Chapter 6

Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Open and Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to argue that all open and distance learning (ODL) institutions should carry out quality assurance and accreditation processes in order for students and funders to have confidence in them. It also explains in detail what quality assurance and accreditation entails in ODL. This chapter follows a qualitative approach in understanding quality assurance and accreditation in ODL. Data were collected via literature review. During recent decades, the discourse and practices of systematic quality assurance and quality control have spread around the world, resulting to a great extent in market-based models related to the ideology and policy of neo-liberalism and expressed in economic rationalities such as new public management, total quality management, public choice, and human capital. Quality assurance and accreditation in ODL aims to maintain and raise the quality of education and to guarantee the improvement of its standards.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on quality assurance and accreditation in open and distance learning (ODL) institutions. Mahlangu (2016, p. 107) maintains that, although much has been written about quality assurance, only limited work exists that explores quality assurance and accreditation in ODL. Quality assurance and accreditation in ODL ought to be based on the following assumptions:

KNOW-learners are able to build their own knowledge on a daily basis looking at external elements; DO-learners are able to apply what is learnt in ODL program; LIVE-all learners are afforded equal opportunities to develop themselves and their communities and therefore they should BE-addressing the skills required for individual students to develop their potential (Mahlangu, 2016, p. 111).

Quality is seen as an ongoing method of evaluating, assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving the quality of ODL education systems, institutions, or programs (Mahlangu, 2016, p. 109). Quality management strategy-as-practice is neither much concerned with nor able to explain the performance of ODL institutions in practice (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016, p.272). Quality management practices must be tied to the "who" and the "how," should quality assurance be done. Quality assurance and accreditation in ODL must strive towards ensuring accountability for public funds; improving the quality of ODL education provision; informing funding decisions; stimulating competitiveness within and between ODL institutions; quality checking on new and private ODL institutions; supporting the transfer of authority between the state and ODL institutions; and assisting students' mobility (Latchem, 2016, p.10).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

This article is based on a social constructivist approach with the view that all knowledge and the meaningful reality is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and transmitted within the social context (Justus & Nangombe, 2016, p.91). Under the influence of neo-liberalism, public education has been invaded by the private sector, which has its own quality education systems oriented toward profit-making. Neo-liberalism not only affects economic and political activities but also is transforming ODL management systems, knowledge production, and educational beliefs. The acquisition of knowledge by countries around the world should include absorbing knowledge of others, open trade, external investment, licensing agreements, and local and indigenous knowledge development. The acquisition of knowledge is concerned with national educational policies, which include improving the education of disadvantaged groups as well as lifelong learning (Chen & Chin, 2016, p. 116). It is good practice that quality assurance (QA) procedures must include self-evaluation,

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