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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF SOCIAL, HUMAN AND MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES

Southampton Education School

**QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN ZAMBIAN
UNIVERSITIES**

by

Evans Lifuka

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education

February 2018

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

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Quality assurance (QA) has, for many years, been mainstream into the provision of programmes for higher education in developed and developing countries. In response to increased numbers of private and state-owned universities and the massification of students in open and distance learning (ODL), African countries and their universities have realised the need for QA. To ensure that these universities improve their quality provision, some countries such as South Africa and Nigeria have established independent QA agencies to regulate and monitor QA in programmes offered through ODL. The expansion in higher education that has taken place in Zambia has resulted in a need to examine available policy measures for QA and institutional QA practices in universities that offer Bachelor of Education/Science degree programmes.

Using a concurrent mixed-method design the study drew on both qualitative and quantitative policy measures for ODL at national level and QA practices at institutional level for ODL. The study relied on in-depth interviews, survey questionnaires and document review for data. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while, to analyse qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS), by means of NVivo. Interviews were conducted with one participant from the Higher Education Authority (HEA), one participant from the Ministry of Higher Education, seven participants from the three universities, one ODL expert and one QA expert. Twelve and 300 questionnaires were collected from heads of department (HODs) and ODL students respectively at the three participating universities.

The study found that, although the Ministry of Higher Education has increased funding and embarked on infrastructure development and training of academic staff in state-owned universities, these processes take a long time, and the amount has not been enough to implement quality provision of ODL. Further, it was found that the HEA did not have a QA framework (tool) for ODL, and instead relied on a general framework for all modes of education delivery in Zambia. Some universities had established internal QA directorates, but these were not fully functional as they were still in the process of designing the internal QA frameworks and systems. One university did not have either a QA unit or directorate.

The findings of this study extend the theory and practice of QA in a developing country like Zambia, where formal QA practice has not existed for long and the attention has focused on conventional education. Therefore, the study provides a conceptual framework that could be used to significantly improve the quality delivery of ODL and move away from the old, traditional methods that are failing to produce quality ODL graduates. Further, the study has established that there is a need to embrace good practice in the provision of programmes through ODL to contribute significantly to strengthening the capacity of universities to deliver quality services. It recommends a multi-sectoral approach by all those involved in ODL.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, EVANS LIFUKA, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Quality Assurance Practice in Open and Distance Learning in Zambian Universities.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission or parts of this work have been published as:

Signed:

Date: 13/11/2019

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Definitions and Abbreviations

ACDE	African Council for Distance Education
ADB	African Development Bank
ANC	African National Congress
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DBIS	Department for Business Innovation and Skills
DEASA	Distance Education Association of Southern Africa
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EU	European Union
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ICDE	International Council for Open and Distance Education
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
NIAD- UE	National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology
NVAO	Netherlands and Flemish Accreditation Organisation
NUC	National University Commission
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency

SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAG	South African Government
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNZA	University of Zambia
ZAOU	Zambian Open University
ZNBC	Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the context of this study and the justification to undertake it. It begins with the background to the study and demonstrates the need for QA in the provision of programmes delivered by ODL modes in Zambia. ODL is an educational process in which much of the learning is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the students and, within this domain; the communication between lecturers and students may be largely through an artificial medium. The openness of distance education is expressed in the manner of communication, learner support and flexibility of the institution that is offering ODL programmes (Moore et al., 2002). This means that the term 'open' is the key element in the practice of distance learning, combined as 'ODL'. In respect of this definition, therefore, ODL refers to the provision of flexible educational opportunities in terms of access and multiple modes of knowledge acquisition (Ezike & Chigozie-Okwum, 2015). The chapter further discusses my personal motivation, and the rationale and the contribution of the study. It also sets out the research questions and finally gives an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background

For decades, policymakers in education have been interested in understanding developments and processes of QA in their learning institutions. The practice of QA in European countries and their universities has been around for over four decades and recently a few Asian countries, such as Japan, Malaysia and China, have shown interest in QA provision of their higher education system (Jung & Latchem, 2012; Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013). QA is an approach to manage quality and focuses on the management of processes. It aims to apply agreed procedures to achieve defined standards, as a matter of routine (Robinson, 1995).

QA has not been overlooked by developing countries in Africa, as universities here have also begun to develop their own internal QA mechanisms. A university is regarded as a centre of excellence that provides quality education and is accountable to its stakeholders, who include students, employers and the government, to ensure that certain minimum standards are met. (Bleiklie, 2004; Huisman & Van Vught, 2009).

QA has been necessitated by the changes that higher education has undergone in recent years due to the emergence of globalisation in the sector. The most significant among these changes

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are the massification of students; labour market demands and competition among universities (see Helyer, 2007; Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009; Margaret, 2011; Odhiambo, 2014; Shchegolev, Lassleben & Martínez, 2016). This has resulted in challenges for universities in providing quality programmes to the students, a situation that has led to a mismatch with the labour market. Some universities may be struggling to inculcate the ideas of employers in their programmes due to the absence of links between universities and industry. Therefore, there is a need for a synergistic approach between them (Wescott, 2002; Isaksen & Karlsen, 2010; ILO, 2010).

For European universities to meet the prescribed benchmarks set by their governments or national agencies, most have had to develop QA regulations. According to De Wit and Verhoeven (2004), the Flemish government through its 1991 legislation, obliged all Flemish universities to develop a QA system. This brought about important changes in the QA initiatives already in universities. In a parallel development, the Swedish HEA has a scrutiny function, whereby it is in charge of reviewing the quality of higher education and granting degree-awarding powers, as well as supervising universities and colleges to maintain their quality standards (Bauer et al., 1999). The management of higher education continues to be promoted through QA monitoring tools, as this is now common practice (Jarvis, 2014). The higher education sector is arguably a key driver of economic prosperity, and this can only be attained through quality provision. By the same score, Harman states:

Wherever you go, managers of higher education systems and institutions today are concerned about quality and how to put in place appropriate QA mechanisms, while ministers, bureaucrats, employers and business interests are all increasingly concerned about the outputs of higher education institutions and the suitability of graduates to meet workplace needs. (1998, 346)

Although QA is a relatively new idea in Africa, its countries have responded by incorporating quality focus areas and processes in the provision of their higher education. For example, in 2007 there were only 16 of the 52 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that had national QA agencies (Mohamedbhai, 2015). Furthermore, Mohamedbhai (2015) observes that most of these agencies were set up mainly to regulate the provision of higher education, particularly those in the private sector, rather than to ensure accountability or quality improvement. Materu (2007) points out that national QA agencies in Africa are perceived as lacking the capacity to carry out their functions and whose members (staff) are insufficiently qualified to understand the processes involved in developing quality standards. In promoting accountability in higher education, Inglis (2005) states that national QA policy should indicate explicitly the benchmarks and criteria for

who should offer education at a higher level. In Africa, regional QA initiatives such as the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) have programmes to bring together universities within the region to design mechanisms to help in the delivery and improvement of programmes (IUCEA, 2010).

In many developing countries, greater emphasis in higher education is placed on conventional modes of delivery than on ODL, where teachers and students physically meet and interact face to face. Conventional delivery has specific times and places for successful learning (Duffy et al., 2002; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). As in this mode of conventional higher education, there is a need to ensure quality in the provision of ODL, and this is the focus of the current study.

Some scholars have observed that, despite ODL having been in existence for a long time as an alternative learning strategy in higher education provision, its quality remains questionable (Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007; Shin & Harman, 2009; Hornsby & Osman, 2014). In the same vein, Jung and Latchem (2012) state that there is a feeling among African countries that ODL programmes are not as good as those in conventional face-to-face provision. Jung and Latchem (2012) go on to state that such attitudes make it difficult for policymakers to make recommendations on the legitimacy and standards of ODL. Similarly, Sawyerr (2004) observes that a good number of universities in Africa lack the necessary infrastructure, qualified academic and support staff to deliver their ODL programmes successfully. According to the Southern African Development Community (SADC, 2010), its member states have taken a long time to embrace ODL because it is regarded as inferior and ineffective. Most people consider this as their last option in education and favour the conventional mode. In line with this development in Southern African countries, Omolewa (2008) observes that it is important for ODL processes in Africa to be re-examined with respect to the provision of quality material, learner support, relevance and sustainability. Olcott (2013) and Ogunleye (2013) believe that in widening access to higher education, ODL as an alternative should provide academically credible and quality content at low cost.

From the researcher's experience as a lecturer at a university that offers programmes in both ODL and conventional modes, it may be argued that the practice of QA in Zambia is under-researched. This makes it difficult to trace QA practice in higher education institutions, although there is evidence of the existence of ODL. In a study conducted on the role of ODL in the right to education, Siaciwena and Lubinda (2008) explain how to increase access to teacher training in Zambia, which has continued to depend on ODL from 1964 to the present day and strives to improve its quality. They conclude that the rising demand for education at all levels of Zambia's education system might necessitate an expansion in ODL. The current situation in Zambia has prompted both public and private universities to offer programmes (Bachelor of

Education/Science degree programmes) through ODL and conventional programmes, and to generate income, as well. Before the new Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, Zambia had 35 private universities registered with the Ministry of Education (MoE), plus three public universities. Some 29 private universities were registered with the HEA as of 30 July 2016, and the number was expected to increase by 2017 (HEA, 2015). The registered universities offer various programmes, including Bachelor of Education degree programmes, through ODL.

Stakeholders in Zambia have raised concerns over the low-quality standards in both the state and private universities that offer programmes through ODL. Some argue that these institutions have become commercial ventures for profit making (Siaciweni & Lubinda, 2008). Bok (2009) observes that universities have now moved away from the traditional concept of providing a service towards profit making. This has affected the relationship between university lecturers and ODL students. In this case, students are treated as customers, thus failing them in their programmes is the absolutely last option. In other words, there is no failing in such an arrangement; the more students a university has, the more profits it generates.

The institutional reputation of a university is critical, as it informs various interest groups and competitors about the kind of quality that it possesses (LeBlanc, 2006). For example, the University of Zambia (UNZA) is the highest ranked in the country in terms of reputation, based on the programmes that it offers. The institution is ranked at 33 in Sub-Saharan Africa, at 55 in Africa and at 2,583 in the world (Webometrics, July 2016). This poor performance partly justifies conducting such a study to uncover the QA practices for universities in the country, in particular those with programmes delivered by ODL. In an effort to improve performance, the Zambian Government has put a premium on raising quality standards in higher education institutions through the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, based on the country's and global needs (GRZ, 2013).

1.2 Personal motivation for this study

I became motivated to investigate issues of quality in higher education in 2013 when I was pursuing a Master of Management in Education qualification with Maastricht School of Management (MSM). This programme had a component of 'quality management', passionately presented by Dr Ton Vroeijenstijn. He made me realise the importance of QA in both public and private universities.

At the time that I was pursuing this course, I was also serving as Deputy Director of ODL and as Academic Co-ordinator at a university in Zambia. With the knowledge that I gained from MSM, I realised that this university had to improve the quality of delivery of its ODL programmes.

Furthermore, I was motivated to conduct this study when I discovered that from 1964 to 2013, the Ministry responsible for higher education had not put in place QA policies for either conventional or ODL programmes.

1.3 Rationale and contribution of the study

As indicated earlier, the practice of QA in the universities that offer programmes through ODL in Zambia is not well documented or backed up by academic literature. This study intends to present institutional QA practices, as demonstrated by the universities that were targeted. Discovering Zambia's QA practice in the provision of programmes through ODL at university level is paramount, since the numbers of ODL students have increased, as most people want to acquire higher qualifications. The UNZA recorded an increase in the number of ODL students from 1,611 in 2006 to 5,213 in 2011 (Nkosha, Simui & Mwewa, 2012). According to Mulwila (2019), "at the moment the number of ODL students at UNZA stands at 8,000 plus". University education in Zambia was expanded through statutory instrument No. 72 of 2013, which gave rise to the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013. The Act necessitated the increase in the number of public universities offering bachelor's degree programmes in education in both conventional and ODL modes of learning (GRZ, 2013).

The Vice-Chancellor of the UNZA, Professor Luke Mumba, stated during an interview on 9 October 2016 on the current state of the university that its quality standards had gone down (ZNBC, 2016a). In the same vein, Professor Stephen Simukanga, Director of the HEA, acknowledged the need to improve the quality standards in the provision of higher education in Zambia during an interview on *the role of the HEA* on 6 November 2016 (ZNBC, 2016b). The Zambian Parliament acknowledges that the standard of university education in the country has deteriorated tremendously, resulting in poor-quality graduates in all fields ('Standards of university education in Zambia', *Lusaka Times*, 6 July 2013). In these broad statements, it could be argued that the perceptions include the quality of ODL, as offered by higher education in Zambia. Therefore, this study hopes to demonstrate whether the proliferation of institutions that offer programmes through ODL could be associated with low quality standards in the Bachelor of Education/Science degree programmes. As ODL is an alternative to conventional education and therefore provides access to Zambians, its quality provision is vital. With the increase in numbers of ODL students, as well as the concerns of stakeholders, this study intends to provide empirical evidence on the national policy and institutional measures in place to provide quality ODL programmes, as well as on challenges encountered in the process.

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Most studies have been conducted on QA in both conventional education and ODL, but they focus on developed countries in Europe, Asia and other African countries with advanced QA practices and experience, yet the scenario is not the same in developing countries (Coates, 2005; Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Parker, 2012; Gbenoba & Dahunsi, 2014; Elassy, 2015). In the review of literature conducted, many studies and theoretical papers have indicated a need to have strong national QA policies and frameworks (Luckett, 2007; Basaza, Milman & Wright, 2010; El Hassan, 2013; Enders & Westerheijden, 2014; Jarvis, 2014). Moreover, some do not provide concrete solutions to actual practices of QA at institutional level that take into account institutional challenges, quality culture and self-reflection. This study is expected to provide information on the need for solutions to quality provision of ODL in Zambia.

There is more theoretical literature on QA, emphasising QA policies and less on the practice and procedures of QA in higher education institutions with ODL programmes (De Wit & Verhoeven 2004; Stella & Gnanam, 2004; Materu, 2007; Altbach et al., 2009; Jung & Latchem, 2012; Kisanga & Machumu, 2014; Odhiambo, 2014). Moreover, absent from these studies is the applicability of their suggested QA policies and frameworks to a developing country like Zambia, constrained as it is in terms of educational resources such as infrastructure, facilities and information and communications technology (ICT). Therefore, this study hopes to demonstrate how QA policies could be institutionalised at university level to offer quality ODL programmes by applying agreed upon QA practices by the stakeholders. These could be similar to the proposed QA practices contained in the conceptual framework for this study (see Figure 3-1).

Few studies have focused on the provision of QA in ODL as conducted in the SADC member states. SADC had adopted simple national survey methods (SADC, 2010), resulting in the findings at national level missing vital information on institutional-specific challenges to the provision of quality programmes in ODL to inform national policies. These SADC studies depend mainly on quantitative methods, without the qualitative information crucial to a deeper understanding in decisions. Mhlanga (2008) tried to shed light on this in his qualitative research on the QA prevalent in selected universities in the SADC region (South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe). However, his study was focused mainly on the QA of conventional modes of learning. While it is true that higher education institutions could apply the same generic quality measures to both conventional and ODL modes, QA frameworks for ODL should contain distinct quality measures that address its unique features. The features include the mode of delivery, structure and lecturers'/tutors' competency in instructional delivery. This study is intended to provide clear, detailed information on the actual QA practices in ODL for education in the three targeted universities (Universities A, B and C). Deliberately, the researcher chose to focus on Bachelor of Education/Science degree programmes, partly out of interest and partly because most Zambian

universities do not offer any practical programmes such as engineering, medicine or nursing through ODL.

As noted earlier, the practice of QA in Zambian universities is not clearly known, and it is difficult to understand whether universities have used various quality measures in the delivery of their ODL programmes. The lack of literature (books and journal articles) makes it difficult to establish the kinds of QA practices that exist. There are more studies on ODL than on QA, which appears to be missing from Zambia's research repository. Based on a preliminary literature review, it was difficult to find much information relating to the practice of QA in universities in Zambia that offer programmes through ODL. The available literature suggests that there is a research gap in this area, and this study hopes to address the gap. The following studies are on ODL: Siaciwena (1988); Chifwepa (2006) and Chiyongo (2010). Chiyongo's qualitative study is on the general management of distance education and does not clearly bring out how institutions could self-regulate in terms of quality without internal QA units. The other two lack a comprehensive focus on the QA of ODL; each focuses solely on either producing materials or ICT. Theoretical papers on ODL in Zambia include Siaciwena and Lubinda (2008), Nkoshla et al. (2012) and Hamweete (2012).

This study is significant, because it is expected to add both theoretical and practical knowledge to the existing literature on QA in the provision of ODL programmes in Zambia. In terms of theory, it hopes to raise awareness among researchers and scholars on the need to conduct studies, as well as to publish formal scholarly works on QA and narrow the literature gap for higher education in Zambia. Further, the study intends to present specific contextual challenges to the quality provision of programmes through ODL in Zambia. The researcher hopes that the conceptual framework for this study could be used as a model for developing QA frameworks for ODL at policy and institutional level, as part of the recommendations. Moreover, it is expected that the conceptual framework will help in designing various innovative quality measures in the delivery of programmes through ODL. In fact, this study motivated me to publish a paper before my final viva, 'Quality Assurance in Primary Teacher Training Colleges in Zambia'.

In terms of a practical contribution, it is hoped that the study will raise the issue of stakeholders' inclusion in matters relating to the quality provision of ODL at institutional level in Zambia. It may help universities to establish their own QA mechanisms and develop a quality culture in which everyone in the university assumes responsibility and ownership. Additionally, the study is expected to provide information for the HEA to strengthen its new QA frameworks, which are currently undergoing periodic iterative developmental processes. Furthermore, this study hopes to provide solutions for universities on the specific, unique points that ODL presents for the

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purposes of QA, such as learner support, material production and ODL experts to deliver the services (see conceptual framework in Chapter 3 for good practice in ODL).

This study is significant, as it is expected to be used as a local empirical reference resource, based on the Zambian context, with regard to QA provision for ODL. The literature reviewed in this study provides cases of countries and higher education institutions whose QA experiences in ODL would offer lessons that Zambia could draw on. The word 'lesson' has various definitions but, for this study, it means identifying good QA practice in other countries and universities that could be applied to a Zambian context.

1.4 Research questions

The overall aim of this study was principally to investigate policy measures for ODL at national level, and QA practices at institutional level for ODL. However, due to the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, it is also important to shed light on how universities implement the national policy. The practice of QA, from the national to institutional level, is a new development and presents a unique Zambian context. Therefore, the study would be incomplete if no attention were paid to the quality measures, successes and challenges of this process based on national policy. The study sought to address the following research questions:

1. What are the policy measures of QA for Zambian universities offering ODL programmes, and how is the policy institutionalised to ensure the prescribed benchmarks are attained?
2. What measures are Zambian universities taking to maintain and improve the provision of ODL programmes?
3. How do universities offering ODL programmes ensure that their students contribute to the development of the university QA system?
4. What lessons can Zambia learn from countries that are perceived to have robust university QA practices for ODL?

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This section presents an overview of the eight chapters of the thesis. Each of these chapters discusses and highlights issues related to QA.

- Chapter 1 consists of the background to this study, personal motivation, rationale and contributions of the study, research questions and structure of this thesis.

- Chapter 2 reviews the literature that relates to this study and includes the global context on diversification, policy, quality, QA, models for QA in higher education and ODL. This is followed by examples of QA for different countries and specific cases from Africa.
- Chapter 3 describes the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. It consists of the Human Capital, Globalisation and Stakeholder, and Organisations as Open Systems theories that inform the conceptual framework of the study. The conceptual framework helps to understand QA systems from policy to its implementation at university level.
- Chapter 4 describes the research methodology of this study; consisting of the research design, strategy, data sources and sampling, data analysis and ethical considerations.
- Chapter 5 presents the findings related to QA policy measures for ODL. The chapter explains the measures that are in place to ensure the quality provision of programmes in ODL at national level.
- Chapter 6 presents the findings on QA practices for ODL at an institutional and practical level.
- Chapter 7 discusses the findings, bringing together the findings from different participants and sources by comparing them and making systematic judgement as presented in Chapters 5 and 6.
- The thesis ends with Chapter 8, which provides the conclusions, implications for policy and universities' practice, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

The next chapter presents the literature review of the study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relating to three key concepts in the title: quality assurance; open and distance learning; and universities. The key concepts search was more applicable in the initial stages of the literature review. The idea to use key words was to help locate the available research studies on the subject of quality assurance in relation to open and distance learning. Equally, the literature reviewed included scholarly articles, books and policy documents on higher education in general that mentioned the impact of quality assurance on open and distance learning.

In terms of criteria used for literature inclusion and exclusion, attention was made to leading, peer-reviewed journals, which served as the bases for reviewing, as they provided theoretical background as well as additional information on the specific subject matter of the study (Levy and Ellis, 2006). In short, the following steps were used to conduct the literature review; 'Input' that involved literature search and screening. At this stage, the researcher was getting to know and comprehend the literature to extract meaningful information from the articles read as well as interpreting and summarising literature. The next step was the 'processing' that comprised literature extraction, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Here, activities such as integrating, combining, comparing, selecting and explanation of literature were carried out. Last but not least was 'writing up the literature' as this meant planning, re-writing and literature structure. The researcher allocated evidences for each section that culminated in the first draft and revised after confirmation of upgrade to PhD candidature. On the other hand, any work that is not peer reviewed (newspapers, magazines, policy documents, books and conference proceedings) were only included in specific areas for providing factual information and to help support certain arguments.

The literature reviewed for this study helps to justify undertaking this study to narrow the knowledge gap, particularly for Zambia, and enables the identification and appreciation of the quality practices in several countries. What this means is that the researcher began by reading literature around the identified topic to conceptualise the framework for this study. In other words, the method that was employed to undertake the literature review was narrative review, which comprises 'comprehensive narrative syntheses of previously published information' (Green et al., 2006, 103). The preliminary conceptual framework and the key concepts to the title (words) helped in setting the parameters for the literature search to make the review feasible. The

literature review of this study followed an inductive approach. The literature read were grouped, based on the information and arguments they presented for further assessing and judging topics for consideration in the main text.

The sources for the literature review were electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Mendeley and the University of Southampton Library search links, such as DelphiS and WebCat. For planning purposes, the researcher planned to spend one year on literature reviewing, but this duration was revised due to the fact that new articles kept on emerging; hence, the whole process lasted one year and two months.

The chapter begins with the global context on the diversification of higher education, policy formulation, quality in institutional contexts, QA, the classification of QA in higher education, broad approaches to QA, QA strategies used for quality reviews and commercial quality models. This section is followed by models for QA in higher education, ODL, leadership for quality assurance in universities offering open and distance learning and developed and developing countries' context of QA in the provision of ODL. The chapter ends with a section on identifying the research gaps and research questions.

2.1 Global context of diversification of higher education

African countries have witnessed a growing demand for higher education, or massification. This has caused concern at the quality of the delivery of programmes in this area. Related to this trend are student mobility, inequalities in access to higher education, increased autonomy, demands for accountability by stakeholders and the financing of this sector. For this study, diversification is the variety of new entities within the higher education system, such as the ones mentioned above in higher education (Van Vught, 2008). In other words, higher education in Africa has undergone complex challenges and changes that have resulted in various modes of higher-level programmes. In a way, there is a relationship between diversification and the QA of ODL. Misaro, Jonyo and Kariuki (2013) observe that it is a common element in many African higher education providers in that they have been recording an increase in enrolment yet lack adequate planning and financial, human and physical resources. From the observation by Misaro, Jonyo and Kariuki, it is clear that some educational institutions in Africa are still struggling to provide quality education. Teixeira et al. (2014) observe that higher education institutions face great pressure to diversify their offerings. Many scholars have been trying to find out the reasons for this decline in the quality provision of ODL programmes at higher education level (Basaza, Milman & Wright, 2010; Hamweete, 2012; Jung & Latchem, 2012; Biao, 2012; Letseka, 2015).

The worldwide massification of higher education has created new challenges in dealing with an increasingly heterogeneous student population (Teichler, 1989; Altbach et al., 2009). One could argue that this has culminated in challenges in addressing QA in higher education institutions, together with inadequate infrastructure and learning and teaching materials. This may have contributed to the difficulties that universities are facing to maintain and improve quality standards. Current trends the world over indicate that the diversification of higher education in various forms has had an effect on the quality of programme delivery in general (Martin & Stella, 2007). For instance, there are cases where governments have cut funding for public and private universities.

As stated earlier, massification has given rise to competition between higher education institutions and resulted in the mass recruitment of ODL students (Altbach et al., 2009). This is of serious concern regarding quality education provision in ODL to large numbers of students. Materu (2007) states that a robust system is essential to ensure that the programmes offered are appropriate to the socioeconomic needs of the society that they serve, because the evidence is that the higher education system lacks any mechanism to promote and monitor the accountability demanded by its stakeholders. It is clear that Zambia is in no way different from other African countries that are experiencing challenges in the quality provision of ODL with the advent of diversification of higher education (Simui, Chibale & Namangala, 2017).

Worldwide, universities have sprung up in public and private sectors, with a huge number of students enrolling for ODL mode. Stella and Gnanam (2004, 143) assert, the new forms and meanings ODL is acquiring, such as its convergence with traditional learning and its global impact, pose several challenges. These have generated urgent concerns to governments and QA agencies all over the world'. Hodson and Thomas (2003) believe that the safety of national systems and legitimacy of the providers help to protect the public from fake providers by emphasising quality. The discussion now turns to policy formulation in the next section.

2.2 Policy formulation

Since the focus of this study is on QA policies in the provision of ODL, it is imperative to expound on the meaning of policy, its implications and the process of development from the outset. It is hoped that the findings from this study will help Zambia in its future development of QA policies in the provision of ODL. Like the word 'quality', policy is a complex word and may mean different things, depending on the context. Torjman (2005) states that although the word 'policy' is commonly used by different authors, its deeper meaning and implications are not clearly

understood. He goes on to state that there is no simple way to explain what policy is. This contributes to the reasons why most people claim to have little or no understanding of policy.

Policies are formulated at different levels. For instance, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) in Zambia formulated the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013. The aim of this policy was to provide for the establishment of the HEA and define its functions and power for QA and quality promotion in higher education. As a result of this Act, higher education providers are in the process of developing their own internal QA policies in line with national policy. Gornitzka (1999) states that a policy is a public statement of an objective and the instruments to be used, and its achievement. As a researcher, a policy is a guideline, regulation, rule, principle or direction that indicates how certain things must be done and by whom, as well as the consequences of not following such a policy correctly.

Torjman (2005) states that a policy takes various forms, including non-intervention, regulation such as licensing, and grant aid, as well as direct public provision. In short, a policy is a high-level statement of ambition that specifies the outcomes to be achieved and helps to guide decision-making through appropriate courses of action. Every educational policy for a nation puts into perspective what education should do for the country as an instrument of development. It requires a concerted effort by all stakeholders if it is to be effective. Not every stakeholder can be present, but their views can be made known through their representatives. For example, members of the University Council and Senate represent people from various areas within and outside the university community.

2.2.1 General policy development

There are steps that should be followed in formulating national policies. These are essential in ensuring good policy development. Failure to adhere to such procedures could result in poor policies. According to Sidney (2006), there are ideal steps, with specific details, yet they differ between one country and the next:

- Define targets
- Define overall strategy of how to meet the targets
- Design policy measure to realise the strategies
- Enforce and monitor policy measures
- Ensure compliance and carry out evaluation to monitor progress.

2.2.2 Challenges in policy implementation

It might be assumed that higher education policy in Zambia is clear on the guidelines that universities should follow (GRZ, 2013). Most governments in developing countries formulate policies and pay attention to meeting local demands. However, sometimes external forces (Amutabi & Oketch, 2003) hamper this process. For example, Samoff and Carrol (2004) observe that certain policies of the World Bank are used as policy guidelines for countries wishing to borrow money for higher education. There are normally several stringent measures and conditions attached to donor funding, commonly known as 'conditionalities'. These act as requirements for higher education policy formulation for recipient countries to fulfil in order to benefit from loans, as a matter of compliance. These sometimes hamper a country's ability to meet its own requirements. For example, Kenya is one of the largest beneficiaries of World Bank loans in the sub-Saharan region. Beyond East and Central and Southern Africa, all the countries in West Africa were compelled to accept imposed conditionalities to qualify for World Bank loans to improve their higher education (Mazrui, 2000; Banya & Elu, 2001). The implications for Kenya was that its higher education system does not entirely reflect the local needs but has been tailored to the donors.

A further issue worth mentioning in policy implementation is the misappropriation of funds. It is difficult to implement educational policies if the funds available are not properly utilised for the intended purpose (Ololubei, 2016). For instance, if a university allocates money to buy books for its library, it should not be used to do landscaping and planting flowers around the campus. Islam and Rahman (2008) state that policy implementation depends on prudent resource utilisation. Cagwin and Bouwman (2002) state that there is a need for any university management to appreciate activity-based costing and expenditure, as this helps to meet certain policy requirements.

2.3 Quality in an institutional context

In order to understand QA, it is important to begin by explaining 'quality': it is difficult to assure quality if the concept is not properly understood from the outset. Quality is a conceptual tool through which QA is implemented. Quality has various meanings and is a relative term, depending on the context and institution. Sabur (2015) states that quality is the total of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. Becket and Brookes (2006) claim that, equally, the difficulty in defining quality makes its measurement contentious. Quality can only be attained if the ways of measuring are approved by the people involved in the process at any given institution. Various people contest the concept of

quality, as their demands for quality procedures and outcomes might not be the same. For example, Vroeijenstijn (2004) defines quality as achieving goals and aims in an efficient and effective way, assuming that the goals and aims reflect the requirements of all the stakeholders adequately. Vroeijenstijn goes on to state that quality is conceptualised differently by the stakeholders involved in higher education (Vroeijenstijn, 2004). By the same score, Tam (2001) observes that each stakeholder in higher education has a different view on quality, influenced by his or her own interests.

From the above description, we can say that there are several ways of describing quality. Harvey and Green (1993) provided a framework of the relationship between quality and the standards in higher education by identifying five perceptions of quality, and this further helps to understand the different concerns and views of stakeholders. These include 'quality as exceptional, quality as perfection or consistency, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money and quality as transformative'.

Quality as exceptional: Here, quality is linked to excellence and elitism. In this case, education is viewed as something special or high class and distinctive. Quality education is not determined using any form of assessment that is provided, but the assumption is that its distinctiveness and inaccessibility are quality in themselves. One important aspect to remember here is the notion of 'quality as exceptional', as it dilutes the perception of excellence. For instance, Harvey (2006) emphasises that excellence is mostly taken to mean outstanding, or quality that surpasses a benchmark, defined in a specified area.

Quality as perfection or consistency: In this approach, quality is seen in terms of consistency, with the focus being on the process. The aim is to meet prescribed specifications perfectly. This approach tries to distinguish between quality and standards. Therefore, quality conforms to a specification, as the product is assessed by its consistency. Harvey and Knight (1996) demonstrate that a quality product or service must conform to an exact specification. Higher education institutions must be consistent in the delivery of their programmes.

Quality as fitness for purpose: This means a programme or service to fulfil the customers' needs, desires and requirements. It can be achieved through the institution's or university's mission statement and its aspirations. Fitness for purpose is a functional definition of quality rather than an exception. In other words, this concept stresses the need to meet the standards defined by the relevant authority, such as the MoHE or the HEA in Zambia. The standards must be acceptable, and the institutions must work towards fulfilling them.

Quality as value for money: The value for money definition of quality is the judgement given to the quality of provision relating to the cost of providing such a provision, for example a situation where more students complete their programmes but pay less tuition fees. What it means is that quality as value for money sees quality as a return on investment. There is value to obtaining a service at lower cost. Although Harvey and Knight (1996) argue that value for money is simply a market view of quality, likened to accountability, it is pseudo market designed to effect changes by way of competition.

Quality as transformation: In broader terms, quality can be considered as taking a transformative approach. Transformation is a change process. In higher education, students are transformed by way of empowerment and the enhancement of their skills and knowledge. Quality as transformation is conceptually in tune with the essential nature of quality. In this case, students' life experience must be transformed through the process of education. Tam (2001) reveals that the central focus of higher education is to maximise students' educational development, improvement and learning that remain the primary goal of universities.

In an education context, quality may refer to a consensus of all the stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, employers and the ministries in charge of education) in speaking the same language in education provision. It is not easy to come up with a comprehensive definition of quality that is accepted by everyone in higher education. What is important is to create a 'win-win' situation, where all the stakeholders are satisfied with the quality of an institution. The IUCEA (2010) states the importance of clearly defined criteria for assessing each stakeholder in quality and competing views for consideration in quality assessment.

Quality can be summarised as the level of satisfaction of customers with services and goods, and whether these are worth the money that they spend (IUCEA, 2010). The manner in which quality is defined has an impact on the type of QA policy and the actual QA mechanisms that any university wishes to use.

2.4 Quality assurance (QA)

Quality assurance is concerned with the process of checking, evaluating and making judgements about quality and standards (Odhiambo, 2011). It may indicate directions for enhancement and improvement (Williams, 2014). On the other hand, quality enhancement (QE) is a deliberate process of change that leads to improvement. It includes both strategic initiatives and small steps at institutional level (Williams, 2014). Elassy (2015) explains that QA and QE are part of a continuum, thus should not be seen as two separate processes.

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QA focuses on assessing quality to determine the strengths and limitations of higher education institutions (diagnostic process). In contrast, QE is concerned with improving the actual quality; it acts as a curing process to the limitation found when quality is being assured. Improvement is the outcome of enhancement, and it arises from enhancement activities and initiatives and from mechanisms designed to support enhancement (Williams, 2014; Elassy, 2015). Although QE and quality improvement are not the same in real meaning, in this study they are used interchangeably.

There are different definitions and explanations of QA with regard to higher education. It depends on how quality is defined in relation with QA. QA, therefore, is the mechanism put in place not only to enhance the prescribed standards but also to maintain them (Inglis, 2005; Odhiambo, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that universities are expected to put in place internal and external QA systems and ensure that they are reviewed periodically for purposes of QE, quite apart from government imposition.

Another question that emerges from the literature is whether QA helps universities to offer higher education programmes consistently and leave room for QE. Regarding this argument, Ellis (1993) stressed that the essence of QA is to ensure that standards are specified and met consistently for a product or service. Inglis (2005) shares the same view that QA is a process oriented to guaranteeing that the quality of a product or service meets predetermined standards, and no assumptions should be made about the quality of competing products or services. In this case, the process of QA compares the quality of products and services with minimum standards that are set by the provider, government or QA external agency.

QA is a systematic management and assessment procedure adopted to ensure the achievement of specified quality or improved quality, and to enable major key stakeholders to have confidence in the management of quality and the outcomes achieved (Harman, 2000; Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007; IUCEA, 2010). Therefore, QA ensures consistency of services and products, and reliability in their delivery. It means a reduction in variability and unpredictability (Robinson, 1995; Harman, 1998). From Harman and Robinson's point of view, it appears that QA can be managed only with input from all interest groups in higher education.

There is a need to create ownership among stakeholders, as it is the only way that they will have confidence in the whole process of QA. The IUCEA (2010) in its report states that stakeholders always have faith in programmes that have clear QA goals and activities that are constantly reviewed with explicit guidelines on student assessment, continuous professional development (CPD) for staff and collaboration with other universities.

QA is a planned, systematic review process within an institution or programme to determine whether acceptable standards of education are being met, maintained and enhanced (Harvey & Green, 1993; Materu, 2007). It means that an institution must be doing something in terms of self-regulation, internal or external quality systems. This might include the involvement of external examiners to conduct moderation for continuous assessment and examinations, including the results of a programme.

QA is an approach to managing quality that focuses on the management of processes. It aims to apply agreed procedures to achieve defined standards as a matter of routine (Robinson, 1995). QA cannot be achieved within a short period. It requires concerted efforts by all those involved. One would therefore suggest that a complete cultural change in an institution is necessary for successful implementation of QA systems. According to Loukkola and Zhang (2010), Sursock (2011), Militaru, Pavel and Zafir (2011) and Ntim (2014), building a quality culture takes time and effort and is closely related to values, beliefs and cultural elements that cannot change quickly.

QA is a new concept that has come from European to African countries to improve quality provision in higher education (Ewell, 2010). Many African countries have independently realised the need to have strong national QA policies with proper guidelines (Letseka, 2015). Kisanga and Machumu (2014) add that there is a need to define QA in higher education reflecting its importance for economic and social advancement. The whole community must strive to make sure that higher education satisfies these outcomes and does not merely produce graduates in large numbers. Presumably, the point that Kisanga and Machumu are making is that universities should produce graduates with the necessary knowledge and technical expertise to be competitive in a global economy (Kisanga & Machumu, 2014).

All the definitions of QA above demonstrate commonalities, although QA is a generic concept whose meaning may depend on the interpretations given. One aspect that stands out clearly is that planning activities must be executed in an orderly manner. With QA in place, QE activities are expected to be performed in a systematic manner, along with good planning. At national or institutional level, QA could be described as 'policy'. In this case, systematic procedures should be followed, as with any policy. For example, QA policies would help to enhance the learning outcomes provided through ODL educational programmes.

2.5 Classification of QA in higher education

Quality assurance is classified as either internal or external. According to Espinoza and González (2013), 'internal QA' (IQA) refers to policies and practices that allow an institution to monitor and improve the quality of its education provision and to make sure that an institution meets its own

benchmarks, together with the standards that apply to higher education in general. It aims to apply agreed procedures to achieve defined standards as a matter of routine (Robinson, 1995). QA cannot be achieved within a short period. It requires concerted efforts by all those involved. In most cases, local people initiate the activities or internal processes involved in IQA. For example, the enactment of the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 in Zambia compels all the universities, both public and private, to put in place internal quality systems. Section 6 (1) of this Act mandates the HEA to promote QA in higher education and audit QA systems in higher education (GRZ, 2013).

The most effective QA arrangements are those that are driven by effective internal decision-making processes and structures that give measures of local adaptation in the faculties (Sursock, 2011). Internal QA should successfully engage the university community. Furthermore, internal quality activities are vital elements of a university's responsibility, accountability and autonomy. It should be clearly stated here that IQA helps institutions to remain on track by adhering to their own local policies, which are in line with the national policy framework or guidelines given to them by external agencies. Cheong (2003) explains that IQA also focuses on improving the internal environment and processes, such that the effectiveness of teaching and learning is guaranteed by meeting the planned goals.

External quality assurance (EQA) has rapidly increased to become a significant element in higher education. For example, it has been said to be a successful area of development in European higher education in the past few decades (Stensaker et al., 2011). EQA involves outside agencies with the mandate to examine the quality of programmes and robustness of the quality systems that an institution has put in place in delivering its programmes and services to the public. Vlăsceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea (2004) state that a team of experts and peers carries out EQA, or inspectors whose interest is to perform three separate tasks: analysis of self-study reports; site visits; and drafting of an evaluation report. The essence of such an exercise in EQA is to ensure that an institution involved in the education provision adheres to the prescribed benchmarks of QA. The team of experts will ultimately write a report based on its findings and make recommendations in areas that need improvement.

According to Stensaker et al. (2011), a key function of EQA is to stimulate change and improvement in teaching and learning in institutions of learning. While EQA has significant advantages for the institutions being reviewed, external experts must not have double standards in trying to gauge improvement and accountability at the same time (Billing, 2004; Mhlanga, 2008). Harvey (1997) observes that external quality monitoring does not in itself improve quality, as it fails to produce cheaper ways to improve quality. EQA is the process to affirm the reliability

and efficiency of the IQA process of an institution (Batoool & Qureshi, 2007). In other words, the essence of EQA is not to duplicate and misrepresent internal processes (Billing, 2004).

As the study comprises the analyses of university-level QA mechanisms and practices, information on internal and external QA will be useful in explaining what contextual factors influence universities in the adoption of IQA, EQA, or both. From the information above, it can be argued that IQA is internally owned and planned. The role of EQA is to support and facilitate internal practices to help in continuous quality improvement.

The next section sets out broad approaches to QA. Universities can choose one or a combination of these approaches.

2.6 Broad approaches to QA

This section of the chapter reviews some general approaches that are used in QA. These approaches include accreditation, benchmarking and quality audits.

Accreditation: Eaton (2012) and Latchem (2016) note that accreditation is the act of reviewing colleges, universities, institutions and programmes to judge their education quality and how well they serve the students and society. Therefore, if the process of accreditation is a success, the institution will be awarded accredited status, implying that the students and the public may expect it to live up to its promise. Accreditation can therefore be said to be both a process and a status. To the students, accreditation provides value that is related to judging the institution's quality, student support and rate of subsequent employment (CHEA, 2011). On the other hand, accreditation signals that members of the public can have confidence in the programmes together with the institution. In other words, accreditation plays a significant role in assuring the quality of the education being provided.

According to the CHEA (2011), it is the responsibility of an institution to carry out internal audits. Areas that are of great concern to the government must be considered first, together with those of members of the public. This can be done by taking quick action in areas where standards are not fully met. Institutions of higher learning are required to identify areas in which they are not doing well through robust internal quality mechanisms.

Manning (2012, 8) observes that 'An institution must demonstrate not only the capacity to ensure its own quality, but also the will to do so; it must have a track record of internal QA'. Materu (2007) explores the positive view of accreditation by arguing that it helps to increase accountability among public and private higher education institutions in Nigeria. This has resulted

in leaders paying attention to quality improvement. Based on the literature reviewed, it is clear that accreditation is of paramount importance to higher education providers.

Benchmarking: According to Spendolini (1992), benchmarking is a continuous systematic process for evaluating the products, services and work processes of organisations that are recognised as representing the best practices for the purpose of organisational improvements. In short, it is the process of recognising 'best practice' in the industry and implementing it. Universities must look out for best practice in the provision of ODL within the higher education system and borrow from it with a view to finding ways to improve their own performance (Jung, 2005; Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007).

Benefits of benchmarking: There are numerous advantages associated with benchmarking; however, any benchmarking programme that does not produce positive improvements is either undesirable or is being wrongly applied. Therefore, it is up to an institution to choose the type of benchmarking that it adopts (Schofield, 1998). According to Appleby (1999, 58-59), the benefits of benchmarking are:

- i. Helps to identify good practice in one institution, which can be incorporated into another.
- ii. It provides realistic targets that can be shown to have been achieved by others.
- iii. Reduces resistance to change, as academic and other support staff can see how a certain practice has worked in other institutions.
- iv. Makes it possible to import technical and innovative ideas from other institutions.
- v. Broadens employees' experience and knowledge base.
- vi. Can be a tool for continuous improvement and a source of staff motivation to change, if used correctly and appropriately.
- vii. Helps to understand competition and the gaps that may exist.
- viii. Helps in establishing good customer care and identifying their needs.
- ix. Acts as systematic framework for objective analysis and evaluation.

Benchmarking should be considered to be a necessary management tool in achieving best-value services in public sector organisations (Magd & Curry, 2003). Universities in both public and private sectors can use benchmarking to improve on service delivery to their customers (Jung,

2005). Magd and Curry (2003) argue that benchmarking is a vital tool in this competitive world, where universities are fighting for the same students and need to show that they are offering quality programmes. It is advisable to take certain precautionary measures when introducing benchmarks, as well as the methodology to adopt them. It is possible that universities in Zambia could embrace benchmarking to help in the identification of good practice in leading universities in various countries.

Quality audits: This is a process of checking that the relevant QA systems and structures within an institution support its key mission, such as teaching and research (Frazer, 1992). This helps to ensure that the education provisions are to the required standards or beyond. Woodhouse (2003) states that a quality audit is scrutiny conducted mostly by a group external to the university in order to check that the QA and quality control mechanisms are not merely in place but are up to the required standards. The institution itself can also carry out quality audits, but objectivity and critical analysis of its own activities are required.

According to ISO 9000 (cited in Woodhouse, 2003), a quality audit has three processes that include the following:

- i. The suitability of the planned procedures in relation to the stated objectives.
- ii. The conformity of the actual activities with the plans.
- iii. The effectiveness of the activities in achieving the stated objectives.

The word 'quality' is not mentioned in the above three processes, but it is implicit, because a quality audit involves checking an institution's conformance to its objectives. It can also be argued that an institution must plan well and be properly structured to meet its aims and objectives. A quality audit is not in itself QA but is one of the processes involved in assuring quality. In normal circumstances, quality audits should be accompanied by a rigorous QA system. Woodhouse (2003) explains that a quality audit is a check to find out whether the institution is fit for its stated purposes. Furthermore, Woodhouse believes that this process is a flexible approach to QA as it deals with an institution concerning its terms as well as its objectives. Materu (2007) demonstrates that educational institutions' activities should be in line with their objectives. In other words, institutions' activities are guided by its objectives. From this argument, it may be argued that higher education institutions should choose their own internal and external QA activities rather than have them imposed on them, as this might conflict with their objectives.

2.7 Quality assurance strategies used for quality review

This section describes different QA strategies that are commonly used in higher education institutions. Institutions may choose any of these strategies, but a combination would yield better results in terms of areas that require attention and improvement.

Self-evaluation: This is the process of critical introspection into how the programmes and services are being delivered by an institution of higher learning. It helps to detect the strengths and weaknesses of an internal system for an organisation. According to Harman (1998), self-evaluation has a number of advantages that include being effective and cost efficient. It normally involves all the major staff in the institution and creates a sense of ownership among the members. This process helps to increase the chances of improvement of areas that are not performing well within the organisation. Harvey (2002) explains that the less threatening the evaluation process, the more open, honestly reflective and useful it is. The emphasis is on being truthful to come up with meaningful findings.

Peer review: This is a form of external evaluation that is carried out by peers representing a QA agency or a university (Harman, 1998). In most cases, this is carried out by practicing officers at the level of senior lecturer, researcher or consultant (equal standing). The officers usually visit the institution during the evaluation process. The areas of assessment are agreed with the university under review. Harman (1998) observes that peer review works well if combined with self-evaluation. It is important, therefore, for the external group to recognise that self-evaluation demands respect for the values of those being evaluated. Indeed, one of the significant weaknesses of peer reviewing is the limited opportunity to challenge the misconceptions of reviewers. It is important to respect and take into account their observations. The other aspect that must be considered before involving external peer reviewers is the cost associated with such exercises. Materu (2007) observes that most of the universities find it difficult to pay the astronomical cost of such an exercise.

External examiners: This practice involves one university or college extending an invitation to the senior members of academic staff at another institution of higher standing to moderate its students' continuous assessment, examination papers and the final computation of the results at either Bachelor's degree or Master's level (QAA, 2011). Harvey (2002) states that external examiners are experts in their fields and provide expert knowledge or external views in the delivery of the individual courses or modules, as well as commenting on the manner in which the entire programme is delivered. This process helps a university to ensure high-quality teaching, learning, assessment and improvement in the delivery of its programmes. Biggs (2001) notes that the traditional role of external examiners in the United Kingdom is to help to maintain standards

in institutions. It is also common practice for universities worldwide to invite senior academic staff and researchers to examine their PhD candidates in various fields for QA purposes.

Site visit: This is when an external group of experts goes to an institution to carry out evaluations of a number of areas regarding quality provision. The reviewers examine an institution's self-study report, interview members of the academic staff and students and carry out inspections of the infrastructure (Hayward, 2006; Blattler et al., 2010). They examine the structure of an institution and the overall effectiveness of the programmes and services that it provides. Site visits are widely used in most European countries as part of the QA procedure, and there are variations in the procedures carried out. Interviews are a major component of the site visits to elicit information from different groups within the institution. Biggs (2001) notes that once the site visit report is compiled, it is normally given to the management. One thing to note is that this is a laborious process and takes time. Therefore, site visits should be based on documents and information provided by the institution or university in question.

In summing up QA strategies, QA agencies and universities must decide on the strategies to use. It is important that universities are aware of and comfortable with the strategies adopted by the agencies.

2.8 Commercial QA models

There are several models of QA, and these may be country and institution specific. Different countries have adopted different models to which their institutions subscribe. This section reviews the Baldrige Criteria, ISO 9000-2000, Six-sigma and total quality management. The suitability of these models for the education sector is still a contentious issue (Mishra, 2007; IUCEA, 2010). The models have worked successfully in the commercial sector. Their use in ODL would help higher education providers in developing their own QA frameworks (Kettunen, 2012). An effective QA model for a university could result in better service delivery that gives confidence to students and other stakeholders (Todorut, 2013). It should be noted that QA was borrowed from the commercial sector and is now being applied to education (Mishra, 2007). The key issue is whether the principles that guide industry models of QA may be applied to higher education in a similar manner.

2.8.1 Baldrige Criteria

In the United States of America, the Baldrige National Quality Programme is the system of implementing the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for improvement of performance excellence. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) (NIST, 2011) manages the

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Baldrige Criteria. The aim of the programme is to increase competitiveness among American entrepreneurs and businesses in the global market (Karathanos & Karathanos, 2005). The programme is widely recognised in the United States as promoting growth and competitiveness. To this effect, every year the American Society for Quality makes awards to institutions that meet the required quality benchmarks.

The Baldrige education criteria for performance excellence comprise the following seven core values:

Leadership: The leadership category focuses on how management officers appreciate the organisation's core vision and how they create clear and visible quality values for them to achieve what the organisation was established for (Rao Tummala & Tang, 1996). A leader in an organisation should understand corporate governance and ethical, legal and public engagement, and show commitment to the general values of the organisation.

Strategic planning: An organisation's strategic objectives, as well as action plans, are examined. Strategic plans are essential because they help to hold an organisation together as it aspires to meet long-term commitments and help to meet the stakeholders' needs.

Customer focus: This category focuses on students' needs and their expectations, plus the stakeholders and the markets that are taken into account by the organisation. Furthermore, student and stakeholder satisfaction as well as relationship enhancement are core to an organisation (Banister, 2001). Here, the organisation is required to make use of customer information for innovative purposes.

Measurement, analysis, and knowledge management: This category examines how the organisation selects, collects, aligns and integrates data for operations and for its general performance. The category also focuses on how the organisation uses review findings for performance improvement and how it develops priorities for continuous improvement (Banister, 2001; NIST, 2011).

Workforce focus: This category examines the organisation's ability to assess its workforce capability and capacity needs and build a workforce environment that is conducive to stimulating performance. Furthermore, it examines how an organisation engages and manages its workforce to meet its mission, strategy and action plans (NIST, 2011).

Operations focus: This category focuses on how an organisation designs, manages and improves its work systems and work processes to deliver customer value, achieve organisational success and sustainability. It also examines workplace preparedness for disasters and emergencies.

Results: This is the last category and examines an organisation's improvement and performance in all six areas mentioned above (Karthi, 2004).

This model is relevant to this study because of its holistic nature in shaping the QA mechanisms of any university. Its focus on improvement is one area that universities could benefit from.

2.8.2 ISO 9000:2000

The International Organisation for Standardization (known as ISO) was founded in 1946 to develop international standards (Murphy & Yates, 2009). Originally, the ISO 9000 series was intended for manufacturing industries, but it has now attracted service industries, including education. A number of higher education institutions and universities have registered with ISO to improve their quality delivery (Shutler & Crawford, 1998). The essence of ISO is to provide uniformity in standards for quality purposes and avoid fragmentation and sub-standard products. It is, therefore, the responsibility of top management in the organisation to meet the ISO guidelines.

Cheng, Lyu and Lin (2004) explain that the ISO 9000 series provides guidelines to universities' top management in order to improve the effectiveness of their education delivery system. ISO 9000 has undergone a number of revisions over time. When an organisation receives certification of ISO 9000, it is an indication that it is meeting its customers' needs and demands. This is only given when qualified auditors are satisfied, based on the assessment of the management systems that the organisation under review has put in place (Cheng, Lyu & Lin, 2004).

ISO 9000 certification for a university offering ODL is an assurance that the education and training being provided meet the institution's aims and objectives, students' satisfaction and the needs of other stakeholders. ISO 9000: 2000 is generic and flexible, and the focus is on establishing quality systems within an organisation. In a seemingly opposite view, Van den Berghe (1997) argues that although ISO is gaining ground and popularity, there is a risk that it could result in setting low content quality standards due to the amount of paperwork required.

ISO has published optimal guidelines for institutions in the education sector to benefit from the latest version, ISO 9001: 2000. This has four major categories: management responsibility; resource management; product realisation and measurement; and analysis and improvement. The argument here is that ISO can work well if it is used as a supplementary QA model or if applied side by side with other internal QA systems at an institutional level that permits improvement.

2.8.3 Six-sigma

Six-sigma is an effective implementation of proven quality principles and techniques by incorporating elements from the work of many quality pioneers (Pyzdek, 2003). It aims to create error-free business performance. As a quality assessment model, Motorola developed Six-sigma in the late 1980s. Since then, it has gained the attention of high-profile companies such as General Electric (Nakhai & Neves, 2009; Gamal, 2010). Six-sigma is slowly penetrating the education sector as a teaching course. Many higher education institutions have now embraced Six-sigma for their quality assessment and improvement (Mishra, 2007).

The objective of this model is to reduce defects and increase customer satisfaction (Dedhia, 2005). Specifically, Six-sigma is about helping the organisation to generate more income by improving customer value and efficiency. Six-sigma has the potential to help to transform universities that are offering programmes through ODL whose purpose is to make profit but, above all, to provide quality. In order to understand Six-sigma, it must be viewed in three different ways; as a metric, a philosophy and a methodology (Mishra, 2007). As a metric, this model is a statistical expression that represents a population's standard deviation and is a measure of variation about the mean. For example, at five standard deviations defects at 233.0 per million will result in 99.997 per cent conformance to standard. Six-sigma has a failure rate process of 3.4 per million (PPM) or is 99.9997 per cent defect-free.

Nakhai and Neves (2009) observe that Six-sigma, as a philosophy, is not only a means of reducing process variation but affords benefits to all stakeholders of an organisation and leads to their satisfaction. As a methodology, Six-sigma uses a systematic yet complicated approach to problem solving called DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve and Control). In other words, the methodology of Six-sigma is a clear, systematic process covering five steps, as shown in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1 Six-sigma DMAIC methodology

Step	Activity
Define	Outline the borders of the project, stakeholders agree on the goals and targets set and the cost of poor quality
Measure	Leaders collect reliable data and develop measurement tools and possible tools for enhancement
Analyse	Bring out the cause of inefficiency; critical thinking and use of statistical tools

Step	Activity
Improve	Teams and stakeholders brainstorm on the methods to address deficiencies and the time needed to execute
Control	Develop metrics to help leaders to monitor progress, as well as reveal out negative developments

(Adapted from Mishra, 2007)

According to Pyzdek (2003), Six-sigma has numerous advantages for service organisations such as universities. The advantages include:

- Improved accuracy in resources allocation
- Improved accuracy of reporting
- Reduced documentary defects
- Improved timely and accurate claims reimbursement
- Streamlined process of service delivery
- Reduced inventory of equipment
- Reduced service preparation times
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Reduced defect rate in service processes.

Six-sigma also has disadvantages that make it difficult to implement successfully (Dedhia, 2005; Gamal, 2010) in that, in certain cases, its solutions are more expensive than the problems. Any organisation interested in using this model must be ready to invest considerable funds. For instance, many personnel must undergo rigorous training for several weeks. This involves officers at various levels, and the skills and tasks given are equally varied. All the members are part of the team and key to the implementation of a Six-sigma project (Pyzdek, 2003; Dedhia, 2005).

Therefore, the successful implementation of Six-sigma depends on the availability of resources for training all those involved in the correct use of DMAIC structure of problem solving. For Six-sigma to work, there is a need for the entire organisation's culture to change. In this study, Six-sigma is explored as an alternative to practice QA provision of ODL in Zambia. Its detailed steps could potentially be used as IQA activities at university level.

2.8.4 Total quality management (TQM)

Feigenbaum first used TQM in 1961 (Martínez, Dewhurst & Dale, 1998). With the creation of the European Foundation of Quality Management in 1988, emphasis was laid on TQM to realise total

customer satisfaction (Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2004). TQM is designed to create awareness within the organisation of the kind of attention that should be given to customers. In other words, TQM is customer focused. TQM has been adopted as a management paradigm by several organisations, and it has spread to other institutions such as banking, insurance and governments. As Todorut (2013) puts it, the objective of TQM is to create within the organisation an atmosphere in which all resources are used creatively and prudently, boosting morale and confidence in management. Most of the higher education institutions in developing countries lack prudent management of resources to help to improve the delivery of education in the most efficient and sustainable manner.

Arising from pressures exerted by stakeholders in education, significant interest in TQM in higher education has emerged. More recently, Sudha (2013) looked at higher education institutions in India that have been confronted by competition for students and profile imaging. He further observes that such competition demands a synergistic relationship among stakeholders through the adoption of TQM as a management tool. One could state that universities and similar institutions are using TQM to improve on quality delivery of their education.

While it should be appreciated that TQM has the potential to shape the operations of higher education institutions, there are challenges in implementing it. Ali and Shastri (2010) state in their critique on the application of TQM in the higher education institutions that these institutions are deep rooted in traditions dating back many years. For example, in adopting TQM, universities that are organised in departmental units must move from a product focus to a market focus. Indeed, the implications of TQM would help to shape the strategies of higher education institutions in their quest to meet the demands of stakeholders.

2.9 Models for QA in higher education

The following specific models are for assuring quality in higher education and are non-exclusive. A combination of these models would be ideal to come up with a comprehensive QA framework at national and institutional level, depending on the context (Kettunen, 2012). The models in this section are proposed to help in addressing the multifarious challenges of higher education depending on the level of integration with modern approaches to come up with a holistic model for quality provision of ODL programmes. In some models, specific examples of their current applications have been cited. The models presented in this section are relatively outdated, but they may still be relevant if they are applied together with current models and approaches in improving and maintaining the quality of ODL.

2.9.1 Transformative model

The transformative model has a specific focus on the students and was proposed by Harvey and Knight (1996). It states that higher education institutions should put in place quality policies that address the student learning experience (Kettunen, 2012). The researcher is of the view that students must be equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills by the end of their studies. The model also emphasises the essence of quality in education, and that transformation enables students to assess and develop knowledge for themselves. Harvey and Knight (1996) state that internal and external stakeholders in higher education have a definite view of the quality of learning. They observe that an efficient model should have a quality culture of continuous improvement that is driven from both bottom-up and top-down approaches. Harvey and Knight's views rest on the importance of stakeholders' involvement in teaching and learning in higher education. The supporters of this model believe that transformative learning is a transparent process and gives an integrated experience that enhances and empowers students. In trying to justify the current relevancy of transformational learning (TL), Hidalgo, Koebernik and Williams (2018) conducted research to determine if higher education academics could use TL with other teaching strategies to improve students' performance and outcomes. Their study concluded that the TL opportunities could serve a role in changing the landscape of higher education settings in improving quality delivery of higher education programmes.

2.9.2 Engagement model

In 1977 Haworth and Conrad presented the engagement model, which focuses on students. It demonstrates that students' engagement in learning should be the primary purpose of higher education (Yarbrough, 2002). This model stresses the engagement and interaction of students with their lecturers, administrators and fellow students as extremely important to their academic journey. These interactions help to enrich their experiences.

The model emphasises the need to provide adequate resources that support students, academic staff and infrastructure. It further states that in quality programmes the principal stakeholders, academics, students and administrators must invest in different clusters of programme attributes and allow them to enrich the learning experiences of students. Similarly, Fitzgerald et al. (2012) state that to thrive in the current times, higher education must adopt new approaches to move engagement from the margin to the mainstream of research, teaching and service. Further, they recommend that specific steps for making engagement central to higher education should include creating opportunities for faculty to embrace engagement; stressing the scholarly characteristics of engagement efforts as well as giving support to the students.

2.9.3 University of learning model

Bowden and Marton (2004) developed this model, reflecting the fact that one of the core activities in a university is learning. This means that, for learning to take place, a university should have strong pedagogical competence to deliver its programmes. This model highlights a synergistic kind of involvement of the academics in things that are common and complementary. In other words, the university learning model involves instructional activities for students in doing tasks and thinking about what they are doing and at the same time involves active learning, as activities that students do to construct knowledge and understanding, besides these activities, vary, but require students to do higher order thinking (Freeman et al., 2014). For example, Haak and colleagues examined the effects of active learning for students in the University of Washington's Educational Opportunity Programme (EOP), with students who were enrolled in an introductory biology course. They found out that active learning approaches promote learning for students and that this kind of learning is an effective tool in making classrooms more inclusive.

In this model, the proponents examined organisational characteristics that are conducive to quality learning and came up with the 'university of learning'. The idea is that academics should commit themselves to a thorough understanding of their subject matter from the learners' point of view to develop other pedagogical methods (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2001).

2.9.4 Responsive university model

Tierney proposed the Responsive University model in 1998. It is based on quality of relationships and emphasises communication with new partnerships, both internally and externally (Tierney, 1998). The model brings out the aspect of academic checks on conforming to the internal and external stakeholders. According to Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2001), responsiveness comes from a service orientation with a focus on customers and that organisations must have adequate information to be responsive and make good judgements. The model stresses that universities will do well if they develop new conversations in terms of system-wide policies and partnerships to meet a variety of public needs.

2.9.5 Quality management in education model

This is a generic model that combines different models, and it was proposed by Srikanthan and Dalrymple in 2007. The aim is to synthesise ideas from the models that have already been discussed and above all the proponents of this model believe in critical transformation of the learners, as this represents an integrated approach. This leads to metacognition: knowledge,

awareness and control of one's own learning. In this way, students are able to indicate the reasons for any approach or change in the course of their learning.

This model goes on to suggest that a university, unlike other successful creative organisations, should have a common purpose and shared goals that make it collective and different from another grouping. Universities should move from rituals of teaching to a commitment to teaching, and collegial processes should be daily practice. The model highlights the importance of teaching, with a focus on discovering students' ways of seeing a phenomenon, as this leads to meaningful outcomes. It is the responsibility of a university to build capacity in students through effective engagement in all the domains. Furthermore, the authors of this model suggest that a quality system must have two aspects, improvement and accountability, as part of the entire process. The researcher proposes that the quality management model could serve as the ideal model to address the current demands and aspirations of universities with regard to service, education, research, community outreach and enterprise.

In summary, quality in higher education is a multidimensional, multi-level and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model (UNESCO, 2002). It relates to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme or discipline. In the context of this study, quality is likely to take different or conflicting meanings, depending on the interests of various stakeholders in a university.

QA has been defined in a number of ways. What comes out clearly is the need to bring stakeholders together, whose concerns must be taken on board with regard to the systems that the institutions would like to adopt. The basic idea of QA, in view of its numerous definitions, is that higher education institutions must convince all their stakeholders that what they are doing is correct in preparing students for the challenges of society (IUCEA, 2010). The other aspect worth noting is that QA is a systematic and far-reaching process that helps to ensure that institutions such as universities have systems that can be reviewed and assessed for the purposes of improvement.

QA provides users of a higher education system with a guarantee that institutions, programmes and courses as well as graduates meet certain prescribed standards. El Hassan (2013) notes that QA comprises the processes undertaken by higher education institutions that are designed to safeguard academic standards and promote learning to acceptable levels for the learners. In this case, there is a need for synergy between and among all the stakeholders to provide quality education that can be sustained by continuous improvements. The application of QA models and educational management models is a complex process. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' model in QA, and it depends on a number of parameters identified by the stakeholders. In the researcher's

view, some of the QA models that are applicable in developed countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Australia may not fit African countries because QA is contextual. This means that ideas cannot always be simply borrowed from countries and universities that seem to be doing well in terms of QA provision, because they may not be applied in the same manner due to several factors. For example, universities that offer ODL programmes in Zambia are struggling to move to blending learning because of poor internet connectivity and lack of infrastructure for ICT. Blended learning is a diverse and expanding area of design and inquiry that combines face-to-face and online modalities. Jung and Latchem (2009) indicate that universities in developed countries are ahead of their counterparts in the developing world with regard to implementing blended learning. This, therefore, presupposes that quality QA models applicable to universities in the developed world may need to be customised to the contextual realities of their counterparts in the developing world.

2.10 Open and distance learning (ODL)

This section discusses the meaning of ODL, its models of delivery and its implementation in Africa.

Open learning is an approach to providing learning in a flexible way. It is organised around the geographical, social and time constraints of the learner, rather than the institution (Bates, 1995; Peters, 2002). Distance education is an educational process whereby an instructor, whose face-to-face contact with the students is limited, conducts the teaching. In this case, a combination of the approach of open learning with the process of distance education is called ODL. ODL is the use of various methods to provide and enhance learning. UNESCO (2002) states that ODL should reflect teaching where an instructor is removed in space and time. It involves the use of technology, such as telecommunications, internet and teleconferencing. ODL refers to the provision of flexible educational opportunities in terms of access and multiple modes of knowledge acquisition.

ODL has given greater opportunity to many people in developing nations who were previously denied the chance to undertake higher education (Rumble; 1989; Dhanarajan, 2001). The essence of ODL, therefore, is to increase access, openness and flexibility. ODL is currently an important topic for most educational planners, academics, administrators and policymakers. This can be attributed to its growth and technology-enhanced learning (Bishop & Spake, 2003). Several countries around the world have developed national policies in education, and these act as guides to the higher education institutions involved or those that intend to offer ODL programmes.

According to the International Council for Open Distance Learning, globalisation and the imperatives of our networked society continue to influence higher education almost everywhere in the world (ICDE, 2013). ODL may be the only way to meet student growth and participation and

the objectives of governments, including anticipated future students' demands for flexible learning opportunities (Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007; Harry, John & Keegan, 2013).

From the observation above, it can be argued that indeed, with good policies in place, ODL has the capacity to reduce the gap that conventional education leaves in terms of access to higher education in both developed and developing countries. It is, therefore, true to state that ODL plays a significant role in mass higher education. Pitsoe and Letseka (2015) comment that ODL is acting as the solution to the critical issues of access to higher education in South Africa. Furthermore, they argue that ODL is a viable alternative to millions of South Africans who were denied the chance to study at higher education level by the past policies of the Apartheid regime. Pityana (2009) observes that on the African continent, where resources are scarce, and the provision of higher education is poor, ODL is seen as a viable and cost-effective means of increasing higher education at minimal cost.

2.11 Leadership for QA in universities offering open and distance learning

This section discusses the roles and attributes of leaders in universities that offer programmes through ODL in spearheading QA provision.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, higher education in Zambia has diversified and many changes have occurred in terms of expansion of the sector, massification, funding, accountability, global networking and QA provision. In view of such developments, in the higher education sector there is need for those who possess a combination of leadership and management competencies to address the challenges faced in the sector, including QA (Black, 2015). By the same score, it is important to note that QA needs to be part of the long-term policy of higher education institutions. Therefore, universities that offer programmes through ODL should be presided over by leaders who will take responsibility for various systems, which include QA of teaching and learning, research and community services, within the environments in which they operate (Owino et al., 2011).

2.11.1 Effective leadership for universities with ODL mode

All the leaders in higher education at national (policy) and institutional level have the responsibility to make sure that there is quality provision in the programmes, and services offered by their universities. However, at university level QA can only be achieved through the concerted efforts of all departments and units within the institution. In the case of Zambia, university leaders must exercise effective leadership that will encourage their staff to work hard towards the common objectives. Effective leadership demands that leaders develop interpersonal skills that

will help them to communicate effectively and build strong working relationships with staff. Moreover, it demands that a leader is an active listener to staff's ideas, suggestions and solutions to make a meaningful judgement or decision (Setiawati, 2016). Furthermore, effective leaders must make sure that they 'think outside the box' so that they can collaborate and benchmark with other leaders and institutions. This will enable them to develop creative thinking and innovative ideas that will help their universities to offer quality programmes through ODL. Regarding experience in teaching, researchers argue that universities in Zambia need leaders who understand and appreciate the global complexities and that higher education is dynamic.

Effective leaders have various roles, and the list is endless. Leaders must be good at delegating tasks to their staff so that, even in their absence, the smooth running of the university is not affected. Nevertheless, there are some tasks that cannot be delegated, particularly those that involve finance, such as signing cheques. Some of the roles for an effective leader include planning, assessing and evaluating various QA activities for the university.

2.11.2 Attributes of effective leadership in QA of universities offering ODL

According to Setiawati (2016), the following are some effective leadership attributes for higher education:

1. *Have interpersonal intelligence*: Effective leaders should help to build professional relationships with all the members of the organisation. They must not feel that they are indispensable, therefore must spot strong leadership attributes in their staff to help to develop them into leaders.
2. *Be creative*: As earlier indicated in this section, leaders are expected to be creative and innovative, as this will enable them to take their university to a higher level.
3. *Be visionary*: A leader should be able to predict the institutional needs and plan the future targets. Besides, leaders are expected to provide guidance in meeting the vision and the mission.
4. *Be a role model*: A leader is expected to be a role model to both academic and support staff. This means that the leader should exhibit leadership values such as excellence, integrity, compassion, courage and loyalty and, above all, show consistency in their actions. These values motivate staff to equally work hard and follow in the footsteps of their leader.
5. *Have planning and accessing skills*: These skills are necessary for a leader to know how the university is progressing and to identify what is required to move forward.
6. *Evaluate skill*: Leaders are expected to have this skill to help them to understand their institution's actions, in line with its goals.

7. *Be knowledgeable and proactive*: Leaders in higher education must be knowledgeable in works related to QA to avoid making irrational decisions. In other words, a leader should keep thinking to arrive at a better decision yet remain positive, even in difficult situations.
8. *Be flexible*: A leader should not be rigid but flexible in dealing with his members. This will enable him not only to respect other people's opinions but also to benefit from such interaction.

With the above attributes, it is important to state that the situation determines the style of leadership that can be applied. These styles include transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, distributed and centralised leadership, among others. Regarding Zambia, the researcher argues that senior officers in universities should deliberately take short-duration leadership courses to help them to enhance their managerial skills in their quest for quality delivery of ODL. Needless to say, not all leaders of university lack these skills. However, universities are sites for innovative ideas and leaders in higher education institutions should be seen to move with the times, should the context permit.

2.11.3 Models of delivery in open and distance learning

There are many different ODL models. Each university decides on the most appropriate model to use, depending on various factors such as availability of funds, infrastructure and the number of ODL students. The models have been changing over time, with the fifth generation being the most recent. At the moment, universities combine the old with the latest generation of models. There is no single super-model for ODL, and the choice is dependent on a number of factors such as the needs of the students, subject matter, costs and the preferred teaching approach (Bates, 1990; Peters, 2002). Each educational jurisdiction must choose and apply ODL models and technology that support and suit its circumstances (Bates, 1990, 1995). In this way, its education will be controlled by avoiding certain technologies that do not favour its students.

The following describes the models of ODL:

Correspondence model: This is the oldest model and is widely used. It is composed of the examination preparation model and normal teaching. In this model, study materials and assignments are given to the students, as well as feedback. According to Ansari (2002), the advantage of this model is that it is cheaper than other models and easy to administer. Mega universities such as the University of South Africa (UNISA) combine this model with other innovations. Onwe (2013) states that the hallmark of ODL is the systematic integration of different learning resources to allow for flexible methods pertaining to effective delivery of the programmes. This model is sometimes referred to as the first-generation model.

Multimedia model: This model is a combination of print, computer-based learning and interactive videos. The instructors offer systematic support to the students. Meaningful interaction between the students and the instructors is relevant to a positive outcome in ODL. These interactions help in eliciting the necessary feedback from the students. The model is expensive to undertake and requires the provision of good infrastructure. Multimedia falls under the second-generation model (Passerini & Granger, 2000).

Tele-learning model: Here the level of flexibility is high, with refined materials and advanced, interactive delivery. The model consists of video conferencing, audio-graphic communication, broadcasting (radio and TV) and audio teleconferencing. This model requires money to build the infrastructure, as well as reliable internet providers with widespread broadband. The model is common among universities in developed countries and falls under the third generation (Passerini & Granger, 2000).

Flexible learning model: The model is highly interactive between the course instructors and the students. It is an improved version of the tele-learning model and uses interactive multimedia, online, internet-based access World Wide Web resources and computer-mediated communication (Ansari, 2002; Aoki, 2012). A high internet speed is necessary for this model. All the assignments are written and submitted online. In other words, this model puts together features of face-to-face learning, and is categorised as a fourth-generation model.

Intelligent flexible learning model: The model brings together the students and their instructors or lecturers. It consists of computer-mediated communication using automated response systems, and campus portal access to institutional processes and resources (Aoki, 2012). The other features are the same as those for the flexible learning model. The model has characteristics that are ideal for technology-enhanced learning and requires commitment to implement certain innovations. It is a fifth-generation model (the latest).

Examination preparation model: There is no teaching of any sort taking place in this model. Students must teach themselves and prepare for their examinations. The role of the university is to conduct the examinations and award the certificates to those students who complete the programmes. Students are expected to be academically disciplined with regard to time management. This model is not commonly used by most universities (Peters, 2002).

2.11.4 Challenges in the implementation of quality ODL

Overall, the challenges of ODL are those predominantly found in sub-Saharan African countries. The following are the critical ones that make it difficult to assure quality:

National policies: The absence of national policies has had a negative impact in addressing QA in ODL. According to Biao, in his descriptive survey research with 217 learners, policies should clearly state the conditions for those with an interest in the provision of programmes through ODL (Biao, 2012). Ideally, the national policies to monitor, regulate and enhance the quality provision of programmes in ODL should give rise to QA frameworks.

Lack of funding: This is another serious challenge that ODL faces. Most of the institutions, whether state or private, do not receive funding from government, a situation that has made it harder to improve the infrastructure of ODL. Basaza, Milman and Wright (2010) indicate in their case study that Uganda currently lacks the physical and human infrastructure to match the demand for tertiary education. Many public universities operate both as conventional and ODL institutions. Universities mainly depend on the same facilities as those that conventional students use. Due to the massive number of students enrolled for ODL, the facilities meant for the conventional mode cannot accommodate all the students in the ODL mode.

Leadership and managerial skills: Most of the ODL institutions in developed and developing countries are expected to move their institutions forward (Irlbeck, 2002). These skills are vital to realise the potential of ODL in capacity building, as well as infrastructure development, for better delivery of programmes and services. Garwe (2013) observes in his case study that what led to the collapse of the Reformed Church University in Zimbabwe was poor corporate governance and leadership skills, compounded by inadequate experience in management. The researcher supports Garwe's observation that good leadership helps in the development and facilitation of work in an organisation, as this leads to the realisation of an institution's vision and objectives. Belawati and Zuhairi (2007) state that management and decision-making processes are difficult to assess because it takes time to observe whether the quality of the decisions has influenced an institution.

Training of staff and technical support: One of the significant challenges of ensuring quality in the delivery of ODL, particularly in Africa, is the lack of training for academic and support staff. Not all academic staff possess the necessary skills and knowledge to handle ODL students as well as their needs (Okonkwo, 2012). According to Mhlanga (2008), in his qualitative study of three universities, the quality of academic staff in ODL is one of the important components in assuring the quality programmes in ODL. In order to have well-qualified staff, there is a need to ensure effective recruitment that takes into account development and appraisal systems for employees. Clarke et al. (2009) state that the other aspect that institutions offering ODL lack is technical support for students.

Infrastructure: A good number of ODL institutions lack the proper infrastructure for them to deliver their programmes to students during their residential schools. The majority of public higher education institutions in Zambia operate dual modes; in Simango's words, from his qualitative study, public higher education institutions use the same inadequate infrastructure for both conventional and ODL modes (Simango, 2016). A few other private universities have more infrastructure, but not enough to accommodate their ODL students. Some of these institutions are compelled to hire public secondary schools, particularly for practical courses and examinations. Such situations make it difficult to provide quality programmes through ODL. Moreover, during quality audits, university infrastructure is reviewed systematically by external agencies to determine its suitability to offer practical courses.

ICT: ODL providers now appreciate the importance of ICT in communicating with students who are located in geographically different areas. The application of ICT in ODL has been a huge challenge for many countries in Africa. Pityana (2009) observes that ODL is technology intensive now; many countries in Africa are finding it difficult to meet the cost of the bandwidth that includes hardware platforms, software, processes and applications. The cost of ICT has forced ODL to rely on printed modules, or 'batches', to supplement face-to-face sessions. It is difficult to upload study material for students in countries where the internet is neither fast nor accessible to all ODL students.

Student study material: There is a problem in the production of quality material in terms of content. The actual hard materials are in most cases poorly written and bound. Okonkwo (2012) observes that, in order to attach quality to student material production, there is a need for universities to engage staff as well as academics on a permanent basis. This makes it easier to train them in content writing, editing, production and publication. In Zambia, it is difficult to find well-trained academics who are trained in course material production (Simui et al., 2017). Reviewing these materials periodically helps to ensure that the standards of the programmes are met. However, this is not the case in some universities, such as UNZA (Hamweete, 2012; Simui, Chibale & Namangala, 2017).

As indicated in Chapter 1, the current negative public perceptions of the quality of ODL will no longer prevail once the above challenges of assessing the quality of ODL are addressed (Simui, Chibale & Namangala, 2017). The negative perceptions are strengthened by the belief that ODL is easier and is therefore for weaker students. However, this is not the case. Basaza et al. (2010) observe that self-discipline, good time management and the capability to pursue courses at a higher level are vital for ODL students. In terms of the public's perception of ODL, Ojo and Olakulehin (2006) note that, unlike in some countries, in Nigeria students have favourable

opinions and perceptions towards ODL, as well as towards its potential. Generally, it is a challenge to instil confidence in members of the public that ODL is as good as the conventional mode or even better. It needs a structured approach to maintaining and improving the quality of ODL. The next section discusses developed countries' QA context in the provision of ODL.

2.12 Developed countries' QA context in the provision of ODL

This section discusses the developments and experiences of selected non-African countries with specific selected cases of universities offering ODL, as well as their practice of QA. The selection of these countries was based on their long history and abundant literature on QA. A number of countries in Africa and Asia have copied and benchmarked these countries with policies at a national and higher education level, that includes the United Kingdom, Australia and the Netherlands.

It is possible for the general approach to QA in both conventional education and ODL to be the same. However, there are specific requirements and application of strategies that are undertaken differently. For instance, in ODL, learners take increased responsibility for the control and direction of the learning process. Secondly, course management is different and the library and learning resources may require more electronic access. Furthermore, the role of faculty members in ODL changes to suit the needs of the students (Pitsoe & Maila, 2014). Successful ODL requires a well-established QA mechanism that should match its nature. Therefore, QA mechanisms must have a systematic review of established guidelines and procedures to help to manage all the tasks related to operations of ODL. As already mentioned, QA includes achieving defined standards of education as well as meeting the needs of stakeholders. Therefore, good practices are a sign that a higher education provider meets the minimum or all the defined quality standards.

2.12.1 Quality assurance of ODL in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has established a QA system for its higher education that it is accountable, rigorous and transparent and responsive to the needs of the stakeholders (Jung & Latchem, 2012). According to Jung et al. (2011), the United Kingdom uses an integrated approach to assuring quality in its higher education by applying the same processes and standards to all institutions, as a unitary state. The United Kingdom has a single national QA system, with some minor adaptations to take account of three devolved national administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is the organisation responsible for ensuring quality and excellence in higher education, established in 1997. Mishra (2007) observes that the QAA is a

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centralised independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges. The subscriptions enable the QAA to carry out institutional audits and reviews. It seems that the audits and reviews conducted by the QAA help to instill confidence in members of the public regarding what universities are offering. In the same view, Hodson and Thomas (2003) state that the QAA's role is expressed in its mission statement: to promote public confidence that quality provision and standards of awards in higher education are safeguarded and enhanced. In fulfilling its tasks, it undertakes the following:

- Working with higher education institutions to promote and support continuous improvement in the quality and standards of provision
- Providing clear and accurate information to students, employers and others about the quality and standards of higher education provision
- Working with higher education institutions to develop and manage a qualifications framework
- Advising on the grants of degree-awarding powers and university title
- Facilitating the development of benchmark information to guide subject standards
- Promulgating codes of practice and examples of good practice
- Operating programmes of review of performance at institutional level and programme levels. (QAA, 2012, 2013)

The QAA has the following aims for the period 2014 to 2017:

- i. Enhance the quality and secure the standards of UK higher education where they are delivered to maintain public confidence.

The intentions, therefore, are to safeguard and promote the national and international reputation of UK higher education through external review enhancement; to widen relevant provider, student and employer engagement with external QA and to enhance learning and ensure external QA evolves to anticipate and influence future change.

- ii. Provide leadership, through knowledge and resources, in assuring and enhancing the quality of higher education within the UK and internationally.

To ensure that QAA's knowledge resources and expertise contribute positively and proactively to public debate on QE; to be at the forefront of policy debates on the quality of higher education, by supporting providers, students and decision-makers in meeting future challenges; and continuously improve assurance and enhancement practices in higher education through evidence-based expertise.

- iii. Extend and enhance the value and reach of QAA's services within and beyond UK higher education.

By establishing QAA as the leading agency in international QA and enhancement, proactively develop and deliver services to meet a broad range of needs, in accordance with the expertise and achieve greater financial sustainability to ensure continued independence (QAA, 2013).

All the universities and colleges that provide higher education in the United Kingdom are independent and self-governing. They are not owned by the state yet are funded by the government through the Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Scotland and Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland. The QA system in the United Kingdom is the same for both ODL and conventional learning, with the same standards being applied in these two different modes of delivery.

Jung et al. (2011, 70) assert, 'The QAA approach to assuring academic quality and standards does not identify, nor does it consider the provision of distance education separately from the provision of on campus education'. There is much debate among higher educational quality experts about what constitutes quality in ODL and the best practices for it. However, to strengthen the general QA practice for higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, QAA published further guidelines for distance learning, arranged under six headings: (1) System design; (2) Programme design, approval and review; (3) The management of programme delivery; (4) Student development and support; (5) Student communication and representation; (6) Student assessment (QAA, 2000).

All six guidelines require attention for QA to be attained in ODL. What this means is that the United Kingdom has realised that, even if the QA criteria are the same with traditional institutions, specific consideration should be given to ODL. These include infrastructure, qualified staff, effective module or course material production and, sometimes, even technology that is used in the delivery of programmes and contact sessions for ODL. Stella and Gnanam (2004) believe that the QAA guidelines for distance education are as a result of the principle that the quality of distance education must be assured, like any other form of higher education.

ODL internal QA in UK universities: All universities and colleges in the United Kingdom are responsible for the standards of their awards, including the quality of education that is provided to students. This means that individual institutions have their own internal quality systems, guided by the QAA.

A good number of universities in the United Kingdom offer programmes through ODL. This study, among other issues, highlights the internal QA system that the Open University of the UK (OUUK)

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has put in place as an example of good practice in ODL. OUUK has strong internal QA mechanisms to maintain and improve its standards. It was established in 1969 and it is the largest Open University, with over 33 per cent of all part-time UK undergraduates every year. The institution has over 200,000 registered students, making it a mega university. Wancai (2009) states that the OUUK is open to the people and promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfill their potential.

Open University's internal QA: The OUUK has placed a premium on its IQA system, which is in line with the QAA's code of practice. For instance, the QAA quality code has three parts: A, B and C. Part A describes various aspects of how the academic standards are set and maintained for higher education, as well as qualifications awarded by UK degree-awarding bodies. Part B looks at specific aspects of academic quality. Part C addresses how higher education providers produce information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (QAA, 2015, 7-8). Wancai (2009) observes that here the system is divided into four different, specific, important QA activities:

Material production: A well-developed material production department is key to the successful delivery of ODL. The material should be of high quality in terms of content and must be interactive, with clear instructions to learners. Wancai (2009) states that OUUK has assembled a strong team in material production, comprising peer groups to review both content and design, with a rigorous process of constructive criticism. External assessors, professional editors, copyright experts, designers, audio and multimedia and other support staff are all involved.

Teaching and learning process: At the OUUK, teaching and learning is through assignments and examinations. The OUUK teaches through its own unique method of distance education. This is called 'supported open learning' and includes flexibility. Students have the liberty to progress at their own pace, which fits well with their jobs, commitments and family circumstances (Wancai, 2009).

Learner support: Generally, the OUUK is supportive of students by providing them with personal tutors who offer their expertise, guidance and feedback. It runs tutorials for various groups of students who need some help. Specialist advisers are always available to assist in many different areas. The university also has different academic social platforms where students interact. For instance, students get together through tutorials, study networks, course forums and online conferencing (Wancai, 2009).

Administrative and operational processes: The OUUK has a network of over 5,000 tutors and is the largest in the United Kingdom. Their responsibilities involve marking assignments, providing

detailed feedback and offering support through telephone and emails. The university has a strong 'customer relationship management system' that involves recording interactions between staff and students (Wancai, 2009).

2.12.2 Quality assurance of ODL in Australia

Globalisation presents fundamental challenges to university education as a complex and contested phenomenon. Globalisation has had an effect on the development of QA to the higher education sector (Vidovich, 2002). The global economic, political and ideological shifts of the 1980s provided the context for the emergence of QA policies in higher education in many countries. For instance, QA systems provided the Australian government with an avenue for steering higher education at a distance, without direct involvement (Vidovich, 2002).

The Australian government established its first clearly defined QA policy, operating from 1991 to 1995, as a device to reform the internal management of universities. Policy on QA in Australian higher education has undergone several alterations. In the early 1990s to 2000 and beyond, it changed three times. For example, in 2000 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was endorsed as an independent body to spearhead quality in higher education institutions. Shah, Nair and Wilson (2011) explain that the functions of the AUQA were to undertake five-yearly cyclical audits, monitoring of universities and submitting data relating to quality as well as helping universities to enhance their standards and comply with the laws and regulations, such as the national protocol and national codes.

The manner in which the Australian government handled QA suggests that its aim was not to interfere with higher education institutions. The formation of the AUQA was a clear indication of the stance that government took to assure quality in higher education provision. In 2001, the AUQA began its work of auditing universities based on 'fitness for purpose' (Shah et al., 2011). AUQA wanted universities to meet the demands of stakeholders through the QA guidelines that it had set for universities.

In 2008, the Australian government reviewed higher education, and in respect to QA established a national regulator called the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). Its key responsibilities were: to register all higher education providers; to accredit courses for non-self-accrediting providers; and to assure quality against externally set standards, together with reducing the risks associated with institutional performance on a number of measures (Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013).

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The Australian government made rapid changes in the management of QA. One of the most important elements that cannot be overlooked is the 'quality culture', as quality is impossible to achieve within a short period. The quality culture of an institution signifies its commitment to satisfying stakeholders' needs and internal activities that support members of staff who are key to ensuring that quality is attained. The members of staff can be either internal or external to the institution (Yorke, 2000; Ntim, 2014). While I am in support of a quality culture, as Harvey and Stensaker (2008) caution, quality culture should not be used as the answer to all the challenges of an institution but as a concept to identify the challenges to quality.

There has been a major change in the QA mechanism in Australia. The arrival of the TEQSA resulted in a move away from a 'fitness of purpose' approach to QA that is driven by strict compliance. The TEQSA can impose sanctions on any university that fails to comply with the guidelines. All the higher education providers must adhere to the rules if they are to continue. There are numerous negative consequences of the current QA framework in Australia. As Shah and Jarzabkowski (2013) point out, significant among others is compliance-driven quality, which has killed the innovative spirit of any internal capacity to design activities that are meant to improve quality at an institutional level.

The new framework has reduced the autonomy of the universities, discouraging them from making even the simplest of decisions; in this case, there is no flexibility. Furthermore, engagement with students is not consistent and there is no provision in this framework to deal with student complaints. This assertion is equally argued by Coates (2005), in that the right kind of engagement is required for students to help in coming up with productive learning. From Shah and Jarzabkowski's point of view, QA in Australia has made it difficult for universities to benchmark with universities outside the country because of strict adherence to the guidelines.

The benchmark standards for all higher education providers were developed by the Higher Education Standards Panel, covering four aspects: provide registration standards; provide category standards; qualification standards; and accreditation standards. Comparing the two bodies, TEQSA and AUQA, there is more freedom in the approach that AUQA adopted than under TEQSA. An issue of ownership comes into play in this case, as there is a possibility that some people would find it difficult to comply with certain demands under TEQSA (Shah et al., 2011; Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013).

Earlier, in 1992, concerns were raised with regard to the quality of ODL, and this necessitated constituting the Nunan and Calvert Commission to enquire into the standards of ODL in Australia. Based on the recommendation made by this committee, an advisory body was established, called the National Council for Open and Distance Education (NCODE). Its role was to advise government

and higher education institutions on distance education policy, sponsoring best practice and co-operation in distance education. In 2000, NCODE was changed to the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-Learning (ACODE) (Inglis, 2005; Jung & Latchem, 2012). Australia's QA has developed over a number of years; and I well believe that this process takes a long time to develop fully. The concept of QA in ODL is not new to Australia; it has been established for some time now. ACODE's mission is to enhance policy and practice in Australia around technology-enhanced and ODL. Some of its functions include the following:

- i. Disseminating and sharing knowledge and experience.
- ii. Supporting professional development and providing networking opportunities.
- iii. Investigating, developing and evaluating new approaches.
- iv. Advising and influencing key bodies in higher education.
- v. Promoting best practice.

The responsibilities of ACODE are not to accredit programmes but to provide expert knowledge and guidelines on benchmarking to all higher education institutions involved in ODL, as well as e-learning (Jung & Latchem, 2012). Such services are provided to help these institutions to devise quality programmes with well-articulated methodologies. The Australian QA system has enabled its higher education sector to be of high quality, because of activities and programmes embedded in the QA systems, despite little flexibility (Gallagher, 2001). The Australian government still plays a crucial role in QA through policy formulation and implementation. The idea is to steer QA at a distance, without direct intervention. The federal government also provides funding to universities, based on the quality reports that it receives from ACODE.

At a global level, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that QA policies and institutional systems have multiplied as a result of globalisation. For example, supranational organisations such as the World Bank have contributed by promulgating QA through economic roles and by using education as a vital element for restructuring national economies (Vidovich, 2002; Shah et al., 2011).

In my view, while governments have a crucial role to play in ensuring that universities and other higher learning institutions offer quality education, direct intervention may have negative effects. This includes reduced autonomy in these institutions, leading to failing to come up with innovative ideas that might drive internal quality.

2.12.3 Quality assurance of ODL in the Netherlands

Quality assurance was introduced in the Netherlands in the mid-1980s. The Netherlands was among the first countries to embrace QA after the United Kingdom and France (Enders &

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Westerheijden, 2014), using different policies. The Netherlands government had then introduced QA in the narrative of 'New Public Management' with ideas of self-regulation, quality improvement and accountability. The Netherlands QA system has undergone a number of changes since the 1980s. The QA reforms in the Netherlands began as an extension of the traditional peer review systems by the academic schemes. The outcome of the Bologna Process and its accreditation approach resulted in significant change to the Dutch QA approach.

QA in the Netherlands is mainly centred on quality as mission-based and fitness for purpose, and accreditation is mandatory in order to award recognised degrees that allow students to obtain grants and loans from the government (Van Berkel & Wijnen, 2010; Enders & Westerheijden, 2014). It is interesting to note that public institutions were funded on this premise, yet funding was not extended to private and foreign institutions, so the government was using a 'carrot and stick' approach to compel higher education institutions to use accreditation.

The first round of programme accreditation was completed between 2003 and 2010. This meant that all the Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes were required to undergo accreditation. The accreditation system was formally introduced in 2005 and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) was given the mandate to undertake this task. In other words, NVAO did not change or replace the QA that existed at the time, but supplemented it (Van Berkel & Wijnen, 2010).

The government of the Netherlands preferred a free market of quality assessment agencies. NVAO was charged with the responsibility for selecting agencies with the capability to produce quality assessment reports. Higher education institutions are allowed to search for an agency to work with from those selected by NVAO, and this arrangement of accreditation has continued. The system aims to ensure that study programmes meet the highest standards. Although this seems to be working for the Netherlands, accreditation promotes rote procedures. Some of the processes are not done correctly, but merely to satisfy the external assessors.

Accreditation in the Netherlands is achieved in a multistep process. For instance, it is usual for a Dutch organisation, the National Institute for Academic Degrees and University Education (NIAD-UE), to make what can be referred to as an independent observation of QA systems of the Netherlands. NIAD-UE (2011) observed the following:

- i. Self-evaluation or documentation submitted by the unit undergoing accreditation.
- ii. External assessment by independent experts.
- iii. Accreditation decisions.

Accreditation in the Netherlands is based on external assessment: this stance is authoritative in nature, as the verdict is either 'yes' or 'no'. The Higher Education and Accreditation Act of 2002 demands that all degree programmes offered by universities must be evaluated against a specific set of criteria. Those that satisfy the requirements are accredited and listed in the central register of higher education programmes (NIAD-UE, 2011; Vroeijenstijn, 2003).

The accreditation of the existing degree programmes is at two levels; the first is conducted by the QA agencies that are recognised by NVAO as able to undertake assessment. It is a requirement that the composition of the team of experts always includes a student from another university (Van Berkel & Wijnen, 2010). This idea of NVAO is likely to improve the quality of an institution through student voice, for instance where students are given opportunities to make suggestions on how to improve internal QA through various academic experience. Coates (2005) set out to explain the potential for student engagement in QA as generating high learning outcomes, even for well-resourced higher institutions of learning.

The final and second level is the decision given by NVAO to accredit the programme or not, depending on the report from the agencies. If any programme fails to meet one or two criteria, accreditation will not be granted. In most cases, this has serious repercussions for the continued existence of the programme (NIAD-UE, 2011). The Dutch higher education system makes it difficult for individual universities to come up with strong and innovative internal QA mechanisms because of its compliance nature. Furthermore, while NVAO encourages improvement in universities' internal processes, the aspect of accountability has the potential to cause serious trepidation among the members of staff involved in the process of accreditation.

In the Netherlands, private institutions that are not funded by the government, including those offering ODL, are free to apply for recognition from the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science as 'Legal Bodies for Higher Education' to allow them to offer accredited programmes. What this means is that no institution in the Netherlands is allowed to offer programmes without following the due process of law and becoming accredited. This is totally unlike the situation in some African countries. As reported in the *Times Higher Education*, 16 April 2015, Nigeria's National Universities Commission (NUC) listed 57 private universities that were operating illegally. It is obvious that the NUC was acting in the best interests of the country by protecting its citizens from sub-standard education from illegal universities.

Government-funded research universities and the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act recognise universities of applied sciences regulated by law. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences funds these universities. They provide legally recognised programmes to legal bodies for higher education. These are private institutions that are not funded by the government but may

be recognised by the Dutch government; this entitles them to provide accredited programmes equal to those provided by the institutions funded by the government (NVAO, 2015).

In the Netherlands, any organisation wishing to be recognised as a 'Legal Body of Higher Education' must follow three steps. To begin with, an institution must first apply to NVAO for extensive initial accreditation that involves assessments of the programmes to be offered. The next step is the institution's request for recommendation from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education (NVAO, 2015). The role of the inspectorate is to assess the quality and continuity of the prospective legal body and compliance with the Act. Lastly, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science makes a decision based on the report from NVAO and the inspectorate from the Ministry.

From the literature above, one would say that the Dutch accreditation system is strong, although the aspect of compliance appears negative. No incentive is given for prospective higher education institutions to do anything different from what is stipulated, even if it is in the best interest of all parties involved in higher education delivery. The accreditation system is the same, irrespective of the mode of delivery. Institutions offering ODL are subject to the same standards and they must meet these without fail. Institutions are not given the freedom to initiate QA systems using their own ideas but must follow policy guidelines. This system does not promote a sense of ownership, as institutions are expected to comply with the accreditation agency.

2.13 Developing countries' QA context in the provision of ODL

This section of the literature review highlights some of the developments and challenges facing developing countries (African) in trying to provide quality ODL. Two countries, Nigeria and South Africa, were deliberately selected, based on the positive strides that they have made in the area of QA as well as their rich history and experience in the provision of quality ODL.

This section presents how the countries mentioned above perform regarding QA in ODL. In some cases, international or continental, regional and national ODL Associations spearhead the QA initiatives. These Associations have been in existence for some time to ensure that the member states embrace QA in their delivery of ODL. For example, the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) is a continental educational body comprising African universities and other higher education institutions that are committed to expanding quality provision of ODL, as well as e-learning. It helps to bring together ODL providers in Africa. ACDE was established at Egerton University in Kenya in 2005 (ACDE, 2011).

2.13.1 ACDE's salient objectives

The primary objective of ACDE is to promote ODL, flexible and continuing education in Africa. The organisation also helps by contributing to the development of policies that are essential for the advancement of ODL and e-learning among member states and individual institutions.

Furthermore, it strives to promote development of appropriate methods and technologies in education and training relevant to ODL. ACDE provides a forum for interaction, sharing and dissemination of ideas on ODL (ACDE, 2011, 1-2; Rotimi & Sanusi, 2011).

Although the ACDE appears to have clear objectives, it has been difficult for it to co-ordinate the quality of ODL appropriately in Africa due to the absence of national QA agencies and, in some cases, regional networks that do not function. A lack of government commitment to the quality of ODL in some countries in Africa has made it problematic for ACDE to penetrate member states (Rotimi & Sanusi, 2011).

Regarding ODL in the southern part of Africa, the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) is striving to become a regional body to co-ordinate member countries successfully in quality ODL provision.

2.13.2 DEASA's core objectives

One of the major objectives of the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) is to enable member states to share information on the quality delivery of ODL. The institution also organises relevant professional development activities with a number of higher education institutions. It creates links with regional and international organisations in the provision of quality ODL. DEASA helps to direct the development and promotion of QA in ODL (DEASA, 2004).

It is possible to argue that DEASA has found it difficult to galvanise all the countries in Southern Africa because it has not had an overwhelming response and commitment from member states. In other words, DEASA requires strong support from the respective governments and institutions. Jung and Latchem (2012) note that, although DEASA looks promising, it is still in its initial stages of planning and is seeking a mandate from member states. DEASA's sustainability is not yet well established.

2.13.3 Nigerian experience of QA in ODL

Nigeria has witnessed the growth of ODL in higher education and is now taking on many students in various programmes (Ojokheta, 2004 & Jegede, 2016; Aderinoye). ODL started as correspondence education and was turned into distance education after some time. Nigeria has

recognised ODL as a vital channel to improve access to higher education effectively (Olojede, 2005). Nigeria is highly diversified in terms of social and cultural characteristics, with an estimated population of more than 182 million in 2015, making it the most densely populated country in Africa (UN, 2015). This kind of population puts pressure on conventional higher education institutions, as the demand exceeds the places that universities can offer in a traditional mode. There is overwhelming massification of students entering higher education institutions.

The National University Commission (NUC) is the agency responsible for the accreditation of all programmes in Nigeria. The NUC was established in 1962 as an advisory agency to Cabinet. In 1964, the NUC became a statutory body and now it is a parastatal organisation, being headed by an executive secretary. In its 53 years of existence, the NUC has developed and undergone some change from a unit of Cabinet into a well-established quasi-government institution (NUC, 2013). Given the above background, it is clear that the issues of QA and accreditation of universities are not new to Nigeria. Unsurprisingly, Alani and Ilusanya (2008) assert that the university system in Nigeria has numerous difficulties to surmount, and that stakeholders continue to question the quality and relevance of the Nigerian higher education system.

In broader terms, the role of the NUC is that of quality control and assessment of universities on a regular basis. However, the specific functions of the NUC include, among other things, the following:

1. Granting approval for academic programmes run in Nigerian universities.
2. Granting approval for the establishment of all higher education institutions offering degree programmes in Nigerian universities.
3. Ensuring QA in all academic programmes offered in Nigerian universities.
4. Channeling all external support for Nigerian universities. (NUC, 2013)

Although NUC has well-established and articulated structures and functions, they mostly cater for conventional face-to-face delivery and do not have specific policies to address the issue of QA in ODL. Olojede (2005) observes that it is impossible to recommend a specific QA policy framework that is capable of universal adoption, because ODL institutions serve different interests depending on the context, purpose and scope. Nigeria does not have any specific body to assess ODL programmes. This absence of QA policies for ODL in Nigeria has made it difficult for the government to monitor how institutions are operating. According to Bukaliya (2013), there are no QA policies to guide the development and implementation of ODL in most countries in Africa. This makes it difficult to benchmark against countries or institutions that have well-instituted ODL QA policies.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has come up with activities that help in the quality delivery of ODL. NOUN is an ODL institution with over 54 centres around the country and over 150,000 students. This makes it the largest tertiary institution in Nigeria. NOUN has a QA unit, established in 2014, that is directly linked to the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. The primary focus of this unit is on the promotion of a culture of quality through continuous improvement of institutional practices and service delivery. One of the significant aspects that NOUN has paid attention to is the quality of course materials. For this reason, in-house training is conducted for all staff involved in its production. It has also set up strong administrative structures that respond promptly with regard to course materials (NUC, 2013).

2.13.4 South African experience of QA in ODL

South Africa has a long and rich history of ODL, supported by QA systems that are backed by the law. The current South African government has shown a political willingness to ensure the quality provision of ODL (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2015). Harry (2003) states that the first democratically elected government of South Africa put a premium on educational policies that emphasises ODL. ODL was identified as a vital strategic tool to accord access, participation and redress in higher education.

A number of indigenous Black South African people did not have access to university education during Apartheid. The African National Congress (1994) acknowledged the need to develop a well-designed quality distance education based on open learning as the only feasible way to meet the requirements of huge numbers of citizens who were systematically disadvantaged by the regime. Apartheid legislation had led to the establishment of universities for each of the main racial groups, which were also disadvantaged by their deeply rural location (Smout & Stephenson, 2002; Luckett, 2007). University education was mostly a preserve of White people, and only a handful of Black people managed to gain access. It was not possible even for those Blacks who had achieved the university entrance requirements to be given places at the most prestigious institutions, such as the University of Cape Town. However, a few Black people went to Fort Hare University, which had a mixture of races.

In South Africa, the QA of higher education institutions is the responsibility of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). This was established under the Higher Education Act of 1997. HEQC is a sub-committee of the Council for Higher Education (CHE). The main function of CHE is accreditation of higher education institutions' programmes, leading to qualification as registered on the National Qualifications Framework and the Department of Higher Education and Training (CHE, 2006).

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The South African government plays a critically important role and has a serious commitment to ODL. It has given a favorable platform to organisations such as the National Association of Distance Education Organisation of South Africa (NADEOSA) to operate and work together with HEQC. It is for this reason that HEQC consults NADEOSA on a number of issues pertaining to ODL. For instance, HEQC made numerous consultations prior and during the 1996 draft of the framework for distance education. Welch and Reed (2005) contend that an inclusive approach was used by taking account of both local demands and the international experience of other countries on the quality of ODL.

In trying to ensure that there is quality in the provision of ODL, the South African government came up with a policy framework for the provision of distance education in universities. The essence of this policy is to make a clear-cut distinction between other forms of higher education and ODL (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014). Distance education had featured in general higher education policies and legislation in the past but, due to its unique features, there was need to develop a policy framework for ODL. The prime concern of this policy framework is improvement of quality in distance education provision, while the responsibility of individual institutions that offer ODL is to ensure quality in ODL. NADEOSA states that education providers should have a clear sense of purpose and direction, in line with the national priorities, as well as quality that is cost effective, in the provision of ODL (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014).

The HEQC is also mandated to engage higher education institutions within their communities through various ways. It is for this reason that the HEQC came up with a tool called the 'code of practice guide' to help to resolve the issue of quality in education provision through community participation. This tool enables institutions to collaborate effectively with their community (Welch & Reed, 2005; CHE, 2006). The focus of the HEQC audit function is quality management; it is concerned with the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality systems in facilitating continuous systematic quality development in higher education (Lockett, 2010).

The HEQC consults widely in shaping its audit and accreditation system by involving key stakeholders. This is a prerequisite for establishing a strong and reliable QA for higher education institutions. CHE (2006) states that stakeholders demand that higher education institutions should provide the public with comprehensive information on the manner in which their quality is maintained and improved upon. In line with the Higher Education Act of 1997, the 'Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African universities' clearly states that the HEQC of the CHE should be fully equipped to evaluate distance programmes. This exercise is highly important, as it ensures that all programmes moving to a new mode of delivery are accredited (SAG, 2014).

In view of the 1997 legislation for South African higher education, it is clear that the country has accorded high importance to the quality of ODL. The assumption here is that the quality monitoring aspect of higher education institution is equally strong. The ODL policy further reaffirms the minimum requirements for distance provision as required by NADEOSA. The South African government has made higher education one of its highest priorities by making sure that innocent citizens are protected from institutions that are only for profit and have nothing of value to offer. The other responsibility of the HEQC is to protect students against poor-quality programmes and ensure that the accredited programmes are maintained (CHE, 2006). In order to meet its objectives, HEQC has developed an accreditation model that stipulates the rigorous steps of accreditation that must be systematically followed.

At University of South Africa (UNISA) QA and governance are coordinated by the vice-principal in charge of strategy, planning and partnerships. By virtue of this position, the vice-principal is mandated to chair the Professional Academic and Administrative Quality Assurance Committee. The functions of this committee are as follows:

- i. Strategic guidance and decision-making
- ii. Policy formulation and decision-making
- iii. Overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the provisions of QA policy
- iv. Supporting integrated quality management and assurance framework at institutional level. (UNISA, 2009)

The arrangement of QA at UNISA makes it easier to organise external audits, as well as the accreditation and re-accreditations of programmes with the relevant bodies. QA is possible if an institution creates a unit, committee or directorate to co-ordinate and spearhead quality activities, both internally and externally. A strong QA system better equips the student with the necessary skills, and ultimately benefits the whole country.

The introduction of QA in South African higher education has not been smooth, due to mixed reactions from different sectors, including the universities as major stakeholders. For instance, during the inception of QA in higher education, the South African University Vice-Chancellors Association made it clear that QA mechanisms should be left to universities themselves, and not external agencies or indeed the government (Smout & Stephenson, 2002). Universities are better placed to assure their own quality of ODL or conventional modes, according to Lockett (2007). Governments, on the other hand, want to have a certain control over the QA of higher education institutions, either directly or through their agencies. Lockett (2007) demonstrates that the external QA of higher education in South Africa is a mechanism that the state uses to achieve

greater efficiency, effectiveness, equity and responsiveness that results in high-quality teaching and learning opportunities for all students.

2.13.5 Zambian context of QA in the provision of ODL

Zambia has a rich history of ODL, starting as correspondence courses, dating to the 1940s when many citizens were studying through commercial colleges in South Africa and Britain for post-primary qualifications (MoE, 2010). When Zambia achieved Independence in 1964, there were only 107 university graduates at degree level (MoE, 1996). At that time, the country was in need of qualified personnel to fill positions in both the public and private sectors. The government decided to establish the National Correspondence College to allow as many Zambians as possible to obtain the Junior and Senior Secondary School Certificates (SAIDE, 1999; Ellis, 2009). This provided an opportunity for many to study in tertiary institutions. The University of Zambia (UNZA) is the pioneer institution, offering degree programmes through ODL.

As already mentioned, a number of countries both in the developed and developing world have realised the importance of ODL. In Chifwepa's survey study and Chiyongo's study, it is revealed that Zambia, like most countries in the world, regards ODL as a most important educational innovation in that it has provided opportunities to citizens who find it difficult to access conventional institutions (Chifwepa, 2006; Chiyongo, 2010). Therefore, with the huge number of students using ODL in Zambia to advance their studies, it is necessary that QA frameworks are in place at both national and institutional levels.

In trying to promote QA in higher education, the Higher Education Act of 2013 permitted the Minister of Higher Education to establish the HEA and appoint members. For a long time, the University Act of 1999, later repealed and replaced by the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, mandated universities to regulate themselves. Moreover, the education policy of 1996 clearly stated that public universities should be able to exercise academic freedom and managerial autonomy to determine their own programmes and regulate the requirements needed (MoE, 1996). With this background, it is clear that the provision of higher education in Zambia is still diverse, diffused and fragmented.

Functions of the newly established HEA are to:

- i. Advise the Minister on any aspect of higher education.
- ii. Develop and recommend policy on higher education, including the establishment of public higher education institutions and the registration of private higher education institutions.

- iii. Establish a co-ordinated higher education system that promotes corporate governance and provides for a programme-based higher education.
- iv. Regulate higher education institutions and co-ordinate the development of higher education.
- v. Promote QA in higher education.
- vi. Audit the QA mechanisms of higher education.
- vii. Restructure and transform higher education institutions and programmes to be responsive to the human resources, economic and development needs of the republic.
- viii. Promote the access of students to higher education institutions.
- ix. Design and recommend an institutional QA system for higher education institutions and recommend to the Minister. (GRZ, 2013, 101-102)

Although the establishment of the HEA in Zambia was a useful idea, education providers in both the state and private sectors may have heard this development with incredulity. The reason is that higher education institutions were accustomed to traditional education delivery. From 1964 to 2016, the QA of university programmes gave the public universities the mandate to self-regulate. The Higher Education Act does not state if the QA of ODL will be carried out in the same way as the conventional mode. However, it states that the Authority will register and regulate all higher education institutions. The draft higher education framework is clear that all higher education institutions will be required to obtain accreditation of their learning programmes through the Authority (HEA, 2015).

2.13.5.1 Challenges of open and distance learning in Zambia

According to SADC (2012), there are numerous challenges facing ODL. Some of these challenges are:

- Inadequate funding from governments and industry for effective development.
- Most people's misconception that ODL is of lower quality than conventional education, due to absence of QA and qualifications frameworks.
- Limited collaboration and partnership with more experienced universities within and outside the country.
- Absence of ODL policies to integrate with national policies to give them status and support. This includes the absence of regulatory instruments and mechanisms to assess and monitor all ODL providers in the country.
- Lack of trained ODL experts to deliver services in various aspects. There are no programmes for capacity building. From the numerous challenges that Zambia has been

facing in terms of taking ODL to a higher level, it seems that not much has been done to promote quality ODL.

In line with the above ODL challenges, Siaciwena and Lubinda (2008) observe that most institutions of higher learning in Zambia lack effective QA systems, coupled with inadequate monitoring and an evaluation base, resulting in failure to support good QA policies. Furthermore, the authors state that the only way to guarantee that the expanding higher education sector is sensitive to national situations and offers value-for-money education is constantly and efficiently to assure high standards in its provision. Universities are expected to be more accountable and transparent to their governments and society, as well as to meet the expectations of their students.

The other practical step that universities and teacher training colleges offering ODL in Zambia seem to lack is student engagement in the provision of quality higher education (Chiyongo, 2010). The views of the students attending various programmes at university level are crucial in developing QA mechanisms. The feedback and direct input of the students can help to identify areas that need improvement in the provision of education. Students' engagement and opinions provide a means of determining the productivity of university education and improving the quality of university education of students and their learning.

2.13.5.2 Quality assurance policy of ODL for University of Zambia

UNZA was the first public university in Zambia, established by the University of Zambia Act (66) of 1965, and it opened the following year. UNZA has undergone many changes in terms of governance and operations. The University started with three schools, namely the School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences, with only 312 students enrolled. In 1979, another Act changed the operation of UNZA into a federal system. This proposed the establishment of two constituent institutions in Ndola and Solwezi, under the main umbrella of UNZA. A 1987 Act recommended having two separate institutions, the University of Zambia and the Copperbelt University (UNZA, 2012).

In 1991, when the United National Independence Party lost the general elections to the Movement for Multiparty Democracy, some changes were made to the manner in which universities were operating. Significant was the enactment of the new University Act in 1992. This Act reduced the powers of the Minister of Education with regard to governance of the universities (Kelly, 1999; UNZA, 2012). The Minister's roles were only to do with general policies of higher education. This Act gave some autonomy to universities in terms of programmes and QA.

However, the 1992 Act was repealed and replaced by the University Act number 11 of 1999. In this Act, the Minister regained much power over both public and private universities.

In 2013, another piece of legislation was enacted to repeal the 1999 Act. This was called the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, as already mentioned. Under this Act, the Minister maintains much power in regulating QA and accreditation of programmes in the universities through a pro-government board (HEA). The Minister in charge of higher education appoints all the members of the HEA board.

UNZA has been offering ODL from as far back as 1968, and a great number have graduated (SAIDE, 1999; Chiyongo, 2010). They include teachers, among other professionals who have undertaken various programmes through ODL at UNZA. It is not easy to ascertain the quality of ODL students at UNZA, because the institution has operated without a QA policy for a long time.

However, UNZA in its strategic plan for 2013 to 2017, gave priority to the establishment of a QA directorate and has since appointed a director. The directorate has been given powers to monitor and evaluate quality in all the operations and functions of the university. It is hoped that officers who are vested with such responsibilities understand and appreciate what QA is all about to fully institutionalise quality systems (UNZA, 2012). It is expected that UNZA QA policies and framework will integrate well with national QA policies for ODL, with good planning.

At the time of writing this document, UNZA has committed itself to develop third- and fourth-year student courses under ODL. This would include the introduction of postgraduate programmes to ODL students. The lecturers involved in ODL are to be trained in instructional materials and teaching on virtual platforms (UNZA, 2012). Distance education has the advantage of reaching large numbers of students, but it can be compromised if insufficient attention is paid to course design and instructor training.

The course modules produced by the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) at UNZA for students pursuing their degree programmes are fair in terms of quality of content, according to Hamweete (2012) and Mundende et al. (2016). However, in some of the modules, the charts and diagrams are not correct (Hamweete, 2012; Mundende et al. 2016). This suggests the need for serious attention to students' study materials. There is a need for further support for all programmes in ODL, periodically monitored and evaluated to determine their relevance.

According to UNZA (2012), recruitment of new academic and support staff will continue under the IDE. The IDE has a programme to decentralise ODL to all 10 provinces of Zambia, as well as inducting lecturers in the presentation of lectures, through residential sessions in provincial centres. All these should have been achieved by 2017, as indicated in the strategic plan. UNZA has

realised the importance of QA, as evidenced by the QA practical steps that it has undertaken in this competitive industry. All over the world, institutions and stakeholders pay attention to the quality of the programmes under ODL. Chiyongo (2010) observes that the existence of a national QA framework would enable ODL institutions to make QA an integral part of their institutional missions with respect to teaching, research and to promote a culture of quality in their institutions.

2.14 Identification of research gaps

Most of the studies that have been undertaken on QA are region and country-specific. These studies are more concerned with quality provision in the conventional mode, without specific guidelines on how programmes offered under ODL can be quality assured. Additionally, studies that have been conducted as a regional block have mainly provided only general trends on the challenges that member states face in providing quality programmes under ODL. These studies lack the specific problems that individual institutions face in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the quality provision of ODL.

The literature reviewed indicated that some of the countries have not yet put in place QA policies at a national level to monitor and regulate the quality provision of ODL. This suggests that the absence of some form of standardisation makes it difficult to check on what universities are doing. A good example is that Zambia has had no QA policy for universities in over fifty years until the year 2013. For instance, it would be impossible to identify practices that are run similarly at universities in South Africa and Zambia because the country is still developing and sharpening its quality tools. Regional block studies also lack information on how developing countries that are constrained by lack of education resources can provide quality in a higher education system.

As already mentioned in the rationale, a few studies have been conducted in Zambia on ODL. These studies are just on specific aspects of ODL, such as 'Management of distance teacher education in Zambia' (Chiyongo, 2010). To date, Chiyongo's study is the only one in Zambia to have tackled the management of ODL with some aspects of QA. It revealed the need for ODL national policy, improvements to the channels of communication between students and their lecturers, better integration of ICT in the delivery of distance education and improved staffing levels, among other issues.

An early work by Siaciwena (1988) is 'Distance teaching at the University of Zambia, with specific reference to the effectiveness of degree courses. This study showed the need for qualified academic staff to be employed full time under the distance education mode at UNZA. More recently, Chifwepa (2006) focused primarily on the 'Model plan for the application of information

communication technologies in distance education at the University of Zambia', finding that 66 per cent of ODL students do not have access to the internet due to both distance and cost. Furthermore, he states that both lecturers and students require training in the use of ICT.

While these studies are empirically based and informative, it is difficult to rely on them to improve the quality provision of programmes through ODL in a more comprehensive manner, considering the developments that have taken place in the Zambian higher education system. Key indicators of quality in ODL do not come out strongly.

It is important to state that this study's views do not seek to trivialise the importance of some of the issues raised in previous studies on ODL. In fact, as identified in the reviewed literature, any QA of ODL requires a holistic approach. Therefore, the findings from these studies could be useful and, in a way, provided the motivation to undertake research in this area.

2.15 Identification of research questions based on literature reviewed

In this study, the researcher wanted to obtain a detailed understanding on the actual QA practices in the provision of programmes through ODL in Zambia. The research questions were partly identified and sharpened through a review of literature on QA and ODL.

Research Question 1 focuses on the QA policy measures in place to ensure that universities that offer programmes through ODL meet the prescribed QA benchmarks. The researcher probed further on the 'specific measures that are in place to regulate and monitor the practice in universities and the challenges in this process'. From the literature reviewed, Research Question 1 is not adequately addressed, as most of the information found relates to the processes and the applicability of QA frameworks meant for universities in countries with developed QA systems. However, the following literature suggests that, for any country to maintain quality in its higher education systems, government involvement is necessary (see Vidovich, 2002; Shah, Nair & Wilson, 2011; Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013; NUC, 2013; Pitsoe & Letseka, 2015) through policy that includes funding and setting up an independent QA agency. Other literature informs Research Question 2, which focuses on the 'QA measures that the targeted universities are taking to maintain and continuously improve the provision of ODL programmes' (see Siaciwena, 1988; Chifwepa, 2006; Chiyongo, 2010; Mundende et al., 2016). There is a literature gap on the specific measures that Zambian universities have put in place regarding their QA mechanisms.

QA is a complex process that requires the views of stakeholders, among them students. These are immediate and crucial in the teaching and learning processes. For Research Question 3, the researcher was concerned with the way 'universities ensure that ODL students contribute to the

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development of their QA'. In other words, the available avenues for students to participate effectively in QA provision at institutional level. Theoretical literature articles on student engagement were instrumental to the formulation of this question. However, lacking from this literature are specific avenues for students to participate in QA in their universities (see Yarbrough, 2002; Coates, 2005; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007; Todorut, 2013).

In formulating Research Question 4, what guided the researcher was the literature reviewed on countries perceived to have effective practices and experience in QA provision (see Wancai, 2009; UNISA, 2009; Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013; QAA, 2013). The Zambian context in terms of QA of ODL is different from that of other countries, such as the United Kingdom and South Africa, as seen in the literature reviewed. However, through inquiry it was possible to compare what the HEA, universities and other institutions in developed countries are doing. The objective of this question was to demonstrate whether Zambia could draw on the lessons learnt by countries perceived to have robust university practices. Further, to examine the differences between the universities in terms of style of QA and how the best practices from other countries could be benchmarked to bridge the gaps.

The study is intended to bring out the unique QA practices, challenges and successes of ODL in the Zambian context.

The next chapter focuses on the theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter 3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning this study. It consists of human capital, globalisation, stakeholder and open systems theories. The idea behind using these theories is not to show how they are linked but to use their distinctive features to explain how they may guide the conceptualisation of QA for ODL. In other words, it explains the theoretical framework's influence on QA policies for higher education in Zambia through regulating and monitoring universities that offer ODL programmes. The conceptual framework explains universities' institutionalisation of national QA policies for ODL as enforcements, along with their internal QA processes.

3.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework discusses the influence of the human capital, globalisation, stakeholder and open systems theories in national QA policy development for institutions of higher learning that provide education through ODL. The section starts by discussing the influence of human capital theory in QA policy formation. This is followed by globalisation and its influence on QA policy design for quality provision of higher education and its implications for QA institutional policies. Next is stakeholder theory. This discusses the importance of stakeholders in contributing to QA policy development for ODL at national and institutional levels. Lastly, open systems theory is discussed to reveal that universities operate as open systems organisations that are influenced by their surrounding communities.

3.2 Human capital theory

One of the assumptions of human capital theory is that education is an engine of growth and is key to development in every society, based on quality and quantity. To be able to make significant contributions to economic growth and development, high-quality education is required (Almendarez, 2010). Human capital theory emphasises how education increases the productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the levels of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability as a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings (Schultz, 1961; Quiggin, 1999; Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). To illustrate, Fitzsimons (1999) points out that in most of the countries in Europe education has been re-theorised under human capital theory as

an economic device and is the most influential economic theory, helping in the development of government education policies since the early 1960s.

Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008) hold that human capital theory provides the justification for large public expenditure on education in both developing and developed nations. This explains why the theory is used as a theoretical underpinning in the adoption of education and development of policies in a number of countries. Through this lens, we can argue that quality higher education prevails if the national higher educational policies for quality of university education produce quality graduates and ultimately improve the quality delivery of education in primary and secondary schools. Almendarez (2010) states that the application of human capital theory to a higher educational system enhances human development in society in general.

In some cases, human capital theory derives its significant influence on countries' education systems from the powerful organisations that keep promoting it, such as the World Bank. Governments are compelled to develop their higher education policies due to World Bank and International Monetary Fund influence, as part of their conditions (Oliver 2004; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Crocker, 2006; Goldin, 2014). The theory has been criticised by some scholars on different accounts. Bronchi (2003) asserts that human capital theory does not bring out clearly how education or other forms of human investments directly relate to improvements in occupation and income. This criticism has remained popular in higher education research but, in this case, does not outweigh the theory's strengths.

The current study is partly informed by human capital theory, by attempting to understand its impact on the national QA policy development in the provision of ODL at higher education level. The Zambian Government (GRZ), being the major funder of higher education, has invested heavily in the QA process. For example, large sums were spent in the establishment of the HEA, now operational. Moreover, human capital theory has a bearing on universities through the implementation of its principles as a guide to the quality training of students. The theory is applied in modern economic literature to explain human capital as an investment, rather than consumption.

3.3 Globalisation theory

Globalisation has several meanings, depending on the context and one's school of thought. In this context, the influence of globalisation theory concerns its impact on higher education. The theory addresses mass demand for higher education and the needs of society in terms of an educated human resource (Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007). It continues to exert influence, especially in developing countries' higher education policies (Altbach, 2004). One fundamental

assumption of globalisation theory is the promotion and enhancement of interconnectedness of individuals, groups and institutions of various forms and for benchmarking purposes, in the case of universities (Mok, 2000; Yang, 2003).

In fact, the theory has permeated through developing countries in terms of governance systems and policy formulation, including education policies that were traditionally the responsibility of individual sovereign states, with no influence from outside pressures (Al'Abri, 2011). This implies that the most affected are developing countries, including Zambia, that are now finding it difficult to develop higher education policies to fit their needs (Enders, 2004).

Globalisation describes the context of economic and academic developments as part of the reality of societal forces pushing twenty-first-century higher education towards greater international involvement (Yang, 2003). Developed countries have also been affected by the challenges of this theory, as it has strengthened their influence over national policy formulation to satisfy supranational organisations such as the United Nations and World Bank. These organisations play significant roles in setting the agenda on education by defining each country's priorities through imposed policies on higher education attached to loans and development aid (Verger, Novelli & Altinyelken, 2012; Ashraf & Kopweh, 2012).

Given that globalisation has managed to cut across higher education policies, the assumption could be that national QA policies are in some way dictated by its tenets. In a globalised world, the power of most states to regulate higher education is fundamentally a challenge, and nations are slowly losing grip of their own higher education systems in their efforts to fit in with the rest of the world (Altbach, 2001; Enders, 2004). Such a development could make it difficult for governments to develop higher education policies and programmes that meet local demand.

Bassett (2006) observes that, if the influence of globalisation theory on higher education is not checked, the consequences will be devastating. This might result in shifting the role of a university (teaching and learning, research and service delivery to society) to that of profit making. Additionally, globalisation theory affects universities in their local policies, as well as implementation. For example, universities are now reconsidering their mission statements in view of the changing job markets in the current economic environment (Nguyen, 2007).

There is now demand for new skills and advanced knowledge, which should go hand in hand with flexibility to match the ever-changing job demands and to deal with the international labour market. Due to globalisation and its influence on the world economy, countries such as China and Vietnam are changing their education systems regarding decentralisation, merging, marketisation

and privatisation (Nguyen, 2007). For instance, the theory has managed to widen and deepen all forms of worldwide interconnectedness at a rapid rate.

Globalisation theory has implications for universities, which are among the most globally sensitive of all human institutions (Marginson, 2014). Moreover, powerful and well-established universities lead the way in the distribution of their ideas. This theory cannot be avoided completely, as history indicates that when universities isolate themselves from economic and social trends, they become stuck and irrelevant (Altbach, 2004). Consequently, some universities benchmark and align their QA practices to international trends without exploring their local context.

Looking at globalisation theory and its influence at both national and university level, the assumption is that its relevance might be drawn from the way in which the Zambian Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 was formulated and how the government planned its implementation. This means that, in a way, higher education policies in Zambia are partly shaped by the dictates of this theory. Similarly, the manner in which universities respond to this policy (Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013), as well as their own independent benchmarking with other universities in the region and beyond, is crucial to the realisation of QA of ODL programmes at the higher education level.

3.4 Stakeholder theory

The term 'stakeholding' has recently become more popular, not only in management literature but in higher education and policy studies (Björkquist, 2009). Stakeholder theory begins with the assumption that values are necessary and explicitly a part of doing business. Therefore, it is a manager's duty to articulate the shared sense of the value that they create, including what attracts core stakeholders together (Freeman, Wicks & Parmar, 2004). To illustrate, Freeman et al. argue that the role of managers in an organisation is to manage the stakeholders and at the same time ensure the survival of the firm by means of balancing their stakes. Moreover, the purpose of an organisation is to represent the ideas and to safeguard the interests of its stakeholders. In the same vein, Freeman (2010) states that stakeholders have the right to hold managers in an organisation to account for failure or incompetence.

The theory claims that managers should ensure that they take account of the legitimate interests of their stakeholders, such as making business decisions. Therefore, creating value for stakeholders is important, so long as the reason is not to avoid government regulations or laws. Björkquist (2009) states that several studies have shown that stakeholder theory could be useful in studying how universities respond to the various demands and expectations of stakeholders.

There are different stakes for stakeholders that explain their power in making decisions in an education context. Some stakeholders have more influence than others. For example, in Zambia, Members of Parliament (MPs) are appointed to sit as council members in state-owned universities and their influence, as politicians, cannot be questioned. Stakeholders are powerful in the way that they contribute, even in their absence. Leisyte and Westerheijden (2014) observe that there is high urgency if a stakeholder has the chance to participate in internal QA procedures at any time with the capacity to constantly check, monitor and maintain the results. For instance, MPs possess certain attributes and are close to vice-chancellors, meaning that priority is given to meeting their demands. In terms of hierarchy, the second class of stakeholders is that of the 'expectants', who exhibit certain attributes, such as the authority to make decisions, and these are also close to and attract the attention of university managers. At the lowest level of stakeholders are the 'latent', with any of these three attributes. It means that when decisions are taken by institutional managers, their demands have the lowest priority.

The Government is one of the stakeholders in all state- and privately-owned universities in Zambia. In this study, the government is a prime partner through passing and writing new regulations for higher education. Moreover, it exercises influence on funding to the sector, thereby becoming a definitive stakeholder. When stakeholders have full recognition, their contributions to QA of ODL programmes in a university become legitimate. Moreover, IUCEA (2010) recognises that quality is a matter of negotiation between the academic institutions and the stakeholders. Particularly in this negotiation, every stakeholder has to formulate clear and explicit requirements and present them to a university. It may be argued that consensus building among all stakeholders is important to come up with all-embracing QA policies.

The point of departure is to understand how universities manage their QA systems, taking into account the various demands and expectations of their stakeholders. It should be noted that the university response to these demands and expectations is not in any way a sign of weakness, but rather a strategic choice that gives it leverage to contain the external pressure. In light of the above, stakeholder theory informs this study on the measures that universities must put in place to ensure that various views of stakeholders are taken into consideration regarding QA provision.

3.5 Open systems theory

Organisations as open systems theory characterises a university as an open systems organisation, operating and constantly interacting within a given environmental context. 'Open systems' refers to the concept that organisations are greatly influenced by their environment (Martz, 2013). In most cases, open systems have the capacity to maintain themselves, based on a throughput of

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resources from the environment. Some may argue that open systems have the capacity to maintain themselves without depending on other systems, but this could be wrong, because open systems have to interact with the environment, not defend themselves against it (Martz, 2013). What this means is that organisations must be in constant touch with the environment that they operate in.

The environment is composed of various groups and organisations with different interests. Because of their various interests, organisations exert considerable pressure on economic, political, educational and social aspects. The role of the environment, therefore, is to provide resources that help to sustain these organisations. Further, Mullins (2007) states that the environment in which it operates influences an organisation. In most cases, this leads to a dynamic equilibrium.

Open systems organisations are constantly in touch with their environment and, as a result, they must structure themselves to deal with the forces that surround them (Lunenburg, 2010). According to this model, an organisation such as a university would be judged to be a productive system if it interacts with its environment, drawing certain inputs from it and converting these to outputs that are offered back to it. In fact, for any organisation to attain its preferred state, the efficiency with which it carries out its production process is vital. Burnes (2004) argues that, when analysing a system, it is important to establish the relationships between the system and its environment, because many changes take place in trying to describe an organisation with regard to its environment. The open systems approach is reinforced by the idea that organisations are sophisticated and adaptive systems whose operations demand constant interaction in a given environmental context, and that this interaction with their environment enables them to survive and succeed. Therefore, the open systems perspective is considered useful in understanding the organisational environment of various organisations, such as universities (Burnes, 2004; Mullins, 2007).

Further, organisations are open systems composed of interrelated parts of subsystems and multiple subsystems that receive inputs from other subsystems and turn them into outputs for use by other subsystems. For instance, in a university, subsystems are represented by the departments yet might resemble patterns and activities within the university that include teaching and learning (Hickson, 1973). This means that universities, as open systems organisations, also adapt their internal functions and their structure to be able to meet environmental needs. Open systems have a goal that they seek to organise within a given environment. Nonetheless, systems seek a state of dynamic equilibrium. In this case, feedback gives information about the state of dynamic equilibrium. For example, a university will be able to

know what factors might lead to poor response rate for prospective students or what would lead to producing poorly trained graduates. The assumption here is that poor ODL QA mechanisms are likely to lead to a poor response rate from prospective students, who would question the quality of the ODL programmes that the universities are offering.

Classification of universities as open systems

Universities do not operate in a vacuum but in an environment with other organisations, competing for various inputs such as finances and recognition (Senior & Swailes, 2010). Environmental influences that help in describing a university as an open system could be said to be either general or specific. Specific factors are the networks of suppliers, government, government agencies and competitors in the same sector. The general environment is composed of four influences that emanate from the location in which the university is situated. These are quality of education, cultural values, economic conditions, and legal and political climate (Hickson, 1973; Senior & Swailes, 2010). Some of the ideal characteristics of bureaucratic organisations are also found in organisations that operate as open systems, such as universities. According to Olsen (2008), the distinctive features of a bureaucratic organisation include division of labour, administrative hierarchy, specific rules of procedure, formalised rules, effective neutral role relationships, rationality of total organisation and positions held by individuals in the organisation. It is also interesting to note that, while universities operate as open systems organisations, their autonomy to design programmes and the environment affects the services that are supposed to meet labour market demands.

Universities try to exercise self-management as much as possible within their environment, but this is not possible in all cases. Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno (2008) state that organisations that produce public goods must ensure control and accountability in their functioning, as the environment in which they operate is important due to its public mission. Universities select the inputs that they receive, and, for this reason, there is a need to draw a line between what must be taken on or not. In analysing the university as an open system organisation, it is advisable to establish the relationships between organisations, external systems and their environment (Senior & Swailes, 2010).

Universities have taken on a form of open systems approach with elements of a closed-door position, because they have the right to accept or reject certain proposals from their environments. What is important is for universities to adapt to change and compete for survival. For instance, a university in a steady state will react towards influences that might upset its functions (Blegen, 1968).

The above elaboration justifies viewing universities as open systems organisations. The chief activities of universities are affected by the conditions prevailing in a given organisational environment. The idea of using these theories is not to show clearly how they are linked, but to use their distinctive features to explain them and how their elements guide the conceptualisation of QA of ODL at national and institutional levels as indicated in Figure 3-1. The theoretical framework for this study is based on the coexistence and operation of human capital, globalisation, stakeholders' and open systems' theories and their influence on the setting of QA framework (tools) for ODL programmes in higher education. In this study, Figure 3-1 informs the conceptual framework in terms of policy formulation and guidelines to universities in line with global practices, stakeholders and their demands in QA provision, training and recruitment of academic and support staff at university level and generally how universities operate as open systems organisations. This therefore entails that there is a relationship between the theoretical and the conceptual frameworks for this study. As indicated earlier in this chapter, these theories are also contributing to formulation and configuration of higher educational QA policies as well as institutional QA policies and mechanisms. Moreover, universities are now faced with the challenges of satisfying such forces as well as their stakeholders in the environments in which they operate.

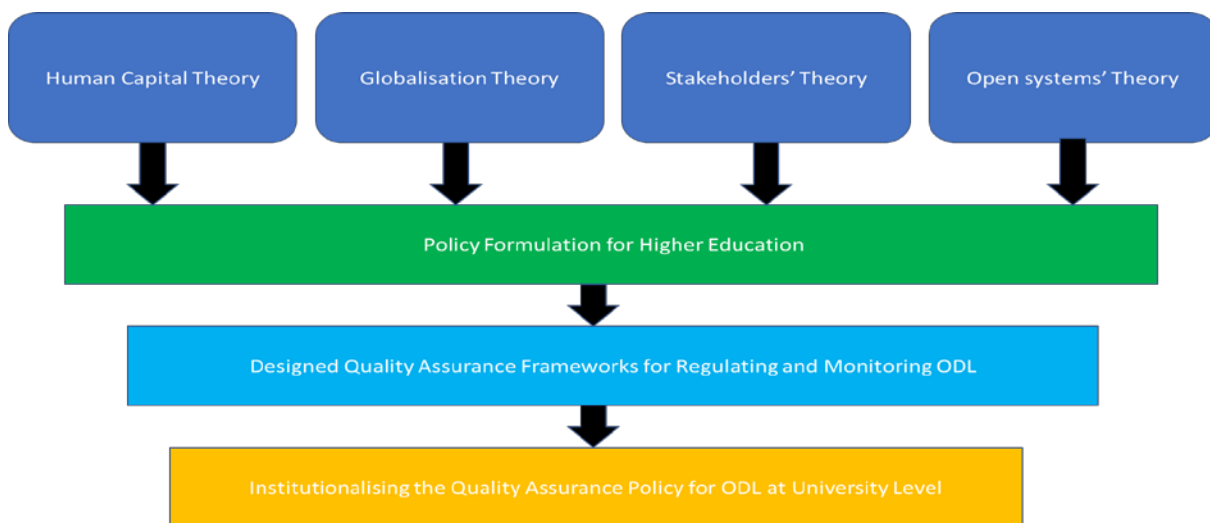


Figure 3-1 Depiction of the theoretical framework for this study

3.6 Conceptual framework

This section presents the stakeholders and quality in the higher education conceptual framework of the Inter-University Council for East and Central Africa (IUCEA), followed by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) list of criteria for quality provision in ODL at institutional level. Next is the adapted and modified conceptual framework for QA of ODL for this study, based on IUCEA and

the COL. The rationale of presenting both the IUCEA framework and COL list of criteria is to show how the conceptual framework for this study has evolved.

The IUCEA framework originally consists of seven parts: requirements of stakeholders; educational activities; transition requirements into goals and aims; research; community outreach; achieving goals and aims; and quality. Enterprise was added to the framework by the researcher as shown in Figure 3-2 below. According to IUCEA (2010), QA in higher education is more complicated than in industry because education has many stakeholders with various demands. The IUCEA's framework is based on the open systems approach. It has a component of stakeholders that represents their demands and expectations. Its goal is to produce quality higher education. The IUCEA model summarises the functions performed by the universities, divided into educational activities, research and community outreach to produce quality.

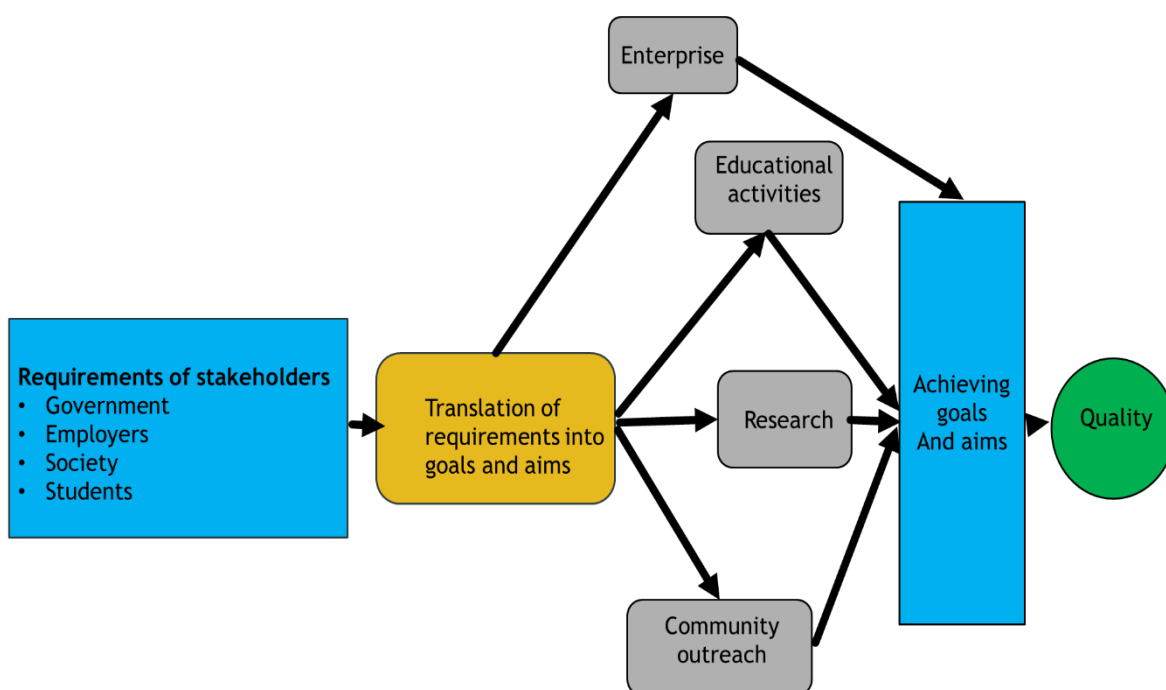


Figure 3-2 Conceptual framework of stakeholders and quality in higher education (adapted and modified from IUCEA, 2010)

The COL has 10 critical areas as indicators of QA in institutions that offer ODL. The conceptual framework for this study uses these 10 areas, which are applicable to the Zambian context. However, the approaches that universities adopt in response to the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 and HEA guidelines may not be the same but depend on several factors, including finances, staffing and infrastructure.

Table 3-1 List of criteria, indicating the standards for ODL in higher education institutions

Criterion
1 Vision, mission and planning
2 Management, leadership and organisational culture
3 The learners
4 Human resource and development
5 Programme design and development
6. Course design and development
7 Learner support
8 Learner assessment
9 Infrastructure and learning resources
10 Research consultancy and extension services

As mentioned earlier, the conception of this study's framework shares features with the IUCEA's stakeholders and quality in higher education model and the COL's indicators(criteria) of QA for ODL, with modifications. The COL toolkit uses 10 key indicators of quality provision as institutional benchmarks as indicated above in table 3-1. However, the conceptual framework for this study takes a broader outlook and has five main parts that include external QA, stakeholders' expectations of quality for ODL, the internal QA mechanism for ODL at university level, the core functions of the university and the outputs. In guiding this study, the adapted conceptual framework assumes that there are critical QA measures, from policy and stakeholder perspectives, that are necessary to ensure that higher education institutions maintain the quality of ODL. Therefore, in Zambia the policy on QA and the institutional measures have a bearing on the quality of the graduates and quality delivery of education in education at various levels.

3.6.1 External quality assurance systems (EQA)

As indicated in the literature review, EQA refers to the actions of the external QA agency to perform various functions, ranging from monitoring, regulation, peer reviewing, auditing and accreditation of higher education institutions. In Zambia, the HEA has been mandated to perform these quality functions; however, the process is still in the developmental stages. The objective is to achieve accountability and to improve the quality provision of programmes for ODL in universities. EQA also helps in standardising quality provision of ODL in higher education institutions, as well as making sure that universities do not become the judge of their own quality

provision (Stensaker et al., 2011; Kisanga & Machumu, 2014). EQA systems involve the following QA approaches:

Benchmarking: This is a modern management instrument with great added value that university leadership and QA agencies can use to make strategic decisions for their institutions. The literature reviewed indicates that universities must look for best practice in the provision of ODL within the higher education system and borrow ideas to improve their own performance. The way in which universities benchmark with others perceived to have good practice helps to ascertain the kind of changes or improvements required (Inglis, 2005). In Zambia, smaller and inexperienced universities benchmark to those within the country that are well established.

Accreditation: This is a process of assessment and review that enables a university or programme to be recognised as meeting the required set quality standards. In most cases, minimum standards are set for accreditation for higher education institutions with a binary statement. This process has now begun with the HEA and a good number of higher learning institutions have been accredited, together with their course and programmes.

External quality audits: This process is a form of external review that brings about a sense of ownership in the institutions by using their self-analysis to guide the review process. A quality audit is not in itself QA but one of the approaches used in assuring quality, yet it is a check to ascertain whether an institution is fit for its stated purpose (Woodhouse, 2003). The external audits can result in the recommendation that the internal audit should focus on specific shortcomings (Kettunen, 2012). Becket and Brookes (2006) observe that the importance of external quality audits is to provide a snapshot of the provision and activities of any programme aspiring to quality. Some of the universities and colleges in Zambia use this process through the universities they are affiliated to, to maintain and improve quality standards.

Peer review: The peer review process incorporates various aspects such as the objectives of the institutions, expansion and diversification plans, teaching and learning, as well as research, among others. This form of external evaluation is carried out by peers representing a QA agency or a university. In most cases, the areas of assessment are agreed with the institution under review (see section 2.7).

3.6.2 Stakeholders' expectations of quality for ODL at university level

QA systems in higher education institutions is influenced by both internal and external systems (IUCEA, 2010). In most cases, external stakeholders' roles must clearly be stated in such a way as to match the expectations of quality provision in the delivery of ODL programmes. In my

experience as a lecturer, stakeholders have different expectations of quality in institutions of higher learning in Zambia and they form part of the external QA systems. The expectations of the stakeholders for the university are important and are likely to determine the success or failure of its internal QA mechanisms. Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno (2008) state that to fulfil their obligation towards being a socially accountable institution and to prevent mission overload, universities should carefully select their stakeholders so that they can identify the right degree of differentiation.

In this study, some question items asked are based on the same principle that guides stakeholders' demands and expectations in QA of ODL at university level (see Appendix A, D, E and F for question items). The researcher proposed the MoHE, employers, students/parents, opinion leaders and society as stakeholders in the Zambian higher education system in QA for ODL.

Employers: These exert influence on the universities regarding the type of graduates that they expect. In some cases, employers demand that graduates possess the necessary aptitude to fit the industrial sector. Their expectations of the graduates range from social cultural values, beliefs and attitudes, to work and employment. Universities in most countries, Zambia included, have recognised the need to link to employers regarding the QA of their education provision (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011).

Students: Students are critical to helping their universities to come up with quality systems. It is important that students' expectations are met, although some are difficult. Students' expectations and experience at universities are crucial. Altbach et al. (2009) observe that the more students there are in a university, the more varied are the demands that they present. According to Coates (2005) and Trowler (2010), consideration of student expectations in determining the quality of university education is helpful; their engagement data have the potential to provide an index of students' activities that produces quality learning outcomes. Gibbs (2010) believes that measuring students' engagement and using questionnaires, is a necessary indicator of QA. The Zambian context is no different, as students' expectations of universities that offer ODL programmes for quality experience are varied and high, in some cases.

Opinion leaders: Zambian universities, both public and private, pay attention to the views and expectations of opinion leaders regarding quality provision of education, ODL inclusive. These leaders express views on behalf of the masses that they represent. Universities have an obligation to consider some of the pertinent views that such people make, particularly those who are in line with its core functions. As earlier mentioned in section 3.4, it is common practice in public universities in Zambia to have politicians from the ruling party as members of the university

senate. Politicians' expectations are from the external and internal stakeholders' points of view on quality provision.

Society: The views, concerns and expectations of members of the community regarding QA of universities and their programmes are expressed through various representations, ranging from formal grouping to professional associations. In Zambia, some universities have links to professional associations, such as the Law Association of Zambia, the Engineering Institute of Zambia and the Bankers' Association of Zambia. The aim is to improve and strengthen quality provision in the delivery of programmes so that graduates' skills match labour market demands and are sought after. Moreover, in the past these collaborations have helped public universities such as UNZA and the Copperbelt University to mobilise funds for infrastructure development and scholarship schemes for vulnerable students with good grades to complete their bachelor's programmes.

Society is concerned with its young people's experiences and whether they are getting value for money. Members of society play a significant role in QA, based on experiences in various spheres of their lives. It is the responsibility of a university to weigh and to accept or discard some of these views, because not all ideas from society have significant impact. Magalhães, Veiga and Amaral (2016) argue that the presence within the university governance of representatives with interests in the outside world should be encouraged if they have a legitimate interest in the social, economic and cultural functions of a university and can enhance its innovation and responsiveness to the real needs of society.

Ministry of Higher Education: The MoHE has certain expectations and requirements for universities, as indicated in the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013. Gornitzka (1999) observes that higher education policies are mechanisms through which governments influence higher education institutions. In this case, the assumption is that the MoHE in Zambia considered the principles of human capital, globalisation and stakeholder theories in its policy development to regulate, monitor quality and accredit programmes through the HEA. In normal circumstances, universities are expected to comply with the QA policy benchmarks set by the HEA.

In other words, stakeholders have the capacity to put pressure on any university by building coalitions with other stakeholders to maximise their collective gain. It is, therefore, useful to identify and explain the level at which institutions give prominence to competing stakeholders (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997; Brugha & Varvasovszky, 2000).

3.6.3 Internal quality assurance mechanism for ODL at university level

Before discussing the internal quality assurance mechanism for ODL at university level, this sub-section begins with a presentation of public and private ownership of higher education institutions, and then outlines the concepts of education as a public and private good.

Zambia's higher education system is comprised of public and private institutions. Related to this is the QA provision of programmes through ODL. To begin with, public institutions are those owned by the state, whereas private institutions are embedded in individual freedom without state interference (Marginson, 2011). It is true that the aim of the public ones can equally be realised in privately owned institutions; in the same manner, private benefits are also created in state-owned institutions (Marginson, 2007, 2011). A high monthly wage for a recently graduated engineer in a new job is an example of private benefits. Public-owned institutions are more open than private institutions to certain democratic policy interventions and demands yet are likely to attain the same goals (Marginson, 2007).

The term 'goods' is used in this context to describe all products and benefits that are intangible, such as educational services. Marginson (2007, 2011) asserts that public goods are non-rivalrous and non-excludable. Non-rivalrous are goods that can never be depleted by the people who utilise them. Non-excludable goods are those goods whose benefits go beyond the buyer, for example law and order. Public goods can be either individual or collective. The most important public goods in higher education are universal knowledge and information.

Whether publicly or privately owned, the nature of education as a public good must be protected. Therefore, QA systems must be in place to protect public interest (Marginson, 2011, 2014). In this study, the criteria for QA in ODL are more like generic statements. They are formulated in such a way that they ensure comprehensive coverage of most domains of quality in ODL (Clarke et al., 2009). Criteria are tools to evaluate the QA and performance trends in the university to initiate continuous quality improvement. They also help in developing internal and external QA systems for an institution to maintain quality standards. Once the QA systems are in place and properly instituted, they should result in greater efficiency and accountability. The systematic use of these good practices would enable institutions that offer ODL to undertake rigorous performance checks, based on extensive internal data.

3.6.4 Leadership

An appropriate leadership style is necessary for creativity and accelerating the diffusion of emerging practices in higher education that includes QA practices (Ng'ambi & Bozalek, 2013).

Strong leadership attributes, good governance and administrative skills are paramount to steer the operations and running of ODL. When an institution endorses QA, senior management should show leadership through commitment to quality provision of ODL (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007). In line with this, the experience of leaders helps it to internalise its capability and take the lead in ensuring that members of staff appreciate the value of quality in service delivery. University members should be given time to prepare and embrace the change ideas regarding quality, rather than having it imposed on them. Although some of the universities might have not participated in the formulation of the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, university leadership must ensure compliance with the Act. To achieve the desired goals, some of the universities in Zambia could not meet the preliminary benchmarks set by the HEA.

Management: Management is essential if universities offering ODL are to perform according to their vision and mandate. Even if a university has enough resources, if they are not properly utilised, it would be difficult to realise its aims and objectives. Therefore, effective management acts as a strategic resource through proper decision-making that gives an institution a competitive advantage over others.

Vision: It is important for an institution to have a shared vision that constitutes its growth after a specified duration of time. This includes student selection and recruitment of members of staff. Universities should have a clearly stated vision that everyone can understand (Simbar et al., 2012). It must give insight into how the aims and goals of an institution could be met. Nearly all Zambian universities have made public declarations on what they hope to achieve, in line with their missions. Educational goals and learning outcomes are included because a university, for instance, should have explicit targets for the graduates whom it plans to produce. It is advisable for the vision to reflect the latest international trends in higher education.

3.6.3.1 Programme structure

Programme structure refers to the content of the course, its aims and objectives and the entry qualifications for prospective candidates. This structure is important, as it provides details of a certificate, diploma or degree programme. Programme structure might include the following as well:

Curriculum design: The curriculum for ODL should be designed to promote self-study among students. The university should ensure that inputs from staff, students, industry and government are put together to devise a more coherent and comprehensive curriculum. Dhanarajan (2001) indicates that it is not possible to be responsive to most local needs while being influenced by internationalisation and globalisation.

Teaching and learning: Teaching and learning are part of the core functions of any university. Quality teaching and learning for ODL students are crucial for them to appreciate the academic experience and grasp the concepts in this process. However, universities and colleges in Zambia are striving to improve their teaching and learning, particularly that QA and the institutional practices are not clearly known. Moreover, the absence of institutional QA policies could be one of the factors contributing to poor teaching and learning processes (Kisanga & Machumu, 2014).

Student assessment: This process gives confidence to learners and reflects on the quality of the institution and its programmes. Such processes allow students to apply themselves critically, and they measure the level of both content knowledge and practical skills. Devedzic et al. (2011) advocate that students' assessment methods should be encouraged to promote creativity and in-depth knowledge of the subject matter. The feedback from students helps to come up with the right pedagogical combination that provides quality teaching and learning and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the QA system.

3.6.3.2 Admission requirements

As part of QA, most institutions all over the world have put in place criteria for admission. These criteria act as thresholds for potential students to be enrolled on various programmes. The criteria take different forms and include a list of requirements that must be met. All the universities in Zambia that offer ODL programmes have admission requirements, but these differ from one institution to the other. Some of these requirements include the following:

Student selection: The credibility of ODL partly rests on the selection criteria of students. The quality of students with the necessary credentials and capacity to undertake rigorous training is important. However, due to massification of higher education in Zambia, some universities seem to have relaxed their selection criteria. This concern demands robust QA systems to regulate and monitor the provision of ODL in all higher education institutions. Failure to select students who meet prescribed standards may result in poorly trained graduates.

Student registration: All students who receive an unconditional offer or letter of admission to a university should be registered before the commencement of their programme. The process of registration is important, because it enables universities to create student databases that make it possible to monitor students' academic progression on the programme. This is common practice in all higher education institutions in Zambia.

3.6.3.3 Training and recruitment

To run ODL programmes successfully, universities should have enough qualified, skilled academic and support staff to meet the institutional objectives for students. Having sufficient academic staff enables the smooth delivery of academic programmes. Some universities in Zambia have placed strong emphasis on training and recruitment exercises, whereas others are still struggling and depend on part-time staff. The following steps and processes are critical to the human resource development of the university that offers ODL programmes.

Staff development for academic (SD): It is the responsibility of a university to provide teaching development programmes at regular intervals to enhance content knowledge and skills for lecturing, tutoring and student learning materials. SD is essential to academic staff, because the knowledge and skills that they impart to students should be in line with the demands of the labour market. Moreover, the quality and qualifications of the academic members of staff help to raise the profile of a university in terms of reputation. It is difficult for any institution to talk of quality education provisions if its academic members are ill qualified (Watty, 2003; Kusumawati, 2013).

Recruitment process of ODL experts: Need for experts in ODL; one of the necessary requirements to run ODL is the involvement of experts. These are the people with the technical knowledge and experience of how ODL functions. It is therefore necessary to involve them from the initial development of ODL programmes. For instance, involving lecturers with content knowledge but without administrative skills creates numerous problems in the whole running of ODL. Members of staff must have the technical expertise to organise ODL and understand all its structures if it is to operate efficiently.

3.6.3.4 Quality monitoring and evaluation

All the programmes offered through ODL are expected to be reviewed periodically. This process helps to assess the difficulties that both students and members of staff face, to ascertain what to include or remove from the programme. In other words, universities that offer ODL should move away from conformance to QE if they are to attract more students and compete.

Quality plans: It is important for a university to plan QA activities within its internal mechanisms. The idea is to make sure that each member of staff has a task to perform so they are set targets to accomplish within a specified time. Such activities might include ODL students' assessments, marking, moderation of results and development of study materials.

Quality culture: Quality culture is an organisation's past and current assumptions, experiences, philosophy, and values that hold it together (Yorke, 2000). It is expected that stakeholders appreciate the QA culture of any institution that offers ODL that they are part of. All members of staff must feel that they are part of the process of assuring quality and that everyone owns the process. Moreover, it is difficult to implement any meaningful quality system in an institution if there is strong resentment from the people who are expected to participate in the process. Quality culture, in a way, can expose the structure and policies of a university if they are not enough to maintain quality of ODL (Mårtensson, Roxå & Stensaker, 2014).

Self-analysis: IQA systems demand that universities conduct some form of self-analysis to bring to light some of the areas that require attention. This process demands factual reporting so that appropriate internal quality measures are undertaken. It is some form of self-introspection and therefore a necessary activity in IQA system for any university that offers programmes through ODL.

3.6.3.5 University resources

Successful operation and function of a university demands that its resources are enough for its programmes. Generally, resources could be divided into various categories but, for this study, only two resources are included as indicators of QA for ODL. These resources are education resources and infrastructure.

Quality education resources: Education resources range from teaching and learning materials to access to such resources by lecturers and students on the programme. With quality education resources available, management of ODL courses and programmes becomes easier. For instance, university libraries should be well stocked with the latest books, journals and other study material written by various researchers and scholars in the form of hard, soft or online copies. ODL students and their lecturers should have access to online library material even when they are off campus. However, by the same premise, Guri-Rosenblit (2009) critically observes that although most ODL is delivered through old media, such as correspondence, it should not be perceived to be inappropriate. Digital technology should always be regarded as the means, not the ends, of distance education. It is still possible to offer quality ODL without digital technology.

Quality infrastructure: The effective and efficient delivery of ODL largely depends on education resources and infrastructure, which must be readily available. For example, the practice in Zambia is that, during student public holidays, ODL students attend residential schools for face-to-face contact with their tutors and course lecturers. These sessions are conducted on university campuses or in hired public institutions, because most public universities do not have the

infrastructure to accommodate students for laboratory practical sessions. The situation is even worse in private universities, which have limited funds to hire such facilities.

3.6.3.6 Student engagement

Student engagement is now regarded as a good thing in higher education by researchers and policy makers. Ashwin and McVitty (2015) observed that one important aspect of student engagement literature is often that the focus of student engagement is left undefined. Further, that this is necessary to know because the meaning of student engagement changes when the object of engagement is not clearly mentioned or changes. On the same score, Suttle (2010) defined student engagement as the psychological investment of attention, interest, effort and emotional involvement expended in the work of learning. In this case, the process of student engagement enables students to feel part of the QA process. It is therefore crucial to clearly indicate the focus of student engagement and what is being formulated through their engagement (Ashwin and McVitty, 2015).

Students' views: In the QA process, students can highlight some of the challenges and difficulties that they experience during the learning process. The rationale of seeking students' views is to allow them to participate in providing solutions to some of their challenges to improve quality delivery of ODL programmes and ultimately their academic experiences. Some of the universities in Zambia have put in place various students' platforms that receive and compile their suggestions on different academic aspects. For example, they use suggestion boxes, student unions and internet media platforms to exchange views with their students.

Student support: Students under the ODL programmes require different levels of support. Besides, models must be developed to support various student groups (Guiney, 2013; Yates, Brindley-Richards & Thistoll, 2014). The support given to the students complements their learning in terms of cognitive, affective and systematic behaviour. To supplement student support services, running online study skills and examination-skills workshops and general course support are essential. This study partly demonstrates the importance of students' contact time with their lecturers. In the case of Zambia, the use of teachers' District Resource Centres (DRCs), where teachers exchange their knowledge and skills countrywide, could help to increase contact with ODL students through regular visits from lecturers and tutors. One such institution is Mukuba University, which has embarked on a project of buying computers and printers for most DRCs, countrywide. Additionally, lecturers are sent to these centres in order to appreciate various challenges of their students on a number of issues.

3.6.3.7 University's core functions

Higher education the world over has moved from the periphery to the centre of government agendas. Universities are now regarded as crucial national assets in helping to address policy priorities such as generation of new knowledge and innovations and providers of skilled manpower. According to Altbach (2004), universities in most parts of the developing world continue to serve as central institutions in national building, research and training. In other words, universities have several functions but, for this study, the focus is on three core functions: educational processes; research; and community outreach.

3.6.3.8 Educational processes

Teaching and learning have been the core functions of higher education institutions from the twelfth century, since the establishment of universities in Europe. Altbach (2014) asserts that the rationale of university teaching and learning is to educate students to work effectively in industry, whether technological or otherwise. However, teaching and learning as a vocational role of universities has become universal and complex. In some cases, this role combines applied training with education in relevant academic disciplines. Universities and colleges in Zambia that offer ODL programmes have given priority to teaching and learning as core processes that are delivered in line with their curriculum, although the QA mechanisms that are in place are different.

3.6.3.9 Research

Research is the other core function of universities that dates to the establishment of the University of Berlin. Research has become the central value of top-tier universities in all developed and developing countries. Academic rewards and institutional prestige for individual academics are bestowed according to their research productivity (Altbach, 2014). Research in many empirical studies requires substantial funding for research equipment, particularly in science-based studies. At university level, research can take various forms and have different agendas. Altbach (2014) states that the aspect on discovery, interpretation and originality connects the vast array of research themes, methodologies and orientations. Universities in Zambia do conduct research in various fields, although most of the researchers and academics are constrained in terms of financial resources. From my experience as a lecturer, there is need for proper government funding for research in both public and private universities.

3.6.3.10 Community outreach

As indicated earlier in this chapter, universities serve many purposes in contemporary society and deserve support, not only for their direct economic roles. One of the other core functions of the

universities is community outreach. Due to the number of functions of universities, it is important for such institutions to establish strong university–community relationships, particularly in the area in which they operate. As part of community outreach, universities are obliged to increase awareness and educate their communities on a range of issues such as education, health and economic issues prevailing in the country. Besides this, universities should have robust policy on corporate social responsibility as means of ploughing back to their community. This practice is common among universities in Zambia, where they have entered into various partnerships with different groupings in communities.

3.6.3.11 Enterprise

At the level of government policy, the university is recast as an enterprise within a competitive marketplace where the “entrepreneurial academic” who commercialises research becomes the role model (Todd, 2007). In line with community outreach, universities are expected to engage with business, public and voluntary organisations to create social, cultural and economic impact through knowledge exchange. Within universities, research expertise can be applied to benefit a range of external partners. For example, external partners could mean access to new ways of thinking or new processes that have a positive impact on their businesses and ‘customers’ which can extend to the wider community or industry sector. In Zambia, public and private universities do collaborate with industries on a number of projects, although this kind of partnership requires strengthening. The benefits to the university could include among others new partners for collaborative projects, industry insights to inform teaching and potential sources of student projects and placements. Enterprise activities can be a source of direct income or provide funding to accelerate university research into tangible services, processes and products that benefit external partners.

3.6.3.12 Output

In terms of output, the aim of higher education institutions is to produce graduates who are qualified for the labour market and to improve educational delivery at various levels of any education system. It is important to state that there are numerous outcomes of such a system, apart from quality, skilled and employable graduates and research publications.

3.6.3.13 Feedback

It is always helpful with any QA mechanisms to have a provision for obtaining feedback, as this makes it possible to adjust and improve on quality standards. Continuous improvement demands that comparisons are made to the input, the processes involved and the output. For example, if ODL students are finding it difficult to grasp concepts in some basic foundational courses in

Bachelor of Education/Science programmes, the entry qualification in these programmes could be adjusted and this should be communicated to the stakeholders. Such a measure would allow only students with the necessary qualifications to pursue university programmes.

In view of the above, Figure 3-3 below is the visual representation of the conceptual framework for this study. The framework is based on the open systems approach and takes a broader outlook with regards to the higher education policy formulation in Zambia, and then focuses on institutional QA practices. It depicts that universities operate as open systems organisations with inputs from their environment. The QA system of a university to some extent is determined by both internal and external factors (Mizikaci, 2006). Therefore, a university must position itself in an environment to compete favourably with other providers. QA of ODL and its service delivery can play a significant role in attracting good numbers of students into institutions.

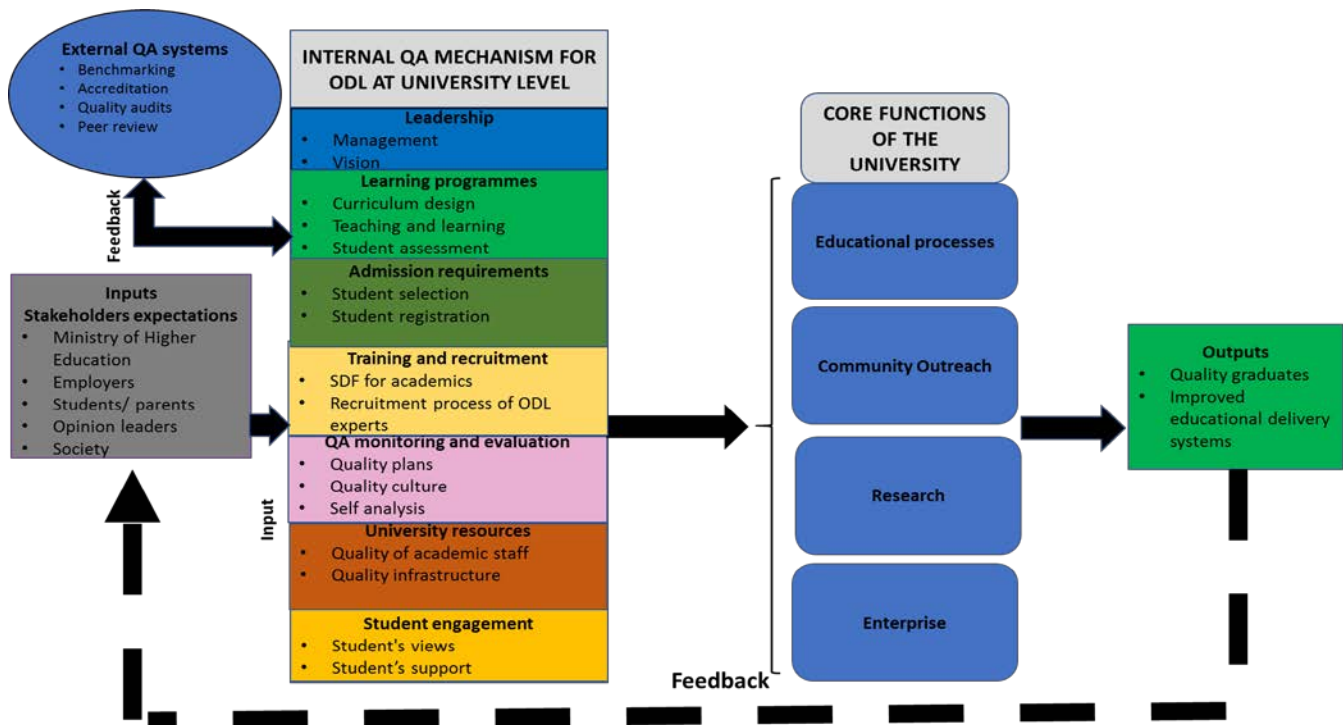


Figure 3-3 Conceptual framework for QA of ODL at university level (adapted and modified from IUCEA, 2010; Clarke et al., 2009)

Some research studies have been conducted in ODL on the Zambian higher education system; however, these studies have omitted QA in either the conventional or ODL mode, particularly in universities. This study has highlighted the institutionalisation of the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 as well as institutional practice of QA in universities that offer ODL in Zambia. The quality of ODL in the absence of the key indicators is an important area to investigate as higher education has been constantly changing; opportunities have also been changing, together with ODL. This study narrows the gap in QA practice in Zambia regarding policy enforcement and its institutionalisation as well as institutional QA practice for ODL.

The next chapter focuses on the study's research methodology.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides details of the research methodology used in this study. In particular, it provides an explanation of the philosophical paradigm, reflexivity, positionality and research design. The chapter also presents the methods, data sources, instruments for data collection, and the validity and reliability of instruments. It further presents data analysis and ends with ethical issues.

As described earlier, this study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the policy measures of QA for Zambian universities offering ODL programmes, and how is the policy institutionalised to ensure the prescribed benchmarks are attained?
2. What measures are Zambian universities taking to maintain and improve the provision of ODL programmes?
3. How do universities offering ODL ensure that their students contribute to the development of the university QA system?
4. What lessons can Zambia learn from countries that are perceived to have robust university QA practices for ODL?

4.1 Philosophical paradigm

This section presents the philosophical assumptions that informed the selection of the methodology used in this study. Methodology comprises the underlying set of beliefs that help the researcher to choose one set of research methods over another one (Wahyuni, 2012). The study took a pragmatic stance and employed mixed methodology in its philosophical approach. Mixed methodology in conducting research is a model that contains elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches within the context of a paradigm (Scotland, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012).

The nature of this study necessitated the use of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques in data collection and analysis to address the above research questions. The justification to use pragmatism in this study draws partly on the work of Creswell (2012), who asserts that pragmatism opens the doors to multiple methods, different worldviews, assumptions,

forms of data collection and analysis for a mixed methods research. Thus, the pragmatic stance was used over the dialectic stance because it was suitable for addressing the research questions for this study. Dialectic stance in mixed methods stresses the need to reconcile the differences between philosophical paradigms to maintain the integrity of each paradigm (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). While this appears to be a straightforward approach, most researchers find it difficult to honour the integrity of each paradigm. Moreover, the dialectic stance is broad and might prove problematic to guide research in various ways (Greene & Caracelli, 1997).

On the one hand, pragmatism permits the use of diverse paradigms of inquiry that, in most cases, are informed by various assumptions in a given study. With pragmatism, it is possible to mix philosophical assumptions by using appropriate choices of methods that link the specific research problem under study. Pragmatists believe that in any study what is important are the methodological decisions in conducting research and the practical demands (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). Moreover, the pragmatic paradigm places the research questions centrally and applies all approaches to understanding the questions (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the research questions were central and data collection and analysis methods were designed to provide insights into the study at hand, without philosophical loyalty to alternative paradigms.

The use of a pragmatic stance is relevant in this study because its objective was to examine the available national QA systems for ODL and the practice of QA in the provision of ODL at university level. As a result of the relationships between the HEA in Zambia and universities, it was possible to establish their challenges in QA delivery of ODL. Due to the pragmatic stance, the researcher was able to gather data using various instruments from respondents with diverse backgrounds and to examine them to gain an in-depth understanding of QA for ODL. This process made it possible for integration and synthesis of information from the respondents in this study.

According to Bryman (2012), the paradigm adopted in a study and the personal position taken by a researcher should link to ontology and epistemology. The study makes an ontological assumption that knowledge can be obtained using single and multiple realities. The purpose of this research was to obtain information on the QA policy measures for ODL at national level and its institutional practice, using proven means such as interviews (Jackson, 2013). Ontologically, the study used several techniques to obtain single and multiple realities on QA practice of ODL in universities in Zambia from various respondents. Conversely, an interpretive technique was applied to analyse the data arising from interactions with all the participants, at the same time applying scientifically proven methods such as questionnaires, which are based on positivism, for the quantitative data.

The epistemological assumption of this study is that knowledge can be created, obtained and communicated using various means (Scotland, 2012). Therefore, the researcher considers humans to play an important role as primary data collection instruments who reveal their differently constructed single or multiple realities. For example, in this study, participants were free to express themselves based on either their experience or understanding of QA of ODL.

Epistemologically, the aim of this study was to create and acquire knowledge through the interactions between the respondents and the researcher. The researcher is aware of other epistemological perspectives in research methods; which include positivism (Weaver & Olson, 2006). The assumption of this perspective is that observations can be objective and either value-free or neutral. Positivists see knowledge as objective and without connection to human experiences (Weaver & Olson, 2006; Bryman, 2012), moreover that knowledge can be obtained only by using scientifically proven methods that can be verified and will reproduce the results. In this case, it rules out the application of interpretivist approaches, which are mainly associated with qualitative and mixed methods, to some extent. Additionally, post-positivism claims that positivists are rigid, with rules of research design and statistical analyses, and this narrows the scope of social research.

As there are so many counter-arguments to the application of paradigms in research, the researcher felt that it was more appropriate to use a pragmatic paradigm to guide the trustworthiness of the outcomes (Feilzer, 2010; Denscombe, 2014). The researcher further argues that it is appropriate to use pragmatism because the opportunity to mix both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study, like this one, is not only legitimate but necessary (Hamersley, 2006).

4.1.1 Reflexivity and positionality statement

Before I discuss my reflexivity, I begin with academic integrity, which in my view works in tandem with reflexivity. Academic integrity refers to the academic practice of values, behaviour and conduct in discharging the work involving teaching, research and service (Macfarlane, Zhang & Pun, 2014). It is normal practice for every researcher to attach academic integrity to his or her research work. Integrity is a complex word to explain, as scholars use several interpretations and conceptions.

This study took a reflective approach to raise awareness of the impact of both the researcher and the participants on the methodology and methods for data collection and interpretation (Plowman, 1995). According to Gray (2018), reflexivity is a concept to describe the relationship between the researcher and the object of research. It involves the realisation that the researcher

is not a neutral observer but, in a way, is implicated in the construction of knowledge. As a researcher, I present my reflective statement and values that underpin this study. I realised that there are some aspects that had the potential to shape my study. I was aware of the need to develop my capacity to bring out some of the issues, assumptions, feelings and beliefs that might have influenced the findings of my study if no practical steps were undertaken. Accordingly, the act of studying a social phenomenon influences the enactment of that phenomenon, because researchers are part of the world that they study, and the knower and the known are inseparable (Perkins, Jay & Tishman, 1993).

As a researcher, I was guided by several values that enabled me not to be biased or to rush to a conclusion. These values include, among others, respect, co-operation, openness, minimal power relation, confidentiality, patience, virtue and openness. In this case, I provided participants with the necessary information and stated my role clearly (Pring, 2001). Some of the participants whom I targeted were senior in their organisations and had much experience and, for this reason, I treated them as my seniors to elicit data from them (Walford, 2012). I was also aware of the different positions, identities, and powers ascribed to me by the participants and how such ascriptions impacted my relationship with them during the period of data collection. Moreover, in a study of this nature it is the researcher's responsibility to inform readers of any bias and assumptions, as it is important to indicate how these may have influenced subsequent findings.

According to Griffith (1988, cited in Mercer, 2007), positionality describes the stance that researchers adopt regarding their participants and research settings. These include gender, class and sexual orientation, which give a researcher lived familiarity with the group being researched. There are different ways through which the positionalities, identities and authorities of the participants and researchers are revealed. At Universities A and B, I often introduced myself to both lecturers and students as a lecturer from another university who was currently pursuing doctoral study in the United Kingdom. My assumption was that maintaining these two identities would enable me to elicit data from the students with fewer difficulties. With the lecturers I maintained the same positionality to build a relationship that would enable lecturers to treat me as a colleague without any undue discrepancy in terms of qualifications. Furthermore, the participants at University A regarded me as a partial insider, because some academic staff who had taught me were still teaching at the institution. This worked to my advantage, as I was able to gather the information that I was looking for. Unluer (2012) states that, as a partial insider, a researcher might unconsciously make wrong assumptions about the research process, based on their prior knowledge, resulting in bias. With this consideration, I resolved not to be overtaken by the knowledge that I possessed about University A, to avoid any distortion of my research findings. There is also a possibility that participants at this institution might have refrained from

giving me certain information, both as they considered me an outsider and as the information that I was looking for was not purely for academic purposes.

At University B, my assumption and belief were that participants identified me as an outsider. In simple terms, outsiders are non-members of a specified group. University B is privately owned, and its main aim is to generate income. It could be true that some officials treated me with suspicion and as one who was on a mission to discredit them. Most likely, they treated me with caution and filtered the information that they gave me. This positionality at University B is reflected in participants' words, such as 'So you have come from another university to find out how we are running ODL and then make a report?' Being an outsider did not disadvantage me as a researcher, because an outsider's advantages lie in curiosity with the unfamiliar and an ability to ask difficult questions. One could argue that these attributes of outsiders enable them to obtain information that is not easy to secure (Mercer, 2007).

The fact that at the time of my data collection I was a lecturer at University C could have contributed to being regarded as a lecturer. At University C, participants identified me as an insider and collecting data was not difficult, as all the participants were willing to share information with me regarding QA provision of ODL. With this on my mind, I interacted with colleagues simply as an interviewer and nothing more. I also applied the same approach to officials from the MoHE and HEA, who treated me with the utmost kindness and respect.

Accordingly, the methodology and methods employed in this study reflect my positionalities and identities as constructed and negotiated in the research process. My role as a researcher with the participants was not static but fluctuating, shifting back and forth along a continuum of insider, partial insider and outsider, from one moment to the other. Over and above my positionality and that of my participants, I tried to present critically the participants' perspectives in my findings in an impartial manner and with balanced views.

4.2 Research design

This study employed concurrent mixed methods design for data collection and analysis. Mixed-methods research is a research design in which the researcher collects, analyses and mixes (integrates or connects) both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or multi-phase inquiry (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the qualitative and quantitative approaches were used independently and in no order.

The concurrent design enabled the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. The idea is that one data collection method would deepen and validate the other

(Gray, 2018). Creswell (2012, 2014) states that a clearer understanding of the research problem results from such a combination. Therefore, this design enabled the researcher to gain a broader perspective of using two different approaches to honour the integrity of each.

The use of a concurrent design makes it easier to cross-check the results from the qualitative perspective to the quantitative. This approach helps to reduce bias in either qualitative or quantitative data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2010). For example, the simultaneous collection of data aimed to address research questions that were asked to various categories of participants to compare their perspectives on QA practice in ODL in Zambian universities. Conversely, this research design allowed the data from two different approaches to have equal weight in informing the findings of this study. Accordingly, the use of mixed methods in this study was based on the research questions and how the design could help in answering these questions. Therefore, the researcher was careful in the use of this research design.

4.3 Research methods

As indicated earlier, the researcher subscribes to pragmatism. Therefore, this study employed mixed methods in the data collection, presentation, integration and discussion of the research findings. Various authors are in support of mixing multiple methods, as this allows for an in-depth exploration of the topic at hand (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell, 2012). One of the study objectives in using mixed methods was to synthesise qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a richer understanding of the phenomenon and generate reliable research questions that provide warranted answers to the research questions raised in this study (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007; Punch, 2013).

Mixed methods allowed the study to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. For instance, the study was able to obtain a greater understanding from the quantitative results related to Research Question 3 on the steps that universities involved in the provision of programmes through ODL have taken to ensure students' contribution to QA systems. On the other hand, the use of a qualitative approach allowed participants to describe their experiences and perceptions on QA (Johnson & Turner, 2003). The results for Research Questions 1 and 2 are derived using qualitative means.

Studies by Saketa (2014) on QA practices in Ethiopian public and private higher education sectors and Ortega (2013) on the impact of self-evaluation processes on QA in higher education in the case of Unibe University, Dominican Republic, applied mixed methods and legitimatised the use of multiple methods to answer research questions. In a similar way, this study used mixed methods that resonate with the research questions on the QA of ODL in the Zambian context.

In summing up, the fundamental rationale for using mixed methods research is to combine methods to use the complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of qualitative or quantitative data. By the same score, using mixed methods makes it possible to triangulate and allow for greater validity in a study by seeking corroboration between qualitative and quantitative data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Yin, 2006; Punch & Oancea 2014; Sparkes, 2015).

Triangulation was necessary to arrive at the correct scenario in Zambia vis-à-vis national QA policies and universities' internal quality systems for ODL.

4.4 Data sources

The participants in this study were drawn from the MoE, cascading through the HEA down to three universities. Four universities took part in this study anonymously. The researcher termed them Universities A, B and C, as pseudonyms. The fourth was University D, for piloting the instruments. Other participants included a QA expert and an ODL expert (consultants in higher education). The MoHE was included in order to respond to QA policy issues. The reasons for including a QA expert and an ODL expert were to benefit from their experience in their respective fields and for the purposes of comparability and confirmability of data from other sources. Similarly, the HEA was deliberately involved as its role is to enforce the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, which regulates and monitors quality in the universities. The HEA was also selected to provide detailed information on how universities are responding to the new benchmarks set in their quality frameworks (tools).

4.5 Sampling procedures

A sampling procedure is the process of selecting from a list of elements in a population (White, 2005). The idea was to collect data from various participants on the topic at hand and make meaningful judgements.

4.5.1 Purposive sampling

The study used purposive sampling to select one official from the MoHE and one from the HEA. In purposive sampling, the sample is created with a purpose in mind. The contours of the demographics are planned well in advance and users that fit this criterion are used for the study (Jackson, 2013). The rationale for using purposive sampling was to select information-rich cases for in-depth study. In other words, if a researcher determines the information that is required in his or her study, it is more economical of time and resources than probability sampling

(Denscombe, 2010). With 18 years of experience in teaching at secondary and university level, the researcher already had knowledge on this topic and aimed to collect valuable data.

4.5.2 Simple random and purposive sampling

University A and University B were randomly picked from a total of 35 registered universities in Zambia. Denscombe (2010) observes that random sampling is an approach that involves the selection of events literally at random, on condition that a selection is genuinely conducted. Although the population was relatively small, the use of simple random sampling in a way legitimised the research process of this study. The names of these two universities were drawn from a container at random. University C was purposively included in the sample because it was among the three newly transformed universities that were gazetted in 2013 by the Government of Zambia. In terms of context, University A is the largest public institution, with about eight thousand ODL students. Students from University A come from various parts of the country, both rural and urban. It is a dual institution, although its ODL Institute is semi-autonomous.

University B is also one of the largest ODL institutions in Zambia, with about five thousand students. It operates as a single-mode institution whose student intake is from across the country. It has a reputation for having produced a huge number of teacher graduates over the past twenty years. Initially, the researcher had planned to pick two universities at random. Because both were 'old' in terms of years of existence, the researcher then decided to pick purposively a 'young' university. The idea was to obtain data that could bring out the other dimensions of quality provision differently from University A and B. University C is a small institution with no more than three thousand ODL students. It is located in an urban area; however, its students come from various parts of the country. In terms of data collection, University C was convenient for the researcher's data collection because it is situated in his home town.

Universities A, B and C have several schools and departments. However, the focus of this study was on their respective schools of education. Each school had eight departments, supporting various combinations of courses leading to bachelor's degrees. Purposive sampling was used to select university officials at management level to take part in this study (University A, 3 officials; University B, 2 officials; and University C, 2 officials), making a total of seven. The variation in the number of management officials from the three universities who took part is due to differences in their organisational structures. Some universities are large and therefore have a larger structure, with more staff. These officials were selected to provide policy-related information on QA of ODL at management level in their respective universities.

One of the objectives of this study was to collect in-depth data on the practice of QA in universities offering ODL. For this reason, another set of participants at departmental level was randomly selected. Each university had eight departments in their respective schools of education. The total number of all departments was 24. Four HODs represented each school from different departments. This meant that only 12 officials at departmental level took part in the study from the three universities.

4.5.3 Multi-stage, purposive sampling and random sampling

The ODL students were selected in this sample using multi-stage, purposive and random sampling at various stages. Creswell (2014) describes multi-stage sampling as a procedure that requires the researcher first to identify clusters before obtaining the names of individuals within the identified clusters. For example, University A and University B had clear and well-defined student registers, together with students' geographical locations, to act as clusters for this study. These two universities were supported by provincial offices across the country. Of the 10 provinces in Zambia, Lusaka and the Copperbelt Provinces indicated that they had ODL students with a mixture of characteristics that were representative of the rest of the ODL students at Universities A and B.

Based on the information in the registers from Universities A and B, university officials from these two institutions advised the researcher to pick Lusaka Province, with eight Districts, and the Copperbelt Province, with 10 Districts. These two provinces are along the national rail line cutting across the central and southern parts of Zambia. Some Districts in these two provinces are classified as peri-urban (outskirts). To obtain balanced views of students from urban and peri-urban, rural settings were included. Luapula Province, which has 11 Districts and is largely rural, was included in the sample after consultation with officials from Universities A and B. All three selected provinces are vast; this made it impossible to collect data from all the Districts. Moreover, it would have been costly and time consuming to go to all Districts. For these reasons, Districts were purposively picked for their ease of access (Lusaka - 3 Districts; Copperbelt- 4 Districts; and Luapula - 4 Districts).

It is true that, by purposively selecting the Districts, some potential participants could have been systematically excluded. Therefore, the Districts acted as sampling frames from which my sample was drawn (Kothari, 2004; Groves et al., 2009). The students in these Districts were picked at random from various primary and secondary schools. This random sampling technique ensures that every element in the sampling frame has an equal chance of being selected for the sample, to minimise unwanted variation in responses (White, 2005; Groves et al., 2009). Selected ODL

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students were at various levels of their Bachelor of Education programmes, and the aim was to obtain a clear picture from students regarding the quality provision of programmes of ODL. Students at University C were randomly selected during their April to May 2016 campus residential schools.

According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Chuan and Penyelidikan (2006), if the population is in the range of 7,500 to 25,000, to make inference to the larger population a sample size of 378 is statistically significant. In this study, the total number of all the ODL students from Universities A, B, and C did not exceed 25,000. Therefore, only 378 questionnaires were required to arrive at 95 per cent confidence interval, with a margin of error of 5 per cent.

Table 4-1 Questionnaire responses of heads of departments and ODL students

University	Heads of Departments		ODL Students	
	Distributed	Returned	Distributed	Returned
University A	4	4	185	125
University B	4	4	81	61
University C	4	4	136	114

The response rates from the HODs and ODL students were 100 per cent and 82 per cent, respectively. The response rate for the students was calculated from the expected number of 378. The study utilised 300 ODL students' questionnaires from 310, as 10 were treated as outliers. The study conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with different participants, as explained later in sections 4.5.4 and 4.6.1.

The intention of this study was not to generalise the findings to all universities that provide Bachelor of Education/Science degree with education programmes through ODL in Zambia. However, the findings of this study maybe transferable to institutions with characteristics similar to this original context (David, 2013). The idea was to collect data to bring out the most critical issues of QA, its practice and applicability at national level and in the higher education institutions that were targeted and offering programmes through ODL in Zambia.

4.5.4 Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling technique is based on a reference model. Participants that match criteria are asked to refer users who, they are personally aware, match the criteria (Denscombe, 2010). This technique is effective, as it allows a researcher to approach new key participants with the help of the nominator. Thus, it helps a researcher to obtain the information necessary for the study. Snowballing is compatible with the purposive sampling used in this study (Denscombe, 2010). ODL

and QA experts were selected using the snowball sampling technique. Conducting an interview with a senior officer at the HEA led to the selection of an ODL expert (Denscombe, 2010), and the ODL expert proposed an experienced QA expert who, at some point, had served as a consultant for UNZA in establishing its QA unit for the IDE.

4.6 Data collection instruments

The concurrent mixed-methods strategy guided the underlying principle behind the data collection in a systematic fashion. Creswell (2012) states that this strategy allows researchers to collect data simultaneously without any restrictions. All the items for the interviews and questionnaires were developed and designed by the researcher. This process was made possible by identifying the main themes in the literature review and concepts in the conceptual framework in order to address the main research questions. For validity and reliability of the instruments of this study, see section 4.6.4.

4.6.1 Research interviews

The interviews were conducted using seven different semi-structured interview guides, one for each category of participants. The idea was to obtain the perceptions, understanding and clear testimony of QA practices in the provision of programmes through ODL from key participants. Milena, Dainora and Alin (2008) state that, in most cases, interviews prove helpful in obtaining a vivid picture of a participant's perspective on a given research topic. The interviews were conducted at two levels, policy and institutional, beginning with senior officials at the MoHE and the HEA. A qualitative approach was used to elicit data from these officials on measures and other commitments in place at national level for QA of ODL for universities. The interviews conducted at this level were directed mainly at Research Question 1 and to some extent Research Questions 2 and 4 on student engagement and lessons from developed countries in the QA provision of higher education (ODL).

Secondly, interviews were conducted at three universities (A, B and C) with senior management officials at the level of dean, director responsible for ODL and QA co-ordinators, as key participants. The aim was to obtain in-depth qualitative information on the measures that universities had put in place; first, to self-regulate and, secondly, how they have institutionalised quality policies. Being members of the university senates, these officials were privy to certain policies and decisions of their universities regarding QA of ODL. The interviews conducted were largely to answer Research Question 2 and, to some extent, 3 and 4.

Thirdly, other interviews that were conducted with one QA expert and one ODL expert. Their participation in this study allowed for independent views on the same topic. This was necessary for the purposes of comparability of findings in order to make a more robust conclusion.

Therefore, this class of participants had a combination of question items to address all four research questions. Their experiences combined well to describe the performance of Zambia in the area of QA of ODL at higher education level and student engagement in quality matters. The researcher maintained the same tone throughout the interviews by ensuring that the conversations flowed to cover the outlined interview questions in a logical and systematic manner.

4.6.2 Research survey questionnaires

This study had two groups of participants, and both were given questionnaires. These were HODs from the universities at departmental level in the schools of education and ODL students. Each group had a different set of questionnaires. The only feasible method of data collection from ODL students in the many and varied parts of the country was through the use of such as survey.

The questionnaires for both groups (officials at departmental level and students) had a combination of closed and open-ended questions. This gave participants the ability to express themselves if there was something that was not adequately addressed by the closed questions. The advantage of using closed questions was to impose some structure in terms of uniformity of length to provide some form of pre-coded data for ease of analysis (Denscombe, 2014; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

The inclusion of officials at departmental level was to elicit data on the QA measures that the departments had put in place to assure the quality of ODL. At the same time, it allowed them to present their own views, as well as those of their staff. These officials were asked questions ranging from QA in general to stakeholder involvement in QA, challenges and student engagement in QA provision of ODL. In this category of participants, the questionnaire addressed Research Questions 2 and 4.

Students participated in this study as stakeholders in the provision of programmes in ODL. Students were key to this study, particularly to issues related to teaching and learning, infrastructure/facilities, learner support, their engagement in QA and to university leadership. Their responses were intended to answer Research Questions 1, 2 and 3.

In a nutshell, this study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to address various research questions in data collection. In this way, the use of mixed methods in data collection was justified. In addition, the study used a document review process.

4.6.3 Document review

Document review is a process of collecting data by reviewing existing documents (Punch & Oancea, 2014). This process was used to confirm mainly qualitative data from the interviews, the documents were in the form of electronic, computer-based, internet-transmitted and hard-copy material. The objective of using this method was to triangulate with the other methods, fill the data gap, lend complementarity, enriched and reliable data (Bowen, 2009). This method was used to obtain information from official documents from the MoHE and Universities A, B and C. The documents included *Higher Education Policies of 1996 and 2013*, *Quality Assurance Framework for the HEA* and the strategic plans of Universities A, B and C. For the purpose of anonymity, pseudonyms have been used to refer to the universities' strategic plans (SP-A for University A; SP-B for University B; and SP-C for University C). Eisner (1991) observes that researchers always attempt to provide a confluence of evidence that generates credibility through triangulation. As mentioned earlier in the rationale of the study, the practice of formal QA in higher education is relatively new, as Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 necessitated this process. Therefore, the only way of obtaining critical information to improve on the findings was through this process. The information obtained is linked to all the four research questions in this study.

4.6.4 Validity and reliability of the instruments

Validity determines whether research truly measures that which it is intended to measure and the truthfulness of the results (Golafshani, 2003; Morse et al., 2008). Validity is concerned with the researcher proving beyond doubt that the study being conducted may be accepted as evaluating what it is stated to evaluate (Kothari, 2004; Muijs, 2010). In this study, as earlier indicated, the interview guides were peer reviewed at two stages by practising lecturers in higher education at University of Southampton and Mukuba University. In order to refine and improve on the coherence of the questionnaires, PhD students at University of Southampton helped to review them. As commented on earlier, the researcher used triangulation to strengthen the findings by way of collecting data using several methods. These are interviews, survey questionnaires and document review. As a researcher, by implication my conduct was in line with the ethical rules and principles of research of not manipulating data. It is the researcher's obligation to share the findings with the participants in Zambia, vis-à-vis the responses that they gave during the interviews.

Reliability is one of the key requirements of any research process. Therefore, reliability is the extent to which results are consistent and accurately represent the total population. If a similar study were to be conducted using the same methodology and if it achieved the same results, then the instruments may be regarded as reliable (Zohrabi, 2013). The rigorous process of the instrument construction explained earlier is likely to give confidence to readers that the results of this study are reliable.

This study is largely qualitative; therefore, the results are dependable and consistent with good replication to cases with similar characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The social context was clear, in that most of the participants came from universities, either as students, academics, managers or education experts. Other participants were qualified experts in their respective field of specialisation of QA and ODL. As a researcher, I read about QA and ODL to gain a better understanding of this topic to make meaningful and reliable judgement (see Appendix K for the pilot study).

4.7 Data analysis

Qualitative analysis is the primary method for this study, and interviews were the primary technique of data collection. Interviews are a distinctive research technique used as a principal means of gathering information and have a bearing on the research objectives for any study. They can be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). In this case, conducting interviews was a way of obtaining divergent views on the practice of QA in the universities that offer ODL in Zambia.

This research employed qualitative and quantitative means of data analysis. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It also interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis helped in identifying the themes as they emerged through repeated reading of the interview texts (Denscombe, 2010; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). In other words, thematic analysis was employed in this study because it enabled the researcher to identify the themes that capture something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was complemented by checking the adequacy of data in addressing the research questions. Although inductive and deductive processes are not mutually exclusive, it should be noted that for this study thematic analysis followed an inductive approach. This means that the themes were identified from the collected data by analysing the pattern of responses from the respondents but not confirmed by the data (Gray, 2018). All the responses that shared

similar patterns and answered the same questions were grouped together and further studied to gain a deeper understanding of their content. Further reading allowed systematic coding and categorisation of the main identified themes. A computer software package called Nvivo was used in the process of thematic analysis.

4.7.1 Process of coding and thematising

This study relied on Braun and Clarke (2006, 16-23) regarding the process of coding and thematising. The process has six stages, similar to qualitative research:

1. **Familiarising oneself with data:** After the data collection exercise, the researcher made sure that he was very familiar with the content. At this stage, the researcher made notes and marked ideas for coding at a later stage. This was a preparatory step to starting coding and transcribing the verbal data of the interviews. The exercise was time consuming but worthwhile, as the researcher kept checking the transcripts against the original audio recording for accuracy.
2. **Generating initial codes:** At this stage, the researcher was familiar with the data, and produced an initial list of ideas based on the data to come up with the initial codes. He used Nvivo software to generate the initial codes. This enabled him to work systematically on the process of coding.
3. **Searching for themes:** After initially coding and collating, the researcher arrived at a long list of codes from the data set. In this study, a number of preliminary codes were identified with various sub-themes that are referred to as nodes in Nvivo (see Appendix L). In this phase, the researcher analysed the codes to see how he could combine them to form overarching themes. The visual representation in NVivo was useful to sort out codes according to themes.
4. **Reviewing themes:** At this stage, the researcher came up with candidate themes, which involved refinement of the themes. Some themes emerged as the main themes and others collapsed into each other, as they could not stand on their own. This phase is all about reviewing and refining the themes. All the collated extracts appeared to form a coherent pattern; if such a relationship had been absent, then the researcher would have done some reworking of the themes, but this was not the case. The essence of this phase was to establish an idea of the various themes and how they were able to fit together.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** At this stage, the researcher defined and re-refined the themes to present for the analyses. For each individual theme, a detailed analysis was conducted by way of telling the story that each theme revealed. At the end of this phase,

the themes were clearly defined. It was possible to change the names of the themes during the final analyses, but at this stage the themes were now known.

6. **Producing the report:** At this stage, the researcher had worked out the themes. This involved the final analyses and write-up of the thesis to tell a story that is convincing to readers. The analyses provided a logical flow of ideas and avoided repetition yet demonstrated the prevalence of the themes from the extracts. The extracts helped to provide an analytical narrative to tell a story, beyond description, and to make an argument in relation to the research questions. In this study, the process of coding and thematising was an iterative process (see Appendix L for sample of a transcribed interview).

Quantitative data from questionnaires were coded and reduced to descriptive statistics, such as percentages and frequencies (Muijs, 2010; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). The reason for using descriptive statistics was to compare the QA activities that universities had in place in the provision of programmes through ODL using survey questionnaires for the students. Additionally, data obtained from HODs and ODL students were meant to compare and confirm the information from the interviews with participants. This process was made possible by using a statistical tool, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). All the questionnaires in this study had a combination of Likert scales and open-ended questions. The objective was to obtain information that was uniform in length for the purposes of quantification and comparison. Coding and entering the Likert scales in SPSS was not problematic, as the data obtained from the Likert scales were pre-coded, unlike the open-ended questions, which I first had to read, one by one, to identify the themes from the responses by categorising the same or similar responses manually. Open-ended questions allowed participants to express themselves. The results from SPSS helped me to understand and compare the statistical results from the three institutions on actual QA practice.

4.8 Ethical issues

Ethics is generally held to deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad. According to Strydom (1998, cited in White, 2005), ethics is a set of moral principles suggested by an individual or group and subsequently widely accepted. They offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and participants, other researchers, assistants and students.

It should be noted that the researcher is responsible for the ethical standards to which this study adhered. To start with, the researcher had to seek approval for the proposal from the University

of Southampton Ethics Committee to proceed with the study. This process allows for clarification and clearance of some of the contentious issues in the study, particularly with the data collection instruments.

Secondly, it was a procedural requirement to secure permission from the MoHE in Zambia to carry out data collection. The purpose of this study was explained to the Permanent Secretary in the MoHE.

Thirdly, serious consideration was given to the ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, participants' and universities' views remain anonymous in this study. This naturally ensures privacy to the participants in this study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) assert that the best way to ensure anonymity is to avoid disclosing the names of participants or any other personal data that might lead to their identification.

Fourthly, the researcher explained to participants the potential benefits of this study and that their privacy would be respected. Informed consent documents were given out in which issues about the research were explained to every participant. All the participants were asked to read and sign the document to indicate their willingness to participate in this study.

The next chapter presents findings related to policy measures for QA.

Chapter 5 Findings Related to QA Policy Measures for ODL

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings for Research Question 1, which, focused on the policy measures of QA for Zambian universities offering ODL programmes to ensure that the prescribed benchmarks are attained. The chapter presents the findings from the interviews with policy-makers, policy implementers, a QA expert and an ODL expert in terms of their perceptions and understanding of the national QA measures that are available to monitor and regulate the provision of programmes through ODL. It begins with higher education QA measures for ODL in section 5.1, followed by the findings on regulation and monitoring of quality in ODL in section 5.2. These two main sections represent the key themes, and under each are sub-sections representing the sub-themes that describe specific QA policy measures for ODL. The raw codes from the transcribed interviews gave rise to the sub-themes identified as indicated in Figures 5-1 and 5-2. The meta themes are discussed in chapter 7. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

5.1 Higher education QA measures for ODL

In the process of establishing robust QA systems at national level for higher education institutions, one of the areas that requires serious attention is the specific QA measures for various modes of education delivery, in this case ODL. This suggests that QA measures for ODL should help universities in meeting the benchmarks prescribed by the Ministry of Higher Education and HEA as shown in figure 5-1 below. QA is contextual, therefore these benchmarks should be relevant to Zambia, as well as attaining QA global demands.

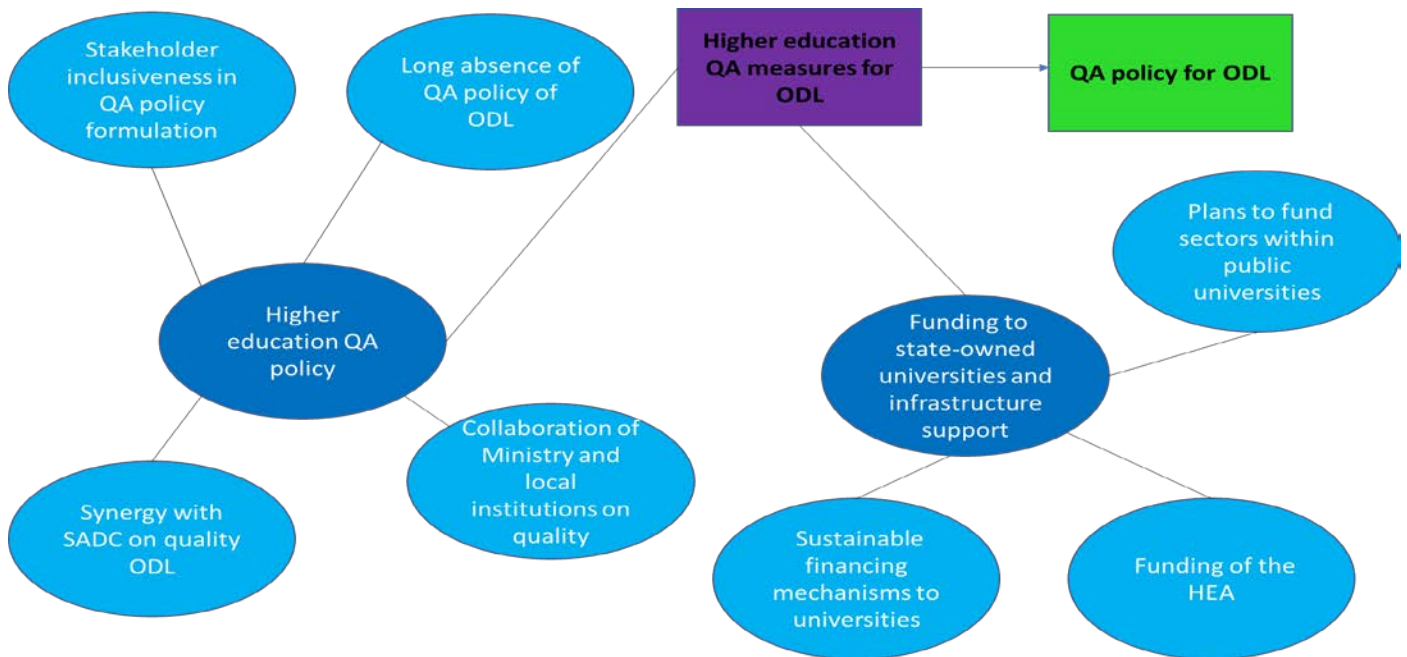


Figure 5-1: Thematic map, showing raw codes in light blue, sub-themes in deep blue, main theme in purple and meta theme in green.

5.1.1 Higher education QA policy

The MoHE in Zambia enacted the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 in order to provide QA policy guidelines to improve and maintain quality provisions of higher education programmes in all the institutions among other areas of concern. In the literature review, Sidney (2006) states that, ideally, the process of policy formulation undergoes several stages before it is completed. This implies that such a process requires time. Furthermore, policy development involves various stakeholders whose views are regarded as essential to this process. For instance, in this case, one of the participants (PL 01) reported that ‘the process of higher education QA policy formulation was very inclusive’. Furthermore, the same participant stated that:

It had taken us a long time to complete the process because we got many contributions from different stakeholders. Initially, it was a countrywide consultative process. The consultation was done in all the provinces in the education sector with the stakeholders.
(PL 01-MoHE)

Consensus building in policy formulation among stakeholders is not easy, as each advances his or her own aspirations. In the case of Zambia, it was the first time that the country had developed such a policy with embedded QA issues. It could be that some stakeholders did not understand QA, its benefits and challenges in the formulation process and implementation at a later stage. This, in a way, could be one of the reasons why the policy formulation took so long.

Educational experts shared the view that the establishment of the HEA (Quality Assurance Agency) would generally help to raise the level of quality at higher education, including in ODL. The Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 is explicit that the HEA shall act independently, with a mandate to regulate, support and advise institutions of higher learning in Zambia. During the interviews, one of the participants observed that the MoHE has shown commitment to improving the quality standards in this sector (Chakwa 10, QA expert). Another participant shared similar views:

The government has done something but has not really gone to the extent of ensuring that quality education is real and what is needed is in place. Now that the HEA has been established we expect a lot of change in terms of quality in all the higher educational institutions. Although the HEA has not fully established itself, I am sure institutions are busy trying to fill in registration forms. I expect the HEA to make sure that they control the quality process as they are directly in charge of all the higher education institutions and universities. (Ponga 11-ODL Expert)

The HEA has a huge task to work with various higher education institutions for them to appreciate the benefits of QA. For instance, it is the duty of the HEA to ensure that institutions of higher learning have appropriate management structures and internal QA mechanisms. In line with this arrangement, the literature review in Chapter 2 indicates that the United Kingdom has established QA systems for its higher education to promote accountability, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders. Other developing countries such as South Africa and Nigeria have already put in place QA systems for their higher education, including ODL. The MoE in Zambia did not want to be left behind in terms of quality provision of higher education, hence the establishment of the HEA through the Higher Education Policy number 4 of 2013.

Regarding quality regulation and supervision of ODL programmes, PL 01 noted their importance, although this practice had taken a long time to develop. It should be stated that the objective of quality regulation and supervision by the HEA is to ensure that higher education institutions execute their core functions of teaching, training and staff development. The HEA should be ready to solve problems that universities face in the provision of ODL programmes, rather than be impractical. It is also expected that the HEA should provide advice to the MoHE on all issues related to quality provision of ODL for further action. The literature review in this study suggests that, without direct intervention on matters of QA, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science decides which

institutions are recognised on the basis of the report from the Accreditation Organisations of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO, 2015).

PL 01 noted:

In the past, there was no regulation and supervision to see how the universities were performing in their ODL programmes, especially private universities whose interest is profit making. Private universities would maximise profit without much consideration of the quality that they are delivering. A few checks and balances will go a long way to ensure that a customer, in this case a student, is protected.

Moreover, state-owned universities were given a mandate to self-regulate (MoE, 1996), thus each university now has its own system of providing quality in ODL programmes. Self-regulation could be ideal if systems are in place. As presented in Chapter 2, the Australian government steers QA from a distance, meaning that universities are given opportunities to structure their QA systems without direct intervention (Jung & Latchem). PL 01 further stated that the 'Higher Education Policy of 2013 has come at a time when the standards of education have really gone down and are in need of revitalisation'.

Before the establishment of the HEA, setting up a private university was open to anyone who wished to do so without the need to follow any rigorous procedures. The fact that this kind of leverage was given to anyone may have contributed to lower quality standards in Zambia. It is true that countries that are doing well in QA provision, such as Australia, have put in place systems and structures for self-regulation, and this has been lacking in the Zambian higher education system.

The findings indicate that there are several reasons why higher educational institutions (ODL) in Zambia have operated without a policy on QA. One is the change of governance structures within government ministries. This could be linked to changes in the ruling political parties that come into power, with different ideologies, and has an impact on the governance systems of the country. During the interviews, from an implementation point of view, this was elaborated as follows:

Changes in government policy structure affect policy formulation as you will realise that, prior to 2011, Ministry of Higher Education was domiciled in the Ministry of Education and this Ministry [Ministry of Higher Education] at the time was called Ministry of Science, Technology and Vocational Training. Therefore, in 2011, two ministries merged and last year in 2015 they were again separated, because the merger did not work as efficiently as it was envisaged. (PL 01, MoHE)

Although the separation of the two ministries responsible for education could have culminated in a number of delays that were policy related, PL 01 (MoHE) recounted the progress made to steer the QA of higher education from a national point of view and to align quality provision with national benchmarks through the HEA:

During the time of the merger from 2011 to date, a lot of progresses on QA issues that you have mentioned have now been registered, such as the establishment of the HEA and its funding. The focus of the country has moved from primary and basic education to secondary and higher education, because now we have a lot of demand for tertiary education. In addition, our focus is on the reorganisation of the sector and includes QA, accreditation of programmes and lecturers, and everything else.

One of the most important aspects in QA is accreditation of programmes and lecturers. For instance, lecturers' main responsibility is to deliver and advance ODL programmes and other services in the universities, hence their qualifications matter a great deal and must be checked by the national quality agency. Universities must also comply with the quality agency, in terms of accreditation, to be permitted to run their programmes. The literature review of this study supports the idea of accreditation in higher education, in that the process helps to review colleges' and universities' programmes to ascertain their quality (Eaton, 2012). Moreover, accreditation as a form of QA guarantees the basic level of quality education provided by the universities that offer ODL in Zambia.

There is a belief that institutional collaboration and benchmarking are essential in the QA of ODL at policy level. Benchmarking involves comparing various aspects of the work of a group of organisations such as products, services or processes. This suggests that benchmarking at national level in Zambia is likely to help the HEA to identify its QA systems' comparative strengths and weaknesses.

In this case, PL 01 illustrated the following:

At the regional level, there is an initiative under the SADC framework, which is talking to open and distance-learning institutions. So yes, there is that synergy between what is being discussed at regional level and national level. (PL 01, MoHE)

It could be argued that when the MoHE and the HEA work together with competent organisations within the region and beyond, such as SADC, it helps to improve the quality delivery of ODL. The Ministry official was confident that borrowing and learning from experienced and successful organisations was the ideal starting point in QA for ODL.

5.1.2 Funding to state-owned universities and infrastructure support

The Government of Zambia has responsibility for funding higher education institutions by way of grants. State-owned institutions maintain their physical infrastructures and facilities by using the same grants. Private universities' main source of funding is students' tuition fees. This means that all privately owned institutions that offer ODL programmes rely on this source of income for their operational costs, apart from any revenue generated through research and consultancy. From a policy perspective, the participant noted:

I know it is common knowledge that we have had issues with financing of universities, which has resulted in students' riots, lecturer boycotts and a lot of other things. As a government, we have not honoured our institutional grants and sometimes this takes long, but we are improving. (PL 01, MoHE)

When governments' commitment to funding universities does not meet with the practicalities of funding disbursements, planning becomes difficult for these institutions. The MoHE in Zambia has a programme to address erratic and inadequate funding to state universities. This means that it is difficult to provide quality ODL in these universities without the funding necessary to maintain quality standards. Basaza, Milman and Wright (2010) indicate in the literature reviewed that the lack of funding has affected the provision of ODL in most developing countries, which includes Uganda and Kenya, besides Zambia.

To illustrate this, the same participant stated:

Universities were invited for meeting and we discussed with them a sustainable financing mechanism, including how government deals with the debt stock of the universities. You may be aware that at the end of 2015 the three public universities all owed K2.6 billion [Kwacha (K), in the Zambian currency: K13, 000 = 1 USD]. If a grant was offered in the old currency, that would be K2.6 trillion. Moreover, this is money owed to Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA), to the National Pension Scheme Authority (NAPSA), to lecturers for their salary increments and to former lecturers for their pension benefits. (PL 01, MoHE)

It is expected that, once state-owned universities liquidate all the monies that they owe other organisations, it will be easier for them to concentrate on quality provision of their ODL programmes without dividing their payment obligations with debt repayment. This situation would allow state-owned universities to plan their activities and would ultimately result in quality provision of ODL.

According to PL 01, the government is cognisant of the importance of quality infrastructure and facilities to provide quality higher education. He went on to state:

As a Ministry, our infrastructure plans are guided by the needs of the institutions. Universities should indicate their need for their infrastructure and the Ministry will be ready to provide. We are trying to improve the quality of education in these institutions. Before we come up with the plan of what the universities need, we consult them to indicate their critical areas. Currently, we have over K330 million [K13, 000 = 1 USD] for infrastructure; state-owned universities themselves decided that money should go into construction of student hostels. (PL 01, MoHE)

As highlighted above, well-maintained infrastructure and other facilities for teaching and learning such as classrooms, libraries and laboratories are prerequisites that enhance quality provision of programmes for ODL. At the moment, it is not clearly known whether these universities meet the benchmark to offer quality ODL.

At policy level, the MoHE collaborates with other international organisations to improve infrastructure for higher education delivery, which includes ODL programmes:

We have a project under the Ministry now that is improving infrastructure at the two public universities (UNZA and the Copperbelt University), as well as a few Technical Education and Vocational Training institutions (TEVET). The project is called Support to Science and Technology Learning in Education (SSTEP). Under this project, there are quite several initiatives and support areas that the universities have indicated. Some institutions have indicated the need for equipment and upgrades of certain facilities. All this is in line with improving training needs for the delivery of their education, especially for open and distance learning. (PL 01, MoHE)

The SSTEP project also has a provision to upgrade lecturers' and tutors' skills and knowledge to match the current labour demands to prepare their students for real-life challenges when they graduate. This is in line with the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, which encourages staff professional development in institutions of higher learning as well as improves their infrastructure and other facilities. This is to enable these institutions to offer satisfactory courses and to charge tuition fees that relate to the facilities.

5.2 Regulation and monitoring of quality in ODL

This section represents the main finding (key theme) that is largely related to policy implementation regarding regulation and monitoring of quality ODL. It highlights the

achievements and challenges, as well as progress made by the HEA, in ensuring that all higher education institutions in the country meet the minimum benchmarks in the delivery of ODL. The main finding is divided into four sub-sections that represent the sub-themes identified from the interviews conducted with officials from the MoHE, HEA and the ODL expert. The sub-themes that help in discussing the key theme are the initial policy achievements, collaborations with various stakeholders, enforcement of QA and the QA challenges for ODL, culminating in ‘regulation and monitoring of quality in ODL’ as the key theme (See figure 5-2).

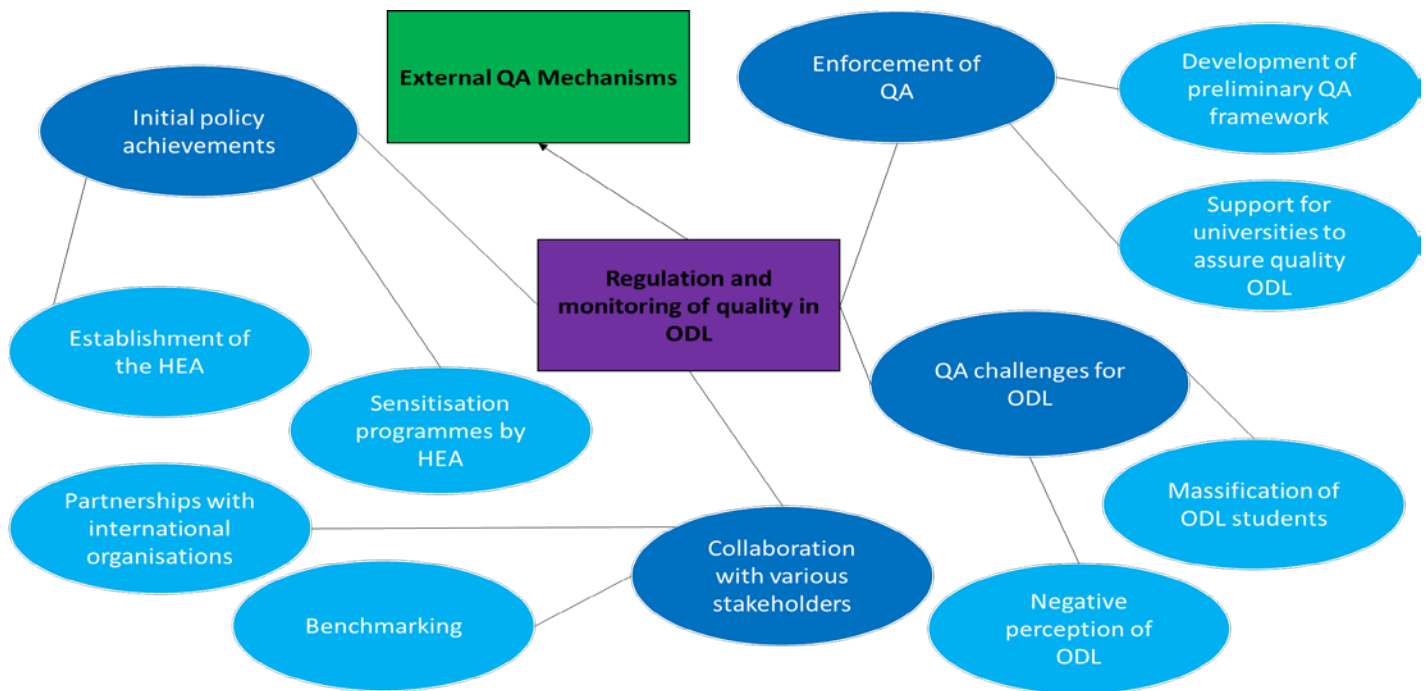


Figure 5-2: Thematic map, showing raw codes in light blue, sub-themes in deep blue, main theme in purple and meta theme in green.

5.2.1 Initial policy achievements

The MoHE believes in steering QA from a distance through the establishment of the HEA. It is common practice in a number of developed and a few developing countries to establish national QA agencies to regulate and monitor quality provision in universities. As earlier indicated, this was the first time that Zambia had embarked on a project to promote quality provision at higher education level and therefore it was expected that some of the initial achievements would be scored, as well as recording some challenges. Mohamedbhai (2015) states in the literature reviewed that some of the Sub-Saharan African countries have set up relatively new QA agencies to regulate the provision in their higher education. However, Materu (2007) points out that some of these QA agencies lack the capacity to perform their function. This means that QA provision is not easy, because of various challenges that include insufficient staff to conduct audits and resentment from universities:

You may wish to understand that the Higher Education Authority board was appointed in October 2014. This institution has been in operation for one year and three months. During this period, we have had to operate initially with staff from the government on attachment as we develop the instruments to quality assure the higher education institutions. (TE 02, HEA)

In a similar vein, the same participant stated:

Well, the successes are so many, the major ones are that now we have QA systems in place, we have the legal framework apart from the Act; we have the statutory instrument in place. We have the structure, we have started recruiting staff, and we have recruited the Director General, so far. We are now going onwards as we have already advertised for other positions. (TE 02, HEA)

With a full mandate and well-intentioned, robust QA process for higher education institutions, the HEA is expected to enforce the provisions of the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013. The institution's requirements apply to anyone who wishes to establish a university. These are the preliminary requirements or benchmarks that higher education institutions are expected to meet to be allowed to operate. With the necessary QA benchmarks in place, it would be difficult to regulate the provision of ODL in universities across the country. For instance, the 1996 Educating Our Future policy gave autonomy to state-owned universities to self-regulation (MoE, 1996). This arrangement resulted in questionable quality standards in higher education provision.

Participants from the MoHE and HEA expressed that:

The Authority established the minimum standards for an institution to acquire the status of a university. As such, all the universities are required to go through the registration process. As I speak, there is a list of registered universities published in the newspapers. (PL 01, MoHE)

The publication of the names of the universities that meet the benchmarks could compel other institutions to follow the correct procedures in terms of the quality provision of their ODL programmes. As part of the jurisdiction of the HEA, registered universities are also published in the government gazette, not just in newspapers and public media. Any university operating without being registered will be found guilty of operating illegally and shut down immediately. Highlighting the registration of universities, TE 02, HEA said:

So far, we have registered 19 higher education institutions, but the number could have gone up. I think we have more than 50 almost 60 plus private institutions that are in the process of registration. Those are the major things we have done so far. (TE 02, HEA)

TE 02 HEA mentioned that HEA planned to line up activities to explain their objectives to members of the public and stakeholders. Being a new organisation that is expected to work with a number of stakeholders, the objectives of HEA must be known to all those involved as well as the public. Stakeholders also have a responsibility to explain the role of the HEA and to help to instil confidence among the public. These activities suggest that the HEA is working on its public image and explaining why it exists. The HEA envisages accrediting university programmes once the registration of universities is complete. On a similar score, one would argue that the HEA is a conduit to advance the interest of Government in the quality provision of university education including ODL. Therefore, through the HEA, universities would be held accountable by the MoHE for failure to meet the QA benchmarks. TE 02 went on to state that:

We have our website running, containing law and regulations, people visit our site. We sensitised UNZA and Mulungushi University and participated in big events like the International Trade Fair for 2015. We had an education exposition, where we met stakeholders and we explained to them the mandate and the requirements of the HEA. Further, we also participated in the Agriculture and Commercial Show where the DG [Director General] sensitised higher education providers.

QA accreditation of university programmes and the lecturers involved in the delivery of the same programmes might require rigorous external quality audits. The finding indicates that the HEA will provide support to the universities to comply and meet the accreditation quality standards of their programmes and lecturers, as highlighted by TE 02 in an interview excerpt below:

The Higher Education Authority has a programme of accrediting the programmes of these universities, as well as accrediting the lecturers. This will help us to improve on the quality of deliverance of these universities.

5.2.2 Collaboration with various stakeholders

In the process of designing QA instruments, the HEA has been working with various international organisation and local stakeholders. Evidence shows that there were stakeholders with various interests and demands in formulating the QA standards. HEA was of the view that collaboration with local and regional organisations on quality was one of the ways of inclusiveness, as well as securing legitimacy from all the stakeholders, including universities. Moreover, it was necessary to align the quality benchmarks to the local context. The reviewed literature indicates the need to bring stakeholders together so that their concerns are taken on board (IUCEA, 2010). In this study, TE 02 stated that the HEA has collaborated with institutions in the country and in the region, such as the Tanzania Commission for Universities, and continues to do so:

Well, when we came up with the instruments we benchmarked with the Council of Higher Education in Africa, the Namibian and the Commonwealth of Learning and Pakistan QA systems. Coming up with the first draft framework was a very interesting process. Several individuals came on board and we learnt a lot, as they opened up areas that we never thought. (TE 02, HEA)

The HEA has continued to consult stakeholders in higher education on how the Associations for ODL in Zambia could be revamped. The involvement of local various stakeholders, as well as benchmarking with other organisations, help to refine and contextualise QA tools for higher education. It is arguable that a strong Association for ODL could help to strengthen the practice of offering quality programmes through ODL in the country. The Association may also work together with the HEA. Although an Association for ODL exists in Zambia, the ODL expert questioned its function:

There is an Association yes; an Association that is supposed to bring together higher education institutions that offer ODL, so that they make sure they deal with issues to promote quality delivery of ODL. Now whether they are doing their work or not is yet another thing, although they exist. I doubt if it is now functioning to the expectation of the people, because we might have known about it, but it seems, one may not know that there is an Association. (Ponga 11, ODL expert)

TE 02 further stated that:

The consultation process on the provision of quality in universities is ongoing; and we shall keep refining it as we move on; you cannot get it right at one attempt. (TE 02, HEA)

It is necessary to make sure that, once the quality standards have been set, other activities for maintaining and refining quality are also available. QA is an ongoing process of improvement and not static. Williams (2014) states that QA systems should have activities and initiatives that form mechanisms to support quality in enhancement. In short, QA is dynamic and contextual, as indicated earlier in this chapter.

5.2.3 Enforcement of QA

QA at national level demands some form of enforcement to make sure that higher education institutions comply with the QA standards that have been set. Moreover, QA enforcement by the HEA is important because universities in Zambia will be expected to adopt a quality approach that reflects their institutional goals and culture to fulfil internal and external requirements. In this case, the HEA has made it clear that institutions will be given leverage to design their own QA

systems but that these should not contradict the stipulated benchmarks, whether conventional education or ODL. When asked whether the HEA will give universities the chance to design their own quality systems, a participant stated:

We have not specified what universities should do, but we have thrown it to institutions themselves to tell us what they are doing. We will ask them how they meet our requirements in terms of quality. If they convince us, fine. If they do not, we will not allow them to offer programmes, because we protect the interest of the people, students and other stakeholders. (TE 02, HEA)

This kind of responsibility given to the universities by the HEA may result in QA innovations at institutional level that will enhance the delivery of programmes effectively through ODL. In the case of Vietnam, universities are autonomous in developing their internal QA systems that fit their context. In the same vein, Do, Pham, and Nguyen (2017) states that universities become more creative and innovative in terms of QA if they are given the leverage to do so.

Similarly, the QA expert expects that:

The HEA is not going to close institutions anyhow; they will give them time to improve and if they do not improve then that is when it becomes a problem. (Chakwa 10, QA expert)

The fact that QA mechanisms are new, from a national point of view, makes it necessary to allow time for the universities to re-organise themselves. The HEA has realised that QA is a long process and the results cannot be seen within a short time. Universities should be allowed time to learn the processes involved in QA provisions, as well as the demands of the QA agency. Consequently, reorganisation of all higher education institutions in Zambia is likely to occur.

5.2.4 QA challenges for ODL

It is a reasonable belief that any organisational change that is not properly handled will result in resentment and other organisational challenges. This sub-section presents findings relating to the perceived challenges for the HEA in executing its functions in the initial stages:

Well, several universities have appreciated the coming in of the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Authority. Unfortunately, some are struggling to meet the requirements. (TE 02, HEA)

It is likely that some of the universities are in the process of putting in place internal QA management systems and structures to help to reduce certain challenges that are making it

difficult for them to meet the requirements as prescribed by the HEA. Related to this, the ODL expert indicated that:

Yeah, well it is something to do with... many of these institutions, as I said, which are mushrooming in the country. As such, it will be a challenge for the HEA to put things in order in their current structure. (Ponga 11, ODL expert)

The HEA has does not have proper structures to deal with so many universities in the country. For instance, the agency has only a few members of staff to carry out its functions. Moreover, the funding is not enough to meet the operational costs. Although the preliminary benchmarks indicate that universities must pay K550 for registration and other amounts for accreditation to be decided later, these amounts may not enough. At this critical, early stage, sufficient government funding is necessary.

The above-perceived challenge of the HEA by the ODL expert in a way resonates with the concern of the QA expert:

I believe that it will take time for institutions, especially private institutions, to understand the role of the HEA. I think they will be seeing it as a form of accountability to check what they are doing, and yet the HEA is there to support them to improve standards in their own institutions. What I am saying is that institutions may not understand the role of the HEA. The HEA will indicate what they would like to see in these institutions and direct them on the best QA practices. Therefore, institutions must be committed to QA provision of ODL. The HEA should help institutions develop a quality culture. Internal QA reports should be transparency to strengthen the relationship between self-regulation and accountability. (Chakwa 10, QA expert)

By contrast, the HEA does not perceive what Chakwa 10 is referring to as a challenge; in the early stages, the Authority stated that it is simply learning and making observations at the same time:

I would not say challenges to that level yet, because we are still in the infancy stages of this process. We have registered them to be universities, but we have not accredited any programme. We wish to start all this from next month, God willing, because we have already advertised for committee of experts, these are the people who are going to do this work. (TE 02, HEA)

Although steering QA from a national level could be associated with some challenges, with good planning the HEA could avoid certain of these. QA challenges could range from organisational structures to lack of personnel to carry out the various tasks.

QA at higher education level is now common practice among countries in the southern part of Africa. This comparison could mean that SADC countries have not fully developed their QA policies and frameworks for higher education. The QA expert during the qualitative interviews described Zambia as doing well, among the SADC countries:

My experience with the SADC secretariat taught me what is happening in the region. From my regional experience in terms of training provision, I think Zambia is on the right track as far as QA is concerned, at tertiary level. (Chakwa 10, QA expert)

5.3 Summary of the findings

This chapter has attempted to explore the QA national policy measures for ODL at higher education level. These measures have a significant impact on the actual QA practices at university level.

In Zambia, a QA policy is now in place and has culminated in the establishment of the HEA. During the policy development process, the MoHE consulted local stakeholders and quality experts from other countries. Evidence from the study suggests that, from the policy point of view, more educational quality measures are needed to improve higher education (ODL). The results show the predicted challenges for the HEA in the domains of physical infrastructure and human resource development, although they treat them as learning curves. The HEA has not yet completed the design of the general and specific QA frameworks to co-ordinate, regulate, supervise and monitor standards of higher education for either conventional education or ODL in Zambia.

According to human capital theory, there is a need to spend more money on training human resources. Therefore, the findings suggest that state-owned Universities A and C do not receive enough funding, as the grants given to them are insufficient to meet the operational cost of quality training for ODL. It was revealed that the three universities (A, B and C) are struggling to provide quality consistently in ODL programmes to meet stakeholders' expectations. As indicated earlier in the conceptual framework, stakeholder theory emphasises that its theoretical principal is to meet the demands of the stakeholders of an organisation (Freeman, 2010). The theory further states that stakeholders have the right to hold university management to account on quality matters. Therefore, the findings of this study on stakeholder engagement at policy level are in line with this theory.

At a policy level, there are plans to improve the general physical infrastructure and provision of facilities such as ICT and libraries in the two public universities (Universities A and C) to enhance

QA. The collaboration with other organisations, such as the African Development Bank, to improve capacity building among academic staff in state-owned universities is critical to the sustainability of QA of ODL. By the same score, benchmarking comes out as an efficient strategy for both policy and in designing QA frameworks. The idea is to stimulate the delivery of ODL in universities that depend heavily on traditional, un co-ordinated quality practices. Globalisation theory promotes and enhances various organisations through numerous forms of benchmarking to standardise higher education. In this case, the findings relate to this theory on benchmarking and the need for the HEA to build capacity in institutions of higher education that will enable them to appreciate and practice quality in the provision of their ODL programmes.

The next chapter presents an extensive description of QA practices in universities offering ODL.

Chapter 6 Findings of QA Practices for ODL at University Level

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings from the qualitative interviews and the quantitative survey questionnaires. The findings were obtained from 11 interviews with participants from Universities A, B and C one QA expert and one ODL expert. Twelve questionnaires were distributed to HODs and 300 questionnaires to ODL students. The chapter presents two sections that address:

Research Question 2: What measures are Zambian universities taking to maintain and improve the provision of ODL programmes?

Research Question 3: How do universities offering ODL programmes ensure that their students contribute to the development of the university QA system? and

Research Question 4: What lessons can Zambia learn from countries that are perceived to have robust university QA practices for ODL?

The chapter begins with the findings on expectations for the HEA in section 6.1, followed by institutional QA for ODL 6.2. These two main sections represent the key themes, and under each are the sub-themes that describe specific institutional QA practices for ODL. Further, the key themes and sub-themes from interview transcripts apply to both survey questionnaires for HODs and ODL students. The meta themes indicated in figure 6-1 and 6-2 are discussed in chapter 7. Information from official documents is embedded in the presentation of the findings to help to reduce bias, to establish credibility and to complement data. Pseudonyms represent interviewees and institutions, in line with ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality.

6.1 Expectations for the HEA

Generally, the findings indicated that universities and other stakeholders have different expectations with regard to the roles and functions of the HEA. Some of the stakeholders expressed hope that the HEA would perform to their expectations and therefore were willing to offer support to the cause of the quality assurance agency. In terms of expectations for the HEA, which is the key theme, two issues are considered. These include the kind of impact that the HEA has made from its inception. The second concern relates to support rendered to the HEA by

the higher education institutions as stakeholders in quality provision of ODL. Thus, this section has two sub-themes, namely 'Impact of the Higher Education Authority' and 'Support to the Higher Education Authority' as indicated in figure 6-1.

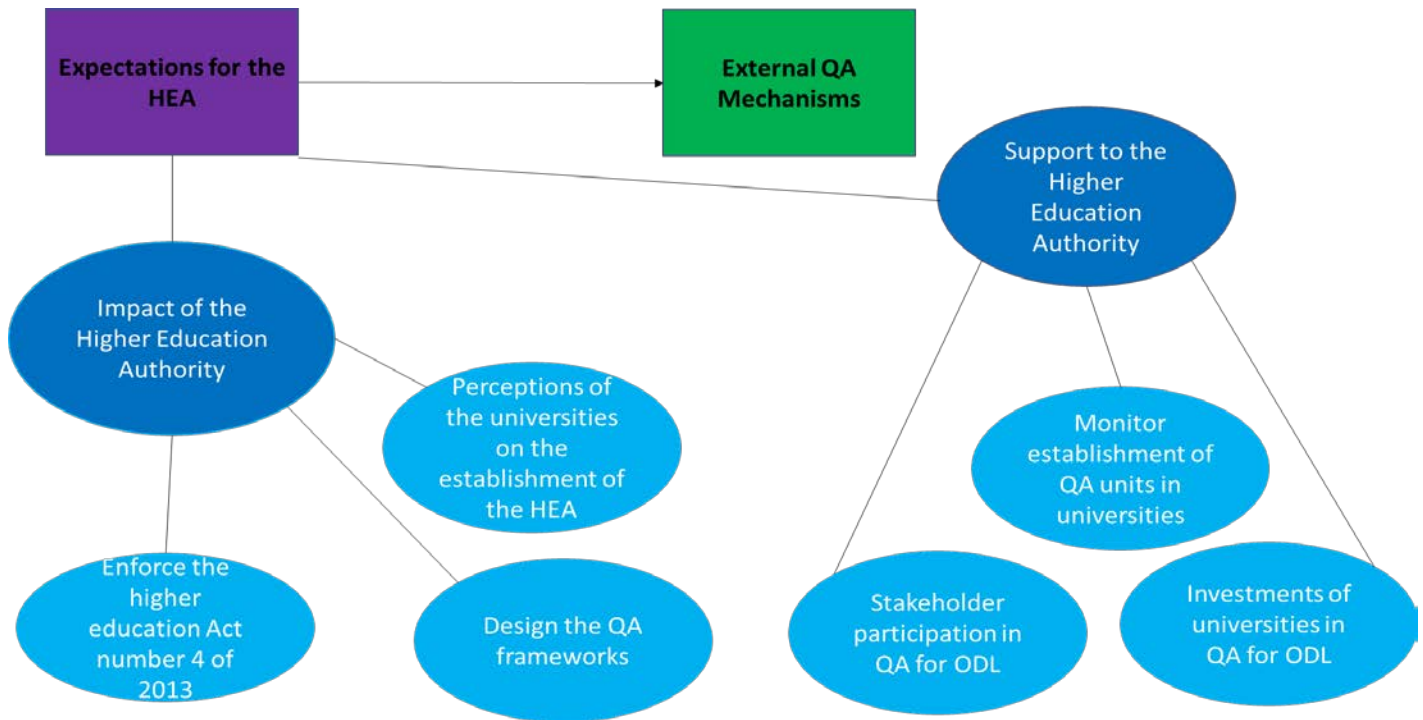


Figure 6-1: Thematic map, showing raw codes in light blue, sub-themes in deep blue, main theme in purple and meta theme in green.

6.1.1 Impact of the Higher Education Authority

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the HEA has been given a mandate to monitor and regulate quality standards in all higher education institutions in Zambia through the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 (GRZ, 2013). This means that the Agency has the responsibility to interpret the Act, enforce it and create the QA frameworks as tools for regulation and monitoring quality provision. When asked about the perceived impact of the HEA to raise the quality standards for both conventional education (full-time study) and ODL, the participant from University A stated:

Yeah, they should really have an impact; one of the things they would like to do which I have seen in their document is the ranking or classification of institutions depending on how they perform, following their criteria of performance. Therefore, that is an encouragement to institutions to see that they are always performing high to maintain quality standards. There will be an impact the fact that the HEA will inspect our institution on what we are doing. This will motivate us to do better in terms of quality provisions. (PEO 09, University A)

By the same score, another participant from University A was opportunistic about the existence of the HEA in trying to bring about enhanced quality to the higher education sector. Currently, the quality provisions of ODL in the universities are unknown, but with the HEA coming on board the practice is likely to change. Therefore, the presence of a well-organised QA agency that will provide regulatory and supportive roles is what universities are looking forward to. One of the participants from University B expressed the need for engagement by the HEA with all the institutions of higher learning and other stakeholders in the higher education sector to build a common understanding of quality matters. Similarly, the literature reviewed indicates that, in South Africa, the HEQC engages with higher education institutions within their communities in a number of ways, and this approach enables the committee to come up with the code of practice guide for quality provision (Welch & Reed, 2005; CHE, 2006):

Having a strong HEA will standardise the way we do business. We expect those that may fall short of prescribed standards to fall by the wayside. This process will give credibility to the higher education sector in Zambia. In addition, I think this should have happened many years ago. It is good that this is happening now; better late than never. I believe and hope that this process will result in greater impact. (AD 05, University A)

The participant from University B was equally positive that the HEA will make an impact on the QA of ODL and its delivery. Since QA provision from the national level is still new in Zambia, it is important that the HEA addresses both the local and global demands in QA provision of ODL. Therefore, there is a need to formulate quality standards that meet the demands and challenges of all the higher education institutions that reflect the Zambian context. This is in line with the literature reviewed for this study in that quality in higher education is a multidimensional, multi-level and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model (UNESCO, 2002; El Hassan, 2013). The participant from University B said:

The HEA will succeed if they embark on sensitisation campaign and advocacy; there is a need to quality assure higher education in general and in particular ODL. Once they build that consensus, institutions will be able to comply with QA requirements. (Lana 06, University B)

Contrary to the opportunism expressed by the participants from Universities A and B on the impact of the HEA, the participant from University C seemed not to appreciate this. It seems that the quality agency is not yet on the ground to roll out its programme to its stakeholders, including universities. This could mean that the HEA is still organising itself for its presence to be

felt by all the stakeholders. What is clear, however, is that University B is aware that the HEA is there to monitor and regulate quality in all higher education institutions. The absence of stakeholder consultations where all the universities are involved could have contributed to such feeling. On this issue, Bola 07 said:

There is no criterion; even the standards are not there. As I am talking, we have not received anything. We have not felt the presence of the HEA, because they do not have the framework. (Bola 07, University C)

Regarding the same issue on the impact of the HEA, from an independent perspective the QA expert stated that it is necessary for the HEA to create impact through its functions. In other words, the QA expert agreed with participants from Universities A and B on the Impact of HEA. He indicated that its full implementation and functioning had not yet been achieved. This could link to what the participant from University C earlier stated that the standards are not available. The following was highlighted to show that the HEA had just started the QA process:

Yes, the HEA will have an impact if they organise themselves very well, because now they do not have the capacity to monitor quality in universities. I think with time, their approach will help to improve standards because they have developed quality standards, which you probably have already seen. What is remaining is its implementation and institutions can be accredited although some of its programmes may not be accredited. It is for this reason that I am opportunistic that the HEA will achieve something. They have established committees of experts, which will be looking at accessing the quality of programmes. (Chakwa 10, QA expert)

The participants from University A and B were convinced that the HEA would have an impact by ensuring that all higher education institutions meet the specified QA benchmarks for ODL. This conviction is on condition that the HEA organises itself for its various tasks to avoid certain challenges. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, some of the quality agencies in Africa are new and lack the capacity to carry out their functions (Materu, 2007).

Participants from University A and B were convinced that the HEA would have an impact by ensuring that higher education institutions provide quality programmes, while the participant from University C indicated that the institution does not clearly understand the role of the HEA.

6.1.2 Support to the Higher Education Authority

The findings indicated that participants from Universities A, B and C agreed to provide support to the HEA in terms of co-operation and involvement in QA activities. Their understanding of the

roles of the HEA was both theoretical and practical; that is, providing literature and other supportive roles to universities. For instance, the participant from University A understood the existence of the HEA, and his belief was that the agency would provide the necessary uniform quality standards for ODL through robust national QA frameworks. Besides, University A aims at equity and consistency in the provision of ODL for all the students. Regarding this issue, AD 05 said:

The HEA is extremely welcome, I think almost every country I have visited all talk about a quality agency. We want students who graduate in these universities via the distance-learning mode to be given the same content with same experience as any other in the rest of the country. It means we will be serving ourselves much better as opposed to the arrangement where people are doing all sorts of stuff and there is no uniformity. We invited them at the time we were working on our QA framework and they were very helpful, and they gave us a synopsis of what is expected of us.

On the same issue of support to the HEA, the participant from University B stated that:

We are in support of the HEA and its establishment is a very welcome move. I think we need to ensure that HEA succeeds. However, one concern I have is that when you look at standards for assuring quality in the higher education institutions there is no specific focus on ODL. It is as if they are taking every institution as conventional. In other words, the quality standards they have established, apply more to conventional institutions/programmes and not ODL. That is my main concern. (Lana 06)

Although the above findings reveal that University A is ready to support the work of the HEA, in other cases there were reservations about giving that support. Lana 06 (University B) said that the university supports the role of the HEA, however his observation is that the HEA had not laid emphasis on ODL in its QA framework. In this case, the researcher felt that the HEA would find it difficult to provide quality standards in ODL should it depend on the general framework to assure both ODL and conventional modes. HEA should specify how the framework meant for conventional mode might apply to ODL institutions because ODL, as indicated in the previous chapters, provides specific unique points that include the type of study material, qualifications and skills for the lecturers and tutors as well as duration of the programme. These areas require specific attention to provide quality ODL. Similarly, in trying to ensure that there is quality in the provision of ODL, the South African government introduced a policy framework for ODL to make a distinction between other forms of higher education (Department of Higher Education & Training, 2014).

On the same subject, the participant from University C indicated support to the HEA, although with dissatisfaction at the way that the HEA was created. Furthermore, it was felt that the absence of the QA framework was a serious concern. In my view, these two issues mentioned above contributed to the reservation shown by the participant from University C to support the mission of the HEA. Moreover, the stance taken by University C matched the findings from the previous section, where the same university indicated that the HEA had made no impact on quality provision at higher educational level. Regarding this issue, the participant from University C said:

We do support the HEA, but we have a problem with the way the Government has established this quality agency. For example, HEA would have put in place a framework to standardise higher institutions of learning in terms of the courses offered. In the absence of HEA, accreditation of institutions would be difficult. (Bola 07, University C)

There is a need for HEA to embrace all the stakeholders in higher education and involve them in all their activities. Such steps will prevent unnecessary misunderstandings and resentment among stakeholders. In line with stakeholder involvement, the theoretical framework of this study reveals that stakeholders have the right to hold managers in organisations such as the HEA to account for failure or incompetence (Freeman, 2010). Therefore, the advantages of having stakeholders that work together ultimately results in a QA system that has input from all those involved with quality delivery of ODL in higher education institutions.

6.2 Institutional QA for ODL

This section presents the findings from participants from Universities A, B and C using in-depth interviews and the survey questionnaires that were distributed to HODs and the ODL students. Institutional official documents were used to supplement certain information. The main section, institutional QA for ODL represents the key theme and has 4 sub-sections, namely; university leadership in quality of open and distance learning, general QA practices in schools of education, training of academic staff and university collaborations and benchmarking which represents the sub-themes as indicated in figure 6-2. This section largely addresses Research Questions 2 and 3 on the measures that Zambian universities are taking to maintain and improve the provision of ODL programmes and the ways in which universities that offer ODL programmes ensure that their students contribute to the development of their respective QA system.

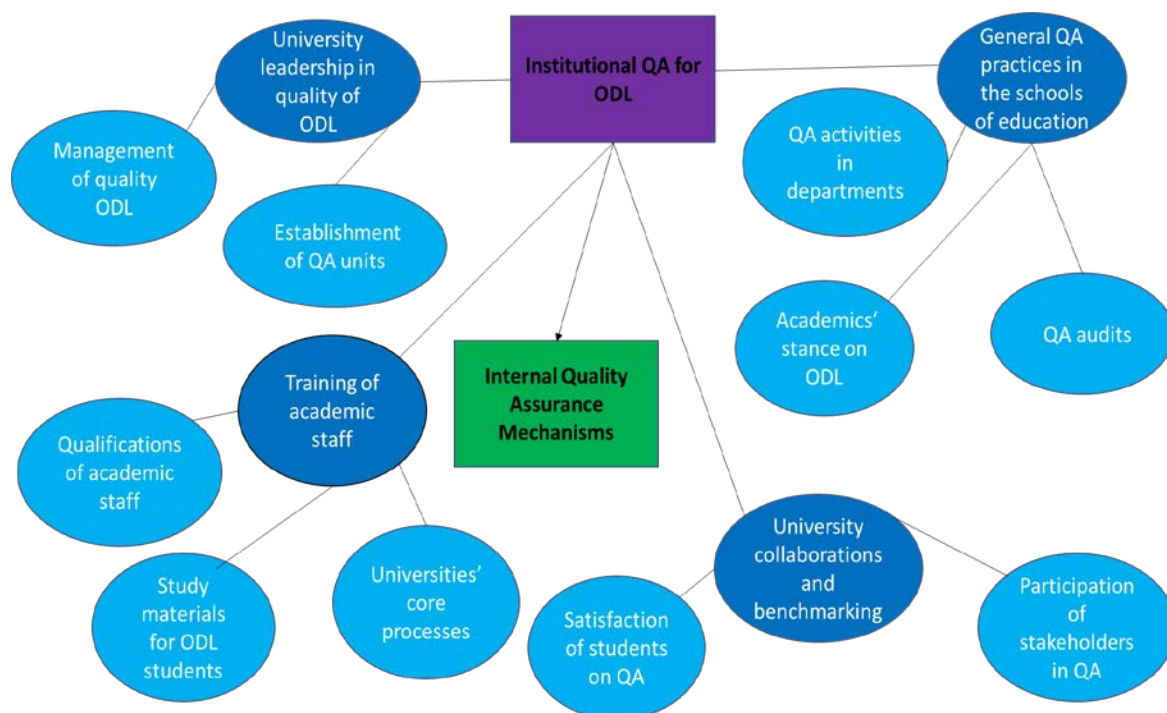


Figure 6-2: Thematic map, showing raw codes in light blue, sub-themes in deep blue, main theme in purple and meta theme in green.

6.2.1 University leadership in quality of open and distance learning

According to Baldrige's Criteria in the literature reviewed, one of the fundamental roles of leaders is to ensure that the core vision of their organisation is actualised through clear and visible quality values (Rao Tummala & Tang, 1996). In a similar way, this section examines the commitment of university leadership in the provision of quality ODL in their institutions. For instance, University A states in its strategic plan for 2013 to 2017 that it will develop and operationalise or implement a university-wide QA framework, as well as draw up the terms of references for the QA framework (University A, 2013). This process will help in monitoring and evaluating quality in all functions of the university. University A's vision in its strategic plan aims to be a provider of world-class services in higher education and knowledge generation, whereas the mission is to provide relevant higher education through teaching and community service. With strong leadership in place, the university wishes to provide ODL as an option for mass teaching, learning and research. On this subject, Kale 03 said:

I think the commitment of the university is unquestionable; it has found it imperative and necessary that we should spend money on establishing a QA unit to help us enhance and maintain quality [ODL], although it has taken long to put in institutional QA measures (Kale 03, University A)

Another participant from the same university commented as follows:

Chapter 6

Yeah, the commitment of management is unquestionable; there is a very high commitment. Quality assurance is one of the strategic directions in our strategic plan that covers 2013 to 2017. (AD 05, University A). The above findings indicate that University A leadership has shown elements of commitment to quality provision of ODL through its strategic plan and by establishing its own internal QA unit with robust internal QA mechanisms that are necessary for any university. Moreover, a QA unit is there to co-ordinate internal quality assurance systems within the university. One of the participants from University A was of the view that it was necessary to spend money to improve and maintain quality education for ODL. All these practical steps show commitment to the type of university leadership.

On the same subject, through its leadership; 'University B' has embarked on the process to establish academic and other policies, including QA. As already mentioned, institutional QA policies are vital insofar as quality provision of ODL is concerned and for the purpose of uniform co-ordination of quality at university level. In line with this, the participant from University B said:

The university leadership is now establishing policies. These are academic policies and human development policies as well as QA policy and operational framework. That is high on the agenda and management has appointed various committees to develop policies that will promote and enhance quality provision. (Lana 06, University B)

Referring to the literature review in Chapter 2, University B's vision as stated in the strategic plan for 2016 to 2019 is to seek recognition internationally by providing quality education through different modes of learning. Moreover, its mission is to be a leading higher education provider, using creative and innovative teaching and learning methodologies aimed at reaching diverse constituencies to promote social and economic development (SP-B, 2016). Through its leadership, University B seems to appreciate quality provision of higher education by ensuring that QA appears in its strategic plan.

Furthermore, University B's leadership has made sure that a QA unit is established to spearhead all QA activities within the university. These findings are not different from University A, which has created a similar unit for QA. For example, University B has put emphasis on some form of periodic review to evaluate its core activities organised by its QA unit. QA is now the trend in most institutions, in both developed and developing countries, and University B is working towards it. In view of the above, Lana 06 stated:

We have a unit known as the Directorate of Quality Assurance; it has four units. One dealing with QA, which is in the Director's office, and then the second one, we have

learner support office, then we also have a printing unit which is responsible for production and distribution of material, the dispatch section, which is responsible for receiving handling assignments and sending them for marking. (Lana 06, University B)

University C, through its leadership, recognises the need to implement QA systems in its programmes. According to Bola 07 (University C), the institution relies on traditional arrangements in terms of programme delivery, similar to the old way of doing things. On the same subject, Bola 07 said:

We do not have the structure to say that this is a QA unit. The way we do things and report to refine the process and improve the quality of our services is not yet developed.... Nevertheless, we do not have an internal QA unit that can review the process; we lack the office to facilitate this process. This is a challenge we are facing and affects our competition with other higher learning institutions that are offering distance [ODL].

This study's literature review shows that University C's strategic plan for (2016–2020) indicates that the institution strives for excellence in the provision of quality training in mathematics, sciences, and home science and technology education, as the mission is to produce knowledgeable, skilled and socially responsible teachers through teaching, research and innovation (SP-C, 2016). It is clear that, since the university is still in the process of transformation, it is not easy to create a fully established QA unit to spearhead quality activities within the university from the very start.

6.2.1.1 Infrastructure for universities

The issue of physical infrastructure and other facilities is one of the elements that help to provide quality ODL programmes. It is important that every university offering ODL in Zambia has the necessary physical infrastructure and facilities to conduct lessons and other academic activities. The infrastructure and facilities at Universities A, B and C should keep pace with the growth of the institution in terms of ODL student numbers. In describing the state of infrastructure at University A, AD 05 said:

The other challenge we are facing in this area is the infrastructure that are supposed to support the learners out there. Therefore, let alone if you talk about internet it is just limited to provincial centres and along the railway line. (AD 05, University A)

Furthermore, University A intends to increase and improve its capacity to rehabilitate and maintain the physical infrastructure, to include the technical capacity of the libraries, archives,

lecture theatres and laboratories with state-of-the-art equipment for the period 2013 to 2017. (SP-A, 2013). A robust strategic plan is essential in quality delivery of ODL to cover the anticipated growth as well as academic expansions. The findings indicate that this institution seems to be on course and has realised the essence of QA.

Another participant brought up a similar view on the infrastructure for science students under the ODL mode in teaching practical modules. There is no doubt that universities that offer science-based programmes should have the necessary laboratories to conduct practical lessons and experiments. In line with this, Zomu 04 from University B said:

While a laboratory may not be needed as such, because there are methods that can be used to reach the same results... but I think for us, it is required and therefore that is a challenge. It makes our delivery on the science side a little more expensive because we are hiring. (Zomu 04, University B)

The confession by Zomu 04 is sufficient testimony that, indeed, the university recognises the vital need for laboratories for ODL students and that these must be made available. In fact, it is difficult to produce a quality science graduate without the practical element.

Universities offering ODL programmes are expected to make use of technology for teaching and learning and ensure that the infrastructure and facilities are operational to meet the objectives. The conceptual framework for this study also emphasises adequate infrastructure in the quality provision of ODL. The third participant was equally specific in explaining the challenges that the university is encountering in the provision of quality ODL:

Yes, there are many others, for example, we have challenges with the technology, the ICT or internet provision is not up to expectations. The application software, which are necessary for students to learn, are not readily available. The internet is inconsistent most of the time, because we depend on other internet providers for our services. As for infrastructure, ODL students need special infrastructure as they come to do their research to consolidate their learning. (Ngoka 08, University C)

The strategic plan (2016–2020) for University C sheds light on the poor physical infrastructure and learning environment. Much of the infrastructure is inappropriate, particularly for physically challenged persons. Infrastructure is in a poor state at University C due to inadequate funding for infrastructure development. In this scenario, the university has slowly embarked on rehabilitating some of the infrastructure, despite budgetary constraints. The ICT infrastructure is inadequate to meet the demands of the current trends in education, particularly ODL. University

C has realised that infrastructure development is one of the major drivers to guarantee quality provision of programmes in ODL.

From the information given above, an inference could be drawn that Universities A, B and C are having challenges with their infrastructure. Most importantly, the three universities seem to appreciate these challenges and that there is a need to develop infrastructure to deliver quality programmes in ODL.

In line with the findings above on infrastructure and facilities, ODL students were asked to rate the same infrastructure and facilities in their respective universities. The idea was to compare their responses with information from other participants. Tables 6-1 to 6-5 indicate students' rating of infrastructure and facilities in their respective universities.

Table 6-1 Students' rating of classrooms

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very poor	8	6.5	6	10.7	17	15.2
Poor	23	18.7	11	19.6	29	25.9
Adequate	33	28.8	17	30.4	43	38.4
Good	49	39.8	15	26.8	20	17.9
Very good	10	8.1	7	12.5	3	2.7
Total	123	100%	56	100%	112	100%

n= 291

Table 6-1 reports on students' ratings of their classrooms at their universities (see Appendix I question item 7). The results show that more students (59, 47.9%) rated classrooms as good or very good than those who did not (31; 25.2%) at University A, while some indicated that the classrooms were adequate (33; 28.8%). Based on the number of students who rated the classrooms highly, together with those who indicated 'adequate', it can be said that the classrooms at this institution are conducive to learning. Although this is not an impressive indication for the institution, the rating was higher than at Universities B and C: 22 (39.3%) and 23 (20.6%), respectively. Universities B and C also recorded 17 (30.3%) and 46 (41.1%), respectively, for students who did not find the status of their classrooms to be at least adequate. In fact, the results show that more students rated the classrooms as poor (or very poor) at University C than those who rated them good (or very good). The number of students

who indicated 'adequate' across all the three universities cannot be ignored. For instance, Universities A, B and C had 33 (28.8%), 17 (30.4%) and 43 (38.4%) students who indicated 'adequate'. Therefore, the results suggest that the classrooms meet the aspirations of most ODL students.

University A is the oldest of the three institutions and, although the buildings are still intact and in good shape, there is need for improvement. But due to financial constraints, the university is facing challenges in upgrading classrooms with modern facilities such as computers, projectors, loudspeakers and good furniture. In the same vein, University C has old structures that do not meet modern university standards. These structures were initially meant for a college with a small number of students. University B hires buildings, mostly from state-owned secondary schools, for their residential schools in the country's provincial centres. Most of these schools are not in good condition. However, University B also has a few structures in some provinces where lectures and practical lessons take place.

Table 6-2 Students' rating of library resources

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very poor	3	2.4	6	10.3	0	0.0
Poor	19	15.3	13	22.4	17	15.0
Adequate	29	23.4	16	27.6	44	38.9
Good	48	38.7	18	31.0	43	38.1
Very good	25	20.2	5	8.6	9	8.0
Total	124	100%	58	100%	113	100%

n= 295

Table 6-2 presents students' ratings of library resources (see Appendix I question item 8).

Students were asked to indicate how they rated the library resources offered by their universities. The results indicate that more students (73; 58.9%) at University A gave a rating of good or very good for the library resources than those who rated them poor or very poor (22; 17.7%). Although 29 (23.4%) of the students indicated 'adequate', there is need for improvement regarding library resources at University A, as the percentage of ODL students who were dissatisfied in this area should not be overlooked. The table shows that 19 (32.7%) students indicated poor/very poor at University B while, 23 (39.6%) indicated either 'good' or 'very good. In this case, it is interesting to note that 52 (46.1%) of students rated the facilities as

good or very good, at University C. These findings complement what came out of the interviews with one of the participants from the MoHE in sub-section 5.1.2 that Government prioritises infrastructure development in public universities. Besides, universities should come up with innovative ideas to generate income for infrastructure development, apart from Government grants.

Table 6-3 Students' rating of laboratories

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very poor	2	2.4	12	27.3	5	4.9
Poor	11	5	11.4	22	22	21.6
Adequate	22	25.9	8	18.2	33	32.4
Good	31	36.5	15	34.1	40	39.2
Very good	19	22.4	4	9.1	2	2.0
Total	85	100%	44	100%	102	100%

n= 231

Table 6-3 reports findings on ODL students' rating of their laboratories at their respective universities (see Appendix I question item 9). The table presents how University A had 50 students (58.9%) who agreed that the laboratories were good or very good, while 13 (7.4%) did not. The laboratories at University A are old, and new ones have not been built since the institution became operational 53 years ago. As indicated earlier, University B rents state-owned buildings to conduct practical lessons for science-based courses. The students stated that infrastructure in these rented schools was run down and not conducive to practical lessons. Therefore, the presentation of the results for University B is based on the rented laboratories as ranked by 19 students as good or very good (43.2%). The table also shows that 42 (41.2%) of the students at University C agreed that the laboratories were in good or very good condition, whereas 27 (26.5%) students felt they were poor or very poor. Here, the situation is very similar to that of University A, as the infrastructure is old and was meant as a secondary school. The percentage of students who indicated 'adequate' at University A 22 (25.9%), University B 8 (18.2%) and University C 33 (32.4%) in a way suggests that these students may have been unsure what to indicate. These findings address Research Question 2 on the QA measures that the three universities have put in place in the provision of quality ODL programmes. Moreover, these findings confirm literature review, on Government's commitment to improving and

maintaining existing infrastructure in state-owned universities. Regarding the private universities, the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 clearly states that all higher education institutions must ensure that they have the necessary infrastructure before they embark on any programme. Any institution that fails to adhere to the prescribed guidelines risks being de-registered or not to be registered (GRZ, 2013).

Table 6-4 Students' rating of the internet

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very poor	3	2.4	16	29.6	7	9.0
Poor	18	14.5	14	25.9	34	22.8
Adequate	17	13.7	9	16.7	32	28.8
Good	46	37.1	8	14.8	24	21.6
Very good	40	32.3	7	13.0	14	12.6
Total	124	100%	54	100%	111	100%

n=289

Table 6-4 reports on the results from the question that asked ODL students to rate the internet provision by their universities (see Appendix I question item 10). The table shows that 86 (69.4%) students at University A considered the internet availability at the institution to be good (or very good), while 21 (16.5%) students rated it poor (or very poor). The table presents the results that University A had 17 (13.7%) students who indicated 'adequate' regarding the same question. Overall, a substantial majority of ODL students considered internet provision at University A to be adequate or better. The table shows that 15 (27.8%) students at University B considered its internet provision to be good or better, while 30 (55.5%) rated it as poor or worse, and only 9 (16.7%) students indicated that it was merely adequate. The table also indicates that University C had 38 (34.2%) students who rated its internet provision good or better, against 41 (31.8%) who rated it as poor or worse.

It should be noted that University A offers several courses in computing at various levels, so strong internet on the campus is essential. The university also operates a Computer Centre that links all the vital activities of the institution. The internet connections at University A allow students to research and pay tuition fees online, as well as registering their courses and programmes, but this is not the case at Universities B and C. The low rating for internet

availability by students at Universities B and C could be linked to comparisons that students make to other universities in their exchange of knowledge and ideas through various media, social and academic groupings. Most importantly, University B and C do not have optic fibre connectivity, which helps to enhance broadband speed.

Table 6-5 Students' rating of university furniture

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very poor	8	6.5	8	14.5	7	6.2
Poor	31	25.0	6	10.9	19	16.8
Adequate	39	31.5	17	30.9	33	29.2
Good	36	29.0	20	36.4	42	37.2
Very good	10	8.1	4	7.3	12	10.6
Total	124	100%	55	100%	113	100%

n= 292

Table 6-5 presents ODL students' rating of the quality of university furniture. ODL students were asked to rate the furniture at their institution (see Appendix I question item 12). The table reports that 54 students (47.8%) at University C rated the state of the furniture at their institution as good or better, and those who rated it poor or worse numbered 26 (23%). Universities A and B recorded 46 (37.1%) and 24 (43.7), respectively for those students who indicated 'good' and 'very good'. The findings show that at Universities A and B some ODL students did not find the available furniture to be at least good (39, 31.5% and 14, 25.4%). In terms of percentages of students who indicated 'adequate', the difference is insignificant across the three universities. From these findings, it is clear that the state of furniture in these three universities was not considered good enough by the ODL students and improvement is clearly required.

The findings indicate that University C is better off in terms of furniture than the well-established universities with the capacity to raise more local resources. This could relate to some of the practical measures that the institution has put in place to buy more furniture by using its own locally generated resources. The other two universities could be complacent, because they are popular and still attract many ODL students. This could be an indication that

universities are not prioritising procurement of student furniture in both private and state-owned universities.

In view of what has been discussed from the tables above, it is evident that all the institutions may require improvement to their facilities to provide quality ODL programmes. Nonetheless, there were differences in the way that students responded to the available infrastructure and facilities in the provision of ODL and can be attributed to a number of reasons as already mentioned in this sub-section.

6.2.1.2 Institutional quality culture

A culture for QA involves values, beliefs and behavioural patterns that bind members of an organisation regarding quality provision in their service delivery to satisfy their customers. In other words, all the members of the organisation should appreciate certain quality cultural elements to achieve the objectives of their organisation. In this study, participants perceived QA as necessary to the quality provision of ODL. They admitted that QA could help to raise the standards of ODL in their universities. For instance, Kale 03 from University A said that 'Every university should assure quality in its provisions. So, I think internal, external QA is very necessary'. Similarly, another participant from the same university said:

Yeah, as I said in the opening remarks, this is a critical component of the functions of the university. Quality assurance should be given high level of prominence in the way the university operates; it cuts across all the functions from administration, teaching and learning, research and community service. (AD 05, University A)

From the responses above on importance of a culture for QA it is clear that, although the practice of QA is not well co-ordinated at this university, as reported in previous sub-sections these participants appreciate the significance of QA in a university as well as its benefits. Similarly, the literature reviewed indicates that QA provides directions for enhancement and improvement as well as checking, evaluating and making judgements in service provision (Odhiambo, 2011; Williams, 2014):

Some stakeholders might regard ODL with suspicion, as an inferior mode of education delivery; the participant from University B believes that the overriding concern for ODL is to put in place QA processes at every stage. Therefore, without making comparison between ODL and other modes of higher education delivery, ODL should be quality assured and produce quality graduates. Regarding the same issue the participant from University B said: Yes, not only in ODL, at all other levels, education should target the very high standards we call quality. Therefore, it becomes even much more important I

guess with ODL because there is a perception in the minds of people that ODL is little inferior to face-to-face. Therefore, QA at every stage, yes, it is not in one area. It is in everything that we do in ODL and must be quality assured. (Zomu 04)

On the same subject of culture for QA, the findings indicate that the participant from University B believes that QA enables institutions, both old and new, to compete favourably. Bola states that a collective effort by every academic and all support staff towards the QA in an institution includes values, norms, working language, as well as habits among members. This entails that there is need for collective agreement in executing the QA processes by all the stakeholders. By the same score, from the Government's point of view, PL 01 (MoHE) stated:

As a country, it is very important that we focus on quality, because then will be reaping from the investment that we are putting in education. This will allow us to have quality graduates going into the industry to make quality contributions to the development of the country. I think quality in education is very critical now.

In all three targeted universities, participants showed an appreciation of a culture for QA as a necessary requirement to QA provision of programmes through ODL. These positive expressions from the university participants may suggest that they have ideas on how to improve quality provision of programmes through ODL at university level.

6.2.2 General QA practice in schools of education

This section (sub-theme) presents findings from the questions that asked participants [HODs] to indicate other available QA practices that help in the delivery of programmes through ODL. The section begins with an examination of QA at departmental level, challenges of quality implementation of ODL, perception of academic on open and distance learning and internal quality audits.

Table 6-6 HODs in the School of Education, by qualification

Qualification	University A	University B	University C	Total
Master's degree	2	4	4	10
Doctorate	2	0	0	2
Total	4	4	4	12

n= 12

Sources: Field data (2016)

Table 6-6 indicates the participation of HODs in this study, four from each university. Of this number, two were PhD holders and the rest were Master's degree holders. As mentioned in the methodology, the HODs were selected randomly for this sample. Although information from these participants was collected using questionnaires, the presentation for Table 6-6 is numerical, without percentages, due to the low numbers of participants in this category.

6.2.2.1 Quality assurance at departmental level

There was an indication of QA at Universities A, B and C at departmental level in their respective Schools of Education. It is expected that departments in a university set-up undertake various activities that relate to the courses/programmes that they offer. These activities include lecturing, assessments of students and moderation of their results. All these activities are conducted as part of quality provision of programmes. Therefore, this section focuses on departmental QA.

Teaching (peer review, tutorials, practical lessons, team teaching): In terms of teaching, three participants from University A indicated the availability of these practices in their departments, with two participants (one from each institution) at Universities B and C stating the same. The quality activities under teaching depend on a number of considerations that include the creativity and resourcefulness of members of staff in their respective departments. Based on the information collected, it is clear that there is a synergistic approach among members in various departments at these three institutions to work together when it comes to teaching.

Training and production of modules (timely modules, training in module writing and distribution of modules at registration): The findings from the three institutions indicate that these activities are mostly available in two institutions, as indicated by two participants from University A and one from University C. These findings are not consistent with the qualitative interviews in section 6.2.3.3, as University B was reported to be training lecturers in module writing and rigour in the production of modules.

Timely feedback from lecturers and tutors: All three institutions reported this practice to be common across the universities. Participants from University C indicated the availability of this practice, together with those from Universities A and B. These findings are similar to what the students indicated in their survey questionnaires in acknowledging the presence of timely feedback, although not to a great extent. Therefore, these results confirm the presence of feedback between the lecturers/tutors and their ODL students.

Student and lecturer contact: Essentially, the idea of grouping ODL students for residential schools during the school public holidays is to increase lecturer–student interaction through

face-to-face contacts. The findings show that all the universities value this practice, as indicated by participants from Universities A, B and C. Quantitative data from student questionnaires suggest a greater prevalence of this activity at University C than at the other two universities.

Teaching practice supervision: The results indicate that University B pays attention to this activity, as evidenced by three participants. There was also mention of this practice by one participant from University A, but not at University C. It is difficult to understand why this practice was not indicated at University C, as all trainee teachers at this institution undertake teaching practice as a requirement of their Bachelor of Education degree programmes. The practice enables students to gain real experience of teaching skills and increases their confidence level and knowledge to apply it in different situations.

6.2.2.2 Challenges of quality implementation of ODL

This section presents some of the common challenges affecting the quality implementation of ODL in the three targeted universities as indicated by the HODs.

Inadequate staffing: It was indicated by all twelve participants that staffing levels are indeed a challenge. For instance, one participant cited limited human resources, in that the same lecturers teach conventional (full-time) and ODL programmes, as one of the challenges. The findings are in line with the qualitative interviews with the ODL expert and participants from University A, who expressed a need for more academic staff, as indicated in sub-section 6.2.3.1.

Inadequate learning material: The university participants stated that their departments lacked learning materials. This problem appeared to affect University A more than Universities B and C. Two participants from University A said, 'Students are not given learning materials'. As mentioned in the previous section, learning materials are essential to the successful delivery of ODL at higher education level. The conceptual framework also highlights the importance of quality learning materials, as well as other educational resources, to deliver ODL effectively.

Limited learning space: At University C, participants indicated that conducting lessons was a challenge due to limited space. The participant at University C mentioned 'Insufficient classroom space' and that 'the rooms are not spacious enough'. This scenario was no different from the other two universities. These findings match those obtained from the interviews with the policy-maker on the Government's commitment to improved infrastructure in universities, as indicated in section 5.1.2.

Poor record management of students' work: Three participants from Universities A and B indicated that they had problems with the management of students' records. One of the

participants from University B clearly said, 'The most challenging issue has to do with student services, loss of written assignments. This challenge is prevalent in the two universities, although nothing was mentioned for University C.

Poor culture for QA: Participants from University B mentioned this challenge. For instance, one of them noted 'Regional managers' negative attitude towards work and general lack of initiative in assisting students in the region'. The situation was the same for Universities A and C, as two participants raised the issue of the poor culture for QA among academic and support staff, although this did not come out for University B. This finding represents an inconsequential disparity between the qualitative interviews in section 6.2.4 of the study that reported positively on the quality culture at the three universities.

6.2.2.3 Perceptions of academics on open and distance learning

Regarding the perceptions of academics and the ODL expert on ODL, it was found that participants share the view that it is a good mode of delivery, provided that there is no interference from external agencies. Secondly, it was found that ODL is the best mode of higher education, provided there is qualified staff to deliver the services to produce quality graduates. The findings from the interviews contradict the literature reviewed in this study, which shows that members of the public have mixed feelings about the quality provision of programmes offered through ODL and that the 'poor quality' means that they cannot be compared to programmes delivered in a conventional mode (SADC, 2012).

Regarding this issue, the following participants said:

ODL is a very good mode of providing education particularly to mature people who cannot find time to go for work and then go to school like face-to-face students. Now for those that have been working in ODL, they can attest that in fact the best education is through ODL, particularly when ODL is properly handled and there is no interference from the national quality assurance agencies. (Zomu 04, University B)

In the same way, the ODL expert stated:

Students who graduate from those institutions that have good ODL staff are okay, but then we have those who graduate from institutions which lack these good qualities for ODL, then they are likely to be problematic. (Ponga 11, ODL expert)

It is clear from the findings that those in academic regard ODL as an acceptable mode of delivery for higher education, whereas some sections of society have negative views. In other words, the findings suggest that all the stakeholders should work together in quality

provision of ODL at both national and institutional level, as this will help to build confidence in the public that ODL is, indeed, an option.

6.2.2.4 Internal quality assurance audits

Participants were asked to state whether their universities had put in place internal quality audits systems. In this regard, their responses were:

I am not aware so far if ODL as a unit or institute has done any audits based on the document produced by SADC. Nevertheless, as an institution, we have not done any internal quality audits across the various functions. This is the process we are beginning to formulate. (PEO 09, University A)

It is clear from the interviews above that QA is in its infancy at University A, and nothing has yet been done regarding IQA. The reviewed literature states that the institution itself can conduct IQA, but this should be an objective and critical analysis of the activities that go on in the system (Woodhouse, 2003). In other words, objectivity is important in this process, as well as avoiding bias, to come up with a balanced report.

On the same subject, the participant from University B said:

First, when I joined, we carried out a quality audit of two main sections dealing with the teaching and learning processes and the printing unit, which produces material and dispatch and handles students' assignments. (Lana 06, University B)

The information above confirms what was stated from the interviews on the practical steps that University B has undertaken to demonstrate that there is quality in the programmes that it offers.

The participant from University C indicated the following:

It is very difficult; we do not have quality audits. There is a need to have a scheme of the things that you are auditing and how to make quality improvements to the system. (Bola 07, University C)

It was clear that University C did not have a QA unit, as indicated in the interviews with some of the participants from the institution. The findings confirm the absence of clear QA guidelines to monitor and regulate internal quality processes. With this background, the institutional strategic plan states:

The strategic plan for Goal 9 at University C focuses on the development and operationalisation of the QA unit and appointing a task team to develop the terms of references. (SP-C, 2016)

From the three institutions, University B is the only one to have conducted internal QA audits; the other two universities are still in the process of doing so.

6.2.3 Training of academic staff

It is important to state that training for members of the academic and support staff at university level takes different forms. For example, universities can send their staff for further training to obtain higher qualifications or, indeed, training through CPD and workshops. Regarding this issue, the participant from University A said:

We need CPD available to provide training to people who are going to teach in ODL mode. But we do not have anything formally established, in that before somebody is allowed to teach ODL students they must first undergo training. (Kale 03, University A). In line with the statement above by Kale 03, University A plans to expand and promote the use of information and communications technologies across campuses and the wider community by expanding its internet broadband. It will: implement a fast internet system; introduce e-learning and ICT learning tools; train lecturers and researchers in the use of ICTs; provide ICT tools for differently-abled students and staff; and control plagiarism control and facilitate student access to social media tools and various ICT accessories for education. In other words, it will offer CPD as a structure to learning and help to ensure competence to practice in terms of knowledge and skills and practical experience.

Furthermore, Kale 03 stated that:

The Institute of Distance Education organises workshops to train those who are going to teach in these programmes, especially in the preparation of modules. In short, in the distance education we have ways of trying to train our lecturers who are involved in teaching ODL students although not formally instituted as earlier indicated. (Kale 03, University A)

The literature review in Chapter 2 states that the National University of Nigeria (NOUN) has paid attention to quality study material for ODL students, and for this reason in-house training is conducted to equip those who are involved in the production of study materials (NUC, 2013). Well-designed study materials could help to raise confidence and motivation among the students to study their programmes. From the interview excerpts above,

University A understands the need for training of its staff in its quest for quality service delivery of ODL programmes.

Another participant from the same university complemented the above statements from Kale 03:

We train our instructional designers, after they are trained, then they are commissioned to develop the instructional material, we call them modules. (AD 05, University A)

AD 05 tried to confirm that University A has put in place certain QA activities, particularly in this area of study material production. However, PEO 09 from the institution did not agree with such statements that University A has put in place training programmes for academic staff. Such contradictory statements from the participants at University A could mean that its QA activities are not uniformly co-ordinated, and individual units as well as departments decide what to do regarding quality. These findings also match earlier statements in this section that University A is still undergoing the process of establishing QA policies and structures as guidelines for institutional QA of ODL. Reflecting this, PEO 09 said:

The institution has not seriously embarked on training academic staff because the framework is not yet approved. Therefore, it will be difficult for my unit to go around in schools and other units to explain anything related to internal quality. This will be done once the document is approved, as this will also give me the authority and mandate to go around.

On the same issue of training, two other participants indicated that University B and C have run training for academic staff on QA through workshops. The following were raised:

Wena has made sure that a good number of our colleagues who joined the ODL academic staff were qualified and some have PhDs, etc., but had not been trained in the delivery of ODL programmes. He arranged a series of workshops to introduce this group of staff to ODL instructional delivery. (Zomu 04, University B)

Yeah, we have already done the orientation workshop. We had it at Moba Hotel where we introduced everyone including ourselves to the ODL work we do but not in detail. We even invited a professor and a lawyer to talk about the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 to explain the intents of the law. (Bola 07, University C)

Participants described some of the measures that universities have put in place for training of staff as part of capacity building. The above findings from University C are supported by Minnaar's research on challenges for the successful planning of ODL (Minnaar, 2013). There is a

need to put in place initiatives that encourage low-achieving lecturers and tutors to enrol for CPD and other forms of training to upgrade their knowledge and skills. The positive implication of this is that capacity-building strategies are properly organised.

6.2.3.1 Insufficient and unqualified academic staff

One of the challenges in offering quality ODL programmes in higher education institutions is linked to staffing by qualified academics and tutors to deliver the programmes. For instance, the conceptual framework for this study emphasises the recruitment of qualified academic staff. Some of the academic staff may have obtained PhDs and Master's degrees, but they are not necessarily qualified to teach ODL programmes. The literature on the challenges of ODL in Zambia indicates that the country lacks trained ODL experts to deliver the services, and those who are available are insufficient in a number of universities (SADC, 2012). Similarly, participants stated:

The challenges that some institutions face have to do with staffing. Those who are offering quality education, some of them might not be qualified, so that is already a challenge. If someone is not qualified to do a certain job and then he is doing it, what do you expect? That is a challenge. (Ponga 11, ODL expert)

Universities in Zambia that offer ODL programmes have a system of providing study materials to their students, common in most teacher training colleges. What this means is that these study materials must be designed by ODL experts in this area, and not everyone can do this. There is a likelihood that some of the student study materials are produced by non-experts, given that only a few academics are qualified to teach in this mode of delivery. Comments were made about the lack of available qualified ODL academic members of staff to design the study materials:

One of the challenges is in the area of experts that are supposed to make available their instructional content, which is currently, perhaps in the conventional way. Converting that into ODL mode is not easy. Some of these experts have not been supportive I must say, perhaps they have their own reasons of doing that. (AD 05, University A)

Another participant from University A had this to say:

You see the problem we have here; we were having the same people who were teaching the full-time [conventional] students as distance education students. These

lecturers are expected to prepare the modules (study material). Performing the same tasks in two different situations may not be that easy. (Kale 03, University A)

Further, University A recognises the need to enhance human resource capacity and management in its plans; for this reason, the university plans to carry out an audit to determine the desired number of academic and support staff, including part-time academics, and implement the Staff Performance Management System. The university further wishes to recruit staff for its Institute of Distance Education. (SP-A, 2013)

The above quotes from University A relate to literature reviewed for this study, in that Zambia lacks trained academics to produce course material for ODL students (Simui et al., 2017). It is still not too late for Zambia to train academics in material design and production. Universities should take a keen interest in continuous professional development (CPD) for their staff in terms of learning material production for ODL programmes.

The participant from University C explained that not all universities have qualified academic staff. He went on to state that none of the lecturers at University C are trained to teach ODL programmes. As a young institution still in the transformation process, University C could still be in the midst of recruiting qualified staff for various positions:

I would say the types of personnel involved in the delivery of ODL courses are not sufficiently qualified. These lecturers were trained to deal with ordinary or the conventional students. They are not specialised to deliver ODL courses. (Ngoka 08, University C)

The claims above by Ngoka 08 suggest that the university is aware of the importance of engaging qualified staff for its programmes. In line with this, one of the strategic goals for University C is to enhance competences and capabilities in staff by developing and implementing a training policy. These steps are likely to help the university to compete with other universities in the country in terms of quality delivery of ODL programmes (SP-C, 2016).

Some participants gave divergent views regarding the same topic. Some stated that their institutions had qualified academic staff, while others said that they were still lacking. One of the participants said: 'We have got PhDs and we have got all kinds of categories. This is a university and we have qualified staff' (Zomu 04, University B).

Zomu 04's claims of having PhDs at University B may mean that the participant failed to distinguish between being a PhD holder and having the necessary qualification in course

material production without a PhD. As already mentioned in this sub-section, there is need to make a clear distinction between academic staff with the necessary qualification to teach conventional students and those meant to teach ODL. These may have the same content, but the delivery could be different.

In closing, the ODL expert reiterated the need for qualified staff to teach ODL programmes:

Some universities have a few qualified distance education practitioners who are trained and qualified. The majority unfortunately, teach regular students and offer distance education without being trained. I would like to see institutions that offer ODL to have qualified academic members of staff to do the job. (Ponga 11, ODL expert)

The information provided suggests that universities lack adequate and qualified staff to deliver programmes through ODL mode. It is also clear that, by qualification, some participants meant higher qualifications only in terms of degrees, not necessarily knowledge and skills. Equally, the ODL expert emphasised the need to train academic staff for ODL programmes. The recruitment and retention of competent academic and support staff by the universities offering ODL should ensure that they meet the quality demands of their stakeholders.

Table 6-7 Lecturers' qualifications in the School of Education

Qualifications	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bachelors' degree	5	3.8	0	0	0	0
Masters' degree	88	66.2	30	54.5	10	83.3
PhD (doctorate)	37	27.8	21	38.2	2	16.6
Associate Professor	0	0	2	3.6	0	0
Full Professor	3	2.3	2	3.6	0	0
Total	133	100%	55	100%	12	100%

n= 200

Source: Field data (2016)

Table 6-7 shows that majority of staff in the three universities 128 of 200 (64%) hold Master's qualifications, with few academic staff holding a PhD. For instance, out of 133 lecturers in the

School of Education at University A, 37 (27.8%) hold a PhD, but only three lecturers are at professorial level. The majority were Master's degree holders, totalling 88 (66.2%). University B has 30 (54.5%) Master's degree holders and two full professors. University C's academic staff consist of a total of 12 lecturers: 10 (83.3%) at Master's level and two at PhD level. University C is new and still in the process of transformation from a college to a university status, started in 2009. Compared to University A and B, it is small in terms of programmes and the remuneration for academic staff is likewise lower. From the results presented in Table 6-7, it is possible to suggest that the three universities should embark on recruitment exercises that will target higher qualifications to PhD status and at the same time have skills to teach through ODL. This will help to improve the academic profiles of these three universities, apart from the quality delivery of ODL programmes.

6.2.3.2 Teaching and learning processes

Teaching and learning are part of the core processes that most of the universities undertake, besides research and community outreach. In other words, universities have the responsibility to put in place procedures and systems that promote quality teaching and learning in the provision of ODL mode. These procedures and systems should be clear and explicit to both ODL students and the lecturers or tutors. The effectiveness of teaching and learning in ODL could depend on the curriculum, knowledge acquisition and skills. In this study, qualitative interviews revealed certain teaching and learning processes that are in place in the three universities. For example, one of the participants from University B said:

Teaching and learning begins with the heads of departments, who has below them several teachers in various areas, these according to us must be ready to receive any feedback from the students or answer questions and clarify; in fact, this is university policy. All lecturers and tutors have offices where they can easily be reached by the students to increase lecturer-student physical interactions. Eeeeh... now, as I said at the beginning, it is not everybody who is a specialist in the area, but those that are not, their colleagues assist them. (Zomu 04, University B)

Although Zomu 04 did not give clear details of what exactly University B has done in terms of teaching and learning, there is some indication that the institution has a few activities related to quality teaching and learning. By the same score, University C believes in departmental involvement in making sure that quality activities are undertaken with care by all the members in the department. For instance, a participant from University C described how all the members in the department get involved in tutorials for the purpose of QA (Bola 07, University C). The claim above could suggest that University C practices team teaching in tutorials and generally

works together. This kind of approach has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage side is that course coverage is quicker, and students benefit from varied presentations by tutors. The findings suggest that Universities B and C have put in place QA activities to enhance teaching and learning at departmental level. The results of the findings also match the conceptual framework of the study that puts emphasis on teaching and learning as vital processes in quality delivery of ODL. Tables 6-8 to 6-13 show students' responses regarding 'teaching and learning' and assessment in Universities A, B and C.

Table 6-8 Are students' expectations of teaching at university met?

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly disagree	4	3.2	2	3.3	2	1.8
Disagree	20	16.1	16	26.2	11	10.1
Neither agree nor disagree	18	14.5	0	0.0	9	8.3
Agree	68	54.8	34	55.7	73	67.0
Strongly agree	14	11.3	9	14.8	14	12.6
Total	124	100%	61	100%	109	100%

n= 294

Sources: Appendix I question item number: 1

Table 6-8 reports findings for ODL students' level of agreement on teaching at their respective universities (see Appendix I question item 1). The results show that University C had more students (87; 79.6%) whose expectations were met by the teaching than those whose were not met (13; 11.9%). These results corroborate the data obtained from qualitative interviews, as presented in section 6.2.8 that highlight how the institution has placed a premium on teaching and learning through proper co-ordination with the education departments. In Universities A and B, 82 (66.1%) and 43 (70.5%) students respectively indicated that their expectations were met regarding teaching, whereas those who neither agreed nor disagreed were 18 (14.5%) for University A and 0 (0.0%) for University B. The results, therefore, indicate that generally a high standard of teaching takes place in these three universities as the percentages for the group of students who responded positively on this subject were consistently higher.

Table 6-9 Are students satisfied with the time given to them by lecturers and tutors?

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly disagree	7	5.6	4	6.6	7	6.3
Disagree	31	25.0	9	14.8	16	14.3
Neither agree nor disagree	22	17.7	6	9.8	12	10.7
Agree	50	40.3	31	50.8	58	51.8
Strongly agree	14	11.3	11	18.0	19	17.0
Total	124	100%	61	100%	112	100%

n=297

Sources: Appendix I question item number: 2

Table 6-9 presents the results on students' satisfaction with the time allowed for them to interact with their lecturers and tutors during residential schools and outside this arrangement. The findings indicate that many more students at University C interact well 77 (68.8%) with their lecturers and tutors than those who do not (23; 20.6%). Students who agreed or strongly agreed totalled 64 (51.6%) at University A and 42 (68.8%) at University B. In terms of percentages, the results for students who least agreed by the time given at Universities B and C were similar. The results for students who did not agree that the time given to them by their lecturers was satisfactory were 38 (30.6%) for University A and 13 (21.4%) for University B. The table shows that the number of students who indicated 'neither agree nor disagree' was small, across the three institutions, with Universities A, B and C recording 22 (17.7%), 6 (9.8%) and 12 (10.7%) respectively. It is not surprising that University C has a higher rate of interaction (time) between lecturers/tutors and students, because the number of all ODL students at this institution is lower and the lecturer–student ratio is high. Based on these results, students at University C tend to have more time with their lecturers/tutors than at the other two universities.

Table 6-10 Are evaluations of assessments for ODL in line with the modules?

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly disagree	2	1.6	1	1.7	1	1.3
Disagree	6	4.8	4	6.7	9	8.0
Neither agree nor disagree	8	6.4	3	5.0	10	8.9
Agree	73	58.4	30	50.0	59	52.2
Strongly agree	36	28.8	22	36.7	34	30.1
Total	125	100%	60	100%	113	100%

n= 298

Table 6-10 presents students' evaluation of the assessment for ODL modules (see Appendix I question item 3). Students were asked whether they agreed that the assessments (formative and summative) given are in line with the module contents. The findings indicate that students gave varying responses, although the strongest (109; 87.2%) was recorded at University A. Universities B and C recorded 52 (86.7%) and 93 (82.3%), respectively. For those who disagreed (or strongly disagreed) totalled 8 (6.4%) for University A, 5 (8.4%) University B and 10 (9.3%) for University C. These results are broadly consistent across the universities, with minor variations. The table shows that the students who neither agreed nor disagreed were small, across the three universities. This could mean that the students' perceptions of assessment activities were based on their study material and that they appreciated this kind of arrangement.

These generally positive findings could mean that these universities understand the challenges that most of their students go through in doing their research, particularly those who reside in rural areas, where there are no libraries or internet connectivity.

Table 6-11 Is feedback from lecturers and tutors effective and timely?

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly disagree	13	10.5	3	5.0	2	1.8
Disagree	40	32.3	15	25.0	26	23.0
Neither agree nor disagree	13	10.5	10	16.7	26	23.0
Agree	50	40.3	25	41.7	51	45.1
Strongly agree	8	6.5	7	11.7	8	7.1
Total	124	100%	60	100%	113	100%

n=297

Table 6-11 presents the findings on whether students agreed that feedback from their lecturers was effective and provided in a timely manner (see Appendix I question item 4). The table reports that at Universities B and C 32 (53.4%) and 59 (52.2%) students indicated, respectively, their satisfaction with feedback from their lecturers and tutors, compared with their 58 peers in University A (46.8%) who reported slightly lower satisfaction. The three Universities A, B and C recorded 53 (42.8%), 18 (30.0%) and 28 (24.8%), respectively for students who were not satisfied with the feedback. The percentage of students who neither agreed nor disagreed at Universities A, B and C were (13) 10.5%, 10 (16.7%) and 26 (23.0%) respectively. Overall, the perceptions of the students as presented in this table suggest that there is need for improvement in the area of feedback. The level of satisfaction by the students is quite low. Interestingly, the results in this table contrast with those in Table 6-10 that report a high level of students' satisfaction with assessments. This could mean that there are areas that universities are doing well, but also there are areas that require improvement, such as giving feedback. Therefore, these findings contradict the qualitative interviews in sub-section 6.2.3.2 on QA measures that University B has put in place vis-à-vis feedback to ODL students. Moreover, information in the conceptual framework states that feedback between the tutors and students might help to come up with various pedagogical combination to provide quality teaching and learning (Devedzic et al., 2011).

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The following tables (6-12 and 6-13) show how students perceive learner support in more specific terms.

Table 6-12 Are ODL tutorials available?

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly disagree	37	30.6	10	16.4	32	28.8
Disagree	36	29.8	13	21.3	23	20.7
Neither agree nor disagree	15	12.4	16	26.2	18	16.7
Agree	29	24.0	15	24.6	34	30.6
Strongly agree	4	3.3	7	11.5	4	3.6
Total	121	100%	61	100%	111	100%

n= 293

Table 6-12 presents ODL students' responses on the availability of tutorials in Universities A, B and C (see Appendix I question item 21). The table shows that 33 (27.3%) students agreed or strongly agreed on the availability of tutorials at University A, compared to 22 (36.1%) of the students at University B. The results at University C were similar to the other two universities, with 38 (34.2%) students agreeing or strongly agreeing. Across all three universities there was less than 50 per cent agreement that the availability of tutorials was satisfactory. Less than 50 per cent agreement among the students in the three universities suggests a need for improvement in making sure that tutorials are available to all the students. These results for University C contradict the interviews conducted with one of the participants from the same university, who indicated that tutorials at the institution were available, as highlighted earlier in this sub-section. Indeed, it is easier to implement certain QA practices in a university when there is co-ordination at departmental level.

These results appear to suggest that universities should recognise the importance of tutorials, particularly in a higher education set-up. It is also possible that some students had difficulty in understanding the real meaning of 'tutorial', especially in their first year. These findings relate to the conceptual framework of the study that highlights students' academic support as an important element in the delivery of ODL.

6.2.3.3 Students' study material/module production

Study material for ODL students is essential to their learning, particularly as face-to-face contact between lecturers and students is limited. Learners have to do the reading on their own most of the time and therefore quality study materials are vital. In this study, all the participants from Universities A, B and C indicated the importance of producing quality study material as well as the steps that each institution has put in place. Regarding this, the participant from University C said:

In the absence of that QA unit, what we usually do is; we make sure that the modules we produce and content in our modules reflects the course outline. The objectives of the course, the rationale and the outcomes are covered in the modules. Therefore, it is through our modules that we ensure that quality. ODL students spend two weeks with us and then we give them the modules to study on their own. (Bola 07, University C)

Study material should be interactive and user friendly to guide students, so they encounter no difficulties. Although University C claims to have a robust process of module production, it is not clear how this process is co-ordinated to ensure quality modules. Similarly, Okonkwo (2012) states that there is a need to attach quality to the production of study material by making sure that the staff engaged is employed on a permanent basis. In other words, changing the staff in the production of modules might compromise their quality.

The participant from University B stated:

Study materials are written according to the principles of instructional design for distance learning. Once we certify that they are okay, they are taken for printing. The other aspect is monitoring the production of material at various stages. We then monitor how they are distributed, because they are delivered at regional centres. The next stage is reviewing the modules after some time with peer reviewers at departmental levels for relevancy of content and correctness of content. Relevance in terms of whether they contribute to the objectives of the programmes. (Lana 06, University B)

Another participant from University B agreed that good-quality modules lead to quality teaching:

Therefore, good delivery of education, good material, let me say, high-class study material that have been prepared for ODL students and this is what we need and for ODL as a plus. (Zomu 04, University B)

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Based on the information from the two participants from University B, it is possible to state that the institution appreciates quality study materials. For instance, monitoring of these materials at various stages is a way to minimise some of the defects and help to keep to the course content. The literature reviewed indicates that periodic review helps to improve as well as maintain quality standards of study material (Simui et al., 2017)

On the same subject, the participant from University A, said:

Here the instructor takes time to plan the instructions as well as the modules that are prepared. These are closely monitored, not just at the point when they are being developed or designed, but they also go through peer review. That is exactly what we do in the Institute of Distance Education. Then they go through mass production of modules and distribute to the students. Students themselves are part of the peer review process. I am 100 per cent that the modules are of superior quality. (AD 05 University A)

The above claims from University A on the processes that are undertaken in the production of modules is an indication that the institution pays attention to quality study materials. Peer reviewing is a sure way to bring the modules to an acceptable level, as prescribed by the available internal quality systems regarding the modules. The involvement of students to critique the study material might also highlight some of the issues that otherwise would be seen as unimportant. The findings show that all three universities (A, B and C) pay attention to module writing and production, although not many details have been given on the available processes in the production of study material. The following tables (Tables 6-13 and 6-14) illustrate students' responses to quality of the study material and their distribution.

Table 6-13 Are the modules/study materials good quality?

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly disagree	7	5.6	2	3.3	3	2.6
Disagree	20	16.0	7	11.5	8	7.0
Neither agree nor disagree	15	12.0	9	14.8	16	14.0
Agree	58	46.4	23	37.7	69	60.5
Strongly agree	25	20.0	20	32.8	18	15.8
Total	125	100%	61	100%	114	100%

n= 300

Table 6-13 presents findings for students' level of agreement on whether the study materials given to them by their universities are of good quality (see Appendix I question item 5). The results indicate that students at University C agreed 87 (76.3%) while 11 (9.6%) did not. The students who agreed with modules being of good quality from Universities A and B totalled 83 (66.4%) and 43 (70.5%), respectively. The table shows that students who disagreed across the universities were below 50 per cent of the total number. These findings complement the qualitative interviews in sub-section 6.2.3.3 with participants at all the universities, which made it clear that they have put in place rigorous QA procedures in producing quality study material for their ODL students. University C appears to be doing better than the other two universities, a fact that could be associated with the design and the language (interactive) used in these materials. Universities A and B are known for producing study materials known as 'batches', largely copied and pasted from other sources. These do not use interactive language, and this could make it difficult for students to use them, as they are not user friendly.

Table 6-14 Is the distribution of study materials/modules satisfactory?

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly disagree	24	19.8	8	13.3	35	31.3
Disagree	42	34.7	10	16.7	40	35.7
Neither agree nor disagree	14	11.6	8	13.3	16	14.3
Agree	24	19.8	27	45.0	20	17.9
Strongly agree	17	14.0	7	11.7	1	0.9
Total	121	100%	60	100%	112	100%

n= 293

Table 6-14 reports on the level of agreement by ODL students that the distribution of study material is satisfactory (see Appendix I question item 6). The findings indicate that more than 50% per cent of students did not consider that proper distribution of study material was taking place at Universities A and C. However, 56.7% of students from University B agreed or strongly agreed that this service was satisfactory. These findings in a way imply a need for universities to put in place robust systems of module distribution without disadvantaging any students.

These findings confirm qualitative interviews from one of the participants from University B, who clearly stated that the university monitors the printing and distribution of modules to the regional centres countrywide. It is surprising that this finding on University A does not correspond with the one obtained from the qualitative interviews in sub-section 6.2.3.3. One would expect a positive response from the students regarding the distribution of modules at this institution, because of its long standing and experience in ODL.

The table above shows that all three universities have not done much in terms of module distribution as the majority of students did not agree that there was systematic distribution of these materials at their university.

6.2.4 University collaborations and benchmarking

Participants from Universities A and B acknowledged that their universities have been working with other universities and ODL organisations to improve on the quality provision of ODL programmes. The following are some of the responses to the extent to which they collaborated:

Colleagues from other universities are invited as external examiners and we have colleagues going to other universities as external examiners especially within the region as it is cheaper to have people from within the region. Sometimes we use to get people outside the region, but it was quite expensive. (Kale 03, University A)

In the same way, another participant from University A indicated that:

We do collaborate a lot, take for instance, before a programme is launched, we do carry out needs assessments that help to actually reposition ourselves and tailor our programmes to meet the needs identified by the industries out there. We are currently collaborating with friends from Zimbabwe Open University. For the first time we are offering four ODL postgraduate programmes. (AD 05, University A)

Universities the world over are encouraged to work with external examiners to independently make assessments on a given academic task as part of QA. This entails universities maintaining quality standards without much internal influence to arrive at the verdict, in this case, University A invites external examiners to examine its candidates. The literature reviewed indicates that the process of inviting external examiners helps a university to ensure high-quality assessment in the delivery of its programmes and to maintain the standards that have been set (Biggs, 2001; QAA, 2011). Further, borrowing and collaborating with other institutions is one way of learning from each other and simplifies the process of benchmarking. In other words, University A is on the right track with regards to these activities.

Regarding the same issue of collaboration and benchmarking, the participant from University B, said:

Maybe not so much universities as such, but bodies and institutions that work in ODL, for instance, the body in Vancouver Canada and the Commonwealth of Learning. These are very useful to us, we are members and we correspond with them at certain times. They do channel out a lot of useful material to those universities that are in ODL mode within Southern Africa, we have the body to which we belong we the ODL people and it helps us in various ways. (Zomu 04, University B)

The findings indicate that Zomu 04 was convinced that it is possible to borrow ideas from institutions that work in ODL to improve on quality delivery of programmes through ODL. In fact, these institutions engage experts to design frameworks and guidelines that help national QA agencies and local universities to design their own frameworks to fit their own contexts. For example, the conceptual framework of this study borrowed some ideas from the COL. As mentioned above, COL is an institution that provides expert knowledge to various universities and organisations that provide higher education. While working with such organisations it could be encouraged, that University C should begin to exchange knowledge with other universities within and outside the country.

The participants from University C indicated that it was difficult to make certain changes to QA provision of their ODL, because the government has not stated the direction in which the university should go, particularly during the transformation from college to university:

That sort of networking or maybe with other universities to come and see how we are faring in the programmes we offer so that they advise as well as do the benchmarking. Such practices do not usually take place. (Bola 07, University C)

The participant from University C was concerned at the absence of QA for ODL at national level. The above statement from University C partly contradicts what the university has already put in place as part of QA, without any guidance from Government on how ODL should be managed. Throughout section 6.2, several QA measures have been mentioned, which this institution has undertaken without reference to Government guidance. With or without Government guidelines, universities must be innovative on their own to provide quality programmes, provided these are within the law.

The findings from the two higher education institutions (Universities A and B) indicate their commitment to collaboration with other organisations as part of QA in their programmes, but not University C.

6.2.4.1 Students' responses on internal QA

ODL students were asked about QA, including their satisfaction with university leadership, communication, enquiry and pre-study advisory services, institutional commitment and the willingness of officials to provide quality ODL at Universities A, B and C. The idea was to complement, as well as compare, students' perceptions and understanding with the information obtained from the interviews and documents. The data from the students helped to address Research Question 3. Tables 6-15 to 6-19 gives students' responses to various issues of quality provisions in their respective universities. The tables relate to Research Question 3 on the

available QA measures for ODL in Universities A, B and C. In the presentation of the findings in these tables, the researcher combined 'Very dissatisfied' with 'Dissatisfied', and 'Satisfied' with 'Very satisfied'. The rationale for combining these responses was to come up with clear categories and avoid a multiplicity of responses.

Table 6-15 Students' satisfaction with ODL leadership and management to quality provision

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very dissatisfied	9	7.3	2	3.3	4	3.5
Dissatisfied	15	12.1	6	9.8	18	15.8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	15	12.1	7	11.5	21	18.4
Satisfied	76	61.2	39	63.9	65	57.0
Very satisfied	9	7.3	7	11.5	6	5.3
Total	124	100%	61	100%	114	100%

n= 299

Table 6-15 presents data on students' satisfaction on ODL leadership and management in Universities A, B and C. Overall, out of 299 ODL students that were sampled from the three universities, 202 (67.6 %) ODL students were satisfied with leadership and management in quality provision across all three universities (see Appendix I question item 14). The results show that University A had more students who indicated satisfaction with ODL leadership (85; 68.5%) than those who were dissatisfied (24; 19.4%). The table indicates that University B had more students (46; 75.4%) who were satisfied than those who were dissatisfied (8; 12.6%). As for University C, more (71; 62.3%) ODL students seemed to appreciate their university's leadership than those who were dissatisfied (22; 19.3%). These results appear to corroborate the findings earlier presented in sub-section 6.2.1 with participants from Universities A, B and C, who highlighted the need for QA and the willingness of their universities' leadership to quality provision of ODL programmes. The reported lack of satisfaction may be consistent with the recent establishment of QA units in Universities A and B, with University C yet to conceive of a QA unit due to its infancy. It makes sense that students have mixed feelings about the leadership and management of QA, because they could be unclear about QA expectations or may lack familiarity with QA.

It is not surprising that students from University B report being satisfied with ODL leadership and management of QA. Similarly, the qualitative interviews in sub-section 6.2.1 reported that University B has established a thriving QA unit. It should be expected that the university would do much better than others whose QA units are either still developing or are yet to be established.

Table 6-16 Students' response to communication for quality ODL programmes

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very dissatisfied	8	7.2	4	6.6	14	12.3
Dissatisfied	26	20.8	6	9.8	34	29.8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	27	21.6	7	11.5	8	7.0
Satisfied	52	41.6	40	65.6	53	46.5
Very satisfied	11	8.8	4	6.6	5	4.4
Total	124	100%	61	100%	114	100%

n= 299

Table 6-16 shows that of 299 ODL students from Universities A, B and C, 165 (55.2%) students showed a level of satisfaction, as opposed to 134 (44.8%) who showed a level of dissatisfaction with available communication in their respective universities (see Appendix I question item 15).

The table indicates that University B recorded 44 (72.2%) of the students indicating that communication was satisfactory (or very satisfactory), while 10 (16.4%) students indicated dissatisfaction at the same university. Further, the results show that Universities A and C recorded 63 (50.4%) and 58 (50.9%) scores for satisfaction, respectively. The table also shows that 7 (11.5%) students were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied at University B. It appears that all the three universities have taken certain measures to make sure that ODL students know of the latest developments in good time, although this requires improvement. Poor internet connectivity and, in some cases, its complete absence across some parts of Zambia may explain the low level of communication between universities and their ODL students. University A is one of the pioneers in the provision of higher education; hence, one would expect the institution to have strong communications with its ODL students. Moreover, University A has been offering Bachelor of Education programmes through ODL for a long time.

Table 6-17 Students' response to enquiry and pre-study advisory services

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very dissatisfied	11	8.9	2	3.3	13	11.6
Dissatisfied	30	24.4	7	11.5	28	25.5
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25	20.3	11	18.0	38	33.9
Satisfied	46	37.4	31	50.8	38	33.9
Very satisfied	11	8.9	10	16.4	1	7.4
Total	123	100%	61	100%	112	100%

n= 296

Table 6-17 indicates the response of students on whether they were satisfied or not with the enquiry and pre-study advisory services in Universities A, B and C (see Appendix I question item 16). The table reports the results and compares the number of students who were satisfied (or very satisfied) with pre-study advisory services in Universities A and C (57; 46.3% and 39; 41.3% respectively) with those who were dissatisfied (or very dissatisfied) in University A (41; 33%) and University C (41; 37.1%). University B reported that 41 (67.2%) students were happy with the services, whereas 9 (14.8%) were not. The table also indicates that 25 (20.3%) students were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied at University A. While, 11 (18.3%) and 38 (33.9%) were recorded for University B and C were recorded for students who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The findings in this table may reflect the status and level of organisation of ODL QA units in these universities, whereby University B, which has already established a QA unit, is reported to be doing slightly better. On the other hand, during the interviews and as reported in sub-section 6.2.1, the participant from University C agreed that the university did not have systematic and co-ordinated QA processes. Therefore, the responses from this table confirm that students may identify with the issues that the universities were going through. Overall, it should be noted that the number of students who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied was above 10 at each university. This could suggest that students did not understand the question.

Table 6-18 Students' response to institutional commitment in meeting their requirements

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very dissatisfied	9	7.3	2	3.3	10	7.1
Dissatisfied	28	22.6	17	28.3	30	26.8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	22	17.7	11	18.3	29	25.9
Satisfied	57	46.0	23	38.3	32	28.6
Very satisfied	8	6.5	7	11.7	11	9.8
Total	124	100%	60	100%	112	100%

n= 296

Table 6-18 reports the results to a question that asked students to indicate the extent to which they were satisfied with the universities' commitment to meeting their requirements (see Appendix I question item 17). The findings show that more students were satisfied (or very satisfied) in Universities A and B (65; 52.5% and 30; 50% respectively). Universities A and B recorded 37 (29.9%) and 19 (31.6%) respectively for dissatisfied (and very dissatisfied) ODL students. The table shows that 43 (38.4%) students at University C were happy regarding institutional commitment to meeting their needs, and 40 (33.9%) who were not. The percentage of students who were happy regarding this question, in a way, suggests that far more should be done to improve institutions' commitment to meeting students' requirements. For instance, institutions could introduce suggestion boxes or conduct student surveys on how the students' requirements could be met. This is a plausible finding, considering that University C is still new and thus has limited structures to support quality delivery of ODL programmes, unlike Universities A and C. The findings also indicate that out of 296 students from all the three universities, 62 (61.9%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Table 6-19 Students' response to commitment of individual academics to quality of ODL

Evaluation	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very dissatisfied	10	8.0	0	0.0	7	6.1
Dissatisfied	17	13.6	4	6.8	6	5.3
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25	20.0	6	10.2	19	16.7
Satisfied	54	43.2	38	64.4	65	57.0
Very satisfied	19	15.2	11	18.6	17	14.9
Total	125	100%	59	100%	114	100%

n= 298

Table 6-19 shows students' responses to individual academics' commitment to quality provision of ODL (see Appendix I question item 18). Students were asked to indicate whether they were satisfied with the commitment of individual universities' academics to ensuring the quality of their ODL programmes. University B reported more students (49; 83%) who were happy than those that were not (4; 6.8%). The table shows that University A had 73 (58.4%) students who were happy and 27 (21.6%) unhappy at the quality. University C recorded students' responses who were satisfied at 82 (71.9%), yet it is still in the process of transformation to full university status. At University C, students appeared to appreciate the efforts being made by university academic staff. These results are in line with the findings from the interviews in sub-section 6.2.1 that clearly state that University C recognises the need to implement QA systems in its programmes.

The evidence presented in the tables above seems to suggest that Universities A, B and C have put in place some QA activities in the provision of their ODL programmes and, as indicated earlier from the interviews. The variation in percentages in the tables could be an indication that the activities are implemented differently and that ODL students equally have different understanding and perceptions on QA activities.

6.2.4.2 Stakeholder engagement in quality provision of ODL

This section presents the findings from the qualitative interviews that address Research Question 3 on how universities that offer ODL programmes ensure that their students contribute to the development of QA systems at university level. The following sentiments from

participants highlight stakeholders' level of engagement in quality provision of ODL at their universities:

We have not really gone into consultations yet, except, in terms of identifying stakeholders. Students have been identified as key stakeholders in our work together with the employers. When I took over the office, we carried out a pilot survey of students' opinions in four programmes. We have also done some trace studies going out to the employers of our graduates in 2015 last year. Therefore, these are key to our work as our key stakeholders. (PEO 09, University A)

PEO 09 further stated that:

In the development of the framework, we have that in mind that we shall consult key stakeholders, and those that we have immediately identified apart from the students and employers are the HEA and the Zambia Qualifications Authority (ZAQA). We have not really gone into consultations yet.

University A seems to attach importance to working with stakeholders in the delivery of its programmes. The process of identifying stakeholders is crucial, before they are engaged by the university concerned to participate in the internal QA processes. Similarly, the theoretical framework of this study shows that stakeholders are powerful in the manner in which they can make contributions, even in their absence, to improve QA internal mechanisms at institutional level (Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014). The involvement of students, employers, HEA and the ZAQA might help the university to come up with robust QA mechanisms without input from various stakeholders.

By the same score, the engagement of stakeholders by University B was confirmed by the following response:

When we are developing courses at board of studies level, we invite stakeholders like Ministry of Higher Education and Professional Associations to participate in board of studies meetings. If we feel that a programme requires some experts, we invite them on our board of studies meetings at school level and later at senate level. (Lana 06, University B)

One of the functions of the MoHE is policy formulation for all the institutions of higher learning in Zambia. Therefore, in a way, the Ministry is an automatic stakeholder in all higher learning institutions, thus its involvement in QA internal mechanisms of the university is likely to add value to the entire process. The professional Associations in this

case are expected to provide the professional touch, particularly to meet the expectations of the labour market for graduates, and the programme's design will be tailored to the demands of the stakeholders and the context.

The QA expert acknowledged that public universities, by their nature, could not avoid the inclusion of stakeholders:

If you take for example public universities, you will find that the bodies of studies in various schools comprise members from outside, so input is there. Zambian Open University is developing a programme in 'policing and security studies' and this was spearheaded by the former Inspector General of Police. (Chakwa 10, QA expert)

Participants from Universities A and B agreed on the importance of employer engagement and other stakeholders in quality provision of ODL. They regard stakeholders as crucial to the quality delivery of ODL programmes at university level.

The findings also uncovered how University C had recognised the importance of stakeholder involvement in the provision of ODL yet did not take practical steps to bring them on board: 'We are still in the learning process and have not even identified who are our stakeholders are, apart from the students themselves' (Bola 07, University C).

6.3 The role of students as stakeholders in quality delivery of ODL

In responding to an interview question on student engagement: How do you hope as an organisation to ensure that students' views are taken on board in QA provisions? the following participant stated:

The students are key stakeholders in our work. We need to have ways in which we devise regular consultations or assessments whereby students can assess the quality of the teaching, quality of facilities, their satisfaction with programmes, all that, you know, so that we constantly get feedback from our students on the challenges they are facing and the things they are satisfied with. (PEO09, University A)

In agreeing with student engagement, another participant mentioned: 'From the outset, we have an association of students under the distance-learning mode' (AD 05, University A). Similarly, another participant asserted:

We have a students' union, which does more than what you are saying; they monitor our own teaching and learning process and have an academic secretary. The academic

secretary works closely with the director of QA to bring out whatever they see as a weakness and so on or areas where we need to improve. (Lana 06, University B)

The above claims from Universities A and B are consistent with those in section 6.2.4.2, where it is clearly indicated that ODL students are in fact identified as stakeholders. This demonstrates that students can make a meaningful contribution to the QA system of a university. The idea of student engagement at institutional level for QA internal systems is no different from QA practice by NVAO, whose teams of experts include a student from another university to advance the ideas of fellow students on quality matters (Van Berkel & Wijnen, 2010).

During the interviews, Bola 07 (University C) responded that:

We are still operating the old paradigm of treating a student as seeker not as a stakeholder so that they take part in the way we deliver the services to them. One of the mechanisms we were using is the evaluation forms to get feedback. In every session, we use to give student evaluation forms for them to make comments on tutorial, lectures and the conduct of the lecturers, but we discontinued with this. In future, we shall reconsider that.

Bola seems to be making conflicting statements as, earlier in section 6.2.4; he stated clearly that his university had not yet started the process of identifying stakeholders, apart from ODL students. It is clear that the institution could be using the students in a different way to obtain feedback yet does not regard them as stakeholders, as indicated above. What is clear, however, is an appreciation that students can contribute to improving the delivery of programmes through ODL.

In an interview with a participant from the HEA on the same subject, it was seen that it is equally in support of allowing ODL students to participate in quality provision at institutional level:

Well, not necessary in our instruments but within the law, there is a requirement that students should sit on board or senate to present their views. Apart from that, the students write to us whenever they are aggrieved, they even come to us and approach us and tell us about some of things they are going through. From that, we should be able to tell that there is engagement of students. In addition, through that, we can engage the administrations and advise them. Where they are quality issues, we would always come in and raise such concerns. (TE 02, HEA)

The participants from the targeted universities indicated the importance of students' engagement in QA matters; this stance was supported by the HEA as one of the requirements envisaged in the QA framework under considerations. The recognition of the students by the HEA that they should become involved in institutional QA provision is one directive that all higher educational institutions in Zambia should observe.

6.4 Students' specific avenues for quality provision in ODL

It could be argued that students' involvement in higher education institutions demonstrates how institutional leadership appreciates the governance and democratic rights of the students. In the analysis of the available means of student engagement, students saw no limit to the number of avenues in their respective institutions, as presented in Table 6-20 below.

Table 6-20 Students' responses on available avenues of engagement in quality of ODL

Methods of engagement	University A		University B		University C	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Through their student union	72	36.7	44	35.2	14	15.2
Through a suggestion box	51	26.0	32	25.6	21	22.8
By filling in questionnaires	41	20.9	22	17.6	31	33.6
Via lecturers' evaluation reports	16	8.1	15	12.0	9	9.7
At departmental level in matters of assessment	16	8.1	12	9.6	17	18.4
Total	196	100%	125	100%	92	100%

n= 300

Table 6-20 presents the level of student engagement in quality provision of ODL (see Appendix I question item 34). The findings from this table show a relatively high number of responses compared to the tables presented earlier. This is attributed to students who gave more than one response to the question. The table shows that more students at Universities A and B (72; 36.7% and 44; 35.2% respectively) indicated 'student union' as a common avenue through which they channel ideas regarding quality provision of programmes at these two institutions. Likewise, 14 (15.2%) students at University C indicated the same. The table shows that students at Universities A, B and C recorded 51 (26.0%), 32 (25.6%) and 21 (22.8%), respectively, for a suggestion box. The findings from the table show that more students (31; 33.6%) indicated filling

in questionnaires at University C than at Universities A and B (41; 20.9%; and 22; 17.6%, respectively). In terms of the percentages for 'via lecturers' evaluation reports' and 'at departmental level in matters of assessment', the three universities indicated low levels of student participation in the provision of quality ODL. The results for University C for filling in questionnaires are similar to the information obtained from Bola 07 in sub-section 6.2.4.2, on student engagement as stakeholders in quality provision of programmes through ODL. Overall, the three universities recorded very low levels in all the five categories through which students participate in internal QA systems.

6.5 Lessons from established QA systems

This section justifies whether there are lessons that Zambia can learn from already established QA systems. The term 'lessons' in this section refers to picking up and citing ideas from other universities with advanced QA practices. This theme provides answers to Research Question 4: What lessons can Zambia learn from countries that are perceived to have robust university QA practices for ODL? The section begins with the current state of universities offering programmes through ODL and ends with some of the lessons from established QA systems.

6.5.1 Current state of universities offering programmes through ODL

During interviews, when asked to state how universities that offer ODL have fared regarding QA in the absence of a regulatory authority, the QA expert gave the following response:

I think University A is the only institution that maintains quality and promotes quality because of the way it was established. As for other institutions, I do not think they are concerned about quality. In fact, if you remember, one of the public universities had to be stopped by the Director of Teacher Education in 2010 from offering their programmes under ODL. They had to be given time to organise themselves in terms of staff training and putting up systems. In other words, there was concern on the provisions of ODL programmes (Chakwa 10, QA expert).

In the QA expert's view, most higher education institutions have not seriously embraced QA and its provisions, apart from University A. Chakwa's claims could be based on a number of factors, including those already mentioned in this chapter, such as the absence of QA units and internal QA mechanisms.

Furthermore, Chakwa stated:

As far as I am concerned, the quality of ODL programmes in Zambia is below 50 per cent, if I were to grade them, except for University A, University B, TVTC, Chalimbana University and maybe Nkrumah University. All these others, especially private colleges, are offering what you would not even call distance learning. (Chakwa 10, QA expert)

Chakwa's observation was complemented by PL 01 in that, in terms of quality, University A has been doing well in the past few years. However, University A has dropped in the ranking of good universities of Africa, owing to fallen standards:

If you look at University A, it was one of the top universities in Africa. Right now, it is falling in the rank of universities, purely because of quality issues. It is for this reason that Higher Education Authority has been established to improve quality. If they do their job right, I do not see the reason why the universities should not compete. (PL 01, MoHE)

For instance, University A is ranked at 33 in Sub-Saharan Africa, at 55 in Africa and at 2,583 in the world (Webometrics, July 2016). The evidence above indicates that there is a need to put in place rigorous QA systems to improve quality delivery of ODL in the universities, particularly those targeted in this study.

6.5.2 Some of the lessons from established QA systems

Interviews with various participants, mostly at university level, were most revealing in terms of the lessons that could be drawn from established QA systems:

We have gaps in our QA systems. When you look at the Open University in the UK and UNISA [University of South Africa] for example in South Africa, they have their own academic and support staff. They also have good and well-maintained infrastructure and facilities that are ideal for ODL. The institutions have experts who review students' study material that are printed using their own equipment. The institutions have means of providing this information to the students who may not need to be at campus but perhaps at home. In other words, learner support is very strong, and students are given feedback within a short time. In our case, we do not have all this, and we may not have it if nothing is done. (Kale 03, University A)

The issues raised above by Kale 03 from University A have already been discussed in this section. These include infrastructure, module production and other forms of learner

support. Any university that offers an ODL programme should ensure that all the necessary facilities are in place to provide quality education. It seems that these facilities are lacking at University A, and this makes it difficult for the institution to deliver its programmes. The institutions mentioned, OUUK and UNISA, are cited in the literature reviewed and are among those institutions that provide quality ODL programmes (Wancai, 2009; UNISA, 2009).

Another participant from the same university added that:

Part of our QA framework is to identify what we call as good practices so that we can benchmark ourselves against other institutions. Nevertheless, our challenge is lack of regional centres and regional tutors. Bigger universities such as UNISA in South Africa have well-established regional centre programmes. Therefore, this is a gap we have identified. We need to recruit a good number of staffs whom we can deploy in these centres. There is no need for the ODL students to be coming for residential schools.
(PEO 09, University A)

The participant from University A recognises the need for quality and sufficient academic staff to deliver the services in the ODL mode. Moreover, the establishment of an internal quality assurance framework in a university is often regarded as one of the most critical components in creating a sustainable internal QA mechanism. Therefore, the HEA should take a keen interest by evaluating the features of an internal QA system at university level to determine whether institutions meet the prescribed benchmarks. These findings also match those from section 6.3 for Universities A, B and C, where participants from these three institutions expressed the need for qualified and sufficient staff to deliver ODL programmes.

In connection to Kale 03 and PEO 09, the following participants from Universities B, C and A explained the situation, as follows:

I think our communication is not as fast as we see it in universities that are in developed countries. While we may insist on delivery of study material online, the majority of the students cannot get this information online because of poor internet connectivity in most parts of the country. We are likely to continue giving out hard copy student study material. Therefore, this is a big gap and a challenge that should be addressed. In developed countries, ODL students and their lecturers are very much acquainted with all sorts of modern gadgets that make communication quickly. (Zomu 04, University B)

Similarly, another participant said that:

The major gap between developed ODL programmes in other places and ourselves could be due to availability of advanced ICT. Students who are pursuing ODL programmes in advanced countries have access to information even when they are at home and without physically being in the library. In our case, the only opportunity ODL students may have is when they come for residential schools. I think that is the major gap. As I have said, we are struggling with the information system we have because we do not understand some of the systems that we have acquired. The reason is the existing infrastructure does not support our ICT systems and this should be improved upon. (Bola 07, University C)

In the same vein, AD 05 stated that:

There is a need for us to improve on the information delivery to our ODL students. Students should have access to information by accessing our libraries online at any time. During my studies at University of Manchester, it was not distance education but conventional mode. Information was always at my disposal, even by my bedside and there was no need to always get into the library. (AD 05, University A)

It is the responsibility of institutional leaders and their stakeholders to ensure that they also give the needed attention to come up with appropriate measures and resources to strengthen the QA mechanisms in both public and private institutions. For instance, the participants from Universities A, B and C bemoaned the absence of communication between the institution and its ODL students due to lack of communicative devices, as well as non-availability of ICT for a ready flow of information. Access to information by the ODL students is another factor that requires improvement at all the three universities.

One participant observed that:

There is a need for strong learner support systems to our ODL students as we see it from institutions in developed countries or with well-established systems, even within Africa. In short, our learner support systems here for distance learning [ODL] are weak. (Lana 06, University B)

It is difficult to strengthen learner support systems to ODL students if some of the critical elements such as those discussed above are not present. Due to limited face-to-face contact between lecturers and ODL students in all three universities, it is essential to make

sure that robust learner support systems are put in place to motivate the ODL students who, in most cases, do the work on their own.

6.6 Summary of the findings

This chapter presents the findings uncovered by the study and reports on them. The findings relate to IQA mechanisms, EQA mechanisms and lessons from established QA systems. As mentioned earlier, data obtained from the interviews, survey questionnaires and documents reveal the various perceptions of participants and the practices of their respective institutions regarding QA.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from this chapter is that Universities A, B and C have operated for a long time without putting in place QA units. At the time of data collection, only University A and B had established these units; University C was still in the process of establishing one. Moreover, the leadership at University A and B has demonstrated a positive commitment towards QA measures in the delivery of ODL, coming up with institutional QA policies, with established units currently spearheading their internal QA mechanisms.

The targeted universities in this study lack qualified academic staff to deliver ODL programmes. Therefore, universities are compelled to use lecturers who are qualified to teach only in conventional mode. This leads universities to depend on part-time lecturers, who may not be reliable all the time because most are committed to full-time jobs in other organisations, where they are required to meet targets as well. Similarly, these three universities lack the proper infrastructure and facilities essential to running ODL programmes, such as spacious classrooms and laboratories, good study materials and internet access. Additionally, the three universities are striving in the area of teaching and assessment of students, as reported by university officials and partly the students themselves. Teaching and assessment are among the core activities, as in any higher education institution, and the understanding is that the standards should not be compromised at higher educational level. Considering tutorial work, students gave mixed reactions. Some agreed that this practice goes on at their universities, whereas others did not.

Not much IQA goes on at departmental level in the three universities (A, B and C). However, some departments have adopted certain practices, such as adequate support to staff and regular curriculum evaluation and review. The findings show that the level of teaching practice supervision and student lecturer contacts is high at University B. Along similar lines, careful attention is paid to module production at all three universities (A, B and C) although, in certain

circumstances, students raised concerns at their lateness and that there were not enough copies for all students. In the same vein, all three universities have been trying to improve the capacity of the academic staff through various internal programmes and training to sharpen their ODL pedagogical skills and enhance the preparation of study material, as well having CPD. Ultimately, these practical steps help to improve teaching and learning for ODL students. However, one participant described difficulty in providing QA training to academic staff in the absence of an internal institutional QA framework as a guiding tool.

Universities have welcomed the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 and the establishment of the HEA, whose responsibilities are to monitor and regulate quality provision in state- and privately-owned institutions. Participants from University C expressed reservations at the mandate bestowed on the HEA, citing a lack of awareness and insufficient staff, among others. However, there is evidence of collaboration and benchmarking among universities and organisations, both within and outside the country, on QA matters in ODL. These bilateral and multilateral agreements and arrangements require strengthening to yield positive results and sustainability.

The study has found that stakeholders are essential to the QA provision of ODL programmes. Their views and concerns are necessary to shape the provision of quality in any institution. Furthermore, a good number of participants agreed that students are important stakeholders and should not be left out when deciding on QA. Their expectations and experience can be relied upon to decide what is best for them.

The study has shown that ODL is an ideal mode of delivering higher education, provided the lecturers and tutors are sufficiently qualified and there is no interference from national QA agencies, as indicated by the participants in sub-section 6.2.1. For instance, by the same score, the literature reviewed indicates that Nigeria has witnessed growth in ODL to improve access to higher education (Aderinoye & Ojokheta, 2004; Jegede, 2016). This means that ODL can be relied upon to provide quality higher education to the citizens of Zambia. The literature review also indicates that ODL has made notable achievements in Africa and that there are many opportunities through which ODL could be used as a tool for development (Biao, 2012). Moreover, ODL can benefit universities because it offers an element of flexibility in the teaching and learning processes using technologies and interdisciplinary approaches as these two processes are key in higher education (Mahlangu, 2018). ODL emphasises high-quality instructional materials designed to give participants access to current knowledge (Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006; Olakulehin, 2017). On the basis of the literature reviewed, it is possible to argue that ODL is not just an alternative to a conventional mode (face-to-face) but recognised as

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a mode of delivery in higher education. In the same way, the three universities (A, B and C) have realised the importance of quality, but how to ensure that quality is an element that is missing. In other ways, higher education institutions are still working to organise themselves to institutionalise the QA that is now a requirement by law. The study shows that there are effective practices in developed countries with strong QA practices that Zambia could learn from.

The next chapter presents the discussion of the findings.

Chapter 7 Discussion of the Findings

7.0 Introduction

The previous two chapters presented the findings to the specific research questions that underpin this study. The discussion of the findings is largely based on the meta themes identified using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In systematically discussing the findings of this study, the meta themes identified in chapters 5 and 6 are now discussed with specific reference to the literature reviewed, participants, and the conceptual framework set out in earlier chapters. In all the cases, the meta themes have been maintained to obtain deep meaning of the findings. This chapter begins with a discussion on the input from the MoHE regarding QA policy for ODL in section 7.1 as a meta theme. This is followed by section 7.2 (meta theme), which focuses on external QA mechanisms. Both section 7.1 and 7.2 address Research Question 1. The chapter further explores the role of the HEA in monitoring and regulating quality in universities that offer programmes through ODL. It also highlights the successes and challenges that the QA agency (HEA) has been facing in discharging its functions in Zambia. The third part is section 7.3 (meta theme), where the discussion focuses on Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) mechanisms of the targeted universities to maintain and improve quality provisions of their ODL programmes. Special emphasis is also on students' contribution to the development of university QA systems and this relates to Research Questions 2, 3 and 4.

The chapter concludes with a discussion regarding the lessons that Zambia could learn from countries and universities that have strong QA policies and quality frameworks. It is the researcher's hope that the findings discussed in this chapter could be used in the quality delivery of programmes through ODL.

7.1 Quality assurance policy for ODL

This section represents the meta theme to address research question number one on QA policy measures (see Figure 5-1). To begin with, Zambia has had several policy measures aimed at upgrading and maintaining quality standards in universities. The measures range from grants and infrastructure developments to the training of academic and support staff. These higher education policy measures are key determinants of quality provision at university level. In essence, the core processes of a university are teaching, learning, research and community outreach which are entirely dependent on the availability of various educational QA inputs.

The higher education policy in Zambia was a directive issued by the MoHE to promote and regulate the quality provision of all programmes in all institutions of higher learning. The policy gives guidelines on certain quality tasks and how to undertake them. According to Torjman (2005), a policy is a high-level statement of ambition that specifies the outcomes to be achieved. It helps to guide decision-making through well-defined courses of action. It also means that higher education institutions in Zambia are obliged to follow the guidelines laid down. The Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 provides for:

Establishment of the Higher Education Authority [HEA] and define its functions and powers; QA and quality promotion in higher education, establishment; governance and regulation of public higher institutions; registration and regulation of private higher education institutions; repeal and replace the University Act of 1999. (GRZ, 2013)

As mentioned in the literature review, it took Zambia many years to come up with this kind of policy (MoE, 1996). During the interviews, participants from University A, as seen in sub-section 6.1.1, agreed that in the past there was no QA regulation or supervision to check how universities were performing. They further stated that this situation led to the creation of private universities that offer poor-quality education, as their focus was on profit rather than quality delivery of programmes (PL 01, MoHE; TE 02, HEA). However, with the establishment of the HEA to monitor and regulate quality provisions in higher education, the prevailing situation is more likely to change, as it is expected that both public and private institutions will comply with the law through the QA benchmarks prescribed by the quality assurance agency.

Before the enactment of the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, state-owned universities had a mandate to self-regulate and to design and re-design their own programmes without any form of intervention by Government, direct or indirect (MoE, 1996). Although the MoE had a directorate for ODL whose responsibility was to regulate and inspect private institutions, this did not have the capacity to institute serious QA measures. The structures were ill defined and lacked qualified personnel to carry out the necessary QA functions. The absence of a legal framework on QA made it difficult for the directorate to function effectively and, over time, it remained unchanged. The directorate has not had authority to superintend private higher education institutions in the country since the establishment of the HEA. This Higher Education Act has now shifted regulatory functions of universities from the directorate in the MoE to the HEA.

On the basis of the evidence gathered in this study, together with the experience of the researcher in higher education, it could be argued that not much has been done to disseminate the detail of the Higher Education Act to stakeholders of higher education, or its implications. It was expected that the HEA would bring on board all stakeholders in higher education at national

level. In line with this, at regional level the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation body has come up with guidelines for QA in African higher education, aimed at increasing access to quality education while addressing social development and employability, but awaits endorsement by ministers of higher education in Africa in either 2019 or 2020 (Quality assurance guidelines await ministerial approval, 2019). Indeed, the study shows that, despite some of the universities being aware of the new QA regulations, they remain unclear on how to implement and institutionalise the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013. Similarly, Bola 07, a participant from University C, in sub-section 6.1.2 expressed reservations about supporting the mission of the HEA as mandated by the Act. It is clear that some universities have received the policy on QA with incredulity and an unwillingness to engage.

After the Act came into effect, it took the Government nearly three years to establish the HEA (2013–2016), and it relied on the HEA to explain and enforce the Act to all stakeholders. From the findings presented in Chapter 5, participants acknowledged that the Government has shown a willingness to improve higher education by putting in place this policy yet felt that very little had been done to ensure that quality higher education was actualised as expected. There is a clear disjoint between the Government's wish to improve quality as set out in the Act and its commitment to implementing and enforcing it. It was expected that the MoHE would develop an engagement strategy to engage proactively all stakeholders countrywide and explain the Act. This was to be done through print and electronic media, using a wide range of engagement methodologies, such as workshops. From discussion with the three universities, it is evident that, while universities are aware that the Act is in place, only those that were involved in the process formulation are fully aware of its intentions and implications. The universities that did not take part in policy formulation feel left out. For example, the participant from University C clearly stated in sub-section 6.1.1 that the institution has not felt the presence of the HEA due to the absence of the QA framework.

The increase in the number of students (massification) and subsequent rise in the number of higher education institutions justify putting in place regulatory measures so that only those institutions that meet specified requirements are permitted to offer programmes at degree level through ODL. It was expected that quality monitoring of universities would raise standards in these institutions that offer various programmes through ODL. Furthermore, the renewed focus on higher education through this policy would help university graduates to meet labour market demands. The literature reviewed in this study highlights that massification in the provision of higher education and the increased numbers of institutions of higher learning have brought about challenges regarding quality provision. Besides, improved quality in higher education would have a positive effect on the ranking of Zambian universities that offer ODL programmes. Higher

education institutions with robust or successful QA systems are more likely to have high-profile education studies and innovations and collaborate with other universities and organisations within Zambia and beyond. This is in line with the conceptual framework of this study, which also highlights the importance of research as one of the core functions of a university. All the funding that is disbursed to public universities is constitutional and, in most cases, backed by policy; these include institutional grants among others. For instance, in Zambia, state-owned universities are not for profit. These universities depend largely on Government funding to meet their daily operational costs and future expansion. In this state of affairs, it would be unreasonable to attribute this to lack of innovation on the part of these universities in terms of income generation activities to improve their facilities and staff remuneration. It is true that the Government increased the funding to state-owned universities, for example from K1.5 billion (1 USD= K14) budget for 2019 intended for the MoHE, a provision of K1.1 billion (1USD= K 14), representing 73.4 % was allocated to university education, yet this allocation was insufficient to meet universities' demands (GRZ, 2019). The literature reviewed, and qualitative interviews revealed the Government's increase in funding to state universities, but this money takes a long time to reach universities, making it difficult for them to implement their planned activities. One participant from the MoHE stated that it is clear that there are problems in financing universities, and, in the past, this has forced lecturers and students to boycott teaching and learning (PL 01 MoHE).

In the researcher's view, the Government should seriously consider further increasing funding to universities, based on the numbers of students and research activities as well as other needs. Inconsistent and low Government funding appears to have contributed to poor-quality delivery of programmes in universities across all modes. This assertion is supported by the interview with the participant from the MoHE, as indicated in sub-section 5.1.2, that the Ministry has had problems in funding universities. In other words, low funding makes it difficult to meet specific set targets aimed at improving the quality standards. It is for this reason that universities should be given autonomy to become entrepreneurial and generate local funds to boost their financial resource base to undertake various projects hinging on quality improvement. Locally generated funds could help to respond to changing social demands and meet ODL students' expectations as well. The researcher's view is in line with entrepreneurial ideas that offer a formula for institutional development putting autonomy on a self-defined basis to diversify income and increase financial resources, reducing dependency on Government, particularly for the state-owned universities (Clark, 1998). The University of Twente in the Netherlands is an example of an entrepreneurial institution that was created for innovations. For example, the university sets a premium on students' innovative projects and collaborates with industry to strengthen such ideas. State-

owned universities could provide quality ODL programmes, if given the latitude to make certain decisions independently.

Entrepreneurial ideas would help in reducing tuition fees, mostly helping self-sponsored students from low-income groups in the event that state and private universities were to increase their tuition fees massively. In addition, a scholarship scheme for ODL students by government would help to resolve this challenge. Along similar lines, the evidence from the findings indicates that private universities are encouraged to raise funds from other ventures, aside from student tuition fees and research, to maintain and improve the quality delivery of programmes in ODL.

One of the government's priorities is to improve the infrastructure in public universities as part of its policy. Infrastructure is one of the most critical requirements in successfully offering quality higher education programmes through ODL. The ODL that this study focused on requires students to report for their residential schools in person during holidays, three times a year in April, August and December. This feature marks the major difference between conventional education and ODL, as it must provide for regular face-to-face contacts between students and their lecturers.

Higher education institutions should provide the necessary infrastructure for learning to take place during residential schools to increase face-to-face interaction between students and lecturers/tutors. Universities that offer practical subjects, such as biology, physics and chemistry, as well as ICT-related programmes, are expected to provide science and computer laboratories for their students' practicals. The interviews revealed that the infrastructure in state-owned universities requires attention, either by renovating existing structures or building new ones. During the interviews, the participants from Universities A, B and C acknowledged the need for infrastructure development in their respective institutions.

Moreover, the study provides evidence in section 5.1.2 that Government has taken note that there is an urgent need to address the issue of infrastructure. The Zambian Government set aside a substantial amount of money in 2016 alone for infrastructure development in state-owned universities (World Bank, 2016). The burden was on the universities themselves to decide on the infrastructure that they urgently needed. During qualitative interviews, the participant from the MoHE confirmed that a series of meetings was held with state universities to discuss the issues of infrastructure and modalities on the disbursement of these funds. Unfortunately, by the end of 2016, these funds had not yet reached the earmarked beneficiaries (public universities). Such delays make it difficult to actualise the plans, particularly on the part of the recipient institutions. These findings relate to the conceptual framework of this study that places emphasis on quality infrastructure for the effective delivery of ODL programmes.

The Zambian Government has been working with international organisations such as the African Development Bank to uplift and renovate the infrastructure of universities and colleges. ODL programmes stand to benefit from such upgrading in general. In the same vein, well-organised private universities have embarked on serious infrastructure development in Zambia. For example, University B has plans to expand its infrastructure around the country, which it has demonstrated by putting up modern buildings at its headquarters/main campus. The university policy is in line with the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, whereby privately-owned universities should improve their infrastructure and critical facilities to enable them to offer their ODL programmes satisfactorily (MoE, 2010; GRZ, 2013).

All universities that offer programmes through ODL have a responsibility to provide the necessary infrastructure and facilities, such as classrooms, libraries, science and ICT laboratories and seminar and workshop rooms. Potentially, adequate infrastructure helps to create an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning, as well as providing an excellent academic experience for ODL students.

7.2 External QA mechanisms

This section represents the meta theme to address the research question 1. The findings regarding external QA mechanisms are divided into three areas: QA monitoring, HEA successes and challenges and conception of the HEA. In this study, the first research question sought to investigate QA measures at policy level for universities that offer programmes through ODL in Zambia. One such measure is EQA, a process that allows outsider experts to review the quality systems of a given institution (Stensaker et al., 2011). EQA is critical in stimulating change and improvement of teaching and learning, it involves outside agencies with the mandate to examine the quality of programmes and the quality systems that institutions have put in place (Vlăsceanu et al., 2004; Stensaker et al., 2011). These external experts make their judgement based on the information that they gather during their visits.

In Zambia, the HEA is an external agency established to provide, among others, rigorous quality assessment to encourage dialogue and collaboration among institutions and faculty members. Generally, EQA requires good planning and money, whether it is course assessment, programme accreditation or quality audits. The HEA continues to receive government grants to meet its operational costs in the initial phases before it can become independent, as the registration and accreditation of universities continues. In future, there is a need for the quality agency to consider flexible ways of paying subscription and accreditation fees by universities when the framework is ready, as part of income generation.

The QA systems that are adopted are determined by the country's educational and political context. In this case, the HEA collaborated with and benchmarked against various QA organisations before coming up with the QA system that fits the structures and systems in Zambia. For instance, the HEA worked with the Council for Higher Education (CHE) in Africa, the Namibian and Pakistan Quality Assurance Systems and the COL. According to Appleby (1999), collaboration and benchmarking help in the identification of good practice at one institution and incorporation into another. The practice also entails importing technical and innovative ideas from other institutions. Similarly, Woodhouse (2003) believes that the process of benchmarking is a flexible approach to QA, as it deals with an institution concerning its aims as well as the objectives. Considering that the HEA is new to quality matters, its approach has been to see how well-established organisations and countries fare in QA matters, as a means of benchmarking. This marks the beginning point for the inclusion or avoidance of certain QA practices.

The findings from the interviews in sub-section 5.2.2 highlighted that, during the process of designing the general QA framework, the HEA engaged selected local stakeholders to bring in ideas to suit the local context. Further, it was stated that the QA consultative process was an on-going exercise to keep refining the instruments, because it was not easy to do it correctly from the start. As indicated in the findings, the HEA has been consulting stakeholders in higher education on a possible means to revamp the Association for ODL. It was envisioned that the ODL Association would help in promoting quality provision of ODL programmes in the country, as well as promoting professional ethics in the practice of ODL at both individual and institutional level. Once a quality culture is embedded among ODL practitioners, it is easier to monitor, regulate and accredit programmes. The situation is that this Association appears not to be functioning and the number of registered members is unknown.

7.2.1 QA monitoring

In general, the findings indicate a compliance approach to QA monitoring and regulation of universities by the HEA. As earlier indicated in Chapter 2, QA is a mechanism that institutions use to provide quality programmes, as demanded by the stakeholders concerned (Harman, 2000; Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007; IUCEA 2010). The compliance approach by the HEA in terms of regulation and monitoring is informed by the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 that, in a way, was politically driven or influenced to compel all higher education institutions to operate within the law. It can be argued that, by steering QA from a distance through the HEA, the MoHE was avoiding being viewed as authoritarian by higher education institutions.

It was found that Universities A, B and C were optimistic about the process of regulation and monitoring of quality by the HEA in fulfilling its mandate. One of the participants from University A was delighted that the HEA plans to rank universities using a points system for QA. He further stated that engagement in serious monitoring of universities by the quality agency was likely to have an impact on quality improvement. Moreover, the engagement of some of the universities in the formulation of the quality standards was another way to legitimise the QA process and to make it easier for all universities in Zambia to institutionalise the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 with less resistance. For instance, one of the participants from University A was positive that the HEA would bring about change in the universities that offer programmes through ODL. Similar sentiments were expressed by the ODL and QA experts, that the HEA should properly organise itself to have an impact on higher education institutions and to help to build capacity for monitoring. Both experts expressed the view that the process of regulating, monitoring and accreditation of programmes would help to raise standards in universities. The QA expert further articulated the advantages of establishing committees of experts by the HEA, and that this process would help to improve various ODL courses and programmes.

These findings are in line with those of Eaton (2012) and Latchem (2016), who noted that accreditation is the act of reviewing colleges, universities, and their programmes to judge their education quality and how well they serve students and society. The findings on regulation and monitoring of universities that offer ODL programmes in Zambia were found to relate to the theoretical framework, particularly on the stakeholders' premise that the theory could be useful in studying how universities respond to the various demands and expectations of stakeholders.

The findings also echo the views of Stella and Gnanam (2004) on the need to design benchmarks for QA. This is related to the Institute for Higher Education Policy of the United States that came up with 24 benchmarks comprising seven areas important to distance education. These include institutional support, course development, teaching/learning, course structure, student support, faculty support, students' evaluation and assessment. These benchmarks could be applicable to Zambia with a different approach, due to the dissimilar context. The literature reviewed indicates that it is important to be aware of the context in which quality standards are being applied (UNESCO, 2002). However, these benchmarks could act as guidelines for ODL institutions in offering their programmes and help to distinguish between conventional education and ODL. In other words, the benchmarks represent the specific unique features of ODL that are not necessarily required at the same level as in conventional education. The evidence presented on the regulation and monitoring of quality by the HEA partly entrenches the study's focus on ODL, not conventional education.

7.2.2 HEA successes and challenges

The HEA is still organising itself in terms of appointing various officers to take up positions, as indicated in its organogram (HEA, 2015). At the time of data collection, the authority was just two years old and its operation was not at full capacity. The few new officials who had taken up their positions, together with those officials who went on to join the HEA on secondment from other government departments, had the task of developing the QA framework. One of the early successes of the HEA was developing a preliminary framework for both conventional education and ODL modes, comprising initial benchmarks for universities before they could be allowed to continue operating. During interviews, the participant from the HEA mentioned additional successes in (sub-section 5.2.1), including putting in place the preliminary QA framework, statutory instruments, the HEA structure, recruitment of staff such as the Director General, and advertising for vacant positions.

A further success was that in less than a year of operation, the HEA registered 19 universities whose names were published in the Government gazette and print media. Registration of universities is a key milestone, as this enables members of the public to have confidence in the system and make informed decisions regarding the quality of universities. It is the responsibility of the HEA to raise public awareness on the status of various universities regarding ODL programmes. All the universities whose names were published had already been issued with certificates of registration, as required by the Act and the preliminary QA framework. Another participant contended that the HEA was in the process of accrediting the programmes to help to improve the delivery of all university programmes (PL 01, MoHE).

The findings indicate that these universities appreciated the role of the HEA. According to Chakwa 10 (QA Expert), privately owned institutions may struggle to understand and readily accept the role of an organisation such as the HEA. These institutions often perceived organisations such as the HEA to be an agency of the Government, established to make their operation increasingly difficult, as opposed to helping them. There is a need for HEA to work on building confidence among all higher education institutions, particularly those that offer programmes through ODL. HEA must therefore work with these institutions and aim to instil a quality culture and help to build their capacity in QA. When this is accomplished, universities will hopefully see the benefits for QA and feel compelled to create their own internal QA systems.

As in most organisations, the HEA might face operational and structural (limited staff) challenges to carry out its functions. While it has been in existence for two years, the finding of this study is that it is likely to take longer before it can operate in full. The participant from the HEA chose to look at the institutional challenges in a more positive sense, stating that the agency was still in its

infancy stages and that what others might perceive as a challenge is in fact a learning process (TE 02, HEA). Related to this, Chakwa 10 (QA Expert) believed that, if Zambia were to be compared with countries in the SADC region in terms of QA at higher educational level, the country is heading in the right direction.

Given the evidence above, it could be said that, during the short period that the HEA has been in existence, it has made strides to ensure that the provision of higher education meets certain quality standards. Notwithstanding, more work is needed on the part of the HEA and all higher education institutions in the country to develop workable QA systems for ODL.

All higher education institutions should operate within the confines of the law (Higher Education Act 2013), as this is a policy directive and the HEA was set up to ensure that institutions comply. However, the interviews from this study reveal that it might take time for all universities to change their traditional QA practice. Therefore, it could be argued that the HEA must give universities a chance to adjust to the new systems. Several interviewees from the targeted universities suggested that, while they were keen to ensure that the right quality systems are in place, they need more time to enable them to do the correct things and possibly have new systems in place by the end of 2018. For instance, HEA has promised to keep on encouraging universities to come up with innovative ideas for internal and external QA mechanisms, as indicated by TE 02, HEA. In this case, the role of the HEA is to check how and what the universities are doing in terms of the QA for their ODL. This approach by the HEA would also allow institutions to ensure that they achieve quality, rather than rushing changes through. Furthermore, if the HEA were to begin closing any institution it found culpable after only a short time, it might not be in the public interest. Suffice to say that the HEA recognises that not all universities will be able to meet the benchmarks by the same time.

The findings above confirm those of the literature review in that, during site visits to institutions of higher learning, in most cases the external experts demand self-study reports and conduct interviews with selected academic members of staff and ask to see the structure of the institutions and the overall effectiveness of the programmes (Harvey, 2002; Hayward, 2006).

7.2.3 Conception of the HEA

The findings on support for the HEA involved the responses of stakeholders, particularly universities, to the establishment of the HEA to monitor and regulate quality provision in all higher education institutions in Zambia. The findings highlight the expected relationship between universities and the QA agency. The focus of this sub-section is on conception support of the HEA by its stakeholders to enhance the context for quality provision of programmes through ODL.

The findings on conception to HEA indicate that all the three universities will be required to comply with the QA regulations. The participants from University A agreed to give support and comply with the HEA in all respects, stating that the university would ensure that all preparations were in place for the major tasks of QA. For example, the university was in the process of developing its internal QA framework and to have its programmes accredited by the HEA as a matter of compliance. The compliance aspect entails that universities that flout the regulations might find it difficult to offer programmes through ODL due to expected sanctions by the HEA. In other words, the participants from University A were convinced that monitoring and regulating quality would help to standardise conventional education and ODL delivery and make it possible for students in both modes to learn the same material. Moreover, this would help to change the negative perception that many people have about ODL. Although the participants from this institution seem to support the work of the HEA, not all academic and support staff appreciate the HEA. Universities, by their nature, have a tendency to protect their autonomy. For example, in a study conducted in Kenya on quality assurance for public higher education, some university officials expressed resentment at being monitored by an external QA agency (Odhiambo, 2014). This means that the HEA should anticipate resistance from some universities or their officials.

It was found that University B was willing to work and support the work of HEA to improve the quality provision of ODL programmes, provided that a QA framework is available. The rationale for having a framework is that QA audits of the HEA are likely to be conducted using the same framework, as a tool. In short, University B gave some form of condition for its support to the HEA. This condition simply explains that, although universities are obliged to operate within the law, as indicated above, they exercise some form of autonomy in service delivery. In a way, this view concurs with Shah and Jarzabkowski (2013) that compliance-driven QA kills the innovative spirit of any internal quality mechanism at university level.

By the same score, University C received the news regarding the establishment of the HEA with mixed feelings. For instance, one of the participants from the institution felt that, before this could be done, there was need for wider consultation by policymakers. These sentiments, in a way, suggest that a good number of stakeholders felt left out of the drafting of the QA preliminary benchmarks by the HEA. This process could have resulted in consensus, whereby each player appreciated the change process. Although there are indications that University C will comply with the provisions of the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 and the HEA ODL QA framework, it may not do so willingly, because it felt excluded from the consultative processes conducted by the quality agency.

7.3 Internal QA systems

This section represents the meta theme as indicated in chapter 6 to address research questions 2 and 3 (see Figures 5-2 and 6-1). The findings regarding internal QA systems are mainly divided into ten areas: institutional leadership for quality provision of ODL; infrastructure and facilities at institutional level; academic staff workload and qualifications; academic staff training; teaching and learning; quality study material; QA initiatives and challenges at institutional level; partnership/benchmarking and stakeholder participation in quality ODL; QA and institutional quality audits.

7.3.1 Institutional leadership for quality provision of ODL

Leadership is a central feature of any university performance; therefore, managers need to understand the nature of leadership influence, the factors that determine relationships with other people and the effectiveness of leadership. In other words, leadership is a matter of making a difference, success which entails changing an institution by making appropriate decisions that involve other people (Mullins, 2007). In this study, Kale 03, the participant from University A in sub-section 6.2.1 agreed that it had taken a long time for the institution to institute QA measures. Nonetheless, he went on to state that his university management was committed to the establishment of a QA unit. His assertion was based on the substantial sum that had been put into this project. University A's strategic plan for 2013 to 2017 indicated operationalisation of the QA frameworks for conventional education and ODL. On the other hand, University B was operating a Directorate of QA whose director was from middle management. Further, the institution aimed to improve learner support, printing study materials, a dispatch section and a unit in charge of overall supervision of quality.

The findings from these two universities are in line with UNISA, which has its own quality unit and a committee chaired by the vice-principal in charge of strategy, planning and partnership (UNISA, 2009). It could be said that leaders at Universities A and B were supportive of ideas for the creation of their QA units. For the successful implementation of programmes through ODL, a concerted effort is required of everyone at these institutions. This evidence also links to the Baldrige Criteria, which place emphasis on leaders of institutions appreciating the core value of their organisation and creating clear visible quality values for them to achieve (Rao Tummala & Tang, 1996).

The leadership at University C recognises the importance of a quality unit or directorate to ensure that there is coherent, consistent and credible quality in ODL programmes, rather than having each school doing things differently, as is the case now. The university is still in the process of

transformation and this may have affected the process of creating a QA unit or directorate, as the university structures have remained the same and are inappropriate for the creation of such a unit. In a university set-up, it is difficult to run quality activities without officers specifically charged with such responsibilities. The participant at this university revealed that HODs have a responsibility to supervise the affairs of their departments, including examinations. This suggests that there are differences between departments in terms of quality and the manner of doing things, as the whole system lacks co-ordination. These findings from University C contradict the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, which clearly stipulates that all higher education institutions in Zambia should have QA units (GRZ 2013). University C's situation demands proper reorganisation and planning for the establishment of a QA unit to improve the provision of ODL across the departments.

It should be noted that the revelations by the participants at University C regarding the commitment of university leaders to quality are not compatible with the institution's strategic plan for 2016 to 2017. This strategic plan shows the institution's commitment to establishing internal QA mechanisms for both conventional education and ODL.

Universities A and B indicated commitment to quality provision of higher education in their strategic plans: to become providers of world-class services in higher education and to be recognised internationally for providing quality education including ODL using various modes of delivery, respectively.

The findings from Universities A and B are consistent with the quantitative data obtained from the ODL students, who expressed satisfaction with their university leadership for ODL and management. In addition, the findings confirm the transformation model that encourages higher education institutions to put in place quality policies that address student learning experiences (Kettunen, 2012). Moreover, the findings align with other studies that have shown that QA directorates/units in universities help to monitor and evaluate quality processes at departmental and school level (CHEA, 2011; Espinoza & González, 2013). With the directorate/unit in place, it is possible to determine internally and externally how the university performs in all its core areas without breaching the ODL QA framework, as a guideline.

In line with institutional leadership, quality culture for an organisation is the collective behaviour of humans who are part of an organisation and the meanings that people attach to their actions. Culture includes values, norms, vision, working language, systems, symbols, beliefs and habits (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). This means that, to achieve success in QA, everyone in an institution should be involved and share similar aims regarding quality.

The quality culture of ODL is both a formal and an informal part of the institutional structure, which has an influence on how things are done, including decisions and actions. From the results presented in Chapter 6, sub-section 6.2.1.2, one could argue that all three institutions, A, B and C, acknowledge the importance of quality culture and the need for QA. Participants from the three universities explained that quality in university programmes is at the core and involves both internal and external aspects. The findings of this study regarding quality culture are broadly in harmony, as evidenced by the participants' perspective that ODL could do well, with a concerted effort. They indicated that cultivating a quality culture in an institution of higher learning is important and should be supported by all the academics and support staff within universities. These findings may help us to understand that, with a quality culture, any education system could result in a positive perception by everyone involved in the QA process for ODL.

From a policy point of view, the MoHE recognises the importance of a quality culture for higher education institutions to improve the provisions of ODL. For instance, PL 01, a participant from the Ministry, acknowledged that all institutions of higher learning should focus on the quality provision of their education services. This means that there is a need for transformation in education delivery, from more traditional practice to new pedagogical methods that promote quality. The Ministry was equally aware of the difficulties that universities go through to produce knowledgeable and skilled graduates that meet the demands of the labour market in the absence of a quality culture. Therefore, quality is not something that we can negotiate among the academics, support staff or, indeed, other universities' stakeholders.

Generally, an absence of a quality culture affects an organisation's productivity, performance, customer care and services. The evidence from the literature review is that a quality culture in institutions is a sign of commitment to the needs of stakeholders (Yorke, 2000; Ntim, 2014). The findings on organisational quality culture match those of the study conducted by Ntim (2014), in that everyone within a university has an obligation and responsibility to ensure a quality culture. In this study, it is observed that, through a positive organisational quality culture of ODL, universities can manage to reach the quality benchmarks set by the HEA. However, according to Harvey and Stensaker (2008), a quality culture alone should not be regarded as a permanent solution to identifying quality institutional challenges. What this means is that there are many more factors to be considered, among others good institutional planning for QA activities in higher learning institutions. In other words, a transformation to a quality culture is not the ultimate solution. The idea to espouse the embedding of quality culture should go together with planning for all universities to improve ODL. To an extent, the MoHE continues to promote a quality culture in the provision of university education through legislation, regulation, monitoring of quality and funding.

7.3.2 Infrastructure and facilities at institutional level

According to the literature reviewed for this study, higher education institutions in Africa are struggling with low capacity, poor-quality infrastructure and fundamental technological challenges, such as internet, ICT facilities and libraries (Aderinoye, 2008; Igwe, 2008; Wright, Dhanarajan & Reju, 2009). The evidence from the participants revealed that Universities A, B and C have a problem of limited or poor infrastructure and facilities to provide quality programmes through ODL. The qualitative interviews revealed that existing services do not meet the ideal quality standards. For example, all three universities offer science-related courses yet do not have the proper infrastructure or facilities, such as science laboratories. The other facilities absent from these institutions are appropriate library facilities. The facilities are inadequate for many students, particularly during residential schools. A further complication is that library facilities are only available to students who live near university campuses and towns, as there are no online facilities. ODL students from rural parts of the country are the most disadvantaged, as they primarily depended on residential schools to gain access to library services. ODL programmes in these three institutions are delivered through students' residential schools for duration of two to four weeks, depending on the programme.

Modern teaching methods place emphasis on the application of ICT in the presentation of ODL programmes. This is not feasible in these universities because of poor internet connectivity and a lack of ICT facilities. The findings on internet and ICT facilities in these three universities are in line with Chifwepa's recommendations in his study on the need to integrate ICT in the delivery of ODL programmes at UNZA (Chifwepa, 2006). The idea is to give extra study materials and detailed explanations to students through the internet and for them to access library facilities online. In Chapter 6, the students at University A reported that they were more satisfied with the internet than their peers at Universities B and C, an indication that these two universities have not invested much in ICT to improve their delivery of ODL. All three universities have computer laboratories, but these are inadequate for the number of students. The results from Tables 6-1 to 6-4 show that there is need for improvement in the areas of internet, library, classrooms and science laboratories. It is clear that the students were not satisfied with access and provision of these facilities.

Related to the above findings on ICT is Tresman's study, in which he observes that one of the challenges that affect the quality provision of ODL is the lack of online services such as advice, mentoring, library services, teaching and learning environments (2002). The Southern African Development Community shares concern at the poor infrastructure and facilities in the

universities that offer ODL programmes, in that these areas need urgent attention in some member states, including Zambia (SADC, 2010).

Earlier in this discussion, it was noted that the Zambian Government had set aside a substantial amount of money to improve the infrastructure of state-owned universities. If this project comes to fruition, it would be reasonable for universities to decide appropriately the most critical areas that require urgent attention by being given leverage to choose and prioritise their projects.

As for private universities, there will be a need for them to plan how best they can utilise locally generated income to improve and maintain their infrastructure to provide quality programmes through ODL. One of the main findings of this research is that upgrading the infrastructure and facilities of Universities A, B and C will go a long way towards improving the quality of ODL programmes.

Furthermore, institutions play a critical role in ensuring appropriate levels of infrastructure and facilities, as these influence students' choice for their studies. Moreover, the infrastructure and facilities that are available also determine the learner support that institutions can provide to current and potential ODL students. For example, a lack of internet can affect communication between learners and lecturers/tutors, as well as delivery of electronic study materials to students.

7.3.3 Academic staff workload and qualifications

In order to provide quality programmes through ODL, there is a need for sufficient and qualified academic staff with the necessary skills to deliver ODL programmes, and these might not be necessary in conventional education. This study found that Universities A and C operate a dual system, using the same lecturers and tutors for both conventional and ODL on the same programmes. Participants from these two universities indicated in sub-section 6.2.3.1 that they were overwhelmed with work to complete tasks in good time, as they attend to the needs and demands of students through two different modes of learning.

Participants from Universities A and C, Kale 03 and Ngoka 08, respectively stated during the interviews (sub-section 6.2.3.1) that it was not easy to teach conventional and ODL students at the same time. One could therefore argue that, due to the heavier workload on academic staff, the quality of work delivered may be compromised in ODL. The findings discussed earlier show that, to ensure that staff achieves the best results, it is necessary to have separate staff for each mode. Therefore, the directorates of ODL at these institutions should have their own academic

and support staff. Such an approach would help to attend to the needs of the students and increase face-to-face contacts with their lecturers during residential schools.

The findings on lecturers' workload for ODL in this study agree with those of Bukaliya (2013), who argues for a reduction in workload for ODL lecturers for them to focus on the core businesses of ODL, such as spending time on and giving feedback to students, which is a key component of ODL. In fact, University A recognises the problem of heavy academic workloads and is seeking to address it. The institution has already started recruiting academic and support staff for its IDE on a full-time basis. This will also help the institution to fulfil its decentralisation policy of having residential schools in each province, and this requires sufficient staff (SP-A, 2012).

Apart from the limited numbers of academic staff in these three universities, most possess the minimum qualification of a Master's degree. What is interesting is that a good number were trained to teach by conventional modes and therefore lack the necessary pedagogical and andragogic skills to deliver ODL programmes. Some of the skills differ between the two modes of teaching, including coaching, mentoring and monitoring activities that guide students and facilitate learning.

The issues of using qualified academics in the delivery of ODL programmes in order to maintain quality was presented in the previous chapter. The ODL expert interviewed stated that some of the institutions would be found wanting by non-ODL experts in their ODL programmes. To this end, the reputation of a university anywhere in the world is influenced by the qualifications of its academic staff, and institutions need to recognise that academic staff require ODL-specific training to achieve high-quality education.

Although the higher qualifications of lecturers such as PhDs in a university are important to raise the academic profile of an institution, qualifications on their own may not necessarily indicate quality provision in the delivery of ODL programmes. This study shows that, in all three universities, there were fewer lecturers with a PhD than those with a Master's degree. Participants from University A and B appeared comfortable with this status quo. The findings revealed that Universities A and B had taken note of the need to improve the academic status of their lecturers from Master's holders to PhDs, as envisaged in their strategic plans to raise the standard of their academics.

7.3.4 Academic staff training

Linked to academic qualifications is the professional competence of lecturers and tutors in Universities A, B and C. One participant from University A stated that it was difficult to convert

conventional instructional materials to ODL if one does not have the necessary skills and knowledge. Successful ODL programmes anywhere in the world have deliberately put in place programmes to train and equip their academic staff with the knowledge and skills to perform competently. The participants from Universities A and B expressed that their universities organised in-house training such as CPD for their academic staff on the best approach to the delivery of ODL and student instructional design. Sometimes, workshops to which experts were invited to lead training for members of the academic team were conducted on a number of topics regarding ODL. As observed earlier, hard-copy student study materials (modules) were common across the three universities. Due to the large number of students and the cost of production, University A had plans to train lecturers and other instructors in ICT to deliver the modules online.

These findings suggest that having inadequately trained lecturers for ODL at these three universities had the potential to affect the quality of ODL and its provisions and make it difficult to ascertain the standards that these universities have set for academic staff regarding professional competence to teach ODL programmes. The findings confirm those from a study that focused on Tanzania and China regarding the challenges and opportunities of technology-based instruction in ODL, in that when ODL instructors lack technical, pedagogical and andragogical skills it becomes difficult for them to design students' study material (Nyandara, 2012). With these findings, it is possible to argue that some of the participants from the three universities cannot clearly distinguish between academic qualifications and ODL professional competence. One could be a PhD holder majoring in higher education yet not necessarily be qualified to teach programmes through ODL. These findings are consistent with the assertions of Pulist (2017) that training, and development of academic and support staff, are a crucial activity for organisations in order to use the quality services of the staff optimally; therefore, ODL is no exception to this demand for capacity building.

The lack of training programmes for academic and support staff at University C does not inspire quality in the provision of ODL programmes. Qualitative interviews indicated that, in 2016, the university held a seminar for all academic staff, but this was just part of the orientation process for the transformation from a college to a university. It offered very little advice for lecturers on ODL programmes. Similarly, academic staff needs to undergo training that enhances communication with their students as part of learner support. Staff development programmes (SDFs) and CPD are essential to good quality and consistency across departments of a university.

Academic staffs are critical driving factors in ensuring that the core activities of ODL programmes are efficiently executed. Internal training and SDFs in the delivery of ODL are important. Hence, these universities require academic staff to appreciate and understand the philosophy and

practices of ODL. Therefore, training cannot be avoided, as the delivery of quality in ODL is dynamic and new competencies are required. In this case, conducting a training needs analysis would help to identify the specific competencies that academic and support staff require. One of the theories, human capital, in the theoretical framework of this study advocates for investment to enhance worker productivity and lead to greater economic outputs, although its validity is hard to prove.

7.3.5 Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are the core processes of any education system. Quality of programmes in ODL entails a number of things, including accommodating learners with various learning difficulties using approaches and contexts that fit well to maintain innovative practice and research. University B has a system whereby the HODs ensure that all the lecturers make themselves available to ODL students most of the time during residential schools. This may be ideal practice; however, sometimes lecturers may not be available to attend to their students as requested by their HODs, due to other academic commitments. Zomu 04 from University B in sub-section 6.2.3.2 stated that the essence of such measures is to ensure face-to-face interaction between lecturers and students. In terms of teaching, lecturers are expected to provide timely feedback to students who seek clarity on various issues regarding the programme.

Potential ODL students become motivated to enrol for programmes in universities that show proof of academic and learner support. Most of the ODL students in Universities A, B and C were serving teachers, so had other responsibilities, therefore such support was necessary. The findings indicate that University C had a similar system to that of University A, using the departments to take the lead in QA activities regarding teaching and learning. For instance, all the tutorials for ODL students were co-ordinated at departmental level. Consequently, in a university set-up, teaching and learning should focus on a structured learning experience centred on various ways of delivering ODL programmes that are open and flexible for students.

Teaching and learning help to introduce, communicate and expose students to the various skills and knowledge that they are required to possess. These findings are similar across the three universities, particularly on how teaching is co-ordinated in the departments. In some cases, HODs delegated older and experienced lecturers to work with newer ones, so that the new lecturers could settle down quickly, gain confidence and understand what they were supposed to do at each stage.

ODL students in the three universities were asked to state whether they were satisfied or not with the quality of teaching and assessments that they received. The results showed that over 80 per

cent of the students across the three universities agreed that assessments were in line with the study material provided. Assessment is important because it directs students' learning and achievement vis-à-vis the intended programme outcomes. In broader terms, assessment goes beyond the actual testing of the students, and explains the processes that universities design to provide information on teaching and learning as a way of improving the quality delivery of programmes at the level of both departments and the rest of the university. Indeed, it is necessary that the three universities continue with the provision of formative and summative assessments to students and give them a number of opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge. These findings link to the conceptual framework of the study that stresses the need for student assessment as a process that allows students to apply themselves critically. On this matter, Devedzic et al. (2011) state that in some cases student assessments promote creativity among themselves and in-depth knowledge of the subject matter. Similarly, Evans (2016) clarifies that the aim for quality formative assessment is to support students to self-monitor and regulate their own progress in terms of learning.

Regarding 'tutorial work', the results in this study are that more than 50 per cent of students across all three universities agreed on the existence of this practice. Tutorial work is helpful to some of the students in ODL, as it gives a chance to those who may not move at the same pace as other students to go through certain topics for clarification from their lecturers. It should be understood that students have different abilities to grasp concepts; giving them extra time to explain and discuss selected topics in tutorials boosts their understanding of the subject matter.

7.3.6 Quality study material

Having effective, systematically designed study materials for ODL students is critical, together with efficient distribution. These self-study materials are given to the students to supplement and consolidate what they are taught during their residential schools. ODL study materials are supposed to be interactive, stimulating and engaging in silent conversations. The material should be motivating and enthuse ODL students to learn more. In cases where students learn with little support from their lecturers or tutors, study materials take precedence (Bof, 2004; Gbenoba & Dahunsi, 2014). Apart from the study materials, ODL students are encouraged to read widely from other sources of information, such as journal articles and recommended books.

Results from this study revealed that all three universities paid particular attention to the production of ODL study material. Lana 06, a participant from University B, in sub-section 6.2.3.3 stated that his institution always ensured that only quality study material is produced. He stated that experts write the modules (study materials), which are peer reviewed in line with the

content, aims and objectives of each course, and that the directorate strictly monitors the printing. It means that this process, which includes peer reviewing, is intended to assure quality in the final product (module). The university believed that good-quality study material results in quality delivery of ODL.

The process of producing materials at University B was similar to that at University A. The only difference is that, at University A, students were part of the review process to determine the suitability of modules. If students noticed anything wrong in the modules, the modules were recalled for review and amendment. Although students are not experts in module production, it is possible that they might raise important inclusions and omissions necessary to improve the document; needless to say, not all would pay attention to the details. The findings above on module production confirm Siaciwena's observation on the importance of printed study material to institutions that offer ODL programmes, with specific reference to UNZA. Printed study material is the dominant means of instructional delivery to ODL students in Zambia. Siaciwena adds that university libraries do not have enough material, such as books and journal articles, to supplement the modules (Siaciwena, 2006). As for University C, the institution had no specific unit in charge of module production, and this made it difficult to monitor the quality of the modules produced.

7.3.7 Quality assurance initiatives and challenges at Institutional level

Participants from the education departments of Universities A, B and C were asked to indicate the various practices of QA through questionnaires. The results showed differences in the practice, as well as the prevalence, at each of the institutions.

This section discusses QA activities and challenges at departmental level in Universities A, B and C. According to the participants, all three universities reported the existence of peer reviews, tutorials, practical lessons, team teaching and departmental meetings. These findings are in line with Haworth and Conrad's engagement model, which demonstrates students' engagement in learning as a primary purpose of higher education (Yarbrough, 2002).

The findings indicate that all three universities produced study material for their students. Before the module writing, academic staff had to undergo training in module writing. The qualitative interviews were positive about the modules in these universities, but students were not satisfied with their distribution. This made the findings inconsistent with Tierney's responsive university model, as presented in the literature review, which emphasises academic checks to conform to internal and external stakeholder requirements (Tierney, 1998).

All three universities in this study indicated the presence of quality academic feedback. The ODL students also confirmed that they received timely feedback. It's difficult to make progress in any academic programme if learners are not given timely and effective feedback. This practice confirms the main objective of the quality management in education model that states the need for any university to build capacity in students through effective engagements (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007).

Increasing interaction with ODL students is particularly important as ODL students meet face-to-face with their lecturers only during residential schools. All three universities indicated this practice through the qualitative interviews. Given the poor internet connections, it is a good idea for universities to ensure that they create other means of increasing contact with their students. The findings are the same with the engagement model, which stresses interaction between lecturers and students in the academic journey as a vital component (see Chapter 2). These findings match the qualitative interviews, as well as those from the study of the IQA in Dutch universities, which revealed that adequate and thorough IQA design results in intensive attempts at both an individual and faculty level (Weusthof, 1995).

As already observed in Chapters 1 and 2, university education (ODL) in Zambia is under pressure from various stakeholders to meet quality-related demands. Belawati and Zuhairi (2007) indicate that it is not easy to meet all the demands of stakeholders due to various institutional administrative challenges. The findings in this study suggest that these could be addressed by well-organised IQA systems. The participants stated that among the QA challenges that their universities were facing are inadequate staffing, inadequate learning material, limited learning space, poor record management of students' work and a poor-quality culture. With these challenges, it is clear that the three universities were still struggling to meet the demands of their ODL students as stakeholders. The findings are similar to those of Bukaliya (2013) and Musingafi et al. (2015), where they note that universities in Zimbabwe have many administrative challenges in their delivery of programmes through ODL.

There was need for well-co-ordinated QA activities at department level in these three universities. Good-quality ODL could be realised if all the members in the departments were willing to play a part. The introduction of yearly performance appraisals might lead to improved quality inputs by individual members of staff, both academic and support. With good commitment, it is possible for Universities A, B and C to adopt QA as an effective method to respond to challenges in ODL. This study has shown that these universities continue to face various challenges that make it difficult to offer quality programmes through ODL. There is need for good programmes for resource

mobilisation if these universities are to move to the same quality level as institutions in the developed world.

7.3.8 Partnership/benchmarking and stakeholder participation in quality ODL

Universities A and B appreciated partnership and benchmarking with other universities and organisations. Two participants from Universities A and B confirmed their involvement in matters to do with examinations. However, this practice was only at postgraduate level, for PhDs and Master's. It was indicated that, in the past, University A had invited examiners from other institutions within the region and beyond. This practice had to be stopped because it proved to be too expensive for the institution.

University B is a member of the COL, an organisation that conducts research and training for individual higher education institutions that offer programmes through ODL. COL offers technical expertise to universities and independent QA agencies in different countries on various matters of ODL. The idea of such partnerships and benchmarking has helped University B to facilitate knowledge sharing and good results in improved service delivery. University B is also a member of other organisations that promote effective and efficient running of ODL programmes.

When participants from University C were asked to list any partnerships or benchmarking that they had participated in, they mentioned their association with UNZA on various academic issues before the institution became a full university. This partnership collapsed in 2013, as it became an expensive practice. As a young higher education institution, it would be encouraging for University C to benchmark and work with universities that are established, within and outside the country, to learn how ODL programmes are run. These findings confirm Magd and Curry's findings that benchmarking helps to identify any gaps between university's current position and its immediate position. Further, they state that the identified gaps indicate the scope for improvement, as failing to take measures would make it difficult to improve (Magd & Curry, 2003).

As observed in the literature review and the conceptual framework, the delivery of higher education could be successful once stakeholders are satisfied with its provision. In this study, a number of stakeholders were identified, although in this sub-section, emphasis is placed on the contributions of students to quality provision of ODL. ODL students have a pivotal role in ensuring that their university provides quality programmes. Universities have a responsibility to make sure that ODL students are involved in all the activities that lead to quality provision of their programmes. For example, University A recognised students as essential stakeholders and believed that their academic experience was important. To realise this, the university conducted a

survey to gather opinions of students on four different programmes. The idea was to look again at the programmes and make changes suggested by the students. Certain proposals were workable, but others were less easy to undertake.

The findings on student engagement were like those found in the study conducted by Jepsen and Eskerod (2009), that stakeholders' contributions are related to their expectations as rewards in relation to the power that they hold in the project, for example, supportive behaviour by ODL students is necessary in the quest for quality provision of ODL. According to the European Union's study (2009), student feedback is becoming prevalent in the quality provision of their education and constitutes an important performance indicator. Apart from this, participants from University A stated that, in developing its internal QA framework, the institution had the intention to involve students and employers by asking them what they would like to see in programmes. These results are like those discovered by Nadar's study that, in order to measure students' level of satisfaction, higher education institutions should employ a number of both quantitative and qualitative tools to measure their satisfaction; moreover, that the tools should include customer surveys, suggestion boxes, student opinion surveys, complaints procedures, focus groups and consultations (Nadiri, 2006).

University A recognised students as key to ensuring that there is quality in all its programmes. One of the participants emphasised the need to engage students in evaluating the quality of teaching and facilities, as this raised the level of their satisfaction. Once students are involved, they are more likely to bring out their academic challenges and expectations. It is from this point that a university could then work on the same challenges to give students the best educational experience.

At University B, students' concerns were channelled through their union to university management. The union was responsible for gathering any academic matter that affected ODL students to the senate, which deals with numerous issues for the university. Through such engagements, students were able to make their voices heard. It is for these reasons that universities should create enabling environments and conditions that allow full participation by ODL students, using various forums to improve the delivery of ODL.

The evidence from University C indicates that the institution did not involve students in the provision of quality programmes through ODL. In the past, the university used evaluation forms, a practice now discontinued. However, Bola 07, a participant from this institution, was optimistic that the practice could be resumed. Student engagement practice helps university management to appreciate the changes that the students would like to see. In the absence of such

mechanisms, universities cannot know the needs and challenges that students face, and thus improve their ODL.

Comparably, the participant from the HEA stated that the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 supported students' engagement through representation at the highest level of university management. All higher education institutions were encouraged to engage students to make submissions on any QA-related matter. HEA intends to conduct a series of awareness-raising sessions to encourage students to report to them any academic problems that they face in their respective institutions.

A participant from University B talked of institutions' involvement of stakeholders, such as the MoE [MoHE], professional associations and external examiners during course development at the board of studies level (see sub-section 6.2.3.2). For University B, the essence of assembling various stakeholders is to benefit from their expert knowledge. Their ideas help to ensure that programmes are designed to meet the demand of stakeholders involved in the provision of their education. Moreover, one of the other reasons why universities engage their stakeholders is to produce the kind of graduates sought by various industries, based on their competencies, skills and knowledge. On the same subject, a QA expert added that University B, together with the Zambia Police Service, was in the process of designing a Bachelor's degree programme in policing. In this case, the university benefited from expert knowledge from the police. Stakeholder engagement could be used as a strategy by universities to market their programmes to wider society.

As for University C, the institution had not fully appreciated the role of stakeholders in the quality of ODL although, to an extent, it engaged its ODL students in a few activities. These findings match quantitative findings on students' perceptions of engagement to quality provision of programmes through ODL (see Chapter 6).

7.3.9 Institutional quality audits

Universities A, B and C were still in the process of establishing their internal quality systems, and this made it difficult for them to conduct internal QA audits. For example, University A had not yet finalised its internal QA framework and, without this tool, it would be difficult to do anything. This meant that quality was not properly co-ordinated, as each school and department within the university had its own way of doing things.

University C was in the process of establishing a QA unit and the deputy registrar was temporarily appointed to co-ordinate the IQA systems. It is reasonable to suggest that there is no uniformity

of quality systems at University C. One person could not possibly do the work alone and ensure that all departments and schools abided by the internal quality regulations. Despite the absence of staff in this unit, University C reluctantly agreed to operationalise quality systems as stipulated in the strategic plan, which the institution was going to do by first establishing a QA unit.

The situation at University C was no different from that at University A regarding institutional quality audits. University B was the only institution among the three to establish a full QA directorate. The institution conducted two audits in material production and dispatch. One of the participants stated that they were in the process of streamlining its directorate for efficient and effective delivery of programmes through ODL.

As indicated in the literature review chapter, IQA audits are essential for any university that offers ODL. Internal audits help to ensure that internally specified practices and activities are not only done correctly but at the right time. In other words, this process permits those who are co-ordinating quality at institutional level to check and determine what needs to be improved. With the current situation, one could say that the QA measures for Universities A, B and C require improvement to deliver quality programmes through ODL. In the case study conducted at Open University of Malaysia in Indonesia, Belawati and Zuhairi (2007) emphasise that QA activities must be clear, transparent and easy to achieve to meet customer satisfaction. Therefore, institutions must be willing to change and be open to innovation, and benchmarking and internal audits must take place regularly, involving all academic and support staff.

7.4 Lessons from good QA practice

This section briefly discusses the current state of institutions that offer programmes through ODL and some of the quality practices that the targeted universities could learn from institutions perceived to have good practice. There is a need for local universities to learn about quality systems that have worked in other universities and see how such systems could be applied in the Zambian context. In fact, not every aspect of quality can be imported, because QA is not a 'one-size-fits-all' arrangement. Nevertheless, the aim is to borrow key drivers of quality at institutional level in universities with advanced QA systems.

During the qualitative interviews on how universities that offer ODL were faring in terms of quality, the QA expert indicated that the only higher education institution in Zambia that was trying in this area was University A. Perhaps one of the contributing factors for University A's edge over other public and private universities is its long standing in ODL. University A was the first public university in Zambia, and it received attention from Government, as well as funding, although both have now been reduced. Another participant from the MoHE agreed with the QA

expert that, indeed, University A used to be among the top universities in Africa, yet its standards have not been maintained in either conventional education or ODL.

The QA expert further stated that the Department of Teacher Education in Zambia almost de-registered one of the public universities that trains teachers, citing a lack of qualified academic staff to deliver the service. This has contributed to the high number of universities in the private and public sectors that are still struggling to provide quality programmes through ODL. This situation is more visible among private universities because most are for profit, not quality. From these findings, one could deduce that the government had reduced funding to public universities, and the absence of national QA mechanisms might have contributed to the state of the universities offering programmes in ODL mode.

The following are some of the specific lessons that could be drawn from established and successful QA systems:

All three targeted universities agreed that there was a need to establish internal quality units to co-ordinate all the QA activities, as this is the practice in universities with strong internal quality systems. For instance, the absence of an IQA framework in a university makes it difficult to institute QA practices at a local level.

The universities also showed some awareness of benchmarking. It was observed that they were already doing so, but not to the extent of yielding the intended results. Successful universities in terms of QA undertake benchmarking with others to identify practices that are absent or wrongly applied. This aspect came out strongly for consideration at all three universities.

There was also an idea of opening regional centres in all 10 provinces of Zambia to increase face-to-face contact between lecturers and students. This idea was working well for UNISA, which had put in place regional centres across the country. Regional centres would help by reducing the cost to ODL students who had to travel long distances to attend their residential sessions.

Additionally, participants from Universities A, B and C felt that there was need to provide good learner support to their ODL students. They said that universities with strong quality systems provide the necessary support to their ODL students. To retain a student-centred focus, it is essential that ODL students receive the support that they require without delay.

Participants felt that, in most of the universities with good practices that operate dual systems, academic and support staff was not asked to perform a dual role for ODL and conventional teaching. Most importantly, academic staff receives special training for them to handle ODL programmes. These two aspects are crucial to improving quality delivery of ODL in Universities A,

B and C. Academic staff might possess higher qualifications, yet it is vital that they also have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach ODL students.

Participants from the universities bemoaned the need to provide learning resources in various ways to ODL students, aside from the hard-copy study material that is distributed. In other words, they believed that universities with good-quality practice in ODL have different resources for teaching and learning. Most of the universities had internet challenges that made it difficult to communicate with ODL students on issues that concerned them. For instance, quality ODL could partly be achieved through effective application of ICT.

Stakeholder involvement is a critical issue that universities with strong quality systems have employed. The three targeted universities had tried in some way to bring on board some of their stakeholders, but this process needs to be done holistically, so that as far as possible the majority of views of stakeholders are considered. The majority of participants appreciated the engagement of various stakeholders to improve their quality provisions of ODL. Stakeholders' satisfaction with the delivery of ODL is important, as it may serve as an indicator of quality provision of programmes in this mode.

This study has revealed that there are many lessons that universities that offer ODL programmes in Zambia could learn from experienced and successful institutions with strong quality systems.

The last chapter presents the conclusion, implications and limitations of the study.

Chapter 8 Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

8.0 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the policy measures for QA provisions of ODL as inputs in Zambia and to examine institutional QA practices for universities offering programmes through ODL. Therefore, this is a concluding chapter for the whole study. The chapter consists of six sections. The first is a summary to provide the context, background and the importance of this research. The second describes the main findings. The third gives the implications of the findings for policy and universities that offer programmes through ODL. The fourth is on the limitations of the study. The fifth presents the recommendations for further research and the contribution to the body of knowledge, and the chapter ends with the updated conceptual framework after the findings.

8.1 Summary of the study

The study set out to investigate the available policy measures for QA at a national level to regulate and monitor higher education institutions that offer programmes through ODL in Zambia. The study further examined the available institutional QA practices in universities that offer programmes through ODL.

The provision of programmes at higher education level through ODL has been around for a long time in Zambia. Over the past few years, higher education in Zambia has been dynamic and evolving in terms of its provision. For a long period, Zambia had no policy on QA for ODL. The Higher Education Policy of 1996 gave powers of self-regulation to state-owned universities (MoE, 1996). This kind of autonomy meant that there were no restrictions, checks or balances to the quality of education provided by universities through either conventional education or ODL.

Although the MoE had no proper QA framework or monitoring processes, private universities were subject to some form of scrutiny, particularly at the registration stage (MoE, 2010). However, due to simple and weak registration and monitoring processes at the MoE, establishing private universities became primarily a business venture and less the ability and capacity to offer quality programmes through ODL. It was partly within this wider framework that this study was undertaken.

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The literature review of this study provides the theoretical base of quality in higher education and QA in the provision of ODL programmes. The literature states that real quality should be sustained and assessed by the institutions themselves. In addition, QA is conducted within an institution as a system to deliver programmes to the required standard (Harvey & Green, 1993; Materu, 2007). The literature highlights that the QA process requires a concerted effort from everyone involved in the provision of education at both a national and institutional/university level. Moreover, cultivating a quality culture in a university makes everyone involved realise his or her role and feel a part of the process to demonstrate ownership.

The study employed the main ideas of organisations as open systems, and that universities functioning in this way depends on local resources within their environment for survival. Mullins (2007) states that the open systems approach is reinforced by the idea that organisations are sophisticated and adaptive systems whose operations demand constant interaction in a given environmental context. The open systems approach explains that universities receive educational inputs from their environments in the form of policy directives, funding and support from members of the community.

In this study, human capital theory helps to provide justification on the assumptions that the tenets of this theory are incorporated in the higher education national policies of Zambia. Similarly, the reviewed literature suggests that globalisation theory also has an influence on higher education policy formulation at national level. This theory has made it possible for universities to align their programmes with other universities through various means, such as benchmarking and collaborations.

Therefore, the study posits that Zambia's higher education systems and policies are influenced by developed countries and globalisation theory. Policies and the provision of higher education in the country have been changing over the past few years in the hope of improving in competitiveness and fitting in with the current knowledge economy. The study demonstrates that in recent decades globalisation theory has influenced national education policies in Zambia (Altbach, 2001; Enders, 2004).

The study employed the key concepts that underpin stakeholder engagement, which states that stakeholders must be given the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of any organisation in which they have a stake and hold to account those who are given the responsibility to run such organisations. The theory justifies the reasons for allowing stakeholders in the quality provision of programmes through ODL at all levels. The assumption is that stakeholders' concerns about the QA of ODL should reflect the actual quality provision of ODL programmes.

Therefore, the theoretical framework of this study comprises all three theories mentioned above, together with the open systems model and the literature reviewed, which in turn inform the conceptual framework of this study. In this regard, the conceptual framework is a visual representation of the institutionalisation of QA by the universities in an ideal situation. The empirical literature in this study helps to justify that the practice of QA in Zambian universities largely depends on both external and internal QA mechanisms. The findings show that the three targeted universities are still in the process of institutionalising formal QA systems, as demanded by Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013.

The study adopted a concurrent mixed-method design. The study involved 300 ODL students, 12 HODs from the three universities targeted and 11 participants (university officials at management level and independent educational experts). The study employed three instruments for data collection. Questionnaires were distributed to ODL students and HODs, 11 in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants mentioned above, and a document review was conducted to confirm and complement the information that was collected from the interviews. In terms of analyses, the study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data and the quantitative survey questionnaires distributed to 12 HODs. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data from the questionnaires that were distributed to ODL students. The study provides several main findings and conclusions that provide answers to four research questions.

The study sought to address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the policy measures of QA for Zambian universities offering ODL programmes, and how is the policy institutionalised to ensure that the prescribed benchmarks are attained?

Research Question 2: What measures are Zambian universities taking to maintain and improve the provision of ODL programmes?

Research Question 3: How do universities offering ODL programmes ensure that their students contribute to the development of the university QA system?

Research Question 4: What lessons can Zambia learn from countries that are perceived to have robust university QA practices for ODL?

8.2 Main findings

The main findings are presented in two specific sub-sections, the policy perspective and the university perspective, under which the main findings of the study are synthesised in relation to the research questions.

8.2.1 Policy perspective

Research Question 1 was on the policy measures of QA for Zambian universities offering ODL programmes, and how the policy was institutionalised to ensure that the prescribed benchmarks were attained. Before answering this question, it was clear from the outset that Zambia had put in place a policy for higher education that was enacted in 2013.

The evidence showed that, as part of policy measures for QA to the higher education sector, the Government decided to increase funding to universities. The interviews revealed that although this was a positive commitment on its part, the disbursement took a long time to reach the recipient institutions. Without money to procure the necessary teaching and learning materials in higher education institutions, QA is a pipedream for conventional education that expects to benefit directly from Government grants. In this instance, ODL programmes were an indirect beneficiary at public institutions in Zambia that operated dual modes. The findings indicated that the same funds were not enough, meaning that quality of educational processes was affected. On the other hand, private universities were expected to generate their own funds to provide quality in their ODL programmes. This stance by the Zambian Government seems to be related to Enders and Westerheijden's report that the Dutch government did not fund private higher education institutions to improve their quality (Enders & Westerheijden, 2014).

The findings of the study showed that the MoHE appreciated that one of the necessary conditions for quality provision of higher education was good infrastructure and capacity building among academic staff who delivered the services. For these reasons, the Ministry collaborated with other multilateral organisations to upgrade the infrastructure and qualifications of academic staff in state-owned higher education institutions. Moreover, the training of academic staff confirms the human capital theory by justifying the huge expenditure on education and training (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008) as well as Pulist (2017), who believes in training and development of academic staff in an organisation to benefit from the new acquired knowledge of staff. These findings also confirm the conceptual framework of this study that partly emphasises the infrastructure and quality of the academic staff. In private universities, academic staff is not considered for training that is spearheaded by the MoHE in Zambia, but in a way these institutions

benefited the lecturers from state-owned universities as, in most cases, they were contracted to offer the services.

Policy measures for QA as inputs have a direct bearing on the quality of ODL graduates produced by the universities targeted by this study. The findings of this study therefore suggest that the long absence of policy to regulate and monitor higher education has contributed to a massification of universities that do not appreciate quality. In this case, a strong, rigorous policy to assure quality is the best solution to regulating all providers of ODL. The findings indicate that not all stakeholders were involved in policy formulation; since the policy on higher education was new, the MoHE should have come up with a dissemination plan to explain its aims and objectives to all stakeholders, including universities. This would have made it easier for universities to institutionalise the Higher Education Policy number 4 of 2013. Surprisingly, this was not the case in Zambia, and some participants claimed ignorance of the Act. In contrast, there was a feeling of camaraderie with other participants, particularly those from Universities A and B. This is a sign that these participants welcomed the introduction of such a policy.

The above findings that relate to policy measures on the QA of higher education are premised on the open systems approach in the conceptual framework and does not fully represent a dedicated QA system that could help to improve QA processes for ODL at an institutional level, notwithstanding the few strides that the MoHE is trying to take to improve the higher education sector (ODL).

The study reveals that, despite the Higher Education Act having been passed in 2013, the HEA started its operations only in early 2016. This delay could have affected the ability of the QA agency to commence its work in good time, as envisaged by the Act. The HEA did not have a framework for either conventional learning or ODL, and instead the preliminary benchmarks were employed as tools for registration and monitoring of universities. The general framework was still in draft form for all modes of higher education delivery. It was found that the HEA should stress the importance of addressing the specific requirements of ODL in the effective quality provision of programmes, including good infrastructure, pedagogical skills, learner support and study materials. Therefore, it was naïve of the HEA to rely on the general QA framework in QA for ODL; there was a need to draw a clear distinction between ODL and conventional education if the quality standards of ODL were to be maintained and improved in Zambia.

While it is good to see the establishment of the HEA, the sustainability of its functions is another important aspect for consideration. The findings show that the HEA does not receive adequate funding, and this has posed a challenge to fulfilling its mandate from the beginning. In addition, the HEA is understaffed to undertake its various enormous tasks. Effective QA monitoring

demands adequate staff, especially considering that the number of universities and programmes is expected to increase. Furthermore, it was found that, although the funding of the HEA from the MoHE was consistent, it was expected that the QA agency would require additional amounts to monitor and regulate the quality standards of programmes in universities that offer ODL. In other words, having consistent national QA systems for the HEA demands a steady flow of income, as low funding or cuts to the funding may compromise the quality of ODL in higher education institutions. For instance, the HEA is likely to conduct a number of activities that include physical inspections of university campuses, and that will require financial resources. Worldwide, successful QA agencies are well funded by their governments from their central treasuries to supplement what the agencies generate through university subscriptions, affiliations and accreditation fees, which in most cases is inadequate (Materu, 2007). If funding continues to be a problem for the HEA, it will be difficult for it to justify its existence.

The findings suggest that the HEA has adopted a compliance approach to QA provision. It means that higher education institutions are not given much leverage to do things other than to meet what is prescribed as a benchmark. Although this approach is ideal for a new system of QA in Zambia, the researcher feels that it limits innovation by universities to provide quality ODL. The researcher believes in a bottom-up approach that permits universities to decide quality measures at a local level rather than to have this dictated by the quality assurance agency (Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007). In other words, bottom-up approaches must accompany top-down approaches to function as a common entity in QA provision, from policy to the institutional level.

The study demonstrates the need for EQA systems. For example, in a way robustness in national EQA mechanisms and the entire audit process necessitate internal quality systems at each university that offers programmes through ODL. EQA mechanisms could be successful if qualified, competent and experienced members of staff are recruited to spearhead the process. These findings on the QA approach in Zambia are consistent with Materu's (2007) and Kisanga and Machumu's (2014) studies that found that many African countries have realised the importance of rigorous national QA mechanisms for their higher education systems. It should be noted that EQA is relevant if it complements internal quality assurance processes to realise continuous improvement in the delivery of programmes through ODL. It is therefore, feasible that the steps that the HEA has taken may provide users of ODL with a guarantee that the institutions, programmes and graduates meet the prescribed standards.

8.2.2 University perspective

The second research question was on the measures that Zambian universities have taken to maintain and improve the provision of ODL programmes. From the beginning of this study, the researcher was aware that universities that offered programmes through ODL in Zambia were at least doing something to assure their quality. However, the details of institutional QA systems available were unknown. The study indicated that external influence, such as the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, has a bearing on the institutional QA systems. All the universities in Zambia are expected to institutionalise the Act by meeting the prescribed QA benchmarks. As indicated in the previous section, the HEA has a mandate to raise the quality standards in the provision of programmes through ODL.

The study revealed that the leadership of the three universities that were targeted, in a way, appreciated QA. For instance, Universities A and B had decided to establish QA directorates to spearhead their internal quality systems. These developments had taken place before the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013. University C had not yet established a QA unit, yet participants expressed a desire to have a unit for QA. Generally, there was a positive perception among the three universities for a need to improve the quality delivery of ODL programmes. The leadership of these universities was working on transforming the minds of all those involved in the delivery of ODL programmes. The idea was to develop a quality culture whereby everyone owns the process of change and is a part of it. Furthermore, in the researcher's view it is the responsibility of university leadership to help to sustain quality provision of ODL programmes effectively by engaging all those responsible for various activities at institutional level.

In addition, the quantitative findings suggest that ODL students likewise appreciate the commitment of the leaders of the Universities A and B to improve the quality provision of their programmes. Leaders of these two universities believe that QA systems are contextually driven and that specific challenges can be addressed at an institutional level. These findings are consistent with Mullins (2007), in that leadership is a matter of making a difference; it entails changing an organisation to make appropriate choices from the alternatives and use others to develop and to get the work done. The conceptual framework of this study also shows the importance of leadership in QA of ODL, as one of the necessary elements in internal quality assurance mechanisms.

The findings indicate that Universities A and B provide some form of in-house training for their academic staff in the form of CPD to improve teaching and module-writing skills. It was also found that University C did not do much by way of providing training to academic staff, apart from one orientation workshop conducted to instruct academic members on their specific roles in a new

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university set-up. Related to this, all three universities attach importance to study materials, although most academics who teach ODL at these institutions are not trained in this mode. Conversely, attention is paid to the development of ODL study materials. Study materials are critical to the delivery of ODL, because the country is constrained by scarce educational resources such as ICT that might enable students to research widely to supplement the materials produced by academic staff.

Teaching and learning are one of the core processes of the universities. Therefore, regarding these processes, the three universities were reported to have put in place various activities to support the teaching and learning of their ODL students but, due to a lack of necessary infrastructure and facilities, as explained earlier in this chapter, teaching and learning are not conducted as required. For instance, it is difficult to conduct practical lessons in the absence of the science laboratories. Despite all the impediments, the commitment of lecturers to their duty was reported to be fair. ODL students enjoy learning in an environment that is supportive of their learning. Interestingly, at Universities A, B and C, students indicated their satisfaction with teaching and learning, feedback, time with their lecturers, tutorials and assessments. However, the study found that the three universities lack co-ordinated learner support systems for ODL students. On the one hand, Jung and Latchem (2007) state that successful ODL programmes pay attention to student support services, especially as the learners are on their own most of the time.

Universities A, B and C were reported to have shortages of qualified academic staff. The lecturer–student ratios are too low to pay quality attention to all ODL students. These universities depend on lecturers who are qualified to teach students in a conventional mode. Most of these lecturers and tutors lack the necessary pedagogical skills to deliver ODL programmes. For instance, University B does not have the required number of lecturers and tutors; it relies on part-time and hired staff from public institutions. Some of the part-time lecturers have much work from the public universities where they teach, and this impacts on their ability to perform. On a similar note, the study revealed that Universities A, B and C do not do much in terms of capacity building for academic higher qualifications for staff. Most of the academic staff are Master’s degree holders, and only a few are at PhD level. Although this is not a requirement for lecturers in Zambia, having academic staff with higher qualifications certainly helps to raise the profile of universities, together with that of their academic publications.

Funding to higher education institutions is important for them to provide quality education. Universities A and C are not receiving funds on time from the government, despite the increase in funding reported in Chapter 5. This has affected these institutions’ acquisition and maintenance

of the required quality standards. The operational costs of a university are high, and this makes it difficult to maintain and improve infrastructure and facilities such as classrooms, computer and science laboratories, as well as internet connectivity. Funding as an external policy measure for QA helps higher education institutions to run smoothly. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, private institutions that offer ODL programmes benefit from conventional education through infrastructure and other facilities in state-owned institutions that have dual modes.

The universities in this study are still striving to establish strong internal quality systems to co-ordinate all QA activities across the institutions. Universities A and B are still working on their internal QA policies that will give rise to their internal QA frameworks (tools). Without these essential tools, co-ordination of QA activities is difficult because there are no guidelines to follow. All the departments in the schools of education have their own systems for undertaking academic activities. The IQA systems at University C were reported to be in the early stages, and little development had taken place in this regard. The institution was expected to accelerate the pace in developing IQA systems upon being afforded the status of a fully transformed university.

The third research question focused on how universities offering ODL programmes ensure that their students contribute to the development of their QA system. The researcher was aware of the importance of stakeholders in the quality provision of ODL. This study set out to bring out this engagement, with a specific focus on students. The findings indicated that Universities A and B acknowledge that stakeholders are essential partners in ensuring that QA activities are put in place for programmes in ODL. The two universities embrace and work together with their stakeholders in different areas, which include having meetings with them at senate level and during programme design. These findings are consistent with those of Jung and Latchem (2007), in that universities have been exchanging ideas with employers on the skills and knowledge that graduates should acquire. Equally, University C confirmed that it has been working with some of the stakeholders, but not with full engagement.

Additionally, the findings suggest that the three universities engaged ODL student as stakeholders in the provision of quality for their ODL programmes. Students are given opportunities to participate in quality activities through various avenues that include student unions and filling out questionnaires. Through such engagement, students can make suggestions and give their ideas on how certain practices could be improved. From these revelations, it seems that universities understand the various roles of stakeholders in QA and that their stake is contextual. These findings are broadly in line with stakeholder theory, which partly underpins the current study, as illustrated in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The theory emphasises participation of all those who have an interest or stake in higher education or any formal organisation (Freeman,

2010). Therefore, there is a need to identify the important stakeholders in the quality provision of ODL through stakeholder analysis to secure them, as well as the specific level of attention that they need in the QA process. This study has demonstrated that QA is a joint venture between higher learning institutions and their stakeholders. These stakeholders have their own needs and ideas of quality.

The fourth research question was on the lessons that Zambia could learn from countries perceived to have robust and successful university QA practices for ODL. This study revealed that there were significant lessons from developed countries with strong QA systems on which Zambia could draw. This is in line with benchmarking and networking and works on the basis of learning from others what makes them the best, or among the leaders, in higher education provision of ODL. It should also be noted that there is no single accepted criterion of quality provision of ODL programmes, as this depends on the quality agencies and the institutions involved to benchmark with other institutions (Jung & Latchem, 2007)

All three universities in this study are concerned about the availability of skilled personnel to teach students by ODL, as is the practice in countries and universities with strong policies in recruiting and training their academic staff. The conceptual framework of this study also emphasises the importance of training and recruitment of academic staff to deliver the services in ODL. Universities A and C expressed concern that there was a need for specialisation for both ODL and conventional academic staff, as a dual mode of teaching and learning results represents overload. Lecturers should be given enough time to provide the necessary feedback to ODL students; when they are overloaded, feedback becomes poor.

Universities with strong QA systems have invested in various technologies that help in exchanging notes with students over the internet. Lecturers and tutors are able to upload their feedback, assignments and comments as requested by learners. In other words, the universities in this study lack strong student support in terms of offering immediate, spontaneous feedback to their ODL students by means such as the internet, especially when opportunities for face-to-face contact are few and far between. ODL higher education is becoming complex and taking on different forms, for instance some universities in advanced countries are moving away from typical ODL to blended learning.

Some participants indicated that students and other stakeholders were given a chance to participate fully in ensuring that students are given the best experience. This element required reinforcement to improve on the delivery of ODL in the three universities (A, B and C). These findings link to the conceptual framework that emphasises benchmarking as one of the criteria for

good QA practice in ODL. This aspect was reported to be missing, as the practice did not come out strongly in participant comments.

The study provides evidence that it is not easy to define quality and attempts to do so demand that more emerging questions should be answered. Quality in ODL has different meanings for governments, institutions, employers, academic members and students. In this study, the focus was on the available QA measures for ODL and local institutional QA practices, which includes areas such as institutional leadership to spearhead quality, learner support, curriculum, courses, pedagogy, student feedback and their completion of studies to match labour market demands. By the same score, the study has highlighted that QA is contextual, from one country to another. The study did not specifically deal with quality pedagogy, as one of the objectives was to generally prove that ODL has specific unique qualities in its own right; therefore separate QA frameworks must be employed at national and institutional level, as indicated in Chapter 1 and in the conceptual framework of the study that, in a way, represents the benchmarks for an ideal situation in the quality provision of ODL. Pedagogy in ODL could be defined as a framework of learning collaborations between teachers and their fellow academics, teachers and students, students and their fellow colleagues and students and society to aspire for a deeper insight of the core learning objectives through Information Communication Technology (ICT) (Ramdass and Masithulela, 2016). However, the term 'open' in Open and Distance Learning is a desired characteristic as 'open learning' implies open to everyone but what is cardinal is that the term hides in pedagogy, to mean open learning environments.

The overall findings of this study suggest that EQA lacks the necessary tools to regulate and monitor higher education institutions that offer ODL programmes in Zambia. The IQA systems in all three universities were also in their developmental stages, and a more realistic picture will be seen once the higher education institutions begin to institutionalise the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013. These universities show a certain level of commitment, as evidenced by some of the quality activities that are in place. However, they lack the co-ordination that would help to improve the quality provision of ODL.

The main findings point to the implications of the study in the next section.

8.3 Implications

As already mentioned, this study has helped to extend our knowledge of QA practice in the provision of programmes through ODL in three universities (A, B and C) and the measures (inputs) from a policy point of view. This section presents the study's implications and recommendations for policy and higher education institutions. However, the most significant implication of the

study is that there is considerable potential to develop quality ODL programmes in Zambia. If fully exploited, this could provide much-needed access to quality higher education in the country. High-quality programmes in ODL are capable of producing graduates who can perform well in various spheres of life and contribute to the economic development of the country. This would reveal the degree of success of the institutions that contribute to graduates' preparation for real life or job markets.

8.3.1 Implications for policy

The findings of this study have implications for regulating and monitoring quality programmes under ODL in institutions of higher learning. The findings suggest that there is a need to narrow the gap between the ODL QA framework and what is expected of all higher education institutions that offer ODL programmes. The actual QA practices in the three targeted universities fail to meet the expected quality standards of programmes taught under ODL. The starting point, from a policy point of view, is to review the challenges that private and state-owned universities face to make an impact on the quality provision of programmes through ODL. The other specific implications from policy (part of EQA) to help universities' quality provision are discussed later in this sub-section.

This study has shown that a certain level of consultation took place during the formulation of the higher education policy and the general QA framework for the HEA. However, some stakeholders alleged that they were left out of the two processes. There is a need for the MoHE as policymaker and the HEA as enforcer to consult stakeholders effectively. Stakeholder input is vital in building strong QA mechanisms at a national level, and this could be done in many ways, such as by conducting workshops, seminars and visits to universities. At the same time, the inclusion of stakeholders in such processes could help to reduce tensions and resentment among all parties interested in ODL.

There is a need to improve the strategic management of Universities A and C through a rigorous process of developing people with good leadership and professional competence. One of the strategic ideas is restructuring the universities to be more responsive to the needs of students, members of the community and other stakeholders. The poor funding to higher education reported in this study has many negative consequences insofar as QA of ODL is concerned. Therefore, adequate budgetary and resource provisions are necessary to increase the working capital of state-owned universities that offer ODL programmes. The aim is to stimulate competition among universities through performance-based funding. In most countries, public

funding is tied to institutional and programme performance. Funding is likely to encourage QA innovation, which has not been the case for a long time in Zambia.

Although there are plans to improve the infrastructure capacity of state-owned institutions, the pace is slow. It would be opportune to carry out rehabilitation and upgrading of infrastructure and facilities to support intensive learning by students during ODL residential schools, as well as to increase face-to-face interaction between students and lecturers. At this level, benchmarking against other organisations within the region and at an international level on how to develop QA frameworks is one of the best options. This approach enhances the quality of ODL programmes in the country and strengthens partnerships with both state and private institutions.

The HEA should provide the necessary information on all universities that offer ODL programmes to the public so that they can make the correct choice of institution. For example, the agency published the names of the private universities that met the preliminary benchmarks for registration. In a way, the process of registration and accreditation are the only means to deter higher education institutions that would prefer to operate illegally. However, it is important to take care to minimise some of the unintended consequences likely to affect the autonomy of the universities involved. This exercise did not involve state-owned universities, apart from programme accreditation and other QA processes.

QA should not be performed selectively to achieve its main objectives. It is possible that some state-owned universities require considerable attention to improve the quality of the delivery of programmes through ODL. There is a need to develop a workable, relevant, contextual regulatory framework, transparent to all stakeholders, to promote the successes of ODL. This would enable higher education institutions to design innovative QA ideas that benefit the students and the country at large. At a policy level, collaboration is vital to the development of a robust QA framework and helps to improve the public image of ODL programmes.

8.3.2 Implications for universities with ODL mode

According to this study, the three targeted universities have practical elements of QA in the provision of their programmes through ODL. The activities that they have put in place require co-ordination and a strong quality culture among everyone involved in these processes. It is a reasonable belief that, with high-quality programmes in ODL, graduates will perform well in the education sector.

The findings revealed that Universities A, B and C do not have qualified lecturers to deliver the services in ODL. This situation makes it difficult to offer higher programmes that need academic

staff with necessary knowledge and skills for ODL and to supervise student projects. Universities should deliberately put in place staff development (SD) and training policies for academic staff for future expansion of their programmes. Such a move would give universities an edge over their competitors, as potential students are interested in the profiles of the lecturers who match their interests; a good lecturer profile at a university acts as a marketing tool to attract huge numbers of potential students.

The study shows that all three universities in this study have weak internal quality systems and that this makes it difficult for meaningful quality activities to be in place. Since the HEA has adopted a compliance approach for universities, it will be difficult for the three universities in this study to institutionalise and operationalise the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013. Internal quality processes are underway at these institutions, but the rate at which they are moving could be increased. If this were done, rising from one level to the other would not be such a problem. Evidence from the literature review of this study states that increased acceptance of ODL in widening access to higher education in both developed and developing countries demands that QA processes are developed and maintained if ODL provision is to be relevant and more functional.

The study also reveals that ODL students are given opportunities to participate in quality provision of their programmes in their respective universities. This is a good indication of student engagement, yet there is a need for more, with clearly defined student engagement in the quality provisions of their education. Universities are expected to provide ODL students with permanent platforms for them to make meaningful contributions to the quality academic experiences, for example creating student surveys like those found in UK universities, such as the University of Southampton and Sussex University. In each case, students are given opportunities to express themselves anonymously. Moreover, universities should be ready to be held accountable by their stakeholders, and the inclusion of students is just one way. These findings confirm the argument for stakeholder engagement in the QA of education, as this helps to check constantly and to maintain standards (Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014).

The three universities in this study should devise IQA policies and strategies for ODL. QA demands that universities should be ready to prove to their external auditors the robustness of their IQA systems. There is also a need for universities in Zambia to re-strategise QA systems that would help in the delivery of ODL, based on the available resources and the contexts in which they operate. Although the study focused on these three universities, the implications should be taken to extend to the whole range of higher education institutions with the same or similar characteristics as these in Zambia.

8.4 Limitations of the study

There are lessons that can be drawn from the limitations of this study, as well as its findings. The study attempted to offer a contextual evaluation of QA practice of ODL. The study was conducted in both rural and urban areas of Zambia, and a number of limitations emerged.

The findings of this study are limited by the sampling of just three universities: two state-owned and one private. Including another private university in the sample may have given a broader and more balanced picture of institutional QA practice for ODL in Zambia.

The use of ODL students to obtain data may have been overstated or understated, because each student has different expectations and perceptions of their programme and this could raise some bias in interpretations of the findings. Furthermore, the study managed to engage only 300 ODL students of the 378 who were targeted. The extra numbers could have provided more information, although it would be unlikely that the extra would cause the findings to drift far from those obtained. Moreover, the study did not conduct interviews with the ODL students. It is possible that face-face interviews may have brought out more detailed information on quality provision of ODL in their respective institutions to enhance the robustness of the findings.

Observation could have been included as another method of data collection. This may have complemented the findings for comparability and confirmation of information from different methods to examine the QA practice of ODL. Similarly, the study may have benefited greatly if qualitative in-depth interviews had been conducted with the 12 HODs, rather than relying on the questionnaires that were administered. By their nature, a survey tends to restrict the gathering of the views and perceptions of participants.

The conceptual framework has highlighted curriculum design, student selection and registration as some of the important indicators of QA for ODL. However, these three indicators did not come out very strongly in data collection instruments to ascertain how Universities A, B and C value these indicators. The researcher therefore feels that this should be addressed in detail and recommends future studies to address these areas.

The lack of prior scholarly studies on QA at tertiary level in the Zambian context made it difficult for the researcher to find literature with a strong local educational context. A stronger background would have been presented if more information on QA in Zambia had been available.

It was not easy to collect data on ODL, as ODL students are not found in any single place. At the time of the data collection, ODL students had not yet assembled for their residential schools,

apart from those at University C. A good number of these students did not return their questionnaires, and some who returned them failed to complete them fully.

Finally, at the time of data collection, the HEA was in the initial stages of operation and the structure was in the process of establishment. The institution had limited capacity to undertake its various tasks, combined with scant experience of the QA process. This means that the findings are based on preliminary QA work. In other words, the evaluation on policy measures for QA in Zambia was undertaken early, before implementation of the policy. Some participants did not understand QA, including those at the universities.

The limitations of the study give rise to recommendation for further research.

8.5 Recommendations for further research

The debate on the QA of programmes through ODL is slowly gaining momentum among stakeholders in Zambia. There is a need for a concerted effort by all those involved in the provision of higher education to maintain and improve this sector. More research should be conducted within the local context, as this will allow for the further evaluation and assessment of QA at higher education level. Exploring the following areas as future research studies could help to address the issues that ODL faces in Zambia.

First, it would be interesting to conduct research that involves at least two private universities and two public universities to understand in depth the practice and challenges of QA in ODL. This may give a more balanced view of what exactly the universities are doing to assure the quality of ODL in Zambia.

Secondly, as earlier observed, the findings of this study show that the HEA is still new, and not much work has yet been done to make strong claims on its performance. The organisation has not yet completed the process of designing QA tools for ODL. Therefore, once the necessary programmes and tools are in place, studies on their performance may determine their successes and challenges.

Thirdly, with the QA framework for ODL in place, one avenue for further research would be universities' compliance with policy on QA and its institutionalisation, and other benchmarks for both conventional and ODL education. How these universities respond would be a matter of interest in higher education.

Fourthly, the other area of research interest relates to the QA benefits of the MoHE's decision to allow the older, state-owned universities to take over the management and operations of the

newly transformed state-owned universities. The rationale behind such a move is of interest, particularly as the older ones are experiencing internal QA problems that have remained unresolved for a long time, so the quality of their programmes remains questionable.

Lastly, it would be interesting to investigate whether this study's conceptual framework could be used as a guide to formulating national QA standards for ODL and institutional quality systems for ODL.

8.6 Contribution to body of knowledge

The findings, discussion and conclusion of this study were based on the Zambian context to contribute to the body of knowledge with regard to QA policy measures for ODL at national level, and to regulate and monitor ODL provision in higher education institutions and institutional QA mechanisms. The findings propose the best practice in the QA of ODL, particularly for countries and universities with a similar context to Zambia and the target institutions. The massification of ODL that has culminated in increased numbers of universities is justification enough to investigate Zambia's policy quality measures and institutional QA systems to regulate, monitor, maintain and improve the QA provisions of ODL.

As indicated in Chapter 1, this study's contribution to knowledge is twofold: practical and theoretical. In terms of its practical contribution, it provides a conceptual framework that proposes good practices/indicators of QA for ODL that are applicable to developing countries constrained in terms of educational resources or with similar contexts to the three targeted universities. Consequently, the study justifies the need to recognise and appreciate that ODL has specific, exceptional areas that must be considered when using the same QA framework as conventional education.

In terms of its theoretical contribution, the study raises awareness of the importance of stakeholder engagement in the QA provisions of ODL at both national and institutional level. Moreover, institutional QA systems for ODL should be supported by both external and internal policies that are embraced by all parties involved in higher education. This could be achieved through consensus in meetings of stakeholders and sharing of information in seminars and workshops, where policy issues are discussed. Moreover, the study helps to understand the challenges that make quality provision of ODL difficult and provides information that could be useful to the HEA, developing tools for regulating and monitoring quality in all higher education institutions in Zambia. As already mentioned in the literature review, the challenges for ODL include the absence of institutional QA policies, the lack of trained ODL experts and the absence or rundown nature of the infrastructure.

Further, the study has established that there is a need to embrace QA practices in the provision of programmes through ODL to contribute significantly to strengthening the capacity of universities to deliver quality services as prescribed by the HEA and internal quality systems at institutional level. The study indicates that policymakers and the three Universities A, B and C recognise the urgent need to scale up QA activities in the delivery of ODL programmes. QA is not incidental, and it demands teamwork from everyone involved in the process of establishing a quality culture. Conversely, the study contributes to the body of knowledge by the likely stimulation of other researchers' interest to conduct further research on QA national policy measures and its institutional practice.

8.7 Conceptual framework after the research findings

The conceptual framework of the study has evolved with the research findings. Significant changes in the framework include the addition of two further parts: 'University utilisation of resources for QA and institutional practice to achieve the goals and objectives' and 'Other expected outcomes' as shown in Figure 8-1 below.

Regarding university utilisation of resources for QA and institutional practice to achieve the goals and objectives, the findings indicate the need for establishment of a QA unit to co-ordinate quality activities and prudently utilise university resources. It means, therefore, that internal QA practices of universities offering ODL are expected to be effective to improve the educational processes, research and community outreach. A university should have supportive QA units that value quality provision of its programmes, as well as translating national policies for easy implementation. This requires a robust internal mechanism, with competent leadership and staff to execute their functions. As mentioned in the earlier sections, there is need for QA ownership by all those involved in the process at local level. Therefore, universities are expected to put in place QA training programmes through well-co-ordinated training workshops and Continuous Professional Developments (CPDs) for all academics and support staff to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills. Evidence from the findings indicates commitment of leadership to quality provision of ODL in the three targeted universities, as shown in sub-section 6.2.1.

The study has shown that there are several outcomes from such QA processes apart from those in the initial conceptual framework. The study has also indicated a need for well-designed ODL programmes and effective moderation and marking procedures to ensure that assessments marks or grades are fair, valid and reliable and applied consistently to address judgements between individual examiners. The literature reviewed describes the marking procedure at the OUUK, which is a rigorous process and involves feedback to learners (Wancai, 2009). On the same score,

moderation also helps in giving feedback to the lecturers and links to prescribed quality standards. In a similar way, the findings equally indicate that University B has put in place certain practical measures to ensure that this process is conducted smoothly.

8.7.1 Comparative analysis of Universities A, B and C using the study's conceptual framework

This sub-section presents a comparative analysis for Universities A, B and C in relation to the conceptual framework in Figure 8-1. Some of elements in the framework help to guide the flow of the presentation.

8.7.1.1 External QA systems

Universities A, B and C are still in the process of establishing robust external QA systems. It is true that there are some QA activities that go on in these institutions although they lack co-ordination at institutional level. However, with the establishment of the HEA through the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013, these universities are compelled to put in place external QA systems such as accreditations, quality audits and peer reviews. With regard to benchmarking, University A was reported to have been practicing this as indicated as already mentioned in the findings, while at University B, benchmarking takes place but not on a large scale. There was no benchmarking that was reported as taking place at University C. The absence of external QA systems at university level could partly be attributed to weak internal QA mechanisms. With this background, universities should be given time to put in place all the necessary requirements that include among other 'rigours internal QA systems' that will operate in tandem with the external QA systems.

8.7.1.2 Stakeholders expectations

Quality provision demands that there is negotiation between academic institutions and their stakeholders. In this process of negotiation, each stakeholder needs to formulate clear and explicit requirements. The Ministry of Higher Education provides policies and policy guidelines for all the higher education institutions to follow. In this case, all the three universities are aware of the new policy but have not fully institutionalised it. For instance, University C is aware of the Higher Education Act number 4 of 2013 but still struggling to implement everything that the policy provides due to lack of sensitisation by the policy makers. Universities A, B and C have not fully engaged with the employers of their graduates to ensure that they meet labour market demands. However, during the initial stages of developing internal QA mechanisms, University A made some consultations with various stakeholders who included students, and the HEA. University B equally

consulted the Zambia Police Service in designing a degree programme for the police. Opinion leaders have a stake in public institutions such as Universities A and C. For example, Members of Parliament, Permanent Secretaries and Directors in the Ministry of Higher Education are appointed to represent government as members of the University Senate. The interrelations between higher education institutions and other social institutions is there in all the three universities and members of the society do make comments and offer their opinions to the institutions on various matters.

8.7.1.3 Indicators of QA for ODL at university level

Indicators of QA for ODL at institutional level act as drivers for internal QA mechanisms. These indicators must be present to ensure that there is quality in the provision of programmes through ODL.

Leadership and their commitment are important for successful implementation of QA at institutional level. In terms of leadership, in Universities A, B and C, the results have indicated that leaders in these institutions have shown interest in provision of ODL. To this effect, Universities A and B have established internal QA units to co-ordinate all the QA activities in their respective universities as evidenced in sub-section 6.2.1. Moreover, these units are still in their early stages to create a positive impact in quality of ODL programmes. However, University C operates without a QA unit. A QA unit is a critical component in the provision of quality programmes and helps to link with the external QA systems.

In summary, Universities A, B and C have not completely moved away from what the researcher calls 'traditional practices of offering ODL'. It is true that there is something that these universities have put in place regarding QA, but most of these activities are uncoordinated. These activities include; design of learning programmes, admission and recruitment, QA monitoring, student engagement and utilisation of resources for QA. The activities take place in schools and at departmental levels and the QA practice is different from one department to the other. In a way, these activities are critical and help universities to meet their core functions such as educational processes, research and community outreach to realise various outputs as shown in Figure 8-1. Based on the conceptual framework, there is a clear pattern that these universities have realised the importance of QA provision of ODL programmes but require some form of guidance from QA experts.

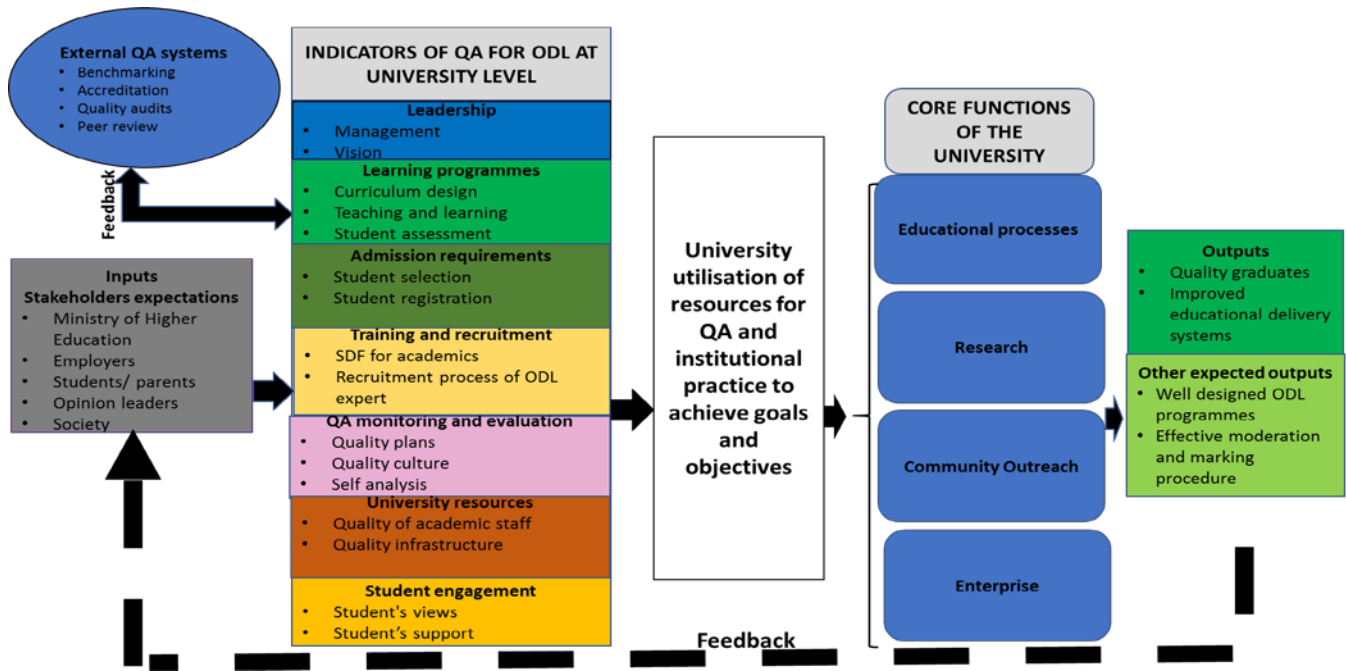


Figure 8-1: Conceptual framework for QA of ODL at university level

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Appendix A: Interview Guide for Policymakers at Ministry of Higher Education

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Director, Higher Education Authority

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Dean, School of Education, University Level

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Director, ODL, at University Level

Appendix E: Interview Guide for Quality Assurance Co-ordinator at University Level

Appendix F: Interview Guide for Quality Assurance Expert

Appendix G: Interview Guide for ODL Expert

Appendix H: Questionnaire for HODs in the School of Education

Appendix I: Questionnaire for ODL Students in the School of Education.

Appendix J: Ethical Approval

Appendix K: Pilot Study

Appendix L: Transcribed interview and the process of coding and thematising

Appendix M: Determining sample size for research

Appendix N: Letter of Authorisation for Fieldwork

Appendix A Interview Guide for Policymakers at Ministry of Higher Education

1. What do you understand by term quality? Do you think that all universities in Zambia should assure quality in their ODL provision?
2. Why has it taken so long for the Ministry of Higher Education to come up with higher education QA policies to monitor and regulate the quality provision of university education in both public and private sectors?
3. Do you think that the Higher Education Authority (HEA) receives sufficient support from you as government to successfully carry out their functions as stipulated in the Higher Education Act of 2013? If any what kind of support do, you offer them apart from funding?
4. How would you describe the process of policy formulation of the Higher Education Act in terms of inclusiveness and wide participation of various stakeholders in higher education including universities?
5. Would you say that the QA of ODL should be the same as that of conventional mode? What is the Ministry's stance in regard to quality provision of ODL by the universities other than what is contained in the Act?
6. What are the successes that you would point at vis-à-vis QA of higher education from the time the HEA was constituted? Are there any challenges that you have encountered or envisage in the process of ensuring that all universities offering ODL are committed to the laws that govern quality?
7. To what extent do you believe that with the Higher Education Act in place now, ODL higher education providers will give value for money to their customers?
8. Are there programmes within the country, regional or international where the Ministry and local universities are seen to work together to provide quality ODL to the Zambian citizens?

Appendix A

9. What plans have you put in place to fund universities that are offering ODL as one way of ensuring sustainability and continuous improvement in quality teaching and learning?
ODL in most of the public universities are using all the resources meant for regular students, which include infrastructure. Do you have any plans to develop such infrastructure?
10. Do you think that Zambian universities offering ODL will be able to compete with other well-established universities from the developed countries with good QA practices such as the UK?

Appendix B Interview Guide for Director, Higher Education Authority

1. To what extent do you believe in the following concepts of quality?
 - a. Quality as value for money
 - b. Quality as fitness for purpose
 - c. Quality as excellence
 - d. Quality as perfection
 - e. Quality as transformation

2. The Higher Education Act of 2013 mandates you to regulate and monitor QA in the provision of higher education in Zambia. What practical means has your organisation put in place to monitor and regulate QA in the universities that are offering ODL? How would you describe the process of designing QA framework(s) for ODL in terms of consensus among the stakeholders?

3. What are some of the positives results that you have scored so far from the time you started operating as HEA? What challenges are you facing if any in ensuring that universities offer quality ODL?

4. Do you have a consolidated list of universities that are offering ODL in Zambia? Have the institutions question met the required benchmarks that you have set for them?

5. Is HEA demanding that universities offering ODL must comply or commit themselves to the provisions of the Act? Would you say that this Act has been welcomed by all the sector players in education?

6. Are there programmes that HEA has put up to sensitise the current universities on the importance of QA and what they should do first in this process? Is there leverage given to universities that would like to do things different, which are not necessary, the same with your demands in terms of QA?

7. There are a number of QA agencies at regional, continental and international levels, which have recorded positive strides in Quality Assurance. As an organisation in charge of

Appendix B

quality provision of higher education, which agencies have you benchmarked or currently working with to improve the delivery of ODL in universities?

8. From your experience in QA matters, which approach is more feasible and practical between autonomy of the universities to assure quality ODL and accountability?
9. Quality Assurance is an expensive venture to undertake and require substantial amount of money. Is HEA sufficiently funded to undertake its functions? If the answer is no, then how do you meet the costs of operations?
10. Do you believe in student engagement in QA provision? How do you hope as an organisation to ensure that students' views are taken on board by all the universities in their ODL provision?
11. How do you find the quality culture and leadership styles in most of the universities in Zambia to stare quality of ODL in the positive direction?
12. Do you have any final remarks or points that you would like to make as we wind up with this interview?

Appendix C Interview Guide for Dean, School of Education, at University Level

1. What do you understand by term quality? Do you think that all universities in Zambia should assure quality in their ODL provision?
2. How long has it taken you to establish your own internal QA Unit? Do think this is necessary or just another way of spending money?
3. How would you describe the quality of teaching and learning in the School of Education for ODL? Do you have lecturers in all the departments who are sufficiently qualified at PhD level to deliver the services?
4. What structures and processes have you put in place as School of Education to ensure that there is quality in the programmes that you offer through the Institute of Distance Education?
5. Would you say that the QA of ODL should be the same as that of conventional mode? Do you have officers or lecturers whose responsibility is to ensure quality at Departmental and School level?
6. Do you collaborate with other universities at region, continental and international level in matters of QA of ODL? What meetings are these and how often?
7. Have you welcomed the enactment of the Higher Education Act of 2013? Would you say you were comfortable with the previous arrangement of self- regulation with full autonomy to regulate yourselves than the current status quo? What sort of Benchmarks or indicators of QA for ODL were you using?
8. As School of Education, do you believe in student engagement in the quality provision of ODL? How do you ensure that you give excellent experience to students' in their academic life?

Appendix C

9. What would you cite as challenges in the quality provision of ODL at this university? Are there conditions necessary, but missing in the quality provision of ODL? State the most significant ones if any.
10. What major gaps are there between good practices in ODL QA in developed countries and what is obtaining in Zambia? Are there means of incorporating some of these good ideas in your system?

Appendix D Interview Guide for Director, ODL, at University Level

1. There are a number of models of delivery in ODL such as correspondence, multimedia, tele-learning, flexible learning, intelligent, and flexible learning. Which one (s) have you adopted from these? How many students do you have who are pursuing Bachelor's degrees with education?
2. Do you believe that the quality of ODL should just be as good as conventional mode or even better? What measures have you put in place to depict a positive perception of ODL among members of the public?
3. How does the University demonstrate that it is providing high-quality ODL?
4. What structure and processes are there between you as ODL and the QA Unit of the University?
5. Is there any collaboration between you and the education industries on the quality of your graduates as well as their expectations?
6. Do you subscribe to the new arrangement were the HEA has now been given powers to monitor and regulate quality provisions in the higher education sector? What do you think could have be done differently if that is the case?
7. External QA is one way of ensuring quality provision in ODL. Has the University been involved in external quality activities of offering ODL? For how long has this been happening?
8. Do you think that the HEA has/ will impact significantly in the manner in which your institution assures quality of ODL? Are there any conflicts between HEA and you as a University?
9. What would you cite as challenges in the quality provision of ODL at this University? Are there conditions necessary, but missing in the quality provision of ODL? State the most significant ones if any.

10. What major gaps are there between good practices in ODL QA in developed countries and what is obtaining in Zambia? Are there means of incorporating some of these good ideas in your system?
11. How would you describe the quality culture at your institution? Are the officers ready and willing to take up changes that go with QA systems at local level?

Appendix E Interview Guide for QA Co-ordinator at University Level

1. What is the composition and structure of your QA team? Would you highlight the processes that you have put in place to assure quality provision of Bachelor of Education/ Science degree programmes through ODL?
2. How long has it taken you to establish your own internal QA Unit? Do think this is necessary or just another way of spending money?
3. Universities in developed countries that are offering ODL have strong internal quality systems and conduct internal quality audits. Has this University been carrying out such audits?
4. Do you subscribe to the new arrangement were the HEA has now been given powers to monitor and regulate quality provisions in the higher education sector? What do you think could have be done differently if that is the case?
5. External QA is one way of ensuring quality provision in ODL. Has the University been involved in external quality activities of offering ODL? For how long has this been happening?
6. Did you have an input in the current Higher Education Act? Do you think that the HEA has/ will impact significantly in the manner in which your institution assures quality of ODL? Are there any conflicts between HEA and you as a University?
7. Do you allow participation of key stakeholders in your internal and external QA processes? Which stakeholders are these and what platforms do you avail them to channel their concerns on quality provision of ODL?
8. What would you cite as challenges in the quality provision of ODL at this University? Are there conditions necessary, but missing in the quality provision of ODL? State the most significant ones if any.

Appendix E

9. There is student representation in the senate, but this might not be enough to allow for student engagement in quality provision of ODL. What measures have you put in place to allow students' full engagement in quality ODL provision and good academic experience?
10. What major gaps are there between good practices in ODL QA in developed countries and Zambia? Are there means of incorporating some of these good ideas in your system?
11. How committed is the University leadership and everyone involved in QA to accept that their input is necessary to realise quality provision of ODL? Are there some internal programmes that you have conducted as a unit to explain the importance and roles of various officers in the quality crusade of ODL?

Appendix F Interview Guide for Quality Assurance Expert

1. To what extent do you believe in the following concepts of quality?
 - a. Quality as value for money
 - b. Quality as fitness for purpose
 - c. Quality as excellence
 - d. Quality as perfection
 - e. Quality as transformation
2. Why has it taken so long for the Ministry of Higher Education to come up with QA policies to help in regulating and monitoring of quality provision of programmes and service in universities?
3. Would you say that in the absence of the Higher Education Act, universities in Zambia have been doing well in the area of quality provision of programmes? Highlight some of the indicators of quality in the provision of ODL by the universities.
4. In specific terms, how would you rate the quality provision of ODL in universities that are offering Bachelor's degrees in education?
5. Do you think that the HEA will make significant changes to QA being practised by universities that are offering ODL?
6. What are some of the challenges HEA is likely to face in discharging its functions? Do we expect to see similar challenges on the part of the universities in due course?
7. There are a number of stakeholders with keen interests in quality provision of ODL. At which stage are they involved vis-à-vis national QA formulation and at university level? Is their input necessary in this regard?
8. From your experience in QA matters, which approach is more feasible and practical between autonomy of the universities to assure quality ODL and accountability? Quality Assurance is an expensive venture to undertake and require substantial amount of money

and commitment. Do universities have the capacity to invest in quality provision of ODL?
If the capacity is not there what is the way forward?

9. Do you believe in student engagement in QA provision? How can universities ensure that students contribute to quality provision of ODL judiciously? Are some of universities that have embraces the views of the students to provide quality?
10. Are there gaps between the QA provisions of ODL in Zambia with that of good practices in developed countries? How can these gaps be reduced if any?
11. Do you have any final remarks or points that you would like to make as we wind up with this interview?

Appendix G Interview Guide for ODL Expert

1. How would you describe the quality of Bachelor of Education degrees that are being offered in Zambia?
2. What values and principles underpin the quality provision of ODL in the university? Where do you place transformational leadership and quality culture?
3. Has government done much to regulate the quality provision of ODL in the country to protect the citizens from sub-standard type of education? With the new law on higher education, do you see some elements of government interference in the way the HEA are operating?
4. What do you think are the most significant challenges and constraints at national and institutional levels in enhancing ODL QA?
5. What factors have contributed to the high increase in the number of higher education providers in ODL? Would you say that private universities are narrowing the gap left by the public universities or simply for profit making?
6. How would you describe the infrastructure and qualifications of most of the lecturers and tutors in degree (education) granting universities, which are offering ODL? Do these institutions have enough support staff to deliver quality ODL?
7. How would you describe the level of satisfaction of members of the public with regard to the current performance of universities offering ODL?
8. Does Zambia have an Association(s) for ODL institutions whose responsibility is to bring together member institutions to share knowledge and collaborate with regional and international organisations for the advancement of ODL?
9. There are a number of models of delivery in ODL such as correspondence, multimedia, tele-learning, flexible learning, intelligent, and flexible learning. Which one (s) have you adopted from these? How many students do you have who are pursuing Bachelor's degrees in education?

10. Do you believe in student engagement in QA delivery of ODL? Suggest some of the practical ways of how ODL students' views can be taken on board?
11. Do you have any final remarks or points that you would like to make as we wind up with this interview? Appendix H: Questionnaire for HODs in the School of Education

Appendix H Questionnaire for HODs in School of Education

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

Faculty of Social, Human and Mathematical Sciences

Southampton Education School

Survey Questionnaire for HODs

**Research Title: An Examination of Quality Assurance Policies, Internal and External
Quality Assurance in Universities offering Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Zambia**

Date: _____

Personal details of the respondent:

Gender: _____

Educational qualification: _____

Years of Experience: _____

University: _____

Instructions: Circle 'O' to indicate your response in this questionnaire. State your answers for 'open-ended' questions within the spaces provided. It will take 15 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. I would like to thank you for your co-operation in advice.

To what extent do you agree with the following?						
Quality Assurance		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	ODL providers should offer quality in their programmes	1	2	3	4	5
2	ODL students must get value for their money	1	2	3	4	5
3	Fitness for purpose in ODL programme is a requirement	1	2	3	4	5
4	Quality as excellence in programmes and services in offered an ODL institution is important	1	2	3	4	5
5	Quality as perfection of programmes and services in provision of ODL	1	2	3	4	5
6	Quality as transformation of students in ODL	1	2	3	4	5

Do you agree that the following stakeholders are important in the provision of quality in ODL?						
Stakeholder involvement in QA		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7	Ministry of Higher Education	1	2	3	4	5
8	Higher Education Authority (HEA)	1	2	3	4	5
9	Employers/Education Industry	1	2	3	4	5
10	Students	1	2	3	4	5
11	Society (members of the community)	1	2	3	4	5
12	Academic and Support staff	1	2	3	4	5
How important are the following in QA of ODL?						
Areas of QA		Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Important	Very Important
13.	Mission statement of an institution	1	2	3	4	5
14	Management and Administration of ODL	1	2	3	4	5
15	Student experience at university	1	2	3	4	5
16	Quality culture of all those involved in ODL	1	2	3	4	5
17	Student admission and their support	1	2	3	4	5
18	Infrastructure and learner resources	1	2	3	4	5
19	Quality assurance unit/directorate within the university	1	2	3	4	5

20. What are some of the practical measures that your department has put in place to ensure that there is quality in the provision of ODL?

21. Are there any challenges that you would like to point out which are making it difficult for your department and the university to put in place internal or external QA mechanism? State in the spaces provide below.

Do you agree with the following as taking place in your institutions?						
Departmental QA policies/ programmes		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
22	The department has put in place QA guidelines to maintain and improve quality provision of ODL	1	2	3	4	5
23	Adequate support and training are given to academic and support staff in the area of QA in ODL	1	2	3	4	5
24	Needs assessment for programmes and courses are periodically done	1	2	3	4	5
25	Regular curriculum evaluation and review	1	2	3	4	5
26	Programmes and courses are reviewed on the basis of students results	1	2	3	4	5
27	Counselling of ODL students on various quality academic issues	1	2	3	4	5
Do you agree that students are engaged in the university's' QA of ODL?						
Student engagement in QA of ODL		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
28	Students are involved in internal QA through their student union as a formal requirement of the university	1	2	3	4	5
29	Students are involved in preparation of lecturers' evaluation reports	1	2	3	4	5
30	Students are involved in any decision-making arising from self-evaluation reports	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix H

31	Students are involved in decision-making at department level in matters of assessments	1	2	3	4	5
32	Students fill in questionnaire to make suggestions on various matters of ODL	1	2	3	4	5
33	Students make contributions through the suggestion box on matters relating to quality provision of ODL	1	2	3	4	5

34. State some of the ways that you think are necessary in allowing students' participation in quality provision of ODL?

35. State some of the facilities that you feel as being critical in quality provision of ODL.

36. How would you describe the university leadership's commitment to quality provision of ODL?

37. Do you have any other final remark with regard to QA of ODL at your institution?

Appendix I Questionnaire for Students in School of Education

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
Faculty of Social, Human and Mathematical Sciences
Southampton Education School

Survey Questionnaire for Students in Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

Research Title: An Examination of Quality Assurance Policies, Internal and External Quality Assurance in Universities offering Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Zambia

Date: _____

Personal details of the respondent:

Gender: _____

Years of Study: _____

University: _____

Instructions: Circle 'O' to indicate your response in this questionnaire. State your answers for 'open-ended' questions within the spaces provided. It will take 15 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. I would like to thank you for your co-operation in advice.

Do you agree with the following as taking place in your institution?						
Teaching and Assessment		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Teaching is to the level of my expectations	1	2	3	4	5
2	Lecturers and tutors have time for students	1	2	3	4	5
3	Assessments given are clear and in line with the module contents	1	2	3	4	5
4	Effective and timely feedback from lecturers and tutors	1	2	3	4	5
5	Good-quality modules/batches which are easy to follow	1	2	3	4	5

6	Module/batch distribution is systematically done and given in good time	1	2	3	4	5
How do you rate the following university facilities?						
Facilities		Very Poor	Poor	Adequate	Good	Very Good
7	Classrooms	1	2	3	4	5
8	Library resources	1	2	3	4	5
9	Laboratories (if applicable)	1	2	3	4	5
10	Internet	1	2	3	4	5
11	Accommodation					
12	University furniture	1	2	3	4	5
13	Recreation facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Indicate the level of your satisfaction in the following:						
Leadership, Governance and Administration of ODL		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
14	Commitment of ODL leadership and management to quality provision	1	2	3	4	5
15	Communication with students for quality ODL programmes	1	2	3	4	5
16	Enquiry and pre-study advisory services	1	2	3	4	5
17	Institutional commitment in meeting students' requirement	1	2	3	4	5
18	Commitment of individual academics to quality provision of ODL	1	2	3	4	5

19. State some of the good practices that you have seen in the university as contributing effectively to ODL, apart from the ones you have indicated above.

20. Describe the commitment of most students to learning and submission of assessment in good time.

Does your university provide the following support to students?						
Learner/Student support		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
21	Availability of tutorials to ODL students	1	2	3	4	5
22	Students are given chance to repeat courses they have not passed/cleared	1	2	3	4	5
23	Induction sessions for new students	1	2	3	4	5
24	Study and examination centres	1	2	3	4	5
25	Access to computers	1	2	3	4	5
26	Counselling of students on various academic issues	1	2	3	4	5

Do you agree that students get engaged in the university's QA of ODL?						
Students engagement in QA of ODL		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
27	Students are involved in QA through their student union as a formal requirement of the university	1	2	3	4	5
28	Students are involved in preparation of lecturers' evaluation reports	1	2	3	4	5
29	Students are involved in any decision-making arising from the self-evaluation reports	1	2	3	4	5
30	Students are involved in decision-making at departmental level in matters of assessment	1	2	3	4	5
31	Students fill in questionnaires to make suggestions on various matters of ODL	1	2	3	4	5
32	Students make contributions through the suggestion box on matters relating to quality provision of ODL	1	2	3	4	5

33. What learner and academic support would you need to improve quality provision of ODL at your university?

34. State some of the ways/avenues for students' participation in quality provision of ODL.

35. State some of the facilities that you feel as being critical in quality provision of ODL?

36. Do you have other final remark with regard to QA of ODL at your institution?

Appendix J Ethical Approval

An Examination of Quality Assurance Policies, Internal and External Quality Assurance in Universities offering Open and Distance Learning in Zambia

Approved by the Ethics Committee in **11 day(s)** on 17/02/2016

Date	Activity	Comments	Attached Documents
17/02/2016 10:53 pm	Reviewed and approved by the ethics committee		
17/02/2016 2:54 pm	Approved by supervisor and sent to ethics Committee	Revision noted.	
15/02/2016 5:33 pm	Submitted to supervisor Lianghuo Fan (lf1a09) (Cat B)		

Appendix K Pilot Study

Introduction

To examine and enhance the validity and reliability of the research instruments and to ensure the feasibility of the study as planned, a pilot study was conducted. Before the pilot was conducted, validation of the interview guides and pre-testing of the questionnaires was carried out. The first phase focused on the validation of the interview guides that were instruments were given to experts in higher education for peer reviewing. This process allowed me to re-look at the questions and remove ambiguous ones. For this exercise, I used one expert from the Southampton Education School at the University of Southampton. I also gave the same instrument to two other lecturers from Zambia, one from University D and the other one from University C, both of whom are in their respective schools of education. In this case, the first phase was conducted deliberately for the purposes of validity as explained above

As for the questionnaires, before data collection, I distributed them at random to 15 PhD students from the School of Education at University of Southampton for pre-testing. The essence was to allow students to make comments as a way of refining the questions and for logical flow. The questionnaires meant for HODs were given to the other four PhD students with a teaching background to make comments. This process helped me to gain insight into participants' minds, which might have gone unnoticed in the process of piloting (Lyberg et al., 2012). This phase helped to strengthen reliability in this study.

As for the pilot, the researcher distributed 10 questionnaires to ODL students and four other questionnaires to HODs at University D. All the participants drawn from University D had similar characteristics as those at Universities A, B and C, these include academic life experiences and works culture and demands for academic staff. University D is situated in the urban area and bigger than University C in terms of student numbers. It is among the three colleges that were transformed recently, in 2013. In the other words the pilot study helped the researcher to strengthen both validity and reliability of the questions to obtain data and information that was required for this study.

The findings

The composition of 10 students from University D was as follows: six female students and four male students. From this list, two male and four female students were in their final fourth year. The other two males and two female students were in their third year. The data collected from these students clearly demonstrates that there was a need for infrastructure development at

their institution. Students bemoaned the lack of infrastructure, including the library, science and computer laboratories, internet facilities, accommodation, recreation facilities, spacious lecture and study rooms, as negatively affecting their studies.

The other factors that came out clearly are the inadequacy of the study material and its late distribution. These material runs out, in some cases, before every student receives a copy. The timetable for residential school activities is another factor that the students brought out, in that it is so confusing that students end up missing lectures and other important sessions. On a positive note, students mentioned that a good number of the academic staff are committed to their work and provide feedback on time. They also suggested that more lecturers with the right qualification should be employed on a permanent basis to alleviate the shortage of academic staff.

The four HODs at University D also raised some issues over the manner in which the entire Directorate of Distance Education is organised. They mentioned that the university leadership has failed to put in place strong QA policies and a QA unit to spearhead the provision of quality in programmes under ODL. To some extent, QA is there, on paper, although there is no QA framework. The quality culture is there, as evidenced by the quality of their study material and a good number of well-qualified lecturers. The same lecturers deliver the conventional education programmes and ODL, hence their workload is overwhelming. The HODs said that it is possible to put in place QA measures if they are encouraged by management.

As a newly transformed university, University D is trying its level best but has much more to learn, as far as QA is concerned. There is much to be done that needs immediate attention, such as a quality culture, which should be of interest to both academic and support staff.

Piloting the survey questionnaires is an effective method to determine the reliability and validity of an instrument with participants similar to the target population (Collins, 2003; Creswell, 2014). The feedback from individual questionnaire items enabled the researcher to make necessary adjustments. This exercise logically helped to reword some of the questions in the instruments, rectifying some omissions. Consequently, the researcher managed to draft new fieldwork instruments that addressed the research questions.

Appendix L Transcribed interview and the process of coding and thematising

There are four parts in Appendix L, these include a transcribed interview, steps undertaken to do the coding, codebook, Nvivo screenshot and the researchers' field.

Transcribed interview:

Me: Good morning Prof.

Prof: Good morning to you.

Me: I would like to welcome to this interview focusing on QA in universities that are offering ODL in Zambia. To begin with, Prof: *What do you understand by the term quality about education?*

Prof: Quality is term that has become very important especially these days because... eee, we are following what we have as quality material, what we should deliver to our students, as something they will rely on that will be of good quality. Therefore, the word quality is that which is excellent, that which is very good; and therefore, when we talk about quality education, we are talking of education of a very high standard. So, to me within the area of education, that's the way I understand quality.

Me: Okay. *Do you think that all universities in Zambia should assure quality in their ODL provision?*

Prof: Yes, not only in ODL, at all other levels, education should target the very high standards we call quality. And so, it becomes even much more important I guess with ODL, because there is a perception in the minds of people that ODL is little inferior to face-face. Now for those that have been working in ODL, when ODL is handled properly, they have found that in fact the best education is through ODL. Where there is little interference from the teacher. The teacher guides and he let the students do the work himself or herself. So, quality therefore, is cardinal and according to the experience we have had eeee...! ODL is very good as mode, especially for the mature people who cannot find time to go to work and then go to school like face-face. But we can find time in our spare time to do work at our own pace and in our own way. So good delivery of education, good material, let me say, high-class material that have been prepared for ODL students is what we need. And for ODL that is a plus.

Me: *How long has it taken your own internal quality unit or Directorate?*

Prof: eemm... at this university we begun with some internal policies, Professor Mwansa who established the university with his colleagues was very much eeee... in QA. But he had a number of things that he was looking after and therefore, maybe we did not see it the way we see it

today. So at a certain point the university recruited a specialist in the name of Professor Richard Siaciwena who had worked in a number of institutions and it was always in that area of QA. Beyond that, he has also worked in a number of institutions as an ODL specialist. So for some years now with Professor Siaciwena the insistence on quality has been great. That is the reasons why he is here in this university, it is because he is helping the university to make sure that QA will be followed.

Me: Okay, Prof. *Do you have lecturers in all the departments who are sufficiently qualified? Maybe at PhD level to deliver the services?*

Prof: We have got PhDs and we have got all kinds of categories. This is a university has got staff. But I think you are talking about ODL? We do not have eeee... everybody properly qualified in ODL. Some came here with some experience in ODL, and others came here without any experience at all and they have picked it up here. So again, Prof Siaciwena has made sure that a good number of our colleagues who came here empty handed, they were qualified, they were PhDs etcetera, but they had not faced the ODL mode and so they are facing it for the first time. Professor Siaciwena has arranged a series of workshops to introduce this kind of stuff to ODL. So, some have now picked it up and others are middling, but they are anxious that they too they should be introduced to this mode.

Me: Okay

Me: *Prof, are there structures and processes that you have put in place, other than what you have explained in terms of... in ensuring that eeeeh that there is quality in the programmes that you are offering as a school?*

Prof: First of all, we begin, I have talked about the workshops, those teachers who have to remain in the university where the ODL is the mode, have to know what we have to do. So, we go to materials. We have the modules have to be prepared in a different way to fit the system here to fit the mode, so eeee... People have to be introduced, they have to be prepared, they have to be... not taught, I shouldn't use the word teach, but they have to be introduced and they have to be prepared in the way to prepare modules for ODL, that is number one. So, the modules themselves are not text books, they are prepared as modules for ODL, that is one.

Two, we have to have within the students' body or with the students we have to have a mechanism to help the learners. So again, from the point of view of QA eeee, the learners have to be assisted. You know it is difficult, well, they are mature, and they can do a lot of work by themselves but there are sometimes, moments when they require some guide, there are moments when they require an explanation from a specialist. So, you make it possible that their possibilities and there are opportunities for students to be in touch with their teachers, so the

learner. Eeee, what can I call it, the learner care has to be there. Eeeee, first we began with materials and we make it possible that there will be opportunities when the student or the learner can reach the teacher, so that were they have difficulties, the teacher can explain, and the can go and continue on their own.

Secondly, we have to have these teachers readily available wherever they maybe, so that they can be contacted either email or by telephone, writing today, posting things through the post-office does not work, it takes long, so the telephone is very good, because it is instantaneous and then you are listening in and you can react. Or were the thing maybe a little long, you send it through email and the teacher the other side will see that email and reply. So, these are some of the modes to help the student as part of QA.

Thirdly, it is the way for instance assignments are done. The student will write an assignment and we read the assignment we should mark it in such a way that we are commenting on what the student has done. Where he has done well, we say so and where we see that he is deficient, we explain to him how he would have replied to that answer, or how he would have handled the material and when we send back the assignment (kofofo... excuse me...), the student sees what he did and then he sees the additional work that comes out in the correction to compliment what he has done. So we are helping the student in moulding him and showing him how to tackle the problem fully.

Me: Prof. Do you have officers or lecturers whose responsibility is ensure quality at departmental and the school level?

Prof: Well, we do have a few of those, first of all it begins with the head of department, who has below him a number of teachers in various areas, these according to us to us must be ready to receive any feedback from the students or ready questions which they can clarify. It is the policy of the university to have these people readily available and that is the reason why they have got offices where they can be easily be reached. Eeeee now, as I said at the beginning, it is not everybody who is a specialist in the area, but those that are not, they are assisted by their colleagues. It is true that some of the teachers, while they may know their area well, they may be smaller points that are very fine and were they may get a little bit of direction from their colleagues when they consult, so consultation among staff is very, very good and also from the student point of view consultation between them and their staff is also good. So, this cross-pollination is useful.

Me: Prof, do you have any kind on collaborations with other universities at regional or continental and national level on matters of QA.

Prof: Maybe, not so much universities as such, but bodies eeeeh institutions that work in ODL, for instance the body in Vancouver Canada, the Commonwealth of Learning, it is very useful to us, we are members, we do correspond with them certain times, and they do channel out a lot of useful material to those universities that are in ODL mode.

Secondly, here with the region we have got what do call it? Southern African Distance eeee, the name skipped me. Within Southern Africa we have got the body to which we belong we the ODL people and it's the body that helps us various ways. There are conferences, there are workshops and we visit, through that body arrangements to visit other universities of similar nature, to be able to exchange views and work together. Then there is another body in Eastern Africa. The body in in Southern Africa is called DESA, it is Distance Association of Southern Africa DESA, and then we have got a body which is in Nairobi which is continental in view eeeeemm.... My memory is a little poor, but I have certain things that we received from them and our Vice-Chancellor recently went to Nairobi to attend a meeting of the African Council on Distance Education. It is a body to which a number of Distance Education Universities or institutions belong. So, and within ourselves, within the universities that we call open universities, we have got Open University for Tanzania, The National University of Nigeria, we got ourselves here, Zimbabwe Open University. There are a number of these universities with which we corroborate and with which we co-operate. So, brotherhood, sisterhood and cross-pollination of ideas is very much alive.

Me: *Okay: Prof, we now have the Higher Education Act of 2013 whose responsibility is to ensure that there is quality in all the Higher Education Institutions, and this has also given rise to the Higher Education Authority and its function is to spearhead quality issues in higher education providers. Would you say as an institution you are comfortable with this arrangement, or the previous one, were you had too...*

Prof: No, the previous one was a little on the useless side because (kofkoffof...excuse me). It was the Ministry which was looking after even the universities and some of the people that were inspectors were not to the level of working with universities, and certain things they didn't understand, there are traditions in universities that are to be a nature than to be kept, which are understood only by universities. So, the Ministry, while it did, it was a good will, but it did full-fill the role of the HEA will. The HEA is a regulatory body, and within it the kind of calibre and the people who are working there have, is much higher than what we had in the Ministry of Education. And so, we are more comfortable to working with the HEA, well we work with the Ministry of Education after all we train its teachers, but am talking about the regulation and regulating, the HEA is well placed.

Me: Okay

Me: *What sort of benchmarking were doing or indicators of QA for ODL that you were using previously?*

Prof: Eeeheem, previously the Ministry of Education visited, and they were interested in seeing the list of teachers for instance and what we were teaching. They were not going to the bottom of the things, because that is university role. So, they weren't doing that. Whereas, you see, with the HEA they have to look at the programmes, they have to look at those who deliver these programmes, therefore, the lecturers they have to look at the qualifications of these lecturers, the experience of these lecturers in research, the publications these lectures have made etc. You see kofkof... so the HEA is more with the universities, because it is part and parcel of them and the people who are there, so far it looks like, it's very good. The Director for instance is the former Vice-Chancellor himself, it gives a lot eeeem not only authority but confidence as well, you see. We are more at home with the HEA. They have just begun their work and there is a lot to do. But we have seen that they have started on good footing.

Me: *As School of Education do you believe in student engagement in quality provision of ODL?*

Prof: Eeeeeh yes, we believe in that. First of all, they themselves are getting education delivered through ODL and secondly, we see that within Zambia, anybody who is establishing a university today is establishing a university that may have a face-face side, but at the same time it will have an ODL side, because they are those, the young especially, they are the ones into studying under the face-face. But the older ones who have other responsibilities and obligations they are more at home with the ODL. So a lot of institutions in Zambia today, including colleges they have face – face and also the ODL. So people that we are training who are going through our hands are being prepared to go into these universities or to go into this institution with some experience of ODL and therefore they go and help out yes, already with some hands-on experience...

Me: *Okay... Prof, how would you cite as challenges in the quality provision of ODL at this university?*

Prof: Eeeeh, let me begin from the sciences, because we teach the science, we do not at the moment have laboratories, but as you know in ODL you do not need laboratories as such, because you can hire, and you may use other methodologies to be able to do the same thing without the laboratory. So, while a laboratory may not be needed as such, because there are methods that could be used to reach the same results, eeee... but I think for us it is required and therefore that is a challenge. It makes our delivery on the science side a little more expensive because we are hiring that is one.

Two, with the students at the moment we have no Dean of Students' office, so the learner care may not be as deep as we would like it to be. Because if we had the Dean of Students office, we

would have facilities there, for instance counselling would be made easier, sports, the contacts would be made easier. We are doing it so the School Education where we have got somebody in the area of sports athletics etc. But it would be better that through the Dean of Students these facilities are there. So that is another challenge. We think that in future we should be able to establish the office of Dean of Students Where student needs and care would be attended much more readily and like automatically. Me: okay....

The third one we are still with the module, it is like the first step in ODL in material preparation we will go to the next stage which would be online, completely online, in some course we are but it is not a university-wide thing. It is a policy, and we will be going in that direction, but for the moment therefore, it does pose a little bit of a challenge because it is not universal yet. Me: okay

Me: *Prof, what major gaps are there between good practices in ODL QA in developed countries and what is obtaining in Zambia, do you see....*

Prof: Yes, I think eeeeh, maybe shouldn't say Zambia because I don't know a number of institutions that maybe offering ODL. Maybe I should talk about ourselves. It is what I singled out as a challenge, eeee.... it is the communication side. I think we communicate not as fast as we see it in the other world. Eeeeem, a lot of our students especially us, we have students all over Zambia, and some these students leave where there is no electrify and they have heard about the computer, some use it, whenever there is electricity when it comes, but those gaps even when there is no electricity they are not using it even if they know how to use it and they are those who don't even know how to use it. So, you see, while we maybe insisting on delivery of material online, there are students that cannot get this information online and therefore, we will continue with hard copies, so that is a big gap. In developed countries you do not see that, because everybody is believed to be in the modern world and they are using these modern gadgets very easily and quickly. That is the type of life they lead but we don't have the type here maybe in towns, yes, but we have students from outlining areas where there is no electricity, that so that is a big gap in communication.

Me: *Prof, with the programme which the Zambian Government has come up with for rural electrification, do you have plans or plan as a university to improve communication with your students?*

Prof: To our students yes, the government assist us through their policy on rural electrification we also gain, the more electricity they give to these outlining areas the better for us, because then communication becomes easier we can reach them, we can send them material online, they can register online, they can send us their concerns online and we make it much easier that way, it will be instantaneous. At the moment, they will telephone and sometimes as I said in some areas

there is no coverage you cannot reach your students. So, they have to go somewhere where there is coverage and talk to you. After they leave that place there is no communication, so we are still very far. So, thanks to the government policy whenever there will be improvement on the electricity. They are also improving our way of delivering our education through better means and better gadget.

Me: Before we wind up, are there some remarks that you would want to make with regard to QA in the provision of ODL?

Prof: Yeah, it's one of the most difficult areas even if you are trying, eeee... You have to be conscious of the fact that this is an area in which you belong and in which you will remain. It's not only for material, it is on everything that is done in ODL. There has to be QA even sensitisation for instance, it has to be quality assured, otherwise you do it wrongly or wrong information is delivered. So, QA at every stage, yes, it is not in one area only it at everything that we do in ODL, it has to be quality assured.

Me: Thank you, Prof, for having given me chance to interview you on issues regarding QA in the universities that are offering ODL. I wish you a very good day.

Prof: Thank you very much I would like to say that I am not a specialist, I only gave eeee... the points of view that I knew something about. But there are specialists whom I hope you will be meeting very soon. So, thank you very much; it was nice talking to you this morning.

Me: Okay. Good day.

Steps undertaken to do the coding:

The coding steps below are in line with coding and thematising in sub-section 4.7.1 in line with Braun and Clarke (2006). In other words, the initial list of codes (nodes) was generated using Nvivo as indicated below in the screenshot. The codebook which comes after the steps for coding, served as a management tool for organising segments of similar or related text to assist in interpretation, and to provide a clear trail of evidence for credibility of the study as well as in the coding and identification of themes. After identification of the themes, this was followed by mapping the raw codes, sub-themes, key themes and meta themes as indicated in Figures 5-1, 5-2, 6-1, and 6-2. Thematic mapping helped the researcher to have deeper meaning texts and to explore the themes that emerged and to identify the patterns. The field note helped the researcher to double check information from the participants interviewed.

Appendix L

Step 1: Reading through the entire transcript

The researcher read the entire transcripts while making notes of the first impression of the information within the transcript.

Step 2: Labelling or coding of relevant words, phrases sentences and sections

During the reading of the transcript, the researcher kept labelling the relevant words, phrases, sentences and sections based on the actions, activities, concepts and difference in opinions. The codes were generated based on several factors including (i) where the respondent indicated that the aspect was important (ii) where the concept was related to reviewed literature and theory.

Step 3: Combining and or categorisation of the codes into themes

After generating a long list of codes, they were independently less informative and therefore a decision was made to create categories that would encapsulate several codes. This led to fewer categories and themes. The exercise also led to dropping of some codes initially generated.

Step 4: Labelling of themes and linking them

The researcher used the codes (nodes) in Nvivo and the codebook to develop subthemes and further reviewed and labelled the themes to decide on the most relevant and how they were connected to each other. After identifying the themes, they were linked and reported in the findings.

Excerpt from data driven codebook for the above transcript:

Theme, Definition	Interview segments
Inputs	
Meaning of quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Therefore, the word quality is that which is excellent, that which is very good; and therefore, when we talk about quality education, we are talking of education of a very high standard.
Importance of QA of ODL in Zambian universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes, not only in ODL, at all other levels, education should target the very high standards we call quality.

Commitment of university leadership to establish internal quality units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At a certain point the university recruited a specialist who had worked in a number of institutions and it was always in that area of QA.
Qualified academic staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have got PhDs and we have got all kinds of categories.
Structures and processes in place	<p>We do not have everybody properly qualified in ODL. Some came here with some experience in ODL, and others came here without any experience at all and they have picked it up here</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have talked about the workshops, those teachers who have to remain in the university where the ODL is the mode. • We have to have within the students' body or with the students we have to have a mechanism to help the learners. • We have to have these teachers readily available. • Feedback is given after marking assignments.
Academic staff to co-ordinate quality at departmental level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do have a few of those, first of all it begins with the head of department. • A number of teachers in various areas, these according to us to us must be ready to receive any feedback from the students or ready questions which they can clarify.
Collaboration with other with other universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe, not so much universities as such but with institutions that work in ODL the Commonwealth of learning, Distance Association of Southern Africa (DESA) and The National University of Nigeria.

Support for HEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HEA is a regulatory body, and within it the kind of calibre and the people who are working there have, is much higher than what we had in the Ministry of Education.
Student engagement in QA at university level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of infrastructure such as science laboratories.
Challenges in the delivery of quality ODL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student support is not that deep • Need to develop online study material for students.

Nvivo screenshot for coding and thematising framework from all the interviews conducted:

Nodes				
	Name	Files	References	
[-]	Meaning of quality in higher education		2	2
	Quality is a measure		2	4
	Quality is meeting certain parameters		2	2
	Quality as excellence		6	8
	Quality as value for money		2	2
	Importance of quality assurance in universities		10	22
	Change in policies delayed the process of QA policy formulation		1	2
	Governments' financial support to the HEA		4	14
[-]	Stakeholders inclusiveness in QA policy formulation		3	6
	Validation process		2	4
	Quality assurance of ODL Vs conventional mode		12	16
	Initial successes of QA in higher education		4	18
	Issues related to quality assurance of ODL at national level		1	2
	Benefits of the Higher Education Act		3	5
	Synergy with SADC on ODL		1	1
[-]	Sustainable financing mechanism to universities		1	5
	Infrastructure development plans for the universities offering ODL		1	4
	Zambian universities to compete with already established universities		2	2
	Practical programmes offered through ODL		1	3
	Challenges to ensure quality ensuring quality provision of ODL		4	10
	Leverage to quality assure differently		2	4

Appendix L

Collaborations with international organisations on quality	1	3
ODL Association	2	4
Autonomy vs Accountability	6	12
Student engagement	10	20
Students' lecturer evaluation	4	6
Face to face contacts	4	6
Through students union	2	2
Quality culture among university leaders	8	14
Establishment of quality assurance unit	10	18
Training of academic staff	12	18
Benchmarking	2	2
Student engagement in quality provision of ODL	8	12
Commitment of academic staff to quality provision of ODL	2	2
Quality assurance at departmental level	4	6
Institutional quality assurance framework	2	2
Quality assurance audits	6	10
Practical component in ODL programmes	1	2
Quality assurance structure at university	1	2
Qualifications of academic staff	6	6
University collaborations	6	18
Perception of universities on the HEA	16	32
Impact of the HEA	10	21
Universities' input in the HEA QA framework	2	2
Support to the HEA	5	8
Challenges in quality provision of ODL at university level	18	50
Module production	10	16
Insufficient academic staff	2	2
Differences between ODL in Zambia and developed countries	14	30

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Quality teaching and learning of ODL		2	4
	<input type="radio"/> Student feedback		2	4
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Perception of ODL the academics.		6	12
	<input type="radio"/> Stakeholders participation in quality provision of ODL at university		6	16
	<input type="radio"/> External quality assurance		4	6
	<input type="radio"/> Internal quality assurance		1	2
	<input type="radio"/> Mode of ODL delivery		4	6
	<input type="radio"/> Quality indicators of ODL		2	2
	<input type="radio"/> The role of government in ODL provision		2	3
	<input type="radio"/> Massification of ODL students		2	2
	<input type="radio"/> Ideal mode of delivery for ODL		2	6
	<input type="radio"/> Reasons for the long absence of QA policies		2	8
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/> Performance of universities offering ODL in the absence of QA policy		2	2
	<input type="radio"/> Grading of universities ODL		2	2
	<input type="radio"/> Indicators of quality assurance		2	3
	<input type="radio"/> Necessary conditions for QA at university level		2	4

Researcher's Field Notes:

Field Notes of: Evans Lifuka

Date of Visit: 16TH June 2016

Time of Arrival at Site: 10:00 a.m.

Time of Departure from Site: 11:50 a.m.

Location Name: Zambian Open University main campus

Address: P.O Box 31925, Lusaka, Zambia

Name of interviewee: Dean School of Education

Observations

- Zambian Open University has more than 6 undergraduate programmes for their ODL mode. The number of ODL students seem to be higher compared to other private universities in Zambia.
- The University campus is new and well-built and more likely to attract potential students.
- The School of Education has a good number of lecturers both full time and part-time.

Appendix L

- The printing section for students' study material was operational and some of the modules had already been printed and ready for distribution.
- Visited the university library but most of the shelves were empty.
- Finally, I was invited by the secretary to the Dean School of Education to conduct an interview with the Dean who was attending to some other people when I just arrived.
- Academic and support staff were busy attending to ODL students who visited the main campus for various issues.

Appendix M Determining sample size for research

Note.

<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	100000	384

N is population size.

S is sample size.

(Krejcie & Morgan, 1970)

Appendix N Letter of Authorisation for Fieldwork


Republic of Zambia
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

TO: Director General - Higher Education Authority
Director - Planning and Development

FROM: Permanent Secretary

DATE: May 20, 2016


SUBJECT – FIELD WORK AND DATA COLLECTION – MR EVANS LIFUKA

At folio 79 is an introductory letter from University of Southampton introducing Mr. Lifuka a student in the Education School.

Mr. Lifuka is studying a topic on “*Examination of Quality Assurance Policies, Internal and External Quality Assurances in Universities offering Open and Distance Learning in Zambia*” hence, he would like to collect data regarding Quality Assurance in Higher Education from the Ministry of Higher Education, Higher Education Authority, University of Zambia and Zambia Open University. In addition he wishes to interview some eminent experts in QA and ODL.

The data collection period will last for two and half months starting 1st April 2016 to 10th June, 2016.

In this regard, you are requested to render assistance to Mr. Lifuka to enable him to collect the necessary information.


Owen Mugemazulu

Mr. Succeed Mubanga
Chief Planner
Kindly deal with
this issue.

24 - 05 - 2016

Glossary of Terms

Accreditation: This is the establishment of the status, recognition, legitimacy and appropriateness of the university, programmes as well as the mode of study. This is to assure the educational community, the general public and other interest groups that a university or programmes has clearly defined educational aims and objectives.

Conventional Mode: This a system of education were teachers and students physically interact face-face. This mode of delivery has a specific time and place for successful learning.

Excellence: This is the benchmark for academic evaluation; in this case, a university should exhibit characteristics that are very good as agreed upon by the stakeholders and are in line with the policy.

Distance Education: This is a method of education in which the student is physically separated from the instructor. It may be used on its own or together with other forms of education, including face to face (Kiryakova, 2009).

Diversification: This refers to massification (significant increase in numbers) of students in universities offering ODL as well as the ever-increasing number of universities in Zambia.

Higher Education: This is the education attained at a university level. A first degree in education. The duration differs depending on the university.

Internal Quality Assurance: This refers to the measures taken within the university to maintain and improve the quality of their programmes. It is one of the most effective ways of self-regulation and demands that both academic and non-academic participate in the whole process.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL): This refers to the use of different methods to provide or enhance learning. This includes the use of technology, such as telecommunications, internet and teleconferencing. In other words, it refers to the provision of flexible educational opportunities in terms of access and multiple modes of knowledge acquisition.

Private university: This is an institution of higher learning owned by individuals with various shares for profit making. There is no government interference in the running of such institutions apart from policy adherence.

Public university: This is an institution owned by government. Government provides grants and all the necessary support required including paying salaries for all the workers. The aim is to provide a service and not for profit making.

Quality assurance framework: This is a systematic illustration of steps, which underpins the university's commitment to academic excellence and improvement. It also stipulates the principles by which the framework is governed and managed.

Quality assurance policy: This refers to policy directives at both national and Institutional level for regulating and monitoring quality provisions.

Standard: This is the level of achievement that an institution provides regarding its programmes that is expected to be attained by students on the programme.

Stakeholders: These are actors (persons or organisations) with vested interest in the policy that is being promoted and are considered as having a stake.