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Implementation of Efficient Quality Assurance System in Higher Education in Cote d'Ivoire: Lessons from Quality Assurance System in Higher Education in China

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Abstract:

This article reports on implementing an efficient quality assurance system in higher education in Côte d'Ivoire: Lessons learned from the quality assurance system in higher education in China. The quality assurance system in higher education is an important element in ensuring the quality of education. In this era of globalization, Cote d'Ivoire is part of a process of improving the quality of education with the aim of making it much more competitive. The introduction of quality assurance has emerged very recently in the education system, and much effort remains to be made to make it functional and efficient. The analysis of the results indicated that the quality assurance system in higher education in China is effective, and many implementation procedures are applied there. This is possible thanks to the presence of a strong policy, careful monitoring and other equally important factors.

China's experience in quality assurance is an example of Cote d'Ivoire, which is still trying to implement a functional quality assurance system to provide quality education. Therefore, this study recommends that the Ivorian government establish an efficient quality assurance system and ensure the implementation of the decisions taken.

Keywords: Cote d'Ivoire, China, efficient, quality assurance system, implementation

1. Introduction

1.1. Concept of Quality Assurance System in Higher Education

In higher education, the term 'quality assurance' is used more to define academic standards practices (David, 2007). According to Harvey (2017), in higher education, quality assurance is defined as a process aimed at establishing stakeholder confidence that the offering (inputs, processes, outcomes) meets expectations or measures requirements minimally. Quality assurance is essential in higher education because it is a means of providing effective and quality education to students. The ultimate goal of quality assurance is to ensure that educational standards are maintained and raised. Quality assurance is a set of actions and procedures intended to be followed with the aim of evaluating and improving the quality of teaching within an establishment. In the same vein, Vroeijenstijn (1995) defines quality assurance as a process to achieve two main objectives, namely: improvement and accountability. According to Kahsay (2012), quality assurance is a set of procedures enabling several objectives to be achieved, among others: improving learning and teaching and building mutual trust between stakeholders as a whole and higher education systems. To speak of quality assurance is to highlight systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of maintaining and improving quality. Considering these different concepts relating to quality assurance in higher education, it is clear that it is of capital importance in the process of improving quality within establishments. It is important that decision-makers in the field of quality assurance in Côte d'Ivoire develop quality assurance practices that are consistent and adequate to the needs of higher education.

1.2. Importance of Quality Assurance

In higher education, quality assurance has become important in higher education for several reasons. In any education or training program, quality assurance is an essential element. It helps ensure that programs meet industry standards and provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their chosen fields. Quality assurance processes within higher education institutions make it possible to improve the quality of programs, increase learner satisfaction and improve the image of the higher education institution. In addition, quality assurance allows establishments to maintain and improve their efficiency, leadership and student progress through personal and external assessments. Quality assurance is important to the extent that it can be used as a means of preventing and improving quality errors that may arise in the learning and teaching process within establishments. According to a report from the European Commission (2022), quality assurance allows for improving teaching, research, and the regulation of higher education.

1.3. A Brief Historical Overview of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Cote d'Ivoire

Quality assurance in higher education in Côte d'Ivoire is a recent topic on the higher education agenda. It was driven by the example of quality assurance systems in other countries in the world and by the need to have a good quality education system. The Ivorian government maintains that a quality higher education system is an essential pillar to support national economic and social development efforts. The introduction of the notion of quality assurance in higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon in Côte d'Ivoire. It was a result of the law of September 7, 1995, relating to Education. This law resulted in the creation of a national quality assurance agency. This agency was conspicuous by its failure. In September 2023, a new decree was established, establishing attributions, organization, and operation of a National Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education and Research, abbreviated ANAQ-ESR. Through this new agency, Cote d'Ivoire is, therefore, concretely part of the quality assurance approach. ANAQ-ESR will operate as a public administrative establishment of a scientific and technological nature. In Côte d'Ivoire, quality assurance plays a key role in the harmonization of higher education, in particular, to facilitate the comparison of skill levels and diplomas, promote the recognition of prior learning, and encourage the mobility of students and universities between different countries, as well as regional collaboration in terms of training offers and cross-border education systems.

1.4. Research Questions

- What are the practices of the quality assurance system in Higher Education in Cote d'Ivoire?
- What are the challenges of implementing an efficient quality assurance system in Higher Education in Cote d'Ivoire?
- What lessons can Cote d'Ivoire adopt from the Chinese higher education Quality Assurance System?

2. Literature Review

To have an efficient quality assurance system, it would be necessary to have a system based on grounded theories. In higher education, establishments use TQM with a view to managing the quality of operations within them. Indeed, the theory of total quality management is a management philosophy that is transversal to the entire organization and integrates all stakeholders into its model structure, seeking continuous improvement in organizational performance and customer satisfaction. TQM was developed by W Edwards Deming (1920) to improve the efficiency of flexible work teams in American industry before World War II. In higher education institutions, the TQM approach mentions that the institute should have a vision of what it wants to be, clearly define its mission compatible with this vision, and accordingly set its objectives to be transformed into specific goals that are achievable and meaningful. In order to have an efficient quality assurance system, it would be important to define the objectives of quality assurance.

According to Abu et al. (2016), educationists, policymakers, academicians, and researchers are showing their sincere interest in Total Quality Management (TQM) as it is recognized as an effective management philosophy for continuous improvement, customer satisfaction and organizational excellence. Also, to have a good quality assurance system, it would be essential for quality assurance stakeholders to have a culture of quality. The concept of quality culture expands traditional approaches to quality assurance by focusing on aspects of organizational psychology, such as shared attitudes and commitment to quality (Christine et al., 2018). The environment of higher education institutions nowadays is very comprehensive, leading to high demands for quality in teaching and research as well as in services and administration. Quality Culture is an element in establishing quality processes. Indeed, it is a specific type of organizational subculture that overlaps with other subcultures based on the shared values of its members. Therefore, higher education institutions should consider implementing a quality culture and a quality management system to have an effective quality assurance system.

3. Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used during the study. Various secondary sources were also used to collect data. The rationale for this study has been derived from various sources, namely: books, published journals, national reports, and other related documents, to collect data and information.

3.1. The Practice of Quality Assurance System in Higher Education in Cote d'Ivoire

Quality assurance is a process for checking that the standards and quality of higher education provision meet agreed expectations. Harman (2000) defined quality assurance as systematic management and evaluation procedures adopted by higher education institutions and systems to monitor performance against objectives and ensure the achievement of quality and quality improvements. According to Abdelali et al. (2022), the quality of higher education currently constitutes the main challenge for public policies in favour of higher education and research in many countries and regions of the world. Since independence in 1960, Cote d'Ivoire has made several efforts to guarantee the quality of higher education. In Ivory Coast, the Ministry of Higher Education opted for an evaluation focused solely on private higher education. The objective of this evaluation is to have a view of the Ivorian government on higher education establishments. Also, it gives credibility to establishments and improves the education system. It is an annual evaluation and concerns, in particular, the quality of infrastructure, equipment, educational management, governance, and internal and external performance. The evaluation of public establishments is almost non-existent in Ivory Coast. The evaluation of private education in Ivory Coast is carried out under the supervision of a higher education directorate and a committee made up of experts. Côte d'Ivoire is in a dynamic phase of establishing a quality assurance system. She tries as best she can to establish quality assurance processes within establishments with a view to achieving a satisfactory result. Ivory Coast, like most

countries in the world, understands that quality assurance is increasingly essential for higher education establishments. The operation of higher education in Ivory Coast, whether public or private, has used the LMD (License – Master – Doctorate) system since 2012 in accordance with the 2009 decree on the adoption, application and organization of the License, Master, Doctorate (LMD). Concrete actions are not taken despite the decisions taken and the decrees.

3.2. Challenges of Implementation of Efficient Quality Assurance System in Higher Education in Cote d'Ivoire

In higher education in Côte d'Ivoire, several challenges cause the difficulty of implementing an efficient quality assurance system. Indeed, despite the efforts of the state of Côte d'Ivoire to offer a higher education system of good quality, it is clear that Côte d'Ivoire is still lagging behind. The major challenge in terms of quality assurance in Ivory Coast is the lack of quality culture. We cannot talk about quality if we lack a system to implement quality in a concrete way. Another challenge just as important as the previous one is the insufficient financial resources available to higher education in Côte d'Ivoire. According to a World Bank report (2007), many public universities in Africa, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, suffer from underfunding. The lack of adequate funding is a very significant factor in the implementation of a solid, viable and efficient system. Also, in Côte d'Ivoire, the rapid increase in enrollment in higher education establishments is an obstacle in the process of implementing an efficient quality assurance system. According to a report from the Ministry of Higher Education of Ivory Coast (2022), Felix Houphouët Boigny University in Ivory Coast, normally designed to accommodate 30,000 students, currently has more than 65,000 students. The picture is painted. It is clear that in this overstaffing, the conditions are not met to make things easier. This results in a lack of adequate infrastructure for learning within the university. This is the result of overstaffing within Ivorian universities. In many public universities, there is a serious shortage of infrastructure, such as lecture halls and student accommodation. Students do not have the conditions required for quality learning, which makes it difficult to achieve satisfactory results. The brain drain is a recurring problem in Côte d'Ivoire, which leads to the lack of experienced and highly qualified academic staff in higher education establishments. Many qualified university staff have left in search of greener solutions. We are witnessing the migration of teachers to Europe, with America hoping to have much more adequate working conditions. In addition, the lack of quality assurance policies within higher education in Ivory Coast is a significant aspect of the difficulty of implementing an efficient system. Without political commitment, it is difficult to achieve satisfactory results. The Ivorian authorities should have the development of a national quality assurance system on their agenda.

3.3. Lessons from Chinese Higher Education Concerning Efficient Quality Assurance System

The issue of quality assurance in higher education in China is now an integral part of the Chinese government's policy with a view to improving quality (Li, 2010). The development of quality assurance in higher education in China over the last decade has been noted both at the level of a national policy and at the level of proceeding for perfect application. Côte d'Ivoire, like most African countries, should take a look at quality assurance practices in China with a view to adopting them depending on conditions.

3.3.1. The Government Should Establish a National Policy on Quality Assurance

In education in China, quality assurance is receiving increasing attention. The Chinese state is developing a comprehensive quality assurance framework to monitor the quality of higher education and provide evidence for awarding performance-based funding (Li, 2014). The Chinese government, through regulations and monitoring policies and processes, is the basis for quality assurance decisions. Driven by regulations, most Chinese universities are implementing self-regulatory processes and mechanisms to improve their performance. Quality assurance in higher education in China is the result of several national reforms that began in the 1980s. The Ivorian government should put in place policies and means of regulation in terms of quality assurance in education. The state should play a regulatory and monitoring role; without monitoring, there will be no satisfactory results. The Chinese government is also present in the evaluation process of higher education establishments. This should be an example of a system that aims to be efficient.

3.3.2. The Government Should Encourage Investment in Higher Education

The Chinese state, aware of the importance and impact of education in society, has invested considerably in education. To this end, according to a World Bank report (2011), Chinese investments in research and development have increased by 20% per year since 1999, exceeding 100 billion dollars in 2011. China's socio-political conditions allowed it to have a distinctive model of financing higher education. The diversification of funding in higher education in China is a success, given the satisfactory results recorded in recent years. Since the 1990s, China has opted for a multitude of funding sources with the aim of having a higher education system that meets the challenges of the moment. Besides, government funding, tuition and fees, entrepreneurial activities of higher education institutions, philanthropy and donations play a very prominent role in the operation of Chinese higher education. According to Ma (2004), with the diversification of funding sources in higher education in China, a new form of relationship between the government and universities, the authority governs universities in general, and universities enjoy more autonomy to satisfy social needs. The Ivorian government should diversify the sources of funding for universities and make them much more autonomous. The lack of funding for universities is a very significant aspect of the quality of education. The Ivorian state should take an example from the higher education system in China.

3.3.3. The Government Should Get Involved in the Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions

The Chinese government has built a national higher education quality monitoring and evaluation system. This system has a very important impact on the quality improvement process. In China, the Ministry of Education promulgated the Notices on Quality Assessment of Higher Education Institutions (2011). The evaluation system in China is very well established and allows us to have an overview and monitoring of establishments. It is a stratified and categorized "five in one" evaluation system. It was established with a view to meeting the challenges and demands of an increasingly diversified higher education system. The role of establishments in the Chinese system is to evaluate themselves with a view to achieving the objectives of the government's agenda in terms of quality of education. The Ivorian government should establish an evaluation and monitoring system with a view to having control over higher education practices. Improving the quality of teaching requires monitoring the practices provided in universities.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Finally, the quality assurance system in China has undergone considerable evolution throughout recent years. Higher education in China is marked by an increasingly growing quality, and this is visible in the different results that are observed. In view of this study, the analysis of documents demonstrates that the quality assurance system in higher education in China has been established and developed to a large extent compared to the quality assurance system in higher education in the Ivory Coast. This is due to the presence of a culture of quality within higher education in China. Also, the strong presence of a quality assurance policy has a significant impact on the quality assurance system in China. The commitment and transparency of Chinese decision-makers in the higher education sector also play a large part in achieving educational achievements. The lesson learned for the Ivorian government for the implementation of an efficient quality assurance system is to have a strong policy in order to promote and improve teaching conditions within Ivorian establishments.

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