

Quality Assurance in Distance Teaching Universities: a Comparative study in Asian region

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Background:

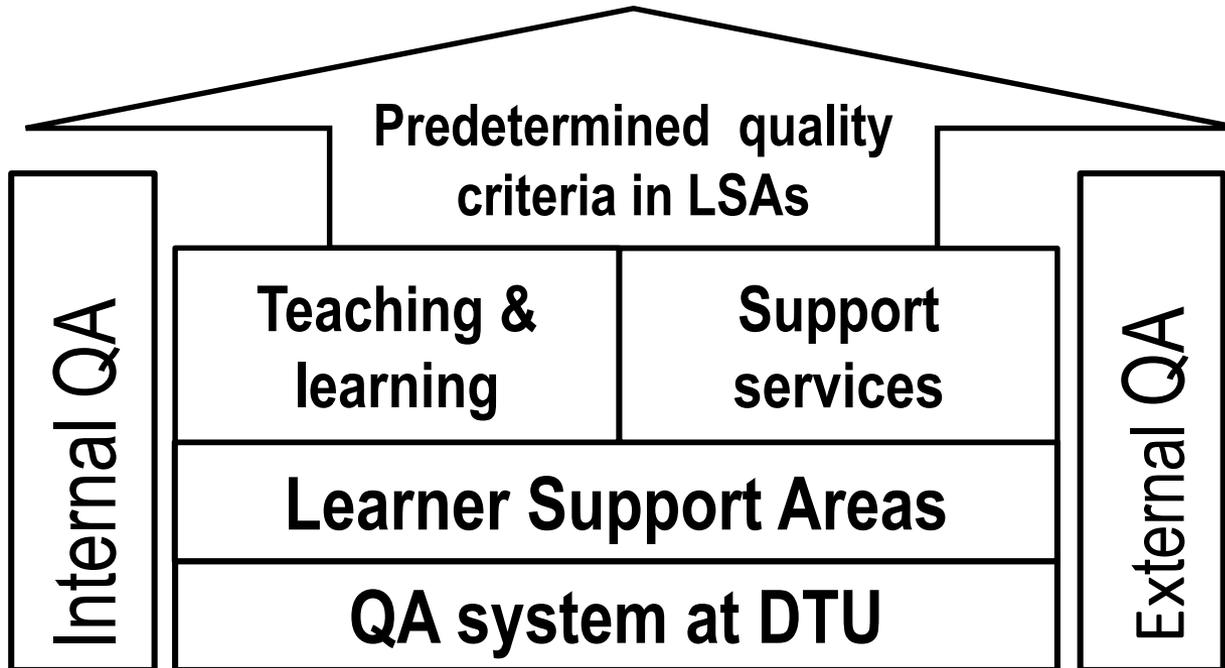
Quality Assurance in Non Traditional Universities

- Involving three Distance Teaching Universities (DTUs) in Asia
- They are single mode universities
- Employing QA program
- Adopting internal QA audit and international QA standard

DTU3: Quality Areas

1. Policy and Planning
2. Human Resources
3. Internal Management
4. Students and Students Profile
5. Program Design and Development
6. Course Design and Development
7. **Learning Supports**
8. Facilities, Media, and Learning Resources
9. Student Assessment and Evaluation
10. Research and Community Service

QA Systems in Learner Support Areas (LSAs):



All-embracing term covering all the policies, processes, and actions through which quality in LSAs are developed and enhanced

5 strategic issues

1. How do key people involved in the QA programs in learner support areas at the three DTUs conceive of quality?
 - In what ways do they understand quality in learner support areas?
 - Given their understanding of quality, how do they perceive QA?
2. What are the institutional policies that support QA in learner support areas at the universities?
3. How do the key people at these DTUs report that QA policies in learner support areas are being implemented?
4. What are the challenges that key people at the universities report they are facing in the development and implementation of QA in learner support areas?
5. How are the results of the current QA processes in learner support areas used to inform practice at the universities?

Data collection (Data Sources)

- ✓ Semi-structured interviews
- ✓ QA Documents

	Participants						
	PC	QC	FD	AS	CS	LC	Total
STOU	1	1	2	1	1	-	6
OUM	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
UT	1	3	2	1	1	1	9

PC (QA policy contributor); QC (QA center); FD (Faculty/Department); AS (Academic staff); CS (Counseling staff); LC (Learning center)

Findings:

How do key people involved in the QA programs in learner support areas conceive of quality?

- ✓ In what ways do they understand quality in learner support areas?
- ✓ Given their understanding of quality, how do they perceive QA?

“For us, [quality is] meeting the customer needs and the criteria that are set by the government” (DTU1-FD-03)

“Quality actually is a culture, good culture. Whatever you do you must do to the best ability required by the designed process...”(DTU2-QC-02)

“Quality should refer to customer satisfaction and compliance to the external quality auditors’ standards...” (DTU3-PC-01)

Findings:

How do key people involved in the QA programs in learner support areas conceive of quality?

- ✓ In what ways do they understand quality in learner support areas?
 - ✓ Given their understanding of quality, how do they perceive QA?
1. QA as a system involves different activities to ensure expected quality (DTU1-PC-01)
 2. QA refers to procedures to ensure expected outcomes (DTU2-QC-03)
 3. QA as procedures or mechanisms to ensure expected outcome (DTU3-LC-01)

What are the institutional policies that support QA in learner support areas at the Universities?

- QA policies in teaching and learning provisions
 - ✓ Develop diverse policies to support the universities' academic services
- QA policies in support services
 - ✓ Develop diverse policies for promoting the development of student's self-managed learning

DTU3 : Quality policies in teaching and learning provisions

- Various forms of learning support services are provided to support students' freedom to take advantage of learning services according to their abilities and conditions.
- A variety of teaching modes are designed and delivered that are easily accessible by the students through different media.
- Learning support services are organized according to standardized guidelines.
- Tutorial sessions are delivered by accredited tutors.
- Tutor' appraisal is conducted regularly by relevant parties accompanied by the provision of feedback on their performance.

DTU3: Quality policies in student support services

- The institution provides support services for learners who are socio-economically, physically or psychologically disadvantaged, and have special learning needs and preferences.
- Support services are provided before and during the learning process through a variety of methods and media that are easily accessible for students.
- Support services are provided by qualified staff.
- Monitoring and evaluation of all learner support services are performed using a clear mechanism.

(DTU3, 2012, pp. 7-9)

How do the key people at each institution report that QA policies in learner support areas are being implemented?

- **The centralized QA management**

“the Quality Assurance Center is to coordinate all activities in order to enforce our quality assurance system” (DTU3-QC-02)

- **The distributed learning centers nationwide**

“At this [learning center], I manage student tutorials... My major responsibility is to manage tutorial programs and to provide learning support for students who have problems with the learning parts” (DTU1-LC-06)

- **One-way traffic (self-instructional learning materials)**

“At STOU, we focus on lots of media... The first one is **textbooks**. In every subject, we have the textbooks to contribute to the studies. And another media is **CD**, or **DVD**, including the content and multimedia in the disc...” (DTU1-PC-01)

- **Two-way traffic for promoting student-tutor interaction**

“We provide **face-to-face tutorials**. To ensure the quality, we start with planning... identifying qualified tutors and determining locations that are easily reached by participants. The implementation of F2F tutorials are controlled by regional office and audited by external auditors” (DTU3-LC-09)

*Continued*_____

- **Personal relationships and empathetic feelings (being responsive to provide helps)**

“We are an open university...and you have to be prepared to help ... for example, a student who called from Dubai. Every time that she called I explained to her, and she felt very good, and she also said “You are a good teacher. You have time for me.” ... I think if I have a good relationship with them, may be it can motivate them to work successfully. If they have a problem, they can come see me. I never refuse my students. Never...” (DTU1-AS-04)

Continued__

The implementation of QA in learner support areas relates to the universities' external environments

- Local culture, particularly language
- Educational technology to support academic and administrative works
- Professional QA agencies' standards (ISO, ICDE, Malcolm Baldrige Award)
- Government QA standards
- Students (surveys to invite regular students' feedback)

What are the challenges that key people report they are facing in the development and implementation of QA in learner support areas?

- QA is perceived as being too demanding and time consuming
“The lecturers, the professors – have a lot of work. We don’t have a vacation like a conventional university. We work continuously. We have to produce the texts; we have to prepare the examination papers, and some document work – we waste time, and you don’t have time to develop yourself. We cannot go to seminars or join training courses...” (DTU1-AS-04)
- Government quality guidelines do not correspond well to distance education system

Findings:

How are the results of the current QA processes in learner support areas used to inform practice at STOU, OUM, and UT?

Continuous quality assessment: “The office has to report every three months, and that will be done at a departmental meeting or division meeting, and that is communicated to the university” (DTU1-PC-05)

Continuous quality improvement: “Now I am doing my 5th module, how to do assignments efficiently and effectively. You know why? ... because they are not able to do assignments... So now I am working on the 5th module: how to write assignment effectively. This is all feedback from the students. We see! Oh ... this is the problem. So we have to do something. We develop ourselves” (DTU2-FD-03)

Recommendations for Practice:

- ✓ There are diverse perspectives of quality and QA.
 - Set a formal and working definition of quality and quality assurance
 - Involve all stakeholders (including faculty and administrators) to establish a set of QA criteria

Thank you