member explains the questions, explains the forms and the staff member also hangs around.</p> <p>But once we have a new SRC on board at the beginning of the year. We conduct a session with them so that we introduce ourselves, the quality assurance office. Then we induct them into the quality assurance activities of the university and how they can play a role in that</p> <p>The induction that we do at the beginning it just an hour.</p>	<p>We are guided by the Constitution and the Constitution is also guided by laws. So that's where all our functions and duties, like all our restrictions lies, so that's our guiding principles.</p> <p>But, also after you were elected into power before you started getting your term, you receive like some sort of like a run through by the previous person who served under your position.</p>

Quality and its meaning

Table 16: Quality definition

Response obtained from member of management
<p>There are... many definitions for quality, a single definition will not suffice to define what it is. Because there are different stakeholders both internal and external. Each one has their own view of quality. As it said, quality lies in the eyes of the beholder. You will see in our quality assurance policy which sets the legal way of defining it is that we have provided for those various definitions according to different perspectives of different stakeholders. Where we say quality is defined fitness for and of purpose. In that with this in mind, we view it as. The university has a purpose as defined in vision. The university meets that purpose, then there's quality. Then we also provide for the, uh, another dimension which says quality is transformation. In this way, we focus on the students to say each transformation is a change with added value. If students are like the system, the quality education that is provided to students is able to transform them. To become better to become useful members of the society then we say this quality. Yeah, so we also provide for quality as value for money. Particularly, funders and government, they want to see whether there is return in their investment when they provide bursaries to students as students failing towards their passing. If they see that there's good numbers of students that are going through the system so those stakeholders, they may conclude that yes there is value in our investment there for there is quality.</p> <p>OK, it's a university policy is there... There is somewhere where QA would also want to find out the input of students.</p>

Section 2: Institution 2

Ways in which students (particularly SRC members) are involved

Table 17 presents information obtained from members of the management on institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved.

Table 17: Ways of involvement

Institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved	
Curriculum review panels	Board of studies
Curriculum development	Programme Advisory Committee
Writing endorsement letters for approving/disapproving a curriculum	Senate
Programme accreditation and development (required by NCHE) Academic Programs Committee	Preparatory Committee (SRC and final year student/s)
Student evaluations Student-lecturer evaluations Student course evaluations	Council (mainly SRC president)
Curriculum framework	Student representatives (in each department)

Ways in which students are involved

Table 18 presents information obtained from students (SRC members) on institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved.

Table 18: Data from SRC members

Institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved	
Academic affairs	Governing council
Curriculum development	Board of studies
Writing letters e.g. to Deans on dissatisfaction of a course	Senate
Preparatory process relating to teaching and Learning e.g. preparing the venue by ensuring that all equipment is working.	Disciplinary board/Crisis committee
Student evaluations (All students)	Council (mainly SRC president)
Lecturer evaluations	Class representatives (Departmental level per module/course)

Responses from which Tables 17 and 18 are extracted.

Table 19: Compilation on involvement

Responses obtained from the members of management	Responses obtained from members of the SRC
<p>Approving, you know the curricula so, first of all, the curriculum is going to the board of studies, each and every faculty in the university has a board of studies. So the curriculum first goes to the Board of studies and also sitting on the board of studies is a student representative. Yeah, sitting on the board of studies exactly to ensure student involvement.</p> <p>We believe that we should have student involvement and that is why we have them involved, sitting on the board of studies of each and every faculty to ensure involvement, you know, in the curriculum where there's a newly developed curriculum or a revised one, we have a student on the board of studies.</p> <p>When we also go out to review the programmes at the institution, we make sure that on the panel of the reviewers there is a student.</p> <p>Then we also have a student representative in, we have a Program Advisory Committee. That the curriculum is also going to and in the Program Advisory Committee we have, OK, we have internal stakeholders, you know, from the faculty, and we also have industry representatives in the Program Advisory Committee and on this committee, we also have a student.</p>	<p>I'm not really part of the Senate but we are informed when the president or the vice president is going into the Senate.</p> <p>Students are in the governing council, which is the highest decision making body?</p> <p>In in every operation, now there's no way where there will be no conflict. And even in, learning facilities it's currently even worse. So in cases where electoral is a complaint of students, now it's also responsibilities of the efforts to intervene. Because what happens is not, we know. There's two sides of the story and everyone would want to defend themselves.</p> <p>We communicate between the students and the board to ensure that they submit quality work.</p> <p>On for instance, senate.</p> <p>We also get student-lecturer evaluations.</p> <p>We write letters to the dean on a dissatisfaction of the course.</p> <p>...representative for academic affairs.</p> <p>I also sit part of the disciplinary board where students are may be subjected to as like appear. It's probably part of the jury, you might say so. If these may be academic wrongfulness or something of this sort. I am part of that committee to assist.</p>

The students also write endorsement letters, OK to any comments from their side they will put in the letter, and then they will sign and you know hand that over to the say the program coordinator.

Senate approving the curriculum and we have also a student representative on senate. OK. So that is concerning, you know, making sure that we have the input of the students.

We have in our program accreditation, we also have, I mean it's part of the NCHE requirements to have a student representative on the panel. It's not the review panel from the side of the NCHE, so they we also have student involvement and then also in the when they are interviewed, because groups of students are interviewed during the program accreditation exercise.

And then also you know student evaluations, student course evaluations, student lecture evaluations.

And then even on council we have a student representative on council. Sorry and council is, you know, giving their final approval of program implementation.

So when we develop our programs, one of the important stages that we engage on this stakeholder consultation and one of our key stakeholders are the students.

The Academic Programs Committee or APC. In APC, the program is also scrutinised, and again these students are part of the APC as part of the SRC. So we have a member of the SRC who sits in the APC.

And under the [university] comes students' council, I basically also assist.

I am the secretary for internal affairs. How I help with the teaching and learning process is that, I ensure that the teaching facilities are up to standards for students to utilise to make sure there's, the mics are working that the venues are OK in terms of exams to ensure that the venues are also secure for the students.

I wrote a very long letter to my Dean in terms of we wanted the discontinuation of online learning.

Why are students involved?

Table 20: Purpose of student involvement

Responses obtained from the members of management
<p>Revisions to the programs our students are involved, so we also make sure that we have a student voice in the crafting of the curriculum.</p> <p>We also had a student representatives, so the curriculum is better interrogated and we also take into account the comments of the students at that level.</p> <p>So it depends on the methodology that the lecturers can use. It is true that when you involve students, it enhances the quality of teaching and learning, it even enhances their understanding. It's comprehension grasping the concepts et cetera, et cetera so. I think we should actually involve our students at university.</p>

Are their voices heard?

Table 21: Are their voices heard

Responses obtained from the members of management	Responses obtained from the members of SRC
<p>Our students are very, they know their rights. They know their rights, and they know their input counts and it will be considered definitely.</p> <p>Yes, yes, definitely at the end of the day we always look at our students not only as students, but they are our customers and they are the primary reason why the institution is in existence in the first place.</p> <p>We have been holding meetings with the student representative body trying to tell them or to share with them the essence of their participation in the evaluations. It's more of encouraging students and also making them see the purpose of the evaluation and how it benefits them. So those are the means that we have been trying to make sure</p>	<p>I think sometimes they are taken into consideration.</p> <p>Like recently we had a dilemma with the whole students were promised something by the university and the university took the thing away from them. So what we did is we decided to like threatened to have a protest.</p> <p>Always not taken into consideration simply because our arguments are not result oriented because we just; when they give you a diplomatic reasoning or something typical or reality, then you feel that no, it's true maybe they are right and then we always come and hope for the next time such an opportunity.</p> <p>OK, so what we would like as Student Representative Council the institution should begin to realise the</p>

<p>that their voices are heard.</p>	<p>efforts of this voice. The voice that the SRC office hold is equivalent to any other office as long as a member of the SRC office is representing the office in the senate and in the governing council. Then once that is realised and the relevance is added to this office.</p>
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Constraints of involving students

Table 22: Constraints and enablements

<p>Responses obtained from the members of management</p>	<p>Responses obtained from the members of SRC</p>
<p>Well, you know... challenges really, you know, with involving them in the program, will be, I really can't think of any honestly speaking, but overall, as I have mentioned before, if we just refer or talk about quality in general, I think as I said, we can do more and we should do more to involve the students and to reach out to them.</p> <p>So in our quality in our revised quality management policy, we have proposed, a quality champion, quality assurance champions for each and every department so that we know there is someone that can be a link between us and the students, because we don't know the students, but the departments know their students.</p>	<p>I don't know if maybe they have a strategy on how they do it, but if they had to give me that responsibility, I'll yes. I'll do it in a sense that I'm considering my time as an undergraduate. Uh, with an undergraduate mindset, and I'll be able to accommodate everything with my time compared to a lecturer who might have a PhD or Masters and they are used to that.</p> <p>Although it will be time consuming because everybody will come up with their own different ways so, but at least it's gonna make some changes because some people find other methods that are not applied, applicable for them</p>

Managements' views on whether students receive training.

Table 23: Management view on training

Responses obtained from the members of management

They are brought to a lecture venue and students are asked to complete but before the students complete the form, the staff member explains the questions, explains the forms and the staff member also hangs around.

But I think this is maybe one aspect in which we also lack a bit, you know to bring out that quality message so that students can understand it better. One of the strategies you know to reach out to the students and to inform them about the quality issues and what their responsibilities are. And for instance, the student evaluations; you know that is the responsibility of the student to complete those surveys. And to make them more aware why they should do it. We have proposed that we also want to may be just giving presentation.

The induction that we do at the beginning it just an hour. Just to present to them what this office is there for and what are the expectation of this office from the students and how can they be involved.

They are brought to a lecture venue and students are asked to complete but before the students complete the form, the staff member explains the questions, explains the forms and the staff member also hangs around.

Enhancement of quality education via evaluations

Table 24: Enhancement and quality of education

Responses obtained from the members of management

Lecturer evaluations and course evaluations is being done by the Teaching and Learning Unit. I know the report goes to the lecturer. They get feedback report, and of course, if there are gaps identified by the students then the Teaching and Learning Unit, you know the unit will provide training course to the lecturers to improve the teaching.

If properly done, it has the potential to enhance.

It seems to be used for promotion.

Students bring a lot of issues, some are personal.

Maturity in them is needed so that they can be actively involved; so that they can meaningfully participate.

We have started summarising all the problems that if there's a problem observed, we compile all those kind of problems and we present to the institution that these are the problems that cut across the institution.

The only concern on the student side, especially with the evaluations, because you know it's a different... see evaluations from a different interest point of view. So for the students, they think that when they say the lecturer is a bad lecturer, the lecture doesn't teach well, they believe that that information should lead to the lecturer to be fired. Come next semester, they see the same lecturer again and they are asked to evaluate the same lecturer then they start losing interest and their participation in meetings and these activities also.

Are there policies on student involvement and QA policies

Table 25: Policies on QA

Responses obtained from the members of management	Responses obtained from the members of management
<p>There are many definitions for quality, a single definition will not suffice to define what it is. Because there are different stakeholders both internal and external. Each one has their own view of quality. As it said, quality lies in the eyes of the beholder. You will see in our quality assurance policy, which sets the legal way of defining it, is that, we have provided for those various definitions according to different perspectives of different stakeholders.</p> <p>We have that overarching quality assurance system. In essence, the quality assurance policy. So I can say there is a policy but however, it's not just about student involvement. It's in the framework of the comprehensive program accreditation process.</p> <p>The quality assurance policy. I articulate that I can share with you our quality assurance policy. This policy applies to all members of the university constituency including students.</p> <p>Very difficult to get because our policies and you know guidelines are only available on the intranet, the staff intranet. So that is not for the public. I mean if you want it then you have to write you know through the vice chancellor's office and so on to get permission.</p>	<p>I don't have all of the policies, but most of them are on online on our website you can probably just go check there; we have like a general Constitution.</p> <p>I think the policies will exist. I think the policies you are referring to, otherwise, they don't exist.</p>

Section C: Institution 3

Ways of student involvement

Table 26 presents information obtained from members of the management on institutional structures and QA process in which students are involved.

Table 26: Data from members of Management

Institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved	
Review curriculum	Board of studies
Lecturer reviews	Stakeholder consultation
Peer Evaluation	Senate
Programme accreditation and development (required by NCHE)	Student representatives Preparatory Committee (SRC and final year student/s)
Student evaluations	Council

Table 27 presents information obtained from students (SRC members) on institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved.

Table 27: Ways of involvement

Institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved	
Lecturer-student evaluations	Senate
Curriculum development	Board
School based study (SBS)	Council
Preparatory process relating to teaching and Learning e.g. preparing the venue by ensuring that all equipment is working. Securing teaching and learning materials	Disciplinary board/conflict resolution meeting (only when it's a student to appear, academic wrongfulness)

Responses from which Tables 26 and 27 are extracted.

Table 28: Data on ways of involvement

Responses obtained from the members of management	Responses obtained from members of the SRC
<p>Review our curriculum just to make sure that whatever we offer, it's actually a hand in hand with what the students think is right. So obviously not only what we want the students think is right, we also do some researches with what other universities are doing with regards now to the same qualification or the curriculum that students have picked up that something is missing or it's not of quality or it's not meeting their demands, but we do make sure that the students are fully involved in the quality of teaching and learning at the institution.</p> <p>So it would be very minimal that they will find faults within the curriculum or within their teaching material that we produce very, very much minimal, but yes they are involved.</p> <p>When we contact the, when we have meetings for stakeholder consultation, we always make sure that we actually involve the students.</p> <p>At the end of the semester, there is an evaluation.</p> <p>The teaching material, the teaching environment, the resources, as well as the</p>	<p>OK. What we is SRC, which stands for student council we all work in. Uh, as a team.</p> <p>I'm not really part of the senate but we are informed when the president or the vice president is going into the senate.</p> <p>So now, instead of the whole class going to management to explain their challenge, it's up to the SRC that face management.</p> <p>But in cases like this when the meeting is held to resolve the conflict, there should be a representative from each side. Which means that there is no way an SRC will represent the lecturer and there is no way management will represent the student.</p> <p>For example SBS, where we ensure that the students are doing their best and we sure the files that the students submit to the lecturers or the SBS coordinator are up to standard. So we are basically, what do you call it? We communicate between the students and the board to ensure that they submit quality work.</p> <p>Also stand in the senate and also represent academic issues amongst students to the senate.</p>

lecture and the teaching and learning in general.

The board is wonders to be able to bring up as evidence is the concentration of the students, so the students must be able to give their input for the accreditation process to take place.

When we also go out to review the programmes at the institution, we make sure that on the panel of the reviewers there is a student.

They evaluate their lectures; they do it at the end of the semester. If it's a year course they have to do it at the end of the year. Then that goes to the HOD and the Deans, so they are actually responsible for that. For us, it's just to make sure that the students do evaluation at the end of the course, and then whatever feedback they get, then the HOD and the Dean for that specific qualification.

Two representatives that can stand in the senate. And it's only just one that can reach to the governing council.

So what happens is that, management might not always be available to see what is happening or what the challenges are that students are facing on campus or the challenges that they're facing in their studies, such as probably.

Why involve students?

Table 29: Why involve students

Responses obtained from the members of management
<p>It's just good at the beginning to be involved from day one until the day they leave the institution. For them now to be able to say I was also part of the curriculum I had been through this curriculum and I see that it was relevant and now I am able to put in practice what I have learned for over the three years or four years.</p> <p>To ensure that students, you know, bring their side and give their input and let them you know speak up and make sure that their voices are heard.</p> <p>Students are represented like in council and senate through the student representative council because SRCs are provided for in the Act which established the university.</p> <p>Quality assurance and student involvement is based on the Namibia qualification Authority (NQA) and the NCHE. Students are placed in these structures because of the two bodies.</p>

Are students' voices heard?

Table 30: Students' voices

Responses obtained from the members of management	Responses obtained from the members of the SRC
<p>Yes our students do, uh evaluations. They evaluate their lectures, they do it at the end of the semester. So they are involved in that way also.</p> <p>Other is through the institutional structures.</p>	<p>I haven't seen our views taken or acted upon in senate.</p> <p>I think sometimes they are taken into consideration. Like recently we had a dilemma with the whole students were promised something by the university and the university took the thing away from them. So what we did is we decided to like threatened to have a protest.</p> <p>You a diplomatic reasoning or something typical or reality, then you feel that no, it's true maybe they are right and then we always come and hope for the next time such an opportunity.</p> <p>When you go to and you are not going with a strong ground and foundation and you are not prepared, that should be, you know, doctors professors coming in a diplomatic way to try to make my points look like they are not relevant. Then obviously, whenever you go to senate your points are out voted</p> <p>We really do make our effort to always bring up our point, but the points are not really considered or they are not always</p>

	<p>accepted.</p> <p>But normally, what we do is that the voice of the SRC office is always undermined and then the quality of our representation is always not there. So in other words, it's like we they just need us to be there because the structure states that we should be there, but the actual fact is that they don't want to consider us.</p> <p>Also just to add... so our university required the institution, which means that there are channels to follow and this really slows down the decision making.</p>
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Do students receive training?

Table 31: Training

Responses obtained from the members of management	Responses obtained from the members of SRC
<p>There is no formal training, but before we do this, we always explain to them informally.</p> <p>We informally take them, take them through the process.</p> <p>So those are some of the things that hinders us now to actually get our students being involved in quality assurance activities, because even if we explain to them informally, it's a thing of maybe explaining to them an hour or before the stakeholder consultation.</p> <p>Might have challenges of even understanding, like, some terms that are not clear to them,</p>	<p>We do receive training. It is a one day training.</p> <p>After you were elected into power before you started getting your term, you receive like some sort of like a run through by the previous person who served under your position.</p> <p>The induction that we do at the beginning it just an hour. Just to present to them what this office is there for and what are the expectation of this office from the students and how can they be involved.</p>

<p>like let's say the terms that are used by the External Quality Assurance Agency like the NQA and the NCHE.</p> <p>But I think this is maybe one aspect in which we also lack a bit, you know to bring out that quality message so that students can understand it better. One of the strategies you know to reach out to the students and to inform them about the quality issues and what their responsibilities are. And for instance, the student evaluations; you know that is the responsibility of the student to complete those surveys. And to make them more aware why they should do it. We have proposed that we also want to may be just giving presentation.</p> <p>Yes, I think it could have been. It would be better if it's extended, because we always get cases where some students don't get enough clarity or the misunderstandings and we sometimes still have to explain what was discussed at the training, because it wasn't so clear.</p> <p>Lecturer evaluations and course evaluations is being done by the Teaching and Learning Unit.</p>	<p>They are brought to a lecture venue and students are asked to complete but before the students complete the form, the staff member explains the questions, explains the forms and the staff member also hangs around.</p>
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Does student involvement enhance the quality of teaching and learning?

Table 32: Enhancement of teaching and learning

Responses obtained from members of management	Responses obtained from members of SRC
<p>Yeah, assist the lecturer or whoever is involved in that subject, assist them as to how they can improve for the next group of students who will be doing the same course.</p> <p>It addresses a variety of aspects, but the main purpose is to find out the students' experiences of learning and teaching; how did they experience the teaching process? In terms of its facilitation, how was it facilitated? Was it satisfactory? Did it help them learn anything? How was the content approached? Was there any role on their side in terms of contribution to content? And also generally how the lecturer conducted himself or herself.</p> <p>This lecturer evaluation reports are used for academic promotions mainly.</p> <p>In many cases is when someone wants to become a senior lecturer or they want these evaluations and attach them to the application.</p> <p>Students are at the core of the institution.</p> <p>Most popular ways in which students are involved in the enhancement of quality of learning and teach is the student lecturer evaluation.</p> <p>Yeah, if used for the intended purpose, this is quality enhancement. Yes, they have a</p>	<p>Apart from that, it's just to defend the institution and to represent it in a positive manner. As if to sell an attractive brand, bringing more customers and those that bring you know, wealth to it.</p>

potential.

Closing of feedback loop. It's very much very much important and also just to provide platforms whereby you induct students into the importance of their involvement in evaluations. Because only when they see better benefits from this process, then they can actively participate, otherwise they just think it's just another, just another activity that we must take off. Then they even ever read blindly. Yes, you conduct evaluation. But the quality of the feedback also matters and if they don't see value in it, they don't expect quality responses from those evaluations.

OK, I solved a number of cases where students have come to report that the quality of teaching and learning is poor. They cannot go ahead or the attitude of the lecturer is not good and all that in there it is affecting learning negatively, so we do not only wait for this end of semester evaluation. And there is this mechanism where they write a complaint. They report through their representatives. And we know right, and we summon the lecturer and say what is happening here? Did you improve? Delivery can improve content, so in a way.

What is quality?

Table 33: Meaning of Quality

Response obtained from member of management	Responses from SRC members on the policies
<p>Yeah, they we have got the quality assurance policy. You can actually access it on our website. The university website and it's available for public. The quality assurance and management policy so you can actually get all that information from there.</p> <p>There are many definitions for quality, a single definition will not suffice to define what it is. Because there are different stakeholders both internal and external. Each one has their own view of quality. As it said, quality lies in the eyes of the beholder. You will see in our quality assurance policy, which sets the legal way of defining it, is that, we have provided for those various definitions according to different perspectives of different stakeholders.</p> <p>The quality assurance policy. I articulate that I can share with you our quality assurance policy. This policy applies to all members of the university constituency including students.</p>	<p>I don't have all of the policies, but most of them are on online on our website you can probably just go check there; we have like a general Constitution.</p>

Section D: Institution 4

Ways in which students are involved

Table 34 presents information obtained from the quality assurance body on institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved.

Table 34: Data from member of Management

Institutional structures and QA processes in which students are involved
Quality assurance of programs/ accredit the program
Institutionalisation of quality culture
Student-lecturer assessment
Curriculum review panel
Tracer studies
Conduct interviews with students on quality matters
University management
Institutional audit
Council
Board

Sample responses from which Table 34 is extracted.

Table 35: Summary table on responses

Responses obtained from member of management	
Assuring programs and also asserting the institutionalisation of quality culture within the institutions. One of the ways we ensure is when we accredit the program, we seek to also ascertain how the students are involved in the process.	The quality of a course remodel as well as the quality of the delivery of that of that course in a way of assessing the lecturer. When we also go out to review the programs at the institution, we make sure that on the panel of the reviewers there is a student saving us a panel member.

<p>After they have graduated, we also conduct tracer studies of graduates and during those three studies we also ask students to reflect.</p> <p>Students are involved in the management of the institution.</p> <p>I also need to mention that the structure of the council, the board also.</p>	<p>We also interview students as part of a specific program.</p> <p>One of the important element we seek to find is the student involvement in this structure because at that level is the institutional audit.</p>
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Responses from member of management on monitoring systems regarding active involvement

Table 36: Monitoring systems in place on student involvement

<p>Responses from member of management</p>
<p>The monitoring system, first of all, is the activities within the institution.</p> <p>When we go to the institution, we want to see evidence that the students were indeed consulted. The evidence that in this program the students have assisted.</p> <p>The other evidence is students giving feedback.</p>

Policies on involvement

Table 37: Policies on involvement

<p>Response from member of management</p>
<p>We have that overarching quality assurance system. In essence, the policy quality assurance policy. In there, it stipulates but to ensure for you to assess the student involvement, you need to check ABC. Yeah, so I can say the there is a policy but however it's not just about student involvement, it's in the framework of the comprehensive program accreditation process.</p>

Constraints of involvement and enhancement of QA

Table 38: Constraints of involvement and enhancement of QA

Responses from member of management
<p>Perhaps, maybe not sufficient orientation of students on their involvement within the institution. I know our quality assurance week. When we do participate, we do see student involvement coming to listen on what quality assurance is all about, but I think in general. The students are not fully oriented on the importance of this. This manifests in when you interview students during the review process, that is when we'll find out, you know how often they fill in the forms, and whether they, I mean like those assessments of programs.</p> <p>Yeah I can say it does in the sense that you know when, when you have dealt with one program within a department, what we have seen is, but if you will find these challenges in one program, especially in terms of student involvement and so forth when you do another program. They can see that the department, at the faculty level stays a learning process say when they have observed a challenge or a problem in this program, they always feed it in another program. If it is poorly reviewed or to be submitted for accreditation. However, in terms of the institutional level, it is something that we have observed that these practices, although it might happen within a department or the faculty, you might find that the problems that are observed in this faculty might pop up in another faculty. We have started summarising all the problems that are observed. Under student involvement, we compile all those kind of problems and we present to the institution that these are the problems that cuts across the institution. So that at least all the deans hear about this. And when they prepare, or when they conduct those exercises. They then they are aware of the problems that we observed in other programs.</p>

Value and beliefs regarding student involvement

Table 39: Value and belief on student involvement

Responses from member of management
<p>First, and the most important one, they have the right to know information about this program.</p> <p>They have the right to demand their money back if the program is not ok.</p> <p>They have the rights to information about the program. Is the accurate name of the program; and information about expected learning outcomes, and the possible areas where they would go after having this qualification.</p> <p>The students have the rights to accurate information about the program. They also have the rights to know after graduating from this program, what are my you know prospective areas of working.</p>

Training

Table 40: Training

Response from member of management
<p>The guidance we give to the students is, if the student have to serve on the panel for quality assurance that student is oriented. Well, maybe a process of three hours.</p>