The role of international students in implementing quality assurance standards at King Khalid University

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to learn how overseas students may help King Khalid University meet quality assurance requirements. All 1853 enrolled students at KKU were considered a representative sample because student involvement in quality assurance is standard practice across the institution. The 45 students who took part in the study were chosen at random. A total of ten current and former members of the student representative council were questioned one-on-one using a convenience sampling technique. A qualitative analysis was performed on the KKU Quality Policy Manual. According to the results, KKU has a firm policy regarding student participation in quality assurance. In addition, KKUQA contains structures that do not incorporate students into decision-making, such as the Academic Committees and the Quality Management Systems Review. Although KKU QA systems do not participate in internal evaluations, they do allow student participation through feedback methods. Additionally, the results demonstrate that formative evaluation of students' overall experiences of university life is not a part of the feedback mechanisms. Also, students do not know what kinds of student involvement there are in quality assurance systems or at what levels. Based on these findings, it was suggested that students should be included in the KKUquality management system structures. Institutional centers should be staffed by SRC QA representatives, and internal assessments should be conducted by QA representatives as well. The SRC ought to additionally compile an end-of-year formative evaluation that encompasses all aspects of university life as experienced by students. The SRC should collaborate with faculty and staff at the university to draft a students' charter that

Introduction

All throughout the globe, universities and colleges use quality assurance procedures and tools to monitor, guarantee, and improve the standard of their academic offerings. Institutional quality assurance encompasses all efforts to set, track, and improve educational delivery standards for the benefit of students (Alrayes, 2021). Teaching, learning, research, administration, and support services are all part of university life that must be quality assured. Government authorities, employers, alumni, faculty, support personnel, and students are all considered stakeholders in higher education institutions' quality assurance efforts. Higher education institutions' policies and efficacy are greatly influenced by the input provided by these stakeholders (Agasisti et al., 2019). Everyone agrees that student participation is crucial for improving education and ensuring high-quality instruction (Alzafari& Ursin, 2019). Participation from students in quality assurance and improvement processes exemplifies a core feature of higher education: that students are both the

end users and decision-makers of university services (Obeidat et al., 2020). Isaeva et al. (2020) found that students' engagement in quality assurance not only boosts their motivation to learn, but also positively affects their learning and development.

The early 2000s witnessed the formal beginning of quality assurance in Saudi higher education. There have been some early successes with internal and external quality assurance. Nonetheless, quality control in Saudi Arabiaian universities is considered to be in its beginning. Several universities have documented student participation in quality assurance procedures. But, according to Pham (2019), student participation in course evaluation is the most typical activity for this engagement. This study seeks to delve into the attitudes and experiences of overseas students regarding quality assurance, as it is possible that grassroots perspectives on this matter differ. This study seeks to quantify the level of knowledge and comprehension among international students regarding quality assurance policies, models, purposes, processes, and instruments, as well as the extent to which these aspects contribute to positive change when put into practice. Decisions about the enhancement of program and institution quality may be aided by the study results by policymakers, institutional managers, and quality assurance experts (Makhoul, 2019).

The quality management system at KKU allows for student participation in quality assurance. This study investigates whether the quality policy and practice of KKU align with international best practices in including students in quality assurance. The primary inquiry of this study is whether the existing philosophy and practice of international student engagement in quality assurance matters at KKU may be enhanced.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the research questions listed below:
1- Does KKU have any policies regarding the involvement of international students in quality assurance?
2- To what extent is the existing level of international student participation in quality assurance at KKU commendable?
3- Are there advantages to having international students participate in KKU's quality assurance program?
4- What are the barriers preventing international students from participating in KKU quality assurance?
5- What techniques may be employed to enhance the participation of international students in quality assurance matters at KKU?

Literature Review

The term "student involvement" refers to the practice of including students in all stages of the educational process, including but not limited to: program development, policy formulation, execution, assessment, and evaluation. The internal review processes are the primary area of student involvement in this research.According to Ta et al. (2023), quality assurance refers to the methodical supervision and assessment of different elements of a project, service, or facility to guarantee that quality requirements are achieved. According to Charteris and Smardon(2019), quality assurance refers to a series of activities or procedures implemented by an organization to verify that stated criteria for a product or service are regularly met. Based on the aforementioned references, quality assurance can be defined as the systematic implementation of a series of operations to verify that predetermined standards are met, hence ensuring the incorporation of quality into a product or process. In the context of higher education, the term "acquire" refers to the process by which students obtain or gain the necessary skills and knowledge (Rahman et al., 2020). Additionally, "requisite competencies" refers to the specific abilities and capabilities that students are expected to possess. Furthermore, "display them at exit" means that students are

expected to demonstrate or exhibit these competencies upon completion of their study. These can be accomplished by implementing suitable policies, structures, resources, and processes (Ching, 2018).

The successful implementation of any program typically begins with the political determination of the authorities. In the context of a university, policy initiatives serve as the driving force behind the implementation of programs. Countries with established quality assurance (QA) systems have enacted statutes or regulations that include student participation. According to Er et al. (2020), it is mandated that students should be acknowledged for their involvement in university activities. These measures acknowledge students' perspectives and enable their involvement in quality assurance matters. According to Article 40 of the Catalan Universities Act, LUC 2003, it is stated that the promotion of student engagement and participation in associative activities is to be encouraged. Student participation in the quality assurance of universities in such nations is required. The two pieces of legislation demonstrate the gravity with which student participation in quality assurance matters is regarded in various regions of the globe.According to Greere (2023) studentshave an active role in developing learning and teaching methods, and their opinions should be regarded as the main evidence for assessing the quality of teaching and learning. Universitieshave a policy that mirrors the legislative actions in Spain and Catalonia. This policy likewise emphasizes the importance of student participation as a key measure of performance.

According to Harefa and Sihombing(2021), the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland consists of internal topic evaluations, institutional level reviews, and other components that involve increased participation of student representatives in institutional quality systems, as well as a national program of enhancement themes. The QA system in Scotland is highly organized and advanced, allowing it to extend to institutions and guaranteeing that student involvement is a quantifiable QA milestone in every school.The Saudi Arabian government's quality control body is the Council for Education. Accreditation and evaluation of educational programs and institutions is the primary focus of the Saudi Education & Training Evaluation Commission, which maintains communication with the institutional quality assurance units. This would be in line with what we know from the European Quality Assurance Agency's lessons, which suggest that the national student union might teach the institutions about international student involvement (Aburizaizah, 2022).

The KKU quality policy document includes provisions for student participation. The document titled "KKU Quality Policy Manual (2023)" The council serves continuously during their study term. Institutional policy functions as a directive for the activities of an organization. The quality policy document also includes provisions for incorporating the perspectives of students, which are highly esteemed and taken into account during the decision-making process. According to the Quality Policy Manual (2023), the institution is dedicated to providing students with the chance to address and discuss concerns with the appropriate person from the Directorate of Student Management. The university appears to be dedicated on fostering student engagement. This section analyzes the existing literature regarding the various levels and types of student engagement.An illustration of a quality assurance system currently in use at universities is provided below (Harvey, 2022):

- Student representation in academic committees and the Senate.
- Staff/student consultation committees, also known as stakeholder satisfaction committees, are established to gather feedback and input from both staff and students.
- Evaluation questionnaire for the course/module/tutor as a feedback method.
- Implementation of students' charter.

- Redress of grievances [forms/box for complaints].
- Representation of former students
- Representation of students in QA office.

Student engagement in universities varies in terms of their participation in decision-making processes that pertain to quality assurance matters. By incorporating students' perspectives, their viewpoints are acknowledged and taken into account during the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the participation of students in the Senate is not apparent in this quality assurance arrangement (Heath et al., 2021). While not specifically mentioned, it can be inferred that students are involved in the institution's feedback methods. Isaeva,et al. (2020) presents a comprehensive compilation of student engagement indicators, including aspects, levels, and forms.

Indeed, it is evident that student engagement encompasses active participation in the decision-making process. In contrast, Isaeva, et al. (2020) went beyond the expected by identifying the different feedback processes. The KKU Quality Policy Manual grants students the opportunity to participate through the institutional SRC, as previously stated. The Alumni Association is extended an invitation to actively engage in the development of the policy handbook, which beyond the standard expectations. This option is being established to create opportunities for alumni to offer suggestions for improving the quality of the institution's offerings. While there is a mechanism for engagement, there is a lack of clear understanding on the specific types and levels of participation (Eaton, 2021).

The QAA (2023) study highlights that the strengths cited by the student bodies mainly revolve around the idea of empowering students to express their opinions and allowing them to provide feedback on quality, standards, and their overall experience as students. Student involvement in quality assurance (QA) is based on their ownership of the learning process. There is a stronger dedication to fostering a culture of excellence, where students, faculty, staff, and university administration collaborate towards a common objective.In addition to the ownership of quality, student written submissions have the added benefit- as noted by Jurakovic et al. (2022) - of fostering a favorable relationship with institutions. One forum where students share their summative assessment of their time at university in its entirety is the students written submissions. By giving the institution a forum to discuss the important concerns brought up by the student population, the evaluation helps to build a relationship with the students. With this relationship, the student's status is elevated from that of a client to that of a shared partner (Cuttance, 2020).

According to Liu et al. (2022), audit teams also appear to have started one or more of their inquiries with student written submissions. Both students and university officials respect student feedback when auditors take it seriously when it comes to quality assurance processes.According to McCann et al. (2022), a number of institutions addressed the issues brought up by students' written submissions, and doing so directly improved the educational experience. The main goal of student involvement is ongoing development. If students' opinions are to be used as input in the process of change, they must participate actively.Since it strengthens the bonds between the two, student participation in QA is highly desired by the institution. Students are the ones who own university life, so their involvement in the process of transformation is crucial (Mohzana et al., 2024).

Although it is desired for students to be involved in quality assurance processes and there are benefits to their participation, there are also problems that need to be addressed. These factors encompass the heightened academic demands on students, their lack of engagement, and insufficient skills (Mtawa et al., 2021).

According to Nguyen (2021), the amount of work that students have can discourage them from participating in quality assurance committees. The additional responsibilities and supplementary tasks, in addition to their academic stress, can overwhelm students. According to Pannen (2021), students are experiencing heightened levels of stress due to the growing concern about debt and a pervasive sense of loneliness and isolation. Consequently, one out of every four students is facing mental health issues. HEIs and external authorities, like the QAA, should not add unnecessary pressure by prioritizing inclusion in quality assurance processes more than academic research, as this would be unfair.This situation is highly applicable to students at KKU who are often adults, parents, and employed. Each specified category carries specific tasks and responsibilities, which further place pressure on students to engage in institutional evaluation processes.

Picton& Kahu (2022) highlighted several obstacles to student engagement, including disinterest, insufficient competences, and inadequate qualifications among prospective students. Due to their already overwhelming workload, some students may lack the motivation to participate in the QA internal review processes. Interested students may find it challenging to possess the necessary competencies to participate in internal review processes. These proficiencies may include computer skills and report writing, among others. Also, the perceived credibility of student experts among professors undergoing evaluation appears to be a difficulty in some cultural contexts. If a student attends an institution solely for lectures, their involvement in institutional assessment is not clearly acknowledged. Students can be regarded as budding researchers, so enabling them participation in the internal evaluation of the entire system (Wysocka et al., 2022). According to Stroebe (2020), there are some nations with highly politicized student unions, and in those situations, it may be difficult for students to put their moral principles ahead of political agendas. Being an extension of a political party in the nation of operation when a student body is involved presents a significant issue. A system like this will allow the political viewpoint to control how the student body operates. When the institution and the student body are at odds, dysfunctional conflicts are likely to occur. If students are expected to be politically correct by the institution, does this mean that they should blindly accept its judgments without considering how they will affect other students.The high occurrence of these difficulties necessitates the need for actions to resolve them.

The preceding section discussed the literature study, which specifically addressed the difficulties associated with student participation in quality assurance. This section is dedicated to finding strategies to reduce or alleviate the issues that have been identified.

Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) is an organization in Scotland that helps and supports students, student associations, and institutions in enhancing student engagement in quality processes. SPARQS also provides guidance to funding councils and institutions on best practices for involving students in quality processes (Zuhairi et al., 2020).The unions' perspective on quality serves as the initial standpoint. This is a system in which the KKU has a quality assurance officer, similar to its representatives for education, sport, and other areas. The KKU would also appoint Quality Assurance (QA) delegates at the university level, who would actively engage in addressing QA matters at the quality council, similar to the practice in Saudi Arabia. As an illustration, the Saudi Arabiaian Ministry of Education would employ quality assurance officials who actively engage in quality assurance activities carried out by KKU.

The student representatives will be better prepared to fulfill their QA duties as a result of the improved training in institutional and national QA issues made possible by the aforementioned arrangement. A Saudi Arabiaian Development Committee Students Union, modeled after the National Unions of Students of Europe (ESIB), with a Quality Assurance office, may be formed if the national unions were to merge. This group could help with the skills, motivation, and

legitimacy issues by teaching its members how to fix them.Regarding the heightened workload and pressure faced by students assigned to handle quality assurance matters, Bohrer (2006) observed that certain institutions do offer support for elected student union sabbatical officer positions, and some institutions provide financial aid for employing union staff officers, both of which can facilitate participation. At KKU, the Quality Control Unit may employ union staff officers who provide assistance to students in their everyday operations.

Method

This study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, which were guided by the empowerment principle. The research aimed to thoroughly investigate the extent of student participation in the internal quality assurance procedures of KKU.According to (Creswell, 2021) Data was collected from the SRC member participants through individual open-ended interviews. The interviews were led by themes. Furthermore, a document analysis was carried out to collect data regarding the policy provisions for student engagement within KKU Quality Policy Manual. In order to facilitate triangulation, data was collected from a specific group of regular enrolled students through the use of questionnaires, taking into account their availability. A variety of data sources were utilized to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the student involvement process and to verify the accuracy of the findings. The findings were analyzed inductively and organized into themes. The findings were presented and analyzed thematically.

Population and Sample Research

The population for the current study consisted of all 1853 registered international students at KKU. A sample of 25 regular students and 20 current and former members of the student representative council were randomly selected for participation. The current SRC members were selected using purposive sampling, resulting in 10 members. Additionally, snowballing was used to identify an additional 10 participants from prior SRC members. The overall number of participants included in the sample was 45.

Results and Discussion

The study's results were broken down into themes for presentation and discussion. The results of the interviews were verified using questionnaire replies.

- **Does KKU have any policies regarding the involvement of international students in quality assurance?**

  Upon analyzing KKU Quality Policy Manual, it was found that it has provisions for student involvement. Specifically, it states that the KKUquality unit facilitates the coordination of student activities through the SRC. The council provides support and assistance to students throughout their whole duration of education. The Alumni Association provides students with the chance to propose new programs and innovative ideas to enhance the well-being of the institution, as it strives to maintain its status as a world-class university.

  These two posts explicitly facilitate student participation in quality assurance. Chiwaro and Manzini (1995) emphasize the significance of policy in providing guidance to administrators of higher education institutions about student involvement. The institution offers students the chance to engage in quality assurance (QA) through the Student Representative Council (SRC) as current students and the Alumni Association as previous students.

- **To what extent is the existing level of international student participation in quality assurance at KKU commendable?**

  An analysis of the education ministry's organization revealed that both the QA Committees and the Academic and Educational Affairs Committee lack student representatives. As the entity responsible for overseeing the quality assurance policy at a national level, the Council

was anticipated to take the lead in education institutions by including representatives of students in its organizational framework. If the governing body does not involve representatives of students in their activities, individual institutions might not be motivated to have them in their structures.

Analysis of the documents indicated that both the KKU SRC and Alumni Association do not participate in internal reviews, as they provide input in the capacity of customers. Students, in their capacity as a consumer, have the right to express their opinions and are not obligated to participate in reviews. According to the guideline, the Vice President oversees quality management systems reviews, while the management representative (QA director) performs secretarial duties. It is envisaged that the responsibilities of student representatives would be clearly defined in this context, thus confirming that student participation in quality assurance is limited to providing input.

Interviews conducted with the SRC have validated the findings obtained from the document analysis. A previous member of the SRC highlighted the absence of frameworks for student engagement in quality assurance matters within the KKU. In order to conduct a more thorough analysis of student engagement, participants of a survey were requested to assess their level of involvement with several areas. The resulting ratings are displayed in the table provided.

Table 1. Opinions of participants about student participation in quality assurance aspects

Students involvement	Rating			
	None	Low	Medium	High
Student representation in academic committees and the Senate.	25 (100%)			
Staff/student consultation committees, also known as stakeholder satisfaction committees, are established to gather feedback and input from both staff and students.	4 (16%)	0 (40%)	1 44%)	
Evaluation questionnaire for the course/module/tutor as a feedback method.				25 (100%)
Implementation of students' charter.	25 100%)			
Redress of grievances [forms/box for complaints].				25 (100%)
Representation of former students				25 (100%)
Representation of students in QA office.	25 (100%)			

All 25 (100%) of the responders indicated a complete absence of student participation in academic committees and the QA office. There is currently no official document outlining the rights and responsibilities of students, commonly referred to as a students' charter. The staff/student discussions are of mediocre to subpar quality. This contradicts the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) standards in the UK, as suggested by Crozier (2012), who emphasizes that student participation should extend across several levels, including the course/faculty level, university-wide level, national level (agency), and international level (European Standards Union).

Student participation in quality assurance has been limited and restricted to providing feedback. Clearly, there are no existing procedures in place to promote student participation in quality assurance. Regarding the various ways in which students might participate in the internal evaluation processes, one responder humorously said, "I am unfamiliar with the term 'internal review'." What occurs throughout the internal review process? The other respondent stated that we have consistently contributed through various means such as tutor, module, and program assessment forms, complaints from customer's forms, suggestion box, and by gathering students' comments at the SRC. According to QAA (2006), there are no written submissions from students. Evidently, the aforementioned list focuses specifically on client input. Without institutional quality assurance committees, student participation will remain peripheral, as indicated by the current status quo. The role of students is defined in the Quality Policy Manual (2023), which states that the institution is dedicated to providing students with the opportunity to voice concerns and address them with the appropriate representatives.

The questionnaire results in Table 1 above validate the findings from the interviews and document analysis. All 25 respondents (100%) indicated that grievance redressed, Alumni representation, and feedback system are highly prioritized. This discovery validates the remark made by Dalton, Churchman, and Tasco (2014) that student engagement fosters self-assurance and a sense of pride in the school. Nevertheless, Patmor and McIntyre (1999) acknowledge that for students' involvement to occur there must be a genuine opportunity for them to have a significant impact. Students typically utilize many instruments to record their feedback or concerns, including but not limited to instructor, module, and program evaluation forms, complaint from customer's forms, suggestion boxes, and the institutional SRC.

- **Are there advantages to having international students participate in KKU's quality assurance program?**
  Both interviews and responders were posed with an identical open-ended question: "Are there any advantages to student engagement in quality assurance?" Their perspectives on the advantages of student engagement are provided and examined in this section. Respondents highlighted that a significant advantage was the possession of high quality. A participant highlighted that the footnotes on KKU quality assurance documentation, titled "Quality is Everyone's Business," encapsulated the complete idea of student engagement. The answer stated that since quality is a collective responsibility, then students should likewise take ownership of all quality assurance systems. The respondents' perspective aligns closely with Crozier's (2012) observation that collaboration between students, representation bodies, academic and support personnel, the national agency, and other stakeholders can effectively improve quality.The participants noted that the advantage of student engagement would be to "alter the current methods and practices." Several participants noted that if their ideas were given due consideration, they would consistently provide valuable input, thereby enhancing the student experience at the university. This observation validates the results of QAA (2006) that institutions have addressed the problems identified through Students' Written Submissions and that this response has resulted in tangible gains for the student experience.
  A reply highlighted that if their comments were given due consideration, it would instill confidence in students towards the university administration. This answer appears to validate the findings of Bohrer (2006) and Dalton et al (2014), which suggest that student involvement enhances the connection between students and the institution.

- **What are the barriers preventing international students from participating in KKU quality assurance?**
  To ascertain the obstacles to student engagement in quality assurance matters from the viewpoint of students, participants were posed with the query, "What do you perceive as the obstacles to student engagement in QA issues?"
  One participant revealed that they had been participating to the maximum extent permitted by the university. The university policy ensures that student engagement is sufficient. Therefore, the policy prohibits students from participating in internal reviews. Policy limitations have impeded the involvement of students in internal evaluations.Some responders brought up the fact that most of their friends are adults with families to support, jobs to maintain, and other social obligations in addition to being students. When one considers internal reviews along with the necessary training and preparations required to be a successful internal reviewer, students could find it overwhelming. The results of the interviews supported the remark made by Brus, Komljenovic, Sithigh, Noope, and Tuck (2007) that students' workloads may deter them from joining quality assurance committees.
  We asked informants about their perception of themselves as reviewers by academics. Their responses were conflicting. While most people would be easy to deal with, there were a few named academics who were likely to be obstructive. This result may neither support nor refute findings from literature reviews suggesting that professors' perceptions of student reviewers serve as a deterrent to student participation. The most likely explanation is that KKU students were not familiar with this position and were unable to respond ahead of time.According to the opinions expressed by the respondents, the former institutional SRC was not very politically active. Their opinions supported the interviewees' answers. Questionnaires were also questioned if there were any active political members of the former or current SRC. These elements were unknown to the informants. They did, however, acknowledge that their political inclination would undoubtedly influence their opinions and interactions with the institution over QA matters if such components ever materialized. They came across as strongly opposed to such a situation. According to the respondents, the SRC needs to be impartial in order to maintain credibility with academics and provide an accurate assessment of the state of quality in internal reviews. The results are in line with the University of California's (2002) policy, which prohibits the use of mandatory student government fees for the purpose of supporting political, ideological, or religious groups or activities, including but not limited to lobbying public officials or agencies. Though people are free to voice their opinions outside of the SRC, this policy discourages political activism within the SRC. This makes room for objectivity when it comes to QA matters.
- **What techniques may be employed to enhance the participation of international students in quality assurance matters at KKU?**
  All 25 respondents of the questionnaire indicated that they have representatives for their respective groups (course/field reps). Their responsibility is to communicate with institutional program coordinators regarding academic matters. Informants were requested to propose tactics that could enhance student engagement in quality assurance at KKU. It was noted by several that the KKU SRC did not participate in addressing QA issues. They proposed that it should have greater participation, considering that they are

the primary recipients of the quality assurance procedures. Although not explicitly stated, it may be deduced that one method of engaging students is through internal evaluations.

The reaction of one interviewee was, "In addition, it is imperative that we compose a comprehensive assessment at the conclusion of the year regarding the caliber of service delivery as SRC." If we implement this practice in our businesses, we should also be capable of implementing it in our university in order to bring about improvements in the next year. The report bears resemblance to the Students Written Submissions found in European universities, as stated in the QAA report.

A participant highlighted the necessity of providing training to SRC members on quality assurance (QA) matters. This training would enable them to acquire the essential skills and competences required for their involvement in internal evaluations and other QA procedures. This remark affirms the fundamental nature of SPARQS in Scotland and the ESIB in Europe. In addition to their other duties, these organizations provide training and assistance to union members in quality assurance roles. The training includes the acquisition of skills, competencies, techniques, attitudes, and methodologies necessary for effective QA practices.

Conclusion

Based on the facts presented above, it can be deduced that KKU has a robust policy regarding the participation of students in quality assurance. In order to give students the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, KKU Quality Assurance has established quality management systems review and academic committees, but these structures do not include student's participation. Student participation is encouraged through feedback mechanisms within KKU's quality assurance systems; however, these systems do not participate in internal reviews. The feedback systems do not include a formative evaluation of the entire experiences that students have gained from their time spent in university. Students do not have a comprehension of the various degrees and types of student participation in quality assurance processes.

Acknowledgments

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