



QUALITY ASSURANCE FACTORS THAT AFFECT DELIVERY OF QUALITY
EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN
MALAWI

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By Martha Mondywa

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Approval of the Thesis

QUALITY ASSURANCE FACTORS THAT AFFECT DELIVERY OF QUALITY
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MALAWI

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Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education

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Abstract

QUALITY ASSURANCE FACTORS THAT AFFECT DELIVERY OF QUALITY EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN MALAWI

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The contribution of quality assurance systems is critical to the delivery of quality higher education in higher education institutions. Malawi has experienced a growing demand for higher education resulting in rapid growth of private universities in recent years; calling for checking on quality of education and quality assurance systems. This study was guided by four research questions, which focused on quality assurance elements that contribute to provision of quality education. The aim of this study was to explore how quality assurance systems affect quality of education in private universities in the city of Lilongwe in Malawi. The research used mixed research methods that included both qualitative and quantitative research methods in data collection and analysis. The sample size for the interviews was 30 respondents while the sample size for survey questionnaires was 70. Data was collected from students, lecturers and members of senior management from three private universities.

The analysis of qualitative and quantitative data obtained from both the interviews and surveys was carried out using thematic content analysis and SPSS respectively. The main findings of both surveys and interviews indicated that Quality Assurance Systems were not well established in the universities under study and that there were gaps related to

infrastructure, quality of teaching staff, learning and teaching resources and lack of stakeholder involvement in private universities quality enhancement. The study further established that leadership in the three selected private university institutions had deficiencies in resource mobilization strategies hence there were challenges with financial resources for the sustainability of their institutions.

The researcher recommends the strengthening of Internal Quality Assurance systems in order to improve issues of infrastructure, learning and teaching resources, leadership capacity and stakeholder involvement through the establishment of Quality Assurance Units, with designated directorates and involvement of stakeholders in quality enhancement activities. This study concludes that internal quality assurance factors are sufficient for improvement of quality education and attainment of accreditation status.

Key Words: Quality; private universities; quality assurance; higher education; quality education; accreditation; internal quality assurance; external quality assurance.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Abbreviations

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CEQ	Course experience questionnaires
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	External quality assurance
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICT	Information & Communication Technologies
IGSCE	International General Certificate of Education
IQA	Internal quality assurance
ISO	International Organization for Standards
LCD	Liquid Crystal Display
MGDS	Malawi Growth Development Strategy
MSCE	Malawi Secondary Certificate of Education
NCHE	National Council for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSS	National Student Surveys
ODL	Open and distance learning

PHEI	Private Higher Education Institutions
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SAS	Statistical Analysis Software
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Scientists
SQF	Student Feedback questionnaires
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNILIA	University of Livingstonia
UNIMA	University of Malawi
UREC	Unicaf Research Ethics Committee

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This study focusses on the quality assurance systems and factors that either enhance or inhibit provision of the quality education in private universities in Malawi. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) revealed that private universities contribute to the absorption of students into the higher education in Malawi as the public universities only absorb about 4000 students into their universities leaving more than 14,000 students for private universities (NCHE selection report, 2017). The World Bank Report (2014) supports this recommendation that private universities should complement the public HEIs in meeting the country's needs for quality education. The Sustainable Development Goal number 4 mentions equitable access to quality education for all (SDG Report, 2021) and this is supported by the Malawi constitution under chapter 25, which calls for equitable and inclusive education for all (Malawi Constitution, 2017). A number of scholars have made similar ~~recommendations~~ on the importance of quality education as a social need and a right as supported by Marcia (2019) who stated that quality education is perceived as a social need that requires ~~social~~ justice as all students have a right to quality education.

In view of this background, private universities should be encouraged to offer inclusive and equitable quality education to all eligible students. Pala (2016) mentioned that there are number factors that affect quality in tertiary institutions including their vision and goals, the teaching staff expertise and experiences, quality of students in terms of the employability of its graduates and their relevance to the labor market. Other factors also include learning resources such as availability of quality library resources and laboratories, admission and assessment standards, the teaching and learning environment. The presence of efficient and effective management systems, governance

and leadership styles has great influence on the quality of education. NCHE envisages that quality of education can be enhanced if there are well-established quality assurance systems in the higher education institutions especially private universities to guide in the delivery of quality educational services and programs (Hoosen, Chetty and Butcher, 2017). This study was undertaken in order to critically examine the fundamentals of the quality assurance systems in the private higher education institutions in Malawi and to explore the internal and external factors that either facilitate or hinder quality assurance practices that are necessary for the improvement of quality education. The following section gives a background and related to the rationale for this study.

1.1 Background

Historically, in the 1960s, the government of Malawi had regulations and policies that prohibited establishment of private universities in order to control quantity and quality of graduates but focused on quality of education (Kajawo and Dong, 2020). Prior to 1994, it was not possible to offer private higher education in Malawi due to government strict policies aimed at controlling output of graduates (Chivwara, 2013 and Zeleza 2018). In 2006, Malawi Government opened up higher education through its liberalization policy due to increased demand for higher education that was attributed by democratization policies that included free primary education and privatization of secondary school education (World Bank, 2014 ; Shawa, 2017). Following these policies, there has been rapid growth of private universities in Malawi as reported by a number of scholars such that in 2018 there were 28 private universities rising from 4 in 2009 (World bank Report, 2014). This is an indication that from 2009 to 2018, there was mushrooming of such private universities in Malawi requiring proper regulation and this trend has been captured in other SubSaharan countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe (Kajawo, 2019; Shawa, 2017 and World Bank, 2014).

Additionally, there was only one public university and its four constituency colleges during the 1960s until in the 2010 when there were developments of more public universities. To date, there are seven public universities and a number of government higher education institutions such as Malawi College of Accountancy (MCA), Malawi Institute of Management (MIM) and others. The increase in the numbers of HEIs led to the government of Malawi to establish regulatory bodies for higher education and therefore, the National Council for Higher Education was established (NCHE) in 2011; since 2016, NCHE has been registering, de-registering and accrediting HEIs in Malawi (Muheya, 2016; Nyondo, 2015; NCHE, 2017) as cited by Kajawo and Dong, (2020). Prior to establishment of NCHE, there was no Quality Assurance framework in place to guide HEIs in establishment of Quality Assurance systems, as even Internal Quality Assurance was still young at institutional level (Hoosen, Chetty and Butcher, 2017). Kajawo and Dong (2020), also established that the trend of rapid growth of private universities was common in the Sub Saharan region and other continents triggering the need for regulation of higher education through registration and accreditation processes.

Despite development of policies, standards and accreditation frameworks for quality checks, quality of education continues to be compromised in private universities as evidenced by de-registration of nine private universities by NCHE (NCHE, 2018). The main challenges faced by private universities leading to the deregistration were aggravated by lack of adequate financial and physical resources and lack of quality assurance systems (Msiska, 2015; Shawa, 2017).

Quality assurance has become a very important area for consideration in higher education institutions worldwide (Anane and Addaney, 2016). The World Bank Report (2014) came up with a comprehensive report on higher education where Malawi was reported to have less than 1% of its population accessing tertiary education and having the lowest enrollment that was below average for the Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, the World Bank report further established that there were inequalities where 91% of the university population came from richest population and not inclusive where a few students with physical challenges were not enrolled because of infrastructural access

challenges. The Sustainable Development Goal number 4 also supports the importance of social justice in education and states that governments should “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” SDG Report (2021). According to this SDG Report (2021), quality assurance systems should be revisited to follow the Covid-19 pandemic preventive measures and therefore revisit the educational standards in terms of infrastructural standards, social distances and ensure disability friendly access to higher education. Additionally, the Malawi Growth Development Strategy II for Malawi guides reforms in higher education to have appropriate quality assurance systems and governance reforms to ensure quality education for all.

Kis (2005) came up with a number of reasons why Quality assurance is important and referred to a number of functions related to quality assurance. These functions include quality control, information and improvement as seen in the national quality assurance systems. Quality assurance involves accessibility, employability and academic freedom in the higher education and it is said to enhance learning and teaching at the same time building trust among stakeholders that are involved in the higher education systems (Kis, 2005).

At global level, quality assurance enhances regional and international collaboration and comparability on quality education for best practices (Nabaho et al, 2020). This study hopes to unpack all the functions that quality assurance fulfills including information sharing and improvement in various quality assurance procedures.

The World Bank team, SADC report (2017), other scholars and NCHE established that there were serious gaps in the delivery of quality education in private universities. The researcher also questions the availability of quality assurance units, involvement of stakeholders, governance structures and role of leadership in delivery of quality education in the private universities from these findings. There were also doubts as to whether the status of quality education continued to meet minimum standards

of higher education even after registration and accreditation by NCHE (NCHE accreditation Report 2017). These gaps and challenges affected the performance of the private universities including staff lecturers, management and their students. These challenges also affected the stakeholders such as parents, employers, and industry, community and government sectors as recipients of such quality of education.

The gaps that were widely identified by the World Bank, National Council for Higher Education and the Researcher were worthwhile to explore the deficiencies in governance structures and infrastructural issues. These infrastructural issues include classrooms, computer laboratories, cafeteria, clinics recreational facilities and sports facilities, lack of learning resources such as internet services, electronic resources, library books and poor quality of teaching staff related to experience and qualifications (World Bank Report, 2014; ~~Acad~~ Report, 2017).

It was further observed that many private universities lacked quality assurance systems, as they had not invested in assigning quality assurance officers to establish and manage quality assurance units at institutional level (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2017). The National Council for Higher Education therefore developed minimum standards for Higher education to guide higher education institutions in Malawi in provision of quality education (NCHE minimum standards 2016). Despite these efforts by NCHE to guide the higher education institutions to establish functional quality assurance systems as one way of improving delivery of quality education, private universities continued to face challenges to meet the minimum standards for higher education.

The Report by the World Bank (2014) established that Malawi's HEIs were struggling to keep up with quality due to lack of funding, shortage of qualified academic staff, poor quality teaching and inadequate infrastructure among other challenges. It was established that in Malawi private universities relied mostly on tuition fees for their operations and sustainability while public universities

were well supported by government subventions (Ryan 2015; Msiska,2015; Kajawo, 2019). This calls for private universities to embark on several resource mobilization strategies, including fund raising activities to improve financial sustainability in private universities.

This agrees with findings in the NCHE Report of 2016 on poor quality of education as established by assessment teams after assessing private universities where a number of HEIs did not meet the minimum requirements for higher education. What then is the purpose of this study? The following section presents and justifies the importance of this study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As the number of private universities increased, there were a number of challenges reported by some scholars and the National Council for Higher Education. Some of these challenges included lack of finances to sustain quality education, poor and inadequate teaching and learning resources, unqualified staff and poor infrastructure (Kajawo, 2019; Shawa, 2017; Nyondo, 2015; Msiska 2015 ;). Further, it was established that private universities lacked proper quality assurance systems to steer and improve the quality education (Shawa, 2017).

According to the SADC report (2018), despite student enrollment increase in both private and public universities in Malawi, there were still challenges with access to higher education and these HEIs struggled to maintain quality of education due to rapid increase in enrollment (Hoosen, Chetty and Butcher, 2017). There were also concerns raised regarding quality of higher education in Malawi by the public as well as the relevant stakeholders related to the rapid expansion since the new millennium (Zezeza, 2018). A number of researchers have commented that quality assurance is quite a new

phenomenon in the higher education sector especially in private universities (Kajawo, 2019) and this makes this study of further significance to explore how well these quality assurance systems are established in the private universities in addition to other related elements to these systems. With reference to the background of the study, private universities continue to face challenges related to meeting minimum requirements for registration and accreditation by NCHE, hence a need to explore further other factors or strategies that can be used by HEIs to improve quality of education. As recommended by Shawa (2017); Wambui (2018); Tsevi (2014) and NCHE (2017) development of quality assurance systems with proper quality assurance units can assist to address challenges faced by higher education institutions. Additionally, Wambui, (2018) emphasized on use of quality assurance instruments as one way of evaluating and improving quality of graduates and evaluation of programs. Shawa (2017), Zeleza (2018) and Kajawo (2019) questioned the performance of private universities in Malawi and investigated challenges faced by such universities as they discovered a number of challenges including inadequate teaching and learning resources, library and laboratory resources, inadequate books, computers, lack of free accessible internet, sports equipment; resulting in closures and deregistration of HEIs. (Hoosen et al, 2017) agrees with Zeleza (2018) and Kajawo, 2019) that there were a number of challenges in HEIs such as shortage of qualified academic staff, poor quality of teaching, inadequate infrastructure and equipment lack of funding and poor quality of teaching and relevancy of teaching and research. `

Furthermore, through NCHE reports and other scholars including exposure to assessment of private universities, the researcher noted a number of gaps related to establishment of proper quality assurance units in private universities evidenced by assigning academic staff to act as quality assurance directors. The absence of proper quality assurance units presented another challenge, as there were no proper structures, policies and instruments to manage quality assurance systems HEIs. It is

envisaged that availability of such quality assurance units would improve quality education hence this study aims at improving such systems in private universities (Anane and Addaney, 2020).

Having worked with the National Council for Higher Education as Quality Assurance Manager from 2014 to 2018, the researcher noted that both public and private higher education institutions assessments conducted since 2016, many private HEIS had not invested in improving educational standards by assigning desk officers to establish and manage quality at institutional level (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2017).

Historically, from the mid-1960s there was only one university in Malawi namely the University of Malawi (UNIMA) with 4 constituent colleges; two in the Southern Region and two in the Central Region. According to Materu (2007), there were five (5) public universities and twenty-six private (26) universities operating at different levels in the country. It is therefore evident that the number of private higher education institutions continue to increase following this trend and therefore requires NCHE to monitor educational standards to ensure quality education with proper quality assurance systems, which includes availability of well-defined quality assurance units.

It is therefore imperative that management of such typical private HEIs appreciate the importance of improving quality at all levels in order to produce fit for purpose graduates, as there were many programs, which were not registered or accredited by the government through the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2017). In light of these challenges and reports of quality gaps by NCHE and other scholars, the researcher was motivated to explore further on other factors that affect private universities including issues of quality assurance systems.

1.3 Rationale and justification of the study

In Malawi, a number of studies have been done on higher education institutions and mostly focused on public universities (Chivwara, 2013). Most studies conducted in Malawi focused on challenges faced by the private universities (Kajawo, 2019; Sharra, 2015). A number of studies that were conducted in Sub-Saharan region and Worldwide focused on management and development of university education and challenges faced by such universities (Mbirithi, 2013; Garwe, 2015; Chivwara, 2013 and Kajawo, 2019). A number of these studies conducted worldwide pointed out that education in private universities was becoming an influence on globalization and democratization in African countries. Without duplicating what other researchers have done in private and public universities, this study focusses on how some of those challenges can be addressed through establishment of proper quality assurance systems in order to offer quality education. The researcher observed that, not many studies have been conducted in this area of quality assurance and therefore this study focusses on internal quality assurance factors that can improve provision of quality education in private universities in Lilongwe, Malawi.

The establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) as a national quality assurance agency was to regulate higher education institutions in Malawi and ensure provision of quality education through registration and accreditation of both private and public universities. This study explores if indeed quality education is being offered following registration and accreditation by NCHE with support from quality assurance systems.

This study was therefore conducted on the assumption that there was a relationship between establishment of well-defined internal quality assurance systems and delivery of quality education in

private universities. For a long time, higher education institutions had been operating without a well-established regulatory body such as NCHE. The absence of this regulatory body enabled higher education institutions to operate without following educational standards and therefore compromising quality of education (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2016).

Further, there has not been much literature conducted in Malawi on status of quality assurance systems and its impact on quality education in private universities. This study may attract key stakeholders and regulators to be involved in private universities to ensure all quality assurance structures are established and that there are proper quality assurance units in place.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This study intends to explore the factors related to quality assurance systems that affect delivery of quality education in private universities in Malawi. It is the expectation of the study to contribute to the reduction of the knowledge gap that exists in the areas of Quality assurance in higher education in private universities, as there has been limited literature in this area. The study aims to come up with internal quality assurance frameworks that will encourage and guide private universities to implement quality assurance systems that include establishment of quality assurance units in their institutions. According to Anane and Addaney (2016), it is important to appreciate that success of the higher education institutions require that quality assurance units be well set up with the involvement of various stakeholders of the universities and that the units must be efficient and effective. The establishment and requirement for well-defined quality assurance units are presented in chapter two of this study.

The main purpose of this research therefore was to explore how quality assurance factors affect provision of quality education in private universities and aimed at establishing internal quality assurance factors that would influence delivery of quality education. This would be achieved by developing suitable internal quality assurance frameworks for quality improvement and unpack

elements that influence quality education. The study also aimed at establishing other factors not established through literature

review that may affect quality assurance systems and influence delivery of quality education in private universities.

The expected outcomes from this study are expected to assist many private HEIs to improve the delivery of quality higher education that will be inclusive and accessible for all students through establishment of appropriate quality assurance systems. It was evident from the data from the National Council for Higher Education and other scholars that there was a need for new research to investigate factors related to quality assurance systems that may enhance provision of quality education in private HEIs. The absence of knowledge on establishment of quality assurance systems in private universities decreases the opportunities to establish credible and functional QA units and improve quality education. The number of private universities not meeting the minimum standards and attaining registration and or accreditation status by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2017) confirmed this.

The study hopes to bring new revelations in light of the correlation between quality assurance systems and quality education through literature review and findings of the study.

In this study, quality of education was measured by the internal quality assurance systems that contribute to quality education. Internal factors included infrastructural and structural issues, availability of Quality Assurance structures, Leadership role and stakeholder involvement. The study has direct impact on both institutional and programme outcomes and the opposite is true that absence of quality assurance systems may affect performance of private institutions. The following objectives and aims of the study were developed in trying to address the research topic.

1.5 Study Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of this study is to improve delivery of quality education in private universities through well-defined internal quality assurance systems.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a) To explore the status of provision of quality education in private universities
- b) To identify policies, structures and instruments related to quality assurance systems used in private institutions
- c) To explore the perspective of stakeholders on quality assurance systems and quality education.
- d) To analyze the challenges faced by private universities leadership in adhering to demands for quality education.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In Malawi, there is increased demand for higher education where annually over 18,000 students become eligible and the public universities can only absorb 26% while 75% of these students can have access of their education in private universities (NCHE selection Report,

2018). However, these private universities face a number of challenges when they offer quality education to such students who should be employable just like those studying in public universities (Kajawo,2019). The role of the private institutions is to provide additional access as well as accelerate provision of higher education while offering quality education (NCHE Report,2018). This study therefore explores factors that may facilitate establishment of proper internal quality assurance systems. The Research study adds new knowledge and new literature to the area of quality assurance in the higher education sector in Malawi, that strengthens internal quality assurance systems. The study addresses the challenges faced by private universities through the establishment of functional quality assurance systems, provision of equitable, inclusive and quality education in private institutions.

The outcome of the study is expected to improve delivery of quality education, eventually strengthen, and contribute to knowledge regarding quality assurance systems in Malawi. The establishment of well-defined quality assurance units is commendable to improve provision of quality education in private universities (Kisanga et al., 2014). This study puts a lot of emphasis on stakeholder involvement and importance of having transformational leadership in private universities as one way of quality enhancement. The provision of quality education is expected to benefit students, industry, regulatory bodies, lecturers and other members of staff as well as leadership of these universities including attainment of accreditation status. The contributions from well-qualified graduates is anticipated to benefit various employers who are key to economic development of the country (Osun State University, 2020).

Additionally, this study is important, because private education is one of the global education priorities that focusses on quality control and quality assurance. Literature has indicated that most of the studies conducted in Malawi focus on public universities and very few focus on private universities (Kajawo, 2019). Further, recommendations have been made to the

management of private higher education institutions and government that are expected to augment the improvement of quality education.

Kisanga et al., (2014) came up with a paper to answer long term unanswered questions concerning quality assurance agencies, policy and mechanisms practiced in most of higher education institutions in Africa; such questions include “why some of the graduates are blamed to lack appropriate competency? Do HEIs quality assurance practitioners rethink and act according to the growing demands for improved quality assurance practices worldwide? Do HEIs have quality supporting staff, administrative staff and librarians who can act accordingly to produce quality graduates?” Why has quality assurance become a big business in both private and public higher education in both developed and developing countries and this is a public concern (Kisanga et al., 2014). It is envisaged that the study will contribute to the developmental and emerging issues related to quality assurance in higher education, explore internal quality issues, and recommend establishment of quality assurance units with an ultimate goal to the improvement of quality education in private universities. The Researcher was motivated to explore on issues related to quality assurance due to increased number of private universities on the market and the increasing demand for higher education as evidenced by number of enrollments in higher education institutions (NCHE selection Report, 2018).

Having clarified the significance of the study, the Researcher developed some research questions and these are questions that are examined and answered in scientific studies and assist in defining the challenges that are highlighted in the study (Gronmo, 2020). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) also supports the revelation that research questions are linked to the research problem and literature that supports the significance of the study field. In line with the study topic, questions were developed in order to try to address the objectives of this study.

1.7 Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

The following research questions were developed:

- 1) How are private higher education institutions progressing in the provision of quality higher education in Malawi?
- 2) What are the nature of the policies, structures and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems that are being used in the selected higher education institutions in Malawi?
- 3) What is the stakeholders' perspective on quality assurance systems in Malawi?
- 4) What is the role of leadership of private universities in adhering to standards of education in Malawi?

1.7.1 Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis I

According to Gronmo, (2020), hypothesis testing assists to clarify whether there is a particular relationship proved in the sample to a certain level of probability; thus hypothesis is about a particular relation of two important variables under study. In this study, the researcher used a relationship between quality assurance and quality education as indicated below:

H0: Establishing proper quality assurance systems and adherence to minimum standards for higher education will attain accreditation status and improve provision of quality education in private higher education institutions in Malawi.

Null Hypothesis

The purpose of hypothesis testing is to clarify whether or not null hypothesis should be rejected. In this study, null hypothesis stated that there is no relationship between the two variables i.e. Quality assurance systems and quality education

HA: Establishing proper quality assurance systems and adherence to minimum standards for higher education will hardly improve provision of quality education in private higher education institutions in Malawi.

The following table presents the four research questions with their related hypotheses and null hypothesis.

Table 1.1: Research questions and hypotheses

Research Question	Hypotheses	Null Hypotheses
1) How are private universities progressing in the provision of quality higher education in Lilongwe, Malawi?	Private universities are doing well in the provision of quality higher education in Lilongwe, Malawi.	Private universities are not doing well in the provision of quality higher education in Lilongwe, Malawi
2) What are the nature of the policies, structures and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems that are being used in selected private universities in Malawi?	The nature, policies and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems in private universities in Malawi are effective.	The nature, policies and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems in private universities in Malawi are not effective.
3) What is the stakeholders' perspective on quality assurance systems in private universities in Malawi?	There is a positive perspective on quality assurance systems in private universities in Malawi by stakeholders.	There is a negative perspective on quality assurance systems in private universities in Malawi by stakeholders.

4) What is the role of leadership of private universities in adhering to standards of education in the selected private universities in Malawi?	The leadership of private universities in Malawi have a role to play in adhering to standards of education in the selected private universities.	The leadership of private universities in Malawi have no role to play in adhering to standards of education in the selected private universities.
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This study will test these hypotheses related to each research question to establish if the hypotheses address the research questions assumptions. In order to follow and appreciate the layout of this study, the following section presents the thesis structure:

1.8 Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 – Introduction: The first chapter introduces the dissertation outlines, background, purpose, aims and objectives of the study and it further presents the problem statement and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of quality assurance frameworks in line with quality education in private universities. The review is structured in line with the research objectives of the study and focuses on quality of education in higher education institutions, the nature of quality assurance policies, structures and instruments, stakeholder’s involvement and role of leadership in quality improvement. Chapter 3 provides the philosophical aspect of the research study and discusses various research paradigms, data collection methodological choices and data analysis. The Chapter outlines the study population, sample size and sampling methods for the study and critically describes the research approaches that guided the whole research involving both quantitative and qualitative study designs. It also includes limitations and delimitations of the study, ethical considerations that

were applied to this research study. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and discusses study findings guided by the research questions and these findings are from surveys and interviews

as mixed research method used for this study to have enriched data. Chapter 5 is the final chapter of the thesis, discusses study implications, recommendations based on study findings, and concludes the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the study while this chapter focuses on the review of relevant literature in order to obtain an overview of the current state of knowledge on the topic under research and isolate gaps in research, cross-examine the studies for methods and build a theoretical framework within which the findings were analyzed and interpreted. The chapter critically analyzes various theoretical quality assurance frameworks with the purpose of developing relevant research questions and these frameworks form a basis for development of a conceptual framework for practicing and implementing internal quality assurance activities in order to improve delivery of quality education in private universities in Malawi. Further, the chapter includes definitions related to quality and quality assurance that are crucial to the understanding of the concepts used in the literature review. For the purposes of presentation and structure of literature review, the following section presents a logical organization of this chapter.

2. 1.1 Organization of the Chapter

The chapter is organized in line with research study objectives and includes literature review processes and searches that have been used related to the study topic. The chapter reintroduces the purpose statement of the study to remind the researcher of the focus areas of study and guides the readers on the importance of the study. Prior to the literature review, the Researcher found it necessary to define concepts and key words used in this study. The first section of the literature review starts with presentation of quality assurance theoretical frameworks used in both external and internal quality assurance systems. The literature review starts with issues related to status of quality

education in private universities and challenges faced by private universities and regulatory processes for private universities. There was also a need to place quality education in higher education in its proper context by way of definition of relevant terms and examining its relationship to quality assurance systems in general.

The Chapter also includes issues related to the quality assurance structures, policies and instruments and this is followed by stakeholder involvement in quality assurance. Stakeholders included in this section are quality assurance agencies, government ministries, students, industry and employers. Prior to the chapter summary, the final section of the chapter presents the leadership roles in quality assurance and starts with presentation of leadership theories that are relevant to leadership in private universities. This is followed by specific leadership roles in terms of monitoring of educational standards and resource mobilization for the universities. The following sections present the literature search strategies that were used in electronic databases; sources of literature; and key words that were used for searching articles and books.

2.1.2 Literature Search Strategies

The researcher used published literature on quality assurance and databases, search engines, search items and sources of literature guided quality education in private universities and the literature search as follows:

The researcher sourced literature from latest published books, journals, articles and reports from relevant stakeholders; Government, National Council for Higher Education, Ministry of Education and private universities. This study mostly used electronic databases to access relevant information related to quality education and quality assurance systems in private universities. The researcher

appreciated the comprehensiveness and the nature of literature required for this thesis hence several resources were used for review including published peer-reviewed articles from different databases.

The researcher explored a number of data bases mostly published peer reviewed journals, articles and books from mainly 90% were searched from ProQuest.com as provided by Unicaf University of Malawi electronic library and other various data bases listed as follows:

<https://proQuest.com;> <https://ejournals.bc.edu;www.chen.org;>
<https://files.eric.ed.gov;www.amazon.com;> [www.google.com.search;](http://www.google.com/search;)
<https://researchgate.net/publications;> www.tandfonline.com/doi/ ;
www.amazonaws.com/academia.edu; [www.universityworldnews.com/post\[](http://www.universityworldnews.com/post[)
<https://scholar.google.com/scholar;> www.iiep.unesco.org/en/new-policy.briefs;
[https://www.theelephant.info/features.](https://www.theelephant.info/features)

2. 1.3 Published literature from electronic searches and key words

Searches restricted access to literature that was published from 2015 to 2021, using English language and only focusing on African region and specifically Sub –Saharan region since this is the geographical area for the study, in Malawi. The literature on quality assurance and quality education in private universities used the following key words to search for relevant articles, books and journals; quality education and private universities, Internal Quality Assurance, External Quality Assurance, quality assurance unit, quality assurance structures, quality assurance and instruments, governance and stakeholder, stakeholder involvement and private universities, leadership and quality assurance, minimum standards and higher education, students and stakeholder and higher education, resource mobilization and leadership and

universities, accreditation and private universities, challenges and private universities, registration status and private universities in Malawi.

2. 1.4 Definitions of Concepts Used in the Literature Review

The following definitions and explanations are commonly used concepts in this literature review and give the meanings in the context of the study topic.

Quality

Quality is defined as exceptional with regard to the highest academic standards and excellence and therefore may not be achieved by all (Matel and Iwinska, 2016)

. Quality is also viewed as being perfect and consistent and therefore is a process to eliminate defects and aiming for a consistent outcome (Harvey and Green,1993). According to Pala (2016), quality is usually defined as fitness for purpose and therefore is measured by the level of fulfillment of a stated purpose, mission or goals that can either be by an institution or an academic program. Further, quality is defined as value for money and therefore focusses on the output with the aim of gaining more efficiency (Pala, 2016).

Furthermore, Wambui (2018) defines quality, as a transformation process where learning is centered on the student, is value-added and transformative with empowerment of a student through the learning process.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance refers to well established national frameworks, including quality assurance agencies formal quality standards and specific review processes and procedures such as accreditation

of higher education institutions and their academic programs, or both (Pala2016). QA systems need to be transparent and provide sufficient information to the public and all relevant stakeholders such as students or parents. Meanwhile, Woodhouse (2006) defined quality assurance as systems and processes that lead to monitoring and achievement of quality.

According to the definition of UNESCO (2004), quality assurance is a systematic review of educational programs that ensures that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are in place. Quality assurance ensures that a learning environment in which the content of programs, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose (Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA, 2015). Shaba (2014) defined quality assurance as a systematic management and assessment procedure that are adopted to ensure achievement of specified quality and enable key stakeholders to have confidence in the management of quality and achieved outcomes.

Quality assurance is an organized review process that is carried out at an institution in order to determine if educational standards are being met, upheld and improved (Materu, 2007).

External Quality Assurance (EQA)

EQA concerns regulations, policies and practices that take place at the national higher education system level to assure quality of higher education programs and institutions. In some EQA systems, the focus is on both programs and higher education institutions, while in others it can be on one or the other.

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)

IQA systems are concerned with institutional policies, self-assessments, institutional audits, students support, and governance, mobilization of academic and administrative resources that is used to offer quality education and is used to support external quality

assurance.

Quality Education

Quality education is perceived as a social need that requires social justice in that all students have the right to quality education (Klaasen, 2020). According to Anka and Khaskhelli (2011), quality education is also referred to as learning and research, which produces knowledgeable and skilled personnel for development and relevant productivity.

Accreditation

Accreditation is defined as a review of the quality of higher education institutions and programs after meeting minimum standards of quality (Ryan, 2015). Accreditation is also defined as a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to examine quality standards of an institution and its programs to determine compliance with standards as set by national quality assurance agency or professional bodies (Pala, 2016).

2.2 Challenges faced by PHEIs in Malawi

As rapid growth of private universities continues in Malawi, there are reported challenges affecting provision of quality of education and some of which are presented in this section. There are several challenges that are faced by the typical private universities as stated by a number of scholars such as Msiska (2015); Zeleza (2018) and Kajawo, (2019). According to Kajawo (2019), most studies had concentrated on public universities and not necessarily on private universities hence a need to explore further on factors that affect quality education in private universities. Some of the challenges faced by private universities included the following sections:

2.2.1 Quality graduates

Mgomezulu and Wamba (2014) stated that one of the challenges attributed to poor foundation in free primary and secondary education is the poor quality of graduates. This results in students that have a poor background and that are not well prepared for higher education to proceed. This resulted in poor graduates that did not present as higher education products even after graduation and these graduates mostly came from private universities. This revelation by Mgomezulu and Wamba (2014) calls for further investigation on factors that might have contributed to such gaps in addition to poor preparation at primary and secondary school levels. This study therefore explores further on other areas to find out other factors at higher education level related to internal and external quality assurance factors.

2.2.2 Teaching and Learning Resources

Galafa (2018) established that one of the challenges faced by private universities in Malawi was that of poor teaching resources that contributed to poor quality of education and mostly due to underqualified staff. Zeleza (2018) also supports this observation that some challenges faced by African HEIs included lack of institutional supplies, research outputs, learning and teaching resources and leadership and this was common to many African Countries including Malawi. Lamberti (2019) commented on the need to improve technology-centered approaches with innovations and increase access to learners. Additionally, Roy (2021) reflected on the quality of teaching and concluded that it involves skills and learning environment in order to address students' learning needs and therefore requires support to staff and students including financial, social and academic support. This support should be inclusive to vulnerable students and include counseling services with the aim of improving learning outcomes and meet students' satisfaction. Roy (2021) further advises that the quality of

teaching should be the responsibility of the whole university and this needs enhancement by establishing proper quality assurance units (QAU) as reported by Kilimanjaro College Academy (2018) and states that international ranking are now based on quality of teaching and students are able to compare such quality with different institutions. With the increase of private universities, in Malawi there is competition among universities to get the best students for the higher education institutions hence a need to offer enabling and quality learning and teaching environments (NCHE selection Report, 2017).

Zhou, Xia and Yin (2016) observed that internet development has generated high demand for university students with the use of personal computers and smart phones and therefore giving a platform for students' studies, entertainment and social relations. These authors further reported that the rapid changes in universities is aggravated by internet services including on line learning which has become a preferred mode of teaching in line with Covid19 pandemic and also increasing access to education through open and distance learning (ODEL) which also proves to be cost effective.

Lamberti (2019) reported that traditional teaching practices have integrated into technology-centered approaches with innovations in South Africa and therefore increasing access to learners through technology. However, the author criticizes that the use of technology in teaching, though appreciated, brings its own challenges. He recommended that teachers should find a way to engage students with supporting technology and digital platforms that have been used by teachers to engage learners remotely and thereby make recommendations for rural areas access.

Lamberti (2019) further recommends Continuous Development Program (CDP) workshops, courses, conferences in order to prevent pedagogical stagnation and encourage quality enhancement. Lamberti further encourages teachers to have access to resources for teaching, technology and understanding. As well observed in private universities where lecturers lack teaching resources such as computers, LCD Projectors and Wi-Fi access as reported by students. These challenges compromise quality of teaching and therefore affects the quality and performance of graduates.

According to Roy (2021) quality, teaching involves teachers' skills and learning environment that addresses students' learning needs. It requires adequate support to staff and students including financial, social and academic support and support to vulnerable students and counselling services. Roy advises on enhancement of teaching so that student learning can be enriched to improve students' satisfaction and that Quality teaching should aim at improving learning outcomes.

A study conducted by Din and Nasfer (2011) to evaluate quality of teaching, examined institutional teaching policies and teaching towards professional development and enhanced professional development for teachers; the study involved five universities and twenty teachers from each university as study participants; these teachers were identified by students in their own universities. The findings indicated that teachers were not given benefits but appreciation and self-satisfaction and that requirement for quality teaching were not available in the five universities. The Authors used purposive sampling to select the teachers and students from their own universities. The general findings indicated that teaching facilities were not proper as there existed ineffective teaching techniques. The findings further revealed that there was no arrangement for teacher development and teachers were not allowed to participate in conferences. Teacher evaluations were performed inconsistently and there were no incentives as these were good teachers.

This study by Din and Nasfer (2011) was very important in evaluating teachers in university and the findings are important to appreciate the challenges that teachers go through. The method used was not well articulated and the selection of participants was biased as some students identified the teachers and at the same time, students conducted interviews. This could easily bring bias in interviewing the teachers who were identified by the same students. The study findings seemed to indicate that although these were good teachers, they had no supportive structures from management and no incentives, no training, no staff development and there were inadequate resources. The researcher finds the above study to be relevant to the current study as one of the focus areas involves quality of teaching. This study also gives another dimension where students play an important part in identifying what they perceived to be good teachers at their school and the students ~~take~~ part in interviewing the teachers. Although this could not be the best way but this is another way of involving students as internal stakeholders; hence agree with the idea of internal quality assurance processes.

The responsibilities of quality teaching should be with the whole institution and not left only to the teachers. With advanced globalization, there is competition among the national and international agencies to grab the best students among higher education institutions. This therefore reinforces pressure for quality teaching and quality assurance. It is likely that international rankings based on the quality of teaching will be set forth, thus reinforcing the attractiveness of quality initiatives. Moreover, many students study at various universities, benefitting from opportunities like scholarships. These students are likely to compare the quality of the teaching received at these different institutions.

This Literature review aims to add value to the topic of this study, which is to explore the factors related to quality assurance systems on quality education of private universities in Malawi. In order to have comprehensive review, the researcher extended the literature review done from Africa to the rest of the world.

2.2.3 Qualification of Teaching Staff

NCHE minimum standards for higher education (2016, pp 37 – 39) under the section on staff complement, prescribed the minimum qualification for teaching to be Master's degree for teaching Bachelors programs and PhD for teaching Masters degrees but Masters holders with experience in the relevant field may teach Masters modules. Assessment for registration and accreditation in 2016 that was conducted by the National Council for Higher Education in Malawi revealed a number of challenges in quality specifically in private universities and these included unqualified lecturers, poor infrastructure, lack of teaching resources such as books, journals, lack of research and publication especially in private universities. A number of scholars have reported similar challenges on unqualified teaching staff in private universities (Msiska, 2015; Zeleza, 2018 & Kajawo, 2019)

2.2.4 Relevance of Programs

Mambo and Meky (2016) questioned the relevance of programs being offered by Malawian private universities as to whether they contributed to the economic development of Malawi and recommended that the importance of new programs that will respond to the MGDs in order to meet the needs of Malawi in meeting its development objectives. This is an area worth exploring further in light of growing number of private universities in Malawi. (Hoosen, Chetty and Butcher, 2017) established that there was a mismatch between programs offered in private universities and labour market requirements; perhaps this is another area for future studies.

Mekoa (2018) conducted a post-apartheid policy review to assess how governments had addressed inaccuracy and abolished the relevancy of programs being offered.

The proposal to transform higher education in South Africa were highlighted in the White paper; this revealed that private universities were offering programs that were not relevant to socio-economic situation in South Africa.

Through interviews with leadership and students in private universities, it is necessary to make recommendations that not only focus on quality but relevance of programs that should contribute to meet the national development agenda in Malawi.

2.2.5 Financial Resources

One of the major challenges faced by the private institution is lack of financial resources and this has a major impact on quality assurance and quality education thereby affecting the institution, staff, students and stakeholders. Kajawo (2019) established that most private universities rely on students' fees collection and cautioned on issues of sustainability. In Malawi, in order to support both government and private universities in offering loans and grants to the needy students, the government established an institution. According to the distribution policy, the private universities would get 20% of the funding from this board but on the contrary, only 7% has been accessed to the needy students so far (as at the time of this research). This is one of the violations of such policies related to social justice and equitable access which requires the Association of Private Universities in Malawi (APUMA) and other civil society organizations ought to fight for rights of students. The leadership in the institutions are expected to identify ways of engaging the government on this issue and lobby for financial support through this Students' Loans and Grants Board.

It was also reported that during the Covid-19 pandemic, many private universities in Malawi especially the typically private owned institutions faced a great deal of financial hardship due to closure of the institutions for prolonged periods and yet there was no support from the government to bail them out (Kamchacha, 2021). This agrees with Mekoa (2018), who commented on the importance

of equality to distribution of resources such as financing and support for the needy students coming from disadvantaged background and pointed out that access to higher education is a social justice issue. The Constitution of Malawi (2017) stated that access to quality education is a right for all and the government should make deliberate efforts to work with private institutions to address financial challenges that hinder provision of quality education in private institutions. Hoosen et al., (2017) also noted that there was little capacity at institutions of higher learning and land inadequate resources, which slowed down the implementation of internal quality assurance systems hence the establishment of quality assurance units calls for a quality assurance budget to address issues of capacity and quality.

The Association of Private Universities in Malawi (APUMA) communicated some challenges faced by private universities as summarized by Kamchacha (2021) at its annual general meeting that calls for support from the government, National Council for higher education and students' Loans Board among other challenges. Kamchacha mentioned funding constraints on academic teacher development and retention, lack of infrastructure and a need for ICT expansion, funding for research and support during pandemics such as Covid, 19 for sustainability of education.

These financial challenges bring about limited use of quality assurance instruments that can go unnoticed in this study as this affects quality enhancement. There are quality assurance instruments and tools that remain unexploited by private institutions that could aid in quality improvement and this could be because of lack of partnerships and collaboration on resource mobilization among themselves as presented by Wambui (2018).

A number of studies have been conducted on challenges faced by private universities in Malawi but not necessarily on quality assurance issues. Kajawo (2019) dwelled much on strategies that could be used to mitigate challenges faced by private universities while this study

takes another dimension to explore factors that may enhance quality education through quality assurance systems as Kajawo's study did not relate any of the challenges faced by private universities to quality assurance systems.

2.2.6 Challenges with Higher Education Regulations

Kamchacha (2021) had presented a number of challenges faced with the National Council for Higher Education as perceived by private universities and these included apparent double standards in the assessment processes between public and private institutions where NCHE's approach was seen to be skewed towards or in favor of public universities. In addition, Private universities observed that some assessors / reviewers from NCHE had a negative attitude towards private institutions as portrayed during the assessment processes, which was seen not to be objective but rather fault finding and not professional as per NCHE's assessment tools and code of conduct (Mkandawire, 2019).

In conclusion, as number of private owned private universities continue to increase, it is anticipated that there may be many challenges, which may go unnoticed and unreported and therefore require further investigations. Most of the challenges faced by private universities could be because of lack of adequate financial resources and lack of proper ~~q~~ quality assurance systems. This study may bring out new factors related to quality assurance that may affect provision of quality education in private universities.

The expected outcomes from this study are likely to assist many such typical private universities to improve delivery of quality higher education that will be inclusive and accessible to as many students as possible through the establishment and appropriate quality assurance systems. There are gaps revealed by a number of studies related to challenges faced by private universities not meeting the minimum standards and attaining registration and or accreditation status by the National Council for Higher Education. Based on the topic of this study, which

focused on factors affecting quality assurance systems in private universities, it was imperative to explore a number of quality assurance theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The following section therefore presents the theoretical frameworks that may apply well and contribute to this research study.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

The literature review includes the review of a number of Quality Assurance frameworks that are related to higher education and how they are used to improve quality education. Based on the critical review of current literature, the chapter dwells much on internal quality assurance systems as basis for quality improvement. This study presumes that provision of quality education is enhanced by availability of quality assurance systems in the higher education institutions. It is speculated that leadership in the HEIs contributes to the establishment and monitoring of QA systems especially in the private higher education institutions. This section of literature review presents three theoretical frameworks namely, External and Internal Quality Assurance Frameworks (Mixed), Internal Quality Assurance Framework and External Quality Assurance Frameworks. The following section gives a general overview of theoretical frameworks related to quality assurance systems.

2.3.1 Theoretical Frameworks on Quality Assurance

This section discusses the theoretical frameworks in general terms as presented by a number of authors before presentation of various related frameworks. From the theoretical point of view, the internal and external quality assurance systems have a relationship with quality education with specific elements that are well defined as indicators of quality. Such elements include governance structures, financial resources, students support, leadership and stakeholder involvement. Anka and Khaskhelli (2011) examined theoretical framework for quality higher education in Nigeria and

identified curriculum and institutional design, self-assessment model, quality teaching and learning and continuous improvement of higher education quality as elements that contribute to achieving quality assurance. The objective of the paper was to provide theoretical framework for quality higher education in Nigeria by identifying parameters towards achieving quality education.

The paper also defined sustainable education as that which is felt by the society, community and the nation. Anka and Khaskhelli succeeded in defining a framework with sound parameters that propel quality higher education; challenges that hinder teaching, learning environment and most importantly proposed recommendation for improving learners' employability and professionalism in Nigeria. However, their work remains in abstract because the paper is silent on this methodology, which they used to establish the findings. Further, the framework does not expound on guidelines for its applicability in HEIs and does not explain the context in which it can work successfully. The researcher finds some anomalies in this framework in that it was generalized by the authors and was not categorized to indicate which elements are related to internal or external quality assurance. In essence, all these elements mentioned in the framework are related to internal quality assurance and not necessarily to external quality assurance systems.

Simona (2015) conducted a study where the theoretical framework on quality assurance in education was expanded by adapting the concept of education audit for an online learning environment. Simona emphasized on the importance of quality assurance systems in higher education as it contributes to accountability of financial resources, improving quality education, assessing the quality of new higher education institutions and assist in international comparison.

The Researcher supports this auditing framework as part of external quality assurance to improve quality education and that the audit should be conducted by national agencies such as national councils for higher education. However, Simona only focused on the audit as a tool to improve

quality education by national agencies but this tool can also be used for internal quality assurance mechanism by universities. As Simona focused on external quality assurance and not necessarily internal quality assurance, it is therefore important to explore further and establish how this tool can be used for both internal and external quality mechanism for both online and face to face learning models.

Ryan (2015) reviewed literature on quality assurance systems in the global higher education and established that accreditation is a mechanism used by many HEIs to ensure quality education as it ensures effectiveness of quality assurance practices. Ryan further mentioned that Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2007), identified three factors that influence international quality assurance trends in higher education that quality assurance is competitive, recognized at regional level and that it requires international framework. Lithuania also uses external quality assurance as an instrument for regulation of quality in higher education sector with focus on external assessment of programs and institutions to decide on outcome of accreditation (Paliulis and Labanauskis, 2015). This refers to assessment of HEIs through accreditation as implemented in many countries through their national agencies.

While agreeing that accreditation is one way of ensuring quality in higher education institutions, there are other quality assurance processes such as registration, peer reviews or audit which can be explored further to establish how these can ensure quality education. Accreditation is therefore viewed as an ultimate outcome of internal quality assurance systems validated by external quality assurance systems but not the only tool as some countries such as Germany, have moved on to self-regulations independent of accreditation processes (Mishra, 2007).

Having reviewed the theoretical frameworks from a number of authors related to quality assurance, the following section explores further on how internal and external quality assurance frameworks can influence quality education.

2.4 Internal and External Quality Assurance Frameworks

Internal quality assurance (IQA) involves processes that ensure quality of internal environment including governance, leadership, academic support, students learning and support. External quality assurance involves external stakeholders during the development and review of standards are met; such stakeholders include students, employers, national agencies, ministries and other professional bodies (NCHE Standards 2012). These two quality assurance systems form part of accreditation processes by the national agencies to ensure that both institutional and academic programs are meeting the requirements to offer quality education.

Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College (2018) developed extensive quality assurance systems and extensive internal quality assurance mechanisms that are generated at departmental level and are continuously monitored. These mechanisms are comprehensible with the quality assurance framework that was set in their policy that was approved by Governing Board and is used to assess both Internal Quality Assurance and External Quality Assurance as presented in the table below:

Table 2.1: Quality assurance functions

SN	Internal quality assurance	External quality assurance
1)	Quality of programs and courses	External examiners
2)	Quality of programs review process	External professional bodies
3)	Quality of academic staff	External accreditation agencies
4)	Quality of teaching and learning experience	Employers
5)	Quality in students' assessment through internal Moderation	Former students (through alumnae)
6)	Quality in support services	Other colleges and universities
7)	Quality of resources and facilities	
8)	Quality of research	

As seen from the table above, internal quality assurance is more comprehensive as compared to external quality assurance stakeholders. IQA focusses on internal ~~enorm~~ issues such as issues to do with teaching and learning, students assessment, support services, research, academic staff and programs while EQA works with a number of external stakeholders including former students, employers, national agencies and professional bodies and external examiners. This can be concluded that EQA is about external reviews and or involvement with stakeholders that are external to the institution while IQA concentrates on the internal quality structures.

Stumbrys (2004) also reported on internal and external quality assurance in higher education in that IQA system objectives enhance quality of services and perfect standards at the same time gain confidence of students, employers and other stakeholders in terms of reliable and comprehensive educational system. Specifically, Stumbrys (2004) reported that EQA assessments aim at confirming reliability and efficiency of Internal QA systems without duplicating processes and this activity involves experts visiting HEIs and these write reports and communicate assessments results.

Stumbrys (2004) also mentioned that in Lithuania, only programs are accredited where the outcomes could lead to full accreditation, Conditional and restricted accreditation. Stumbrys concluded that institutional performance becomes the objectives of higher education market quality assurance while external assessment system is key to quality improvement.

This is an efficient way and cost effective way of ensuring quality and indeed avoids duplication of activities carried out by the HEIs and external experts. The only challenge maybe that if there are many academic programs it could be costly for the University.

The Researcher finds this article very useful as Stumbrys managed to explain the purpose of the article, definition of the key words, key definitions of the key words, key

challenges facing the higher education in relation to provision of quality education and developed internal and external quality assurance framework relevant for Europe. Stumbrys, however, is faulted on failing to provide the source of data and methodology of the study. This is major weakness for readers to make an objective perception on the quality of the work. Further, Stumbrys does not provide a balanced guide for application of the framework as the author only explained guidelines for improving external assessment, leaving out guidelines for internal assessment.

In additional institutional audits such as accreditation, forms part of external QA and include self-assessments, peer reviews, site visits and written reports. However, Materu (2007) agrees with Stumbrys that EQA through accreditation can be very expensive and time consuming but also recommended that ranking of universities by QAA can form part of accreditation process; an example cited of Nigerian universities that are ranked using an instrument called mean academic quality index scores.

In the scenario of Malawian universities and Colleges, ranking of universities could be recommended as one way of quality improvement in addition to accreditation and recommend that NCHE in Malawi should consider going in this direction after developing National Qualification Framework (NQF) and using relevant instruments. Although accreditation is done in Malawi, currently there is no NQF to compare program levels and this leaves a gap in terms of assessing programs and makes it difficult to rank them. Accreditation is very expensive especially for private universities as it involves payment of the reviewers who are assigned to conduct the accreditation exercise for both institutions and programs and this process may be repeated as necessary. Not much has been reported in terms of quality related to research and publications that form part of ranking universities.

Internal quality assurance system is influenced by internal environmental factors such as governance, leadership, academic support and that external quality assurance is dependent

on internal quality assurance systems. In this framework, academic support includes infrastructure, learning resources and other supportive structures. External quality assurance involves accreditation, registration, and quality audit and quality assessment. This framework however does not interlink how the IQA and EQA link to quality education and its outcomes.

There is a relationship between internal and external quality assurance factors as they both have an influence on each other although external quality assurance mainly focusses on registration and accreditation of HEIs that is conducted through quality audit and assessment.

2.5 Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education

The focus of this section is to find out how IQA systems contribute to quality of education in universities and how different countries have utilized these systems. The description of internal quality assurance has been defined at the beginning of this chapter. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP, 2018) conducted a study on Internal and External Quality assurance systems and established that most countries prefer internal quality assurance as this is related to quality enhancement because the universities have a responsibility for the quality improvement. According to research conducted in eight countries through IIEP, the National QA frameworks have influenced the development of IQA.

In Germany Universities, accreditation was not effective in terms of quality enhancement in 2009 and so the government decided to allow universities have their own IQA systems (Mishra, 2007). Recently, the Universities in Germany conduct self-accreditation and therefore no longer require to have programs accredited hence rely on internal quality assurance systems only. This development assures regulators that higher education institutions can do well with self-regulation by instituting and improving internal quality systems without external influence. Much as self-institutional assessment

may yield positive results, the methodology may lack objectivity due to institutional bias and lose credibility of findings. The researcher

finds the German approach to be effective although there may a risk of subjectivity in self- regulation, w h i c h may compromise quality of education.

In another study that was conducted in Europe to identify internal quality assurance processes in HEIs, issues to do with development of institutional quality culture and quality assurance processes were central to the discussions (Loukikola, 2010). Loukikola reported on a survey that involved launching of questionnaires to 14 universities across Europe on line surveys where 10, 000 students responded to the questionnaires. The survey analyzed the involvement of students, external stakeholders in QA systems, establishment of QA units and the role of leadership on QA systems. The survey recommended ownership of quality through a quality culture within universities and empowerment of institutions to lead in ensuring standards. The survey supports this research study which mainly focused on institutional quality processes and therefore supporting the importance of involving students, leadership and other stakeholders in IQA systems. The study was comprehensive as it involved a number of universities across Europe and many students responding to questionnaires portraying that the findings could be credible; however, the study failed to indicate specific findings related to private universities and or whether it involved both public and private institutions. The study also focused only on students and no other key participants like staff, management and other key stakeholders as such findings could be biased towards students' perception.

In a different development, Wattananikom (2014) developed a manual for the internal quality assurance for higher education and reported that internal educational quality assurance is divided in three levels categorized as follows: program of studies (Curriculum), Faculty and Institutional levels. Wattananikom further reported that in Thailand, programs are publicized if they pass the assessment and if they meet the qualification framework requirements for higher education standards tool. Wattananikom further reported that the Higher Education Commission developed an educational quality assurance database called Higher Education on line to record operational results and common

data sets where annual reports are submitted and this is referred to as internal quality assurance assessment report through the database at the end of academic year within 120 days. The Commission then monitors to verify performance progress ~~every~~ five years.

This process of writing an annual report is good for institutional feedback on both programs and institutional issues but the study fails to relate to the three areas in terms of process apart from record keeping. The Commission only verifies performance after five years; this could compromise quality of education within the five-year period; the study fails to mention involvement of private universities and related quality performance indicators.

Internal quality assurance systems are referred to as improvement oriented and focusses more on quality of teaching and learning in light of organizational culture and IQA systems are effective and successful quality assurance processes. Many universities are implementing national quality assurance reforms in higher education through internal quality assurance approaches. It is argued that IQA is more formative and leading in efforts on quality improvement and quality culture.

It appears that the literature on Internal QA system sounds to be comprehensive, gives higher education institutions a lot of autonomy and ownership in terms of ensuring quality, and allows the QAA to monitor standards using approved tools and database (NCHE Standards, 2014). This set up is more or less the practice in Malawi where results are publicized and HEIs conduct own internal auditing processes annually (NCHE Act, 2011). However, there is laxity by HEIs in submission of such internal reports hence a need for NCHE to encourage and support this initiative as one way of internal quality checks (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2017).

The theoretical framework of this study acts as a foundation of quality assurance systems in private universities. This section reviewed a quality assurance framework that focused on

internal quality assurance systems as way of improving quality of education in private higher educations. The following diagram shows the internal quality assurance framework used in ensuring quality education in universities.

Figure 2.1: Framework for IQA in Higher Education



Source: Adopted from Jingura and Kimusoko (2019)

Jingura and Kimusoko (2019) describes an internal quality assurance as used to develop professional competency in higher education institutions. The framework is designed to assess skills, knowledge and attitudes of competences of practitioners to improve effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery. Ministry of health adopted the professional development framework in 2017 in England, to outline key principles, domains, and guidance in planning professional development activities. Jingura and Kimusoko (2019) emphasized that competency professional framework is viable for developing training curriculum and forms a basis for advancing research in HEIs for administrative and academic internal work force.

Martin (2018) supports this framework in his study conducted in 311 institutions from 94 countries to explore the purpose of internal quality assessment. Martin (2018) established that the most significant function of IQA in higher education is to manage a quality cycle that equates to university teaching, research and service and provides support to the infrastructure. The quality cycle denotes planning, implementing, evaluating and improving performance of HEIs. The author highlights its limitations that there is a need for more research and innovation on the framework because it has been adopted in dynamic and rapid changing higher education context.

In another development, related to IQA systems, Swanzy and Potts (2017) conducted an investigation on internal quality strategies in Ghana that focused on improving quality of graduates in polytechnics. The study used qualitative methods using in-depth interviews of twenty key informants and analysts of documents used in polytechnics. The findings established that internal quality assurance focused on staff and students in terms of evaluating quality. This study was shallow as it only focused on staff and students in evaluating quality and did not include other elements as indicated in QA framework on figure 2.1 above.

2.5.1 Benefits of Internal Quality Assurance

This research project revealed that many countries have embarked on reforms through IQA with focus on teaching and learning to align programs to labour market needs. IQA has also assisted in reorganized management processes through analysis and evaluation. Some countries have come up with databases to make it easy to access information related to quality assurance (Martin, 2018). The research also established the importance of leadership involvement in both academic and administrative staff as this helps in decision making related to academics' programs and strategic planning of the universities. Through IQA systems, all

players including students are involved in all processes including governance, tracer studies and program reviews.

Martin and Emaran (2017) reported on another survey that involved 400 universities and established that IQA was used to prepare for national external quality assurance systems as indicated by 89% of the respondents. Martin and Emaran (2017) highlighted IQA tools and processes that address issues of quality and employability from the experience of the Daystar University in Kenya and the American International University in Bangladesh. Martin and Emaran (2017) explained that both of these universities focus their interest to employability of graduates and their IQA systems that focused on collection of information from graduates and employers. Having explored on IQA in this section, the following section specifically focusses on external quality assurance issues.

2.6 External Quality Assurance (EQA)

External quality assurance (EQA) involves external stakeholders during the development and review of standards. In Malawi, the government established the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in 2011 to regulate both private and public higher education institutions (NCHE Act, 2011). However, there is a need to develop a quality assurance framework to guide the HEIs in achieving this quality education. This framework involves external quality assurance systems as it focusses on external assessment of HEIs conducted by a team of Reviewers from outside the institutions (NCHE Minimum standards, 2016). Generally, NCHE assures quality by registering private universities and the accreditation of both private and public universities. This is done by using appropriate assessment tools that focus on both institutional and academic programs (NCHE Report, 2016). NCHE has developed a National Quality Assurance Framework that includes internal

and external quality assurance to guide the higher education institutions in ensuring quality education.

Similarly, Tsevi (2014) reported in her study conducted in Ghana that external quality assurance focuses on outside organizations and these include accreditation, quality audit, and quality assessment. These two national quality assurance agencies give a picture of external quality assurance mechanisms and confirms what the internal quality assurance systems has put in place in terms of infrastructure, learning resources, policies, structures and instruments guided by leadership and stakeholder involvement. The EQA therefore plays a role of checks and balances and monitors what has been established by IQA.

Figure 2.2 below, illustrates the external quality assurance process as presented by Ann Gravells (2016) that the external quality assurance cycle defines requirements and agree on the scope and consult with relevant stakeholders in the process to evaluate delivery and effectiveness of internal audit. The EQA is conducted by regulators to monitor approved center's processes and practices so that they ascertain if the centers are compliant with the standards in terms of qualifications and the entire requirement (Gravells, 2016). This audit could also include assessment of effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems and adherence of educational standards. The findings are then reported to higher education institutions that include recommendations for performance improvement. The cycle calls for repeated processes, once recommendations are addressed; the assessment can be conducted to assess improvement achieved by internal processes (Gravells, 2016).

Figure 2.2: External Quality Assurance

(Source: Ann Gravells, 2016)



Figure 2.3 below presents how internal and external quality assurance systems are related and interlinked for improvement of quality higher education as adopted from regional quality assurance in Southern Africa (SADC, 2018). This framework is recommended by Southern African Quality Assurance Network and includes both EQA and IQA for regulatory cooperation in the region. The framework includes factors such as Governance, leadership, academic support as part of IQA while accreditation, registration, quality Audit and quality assessment involve EQA.

Figure 2.3: Theoretical framework on IQA and EQA

(Source: SADC 2018)



2.6.1 Contextualizing quality assurance frameworks

In order to have a global, regional and national picture of quality assurance systems and how these influence quality educations at such levels, the Researcher explored further to contextualize of quality assurance systems and internationalization of higher education as presented in the following section.

2.6.1.1 Internationalization of Higher Education

In order to appreciate the context of quality assurance at international level it is important to understand the concept of internationalization of higher education. Knight and Sehoole (2013) came up with a definition and importance of Internationalization and defined it as international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers, partnerships, projects and introduction of new international academic programs and research initiatives (Matel & Iwiniska, 2016). With this reference, quality assurance has been internationalized, as there are now global, continental and regional quality assurance agencies and frameworks requiring partnerships, benchmarking at regional and national

level (Hoosen, Chetty & Buther,2017). Higher Education cannot be internationalized without quality assurance global networks at that level. The Authors on this topic stated that globalization is an agent for internationalization of higher education (Matel & Iwinska,2016). However, this comes with its own challenges in terms of different education systems in coming up with universal definitions. Knight (2008) came up with a definition of Internationalization as the process of integrating international, intercultural and global dimensions into purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education in any country. This definition is relevant and applicable to the topic of this research study in promoting and improving quality and relevance of higher education; the aim is to contribute to social, cultural and economic development at the national level. The process of internationalization relates to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and bridges an understanding with higher education in Africa (Colucci,2019). The final chapter of this book focused on thematic analysis of teaching, research and community engagement in higher education with focus on the MDGs. The focus on this was to increase access to higher education in Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Cameroon and Tanzania by applying international policies. The Authors, Knight and Sehoole (2008) concluded that HEIs could drive the development in Africa with a substantial contribution to achieving MDGs through internationalization.

The Researcher finds this book very relevant to this study as it contributes to quality improvement in higher education by achieving MDGs, while addressing challenges faced by HEIs such as teaching, research and community engagement. Private Universities should be encouraged to engage in partnerships with international universities and other international quality assurance agencies and frameworks for quality improvement at all levels as presented in the following section.

The quality assurance structure starts at global level to guide the quality assurance at continental level and other regional and national agencies and has been organized in such that from global level

down to local national quality assurance agencies; this structure depicts a well-coordinated QA structure and includes functions and responsibilities at each level (Colucci,2019). From the continental level, there are regional agencies and then national agencies, which are responsible for higher education institutions. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to establish quality assurance units in their institutions for implementation of QA activities. In this structure the QAU is seen as the lowest level of quality assurance structures (Willemse ,2019). The following section presents such structures from global level to the lowest level and includes their roles and functions.

2.6.1.2 Global Quality Assurance Network

In order to understand the quality assurance system, it is important to have an overview of the status of the quality assurance structure from a global overview, continental, regional, national and institutional level. The quality assurance structures operate from a global perspective at international level through an international Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education. There is an international Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) that was established in 1991 and it draws membership from regional and national quality assurance agencies. The aim of this global QAA is to collect and disseminate current trends in the assessment and improving quality in higher education. Wambui (2018) stated that the quality of graduates and unemployment attracted development of EQA across the globe and governments got involved to regulate higher education at international level.

The global QAA is much involved in developing guidelines for good practices in QA that are included in all quality assurance agencies; these guidelines are referred to as guidelines for good practices (GPP) and aim at promoting good practice for both internal and external quality assurance. The international QAA is also involved in developing frameworks to guide new EQAAs and gives guidance to criteria for self and external evaluation. It is also involved in promoting professional development among EQAA and their staff and has an element of public accountability of EQAA. The global

network is a Worldwide Association with more than 700 QAAs that are active in both theory and practice of quality assurance in higher education.

2.6.1.3 Continental Quality Assurance Agencies

African Union Strategy focusses on establishment and continental political commitment to harmonization of quality education within Africa (Matel & Iwinska, 2016). The African Quality rating mechanisms (AQRM) is implemented by the continental QAA, which is responsible for development of continental manuals for higher Education framework and minimum standards (Kisanga & Machumu, 2014). The strategy also promotes development of effective quality assurance mechanisms. The Implementation of an African Quality Rating Mechanism includes an association of African universities and main objectives included establishment of African systems to ensure performance of higher education on the continent and support institutional cultures and promote African universities for global competition (World Bank Report, 2014). AQRM involves classification of African universities and programs into poor quality, insufficient satisfaction, good quality and excellence (Colucci, 2019). This AQRM is implemented by quality experts in collaboration with national and regional quality assurance agencies. African HEIs are encouraged to adopt the AQRM as one tool to conduct self-assessment and improve quality. There is also a Pan –African Quality Assurance and Accreditation framework to promote partnerships, quality assurance and accreditation across Africa; It also promotes development of national quality assurance agencies (Hoosen et al, 2017).

2.6.1.4 Regional Quality Assurance Agencies

Quality for the higher education in SADC countries with structures and systems is operating at different stages in the implementation of policies. There are common structures related to EQA and IQA where EQA focus on accreditation and audits while university in the region engaging in IQA using institutional plans and implementing QA processes (Matel & Iwinska, 2016). The SADC QA system works with national QA frameworks, facilitate quality improvement, handles capacity building for QAAs, and ensures sharing of information (SADC, 2018). It is established that this structure and trend

applies to all other regional QA such European QA, Asian, Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) and other regional QA s across the world (Matel & Iwinska,2016). Additionally, Ngara (2016) reported about the Southern African Quality Assurance Network as one example of such regional quality assurance agencies, which has 15 members including Malawi.

The SAQAN is involved in harmonization and standardization of university entrance requirements within the region. The countries in the southern region are said to be operating at different levels and that they have different educational systems arising from colonial history (SADC,2018).The network aims at assisting individual countries in developing educational standards and best practices in quality assurance; this includes harmonization of quality assurance in the SADC region based on international standards and fostering networks with regional and international institutions on quality improvement. The SAQAN is also responsible for coordinating international trainings and research programs within southern Africa and promoting regional (SADC) qualification frameworks (SADC, 2018).

2.6.1.5 National Quality Assurance Agencies

These are higher educational regulating agencies such as government councils for higher education at national level such as National Council for higher education in Malawi, that was established in 2011 (NCHE Act, 2011). According to Ngara (2016), countries are operating at different stages with some that are well developed while others are in early stagesuch as Zambia, Malawi and Swaziland. The National quality assurance agencies are responsible for developing standards for HEIs,

national quality assurance and qualification frameworks, conducting assessments for accreditation and registration purposes, evaluating university charters (Matel & Iwinska, 2016).

Further, the national quality assurance agencies are responsible for establishing quality assurance units such as one developed by Kilimanjaro Christian Medical University College at Tumbani College in Tanzania. The QAU stipulates roles, functions and responsibilities of various officers and departments and financial resources.

Quality assurance frameworks for other African countries have moved on to develop instruments for specific programs or processes as the example of Zimbabwe National Council for Higher Education (ZNCHE) where they have developed a Quality Assurance Framework for promoting quality research (Garwe et al., (2019). Research is one of the academic instruments used worldwide to assess universities for purposes of excellence and ranking of universities hence this tool is very important as one of the instruments in higher education. ZNCHE developed, implemented and reviewed their quality assurance framework and research excellence framework in the UK to develop this framework for research. This tool was meant for use by national quality assurance agencies in developing or reviewing their framework for research (Garwe et al., 2019).

This tool is very important in improving quality education, as research is one of the core function in the academic sector; however, the tool only targets research and no other critical areas such as teaching or learning processes, which are critical to quality improvement. This framework is recommended for promotion of research to be used by quality assurance national agencies. Perhaps the authors could come up with a tool to guide universities on quality improvement for research in general. This framework could target students and academic staff so that research being conducted in the region could be of high standards and relevant to individual national needs and not necessarily for academic reasons only. In Malawi, most private universities lack promotion of quality research, this is one of the areas requiring strengthening as identified by Zeleza (2018), and the researcher recommends that research should form part of the elements in the conceptual frameworks. This Framework developed by

ZNCHE could be used as a reference tool to improve research in private universities in Malawi and therefore Malawi NCHE could adopt this framework for promotion of quality research in the higher education sector as a whole.

The world-over, quality assurance frameworks are well-recognized systematic mechanisms for improving the quality of research, innovation, and education to achieve national goals within set standards (Davidson et al., 2020). The key challenge that many nations face is that of ensuring that the frameworks allow opportunities for continuous improvement (Rexeisen et al., 2018). This therefore calls for national quality assurance agencies to conduct continuous follow-ups and assess how the quality assurance frameworks are being adhered to in maintaining quality in the higher education sector. Malawi recently developed a National Quality Assurance Framework as presented in the following section.

2.6.1.6 Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework for Malawi

The National Council for Higher Education recently developed a Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework to guide higher education institutions to strengthen their own institutions and improve quality of education. The framework has two parts: the External quality assurance and internal quality assurance and it is intended to be used by both public and private universities in Malawi. In this framework, EQA is managed by regulatory bodies and is based on activities that support the IQA. On the other hand, IQA focusses on institutional and program quality assurance processes and procedures and is managed and implemented by individual institutions (NCHE, Higher Education Qualification Framework, 2019)

The Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQAF) generally focuses on registration, qualifications, accreditation by institution and programs. The EQA in the framework focusses on quality enhancement and provides for consistency in the adherence to

quality assurance guidelines. The National Council for Higher Education supports that EQA is complementary to IQA in ensuring quality education and adherence to education standards.

The frameworks agree with IQA Conceptual Framework as it focusses on stakeholders' connection. These stakeholders include the students as learner, governments, employers, society and partners. The Framework was developed by adopting a number of international EQA models and mostly the Good Practice Guidelines (GCP) for External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAA). NCHE has indicated that it will continue to conduct spot checks, institutional assessments, site visits, registration and accreditation and follow up visits in accordance with GCP guidelines. The HEQAF is also used as part of EQA tool as quality assurance for training standards and qualifications for national and international recognitions. The Framework has included procedures for assessment, audits and establishment of HEIs including registration and accreditation processes. IQA focusses on ownership of institutional program quality, sustainability and effectiveness, customer focus and leadership commitment, stakeholder involvement and continuous improvement.

This study supports this framework as it is comprehensive and has included both EQA and IQA with similar elements as recommended in the conceptual framework such as stakeholder involvement and leadership roles. The framework has answered the question as to why quality assurance is important in the higher education and suggests two main areas namely accountability to stakeholders and for quality improvement. NCHE expects that all HEIs should set up internal quality assurance systems in their universities that are well resourced. In addition, quality assurance requires well-trained management and support personnel, policies, strategic plan, and leadership support for effective guidance. Leadership should support designing a structure of responsibilities, resource management, monitoring and evaluation. The framework recommends a quality culture to be practiced in the HEIs and that HEIs should have well-resourced and functional quality assurance units as presented in the following section.

2.6.1.7 Quality Assurance Units

Quality Assurance Unit is designed to coordinate activities that are related to quality improvement within a higher education institution and the unit is responsible for ensuring that the university has fit for the purpose and value for money systems that are transformative and have excellent and exceptional services (OSUN State University, 2020). There are requirements specifically meant for an ideal quality assurance unit as recommended by a number of quality assurance agencies, researchers and universities as presented in this section. The units are very important in higher education institutions as a byproduct of quality assurance frameworks and are responsible for managing quality assurance with the aim of ensuring compliance to educational standards as set by national quality assurance agencies for both institutional and academic programs.

a) *Functions of Quality Assurance Units*

There are reportedly three main functions of Quality Assurance Units, as reported by KCMU in that QAU acts as QA Secretariat, is responsible for all day-to-day quality assurance activities and conducts monitoring and evaluation of all quality assurance units and systems. The QAU is very critical in the HEIs as it helps to manage the quality assurance issues on daily basis. The author of this article recommends that the quality assurance unit should be an independent department of the universities and Anane and Addaney (2020) support this recommendation and calls for monitoring and evaluation of all its activities to ensure that all quality issues are being addressed. The specific functions of QAU, as adopted from Kilimanjaro University, are as follows:

- 1) Ensuring that set standards are relevant and appropriate
- 2) The unit is responsible for implementation of quality assurance activities in all
QA units

- 3) Provides guidance and advice to all units on QA issues
- 4) Develops and updates operational manual on QA operations and instruments used for evaluations.
- 5) Responsible for coordinating self-evaluations of quality assurance systems
- 6) Analyzing QA reports such as student's evaluations; external audit reports and presenting the arising issues to management's attention.
- 7) Facilitate registration and accreditation processes of the institution and all its academic programs
- 8) Review and evaluate assessment results from QAA and professional bodies and share results with individual units.
- 9) Monitoring and implementation of internal and external evaluation recommendations
- 10) Advising on all matters affecting teaching and learning, research and consultancy
- 11) Updating the QA system and overall quality status of the HEIs
- 12) Linking HEIs with regulatory bodies in QA matters and other departments.

These functions are comprehensive and guiding the functions of QAU in private universities as mostly noted in the universities under this research study that there were no established QAU; perhaps it could be that universities did not see a need or appreciate the specific functions carried out by the QAU. These functions can be motivating to HEIs to allocate resources, both financial and human resources, to set up functional QAU.

This is one of the major recommendations to university leadership to adopt these functions and tailor make them to suit their needs as universities are operating at different stages. However, these functions should be applied in all higher education settings in order to maximize benefits of the QAUs. Anane and Addaney (2016) additionally came up with

composition of QAU Committee that it should be able to oversee, support the QAU team, and advises that QAU committee should have at least ten (10) members of staff comprising one member from each faculty and non-academic staff from each unit responsible for support services. The QAU Director or his deputy should chair the committee. The author further outlined duties of the QAU committee as listed in the following:

- 1) Support and assist the Director in developing and reviewing QA guidelines and directives related to teaching and learning, research and support services.
- 2) Review guidelines and procedures for monitoring and evaluation of academic programs and all activities from support services
- 3) Advises and assists departments /units, faculties, directorates and schools in conducting self-assessments
- 4) Assist departments, schools in preparation of improvement plans and monitor implementation
- 5) Conduct regular inspection of departments/units/ activities and collect information related to teaching and learning, research and support systems.
- 6) Develop tools and data collection tools from Alumni, employers and other stakeholders on quality related aspects.

b) Importance of Quality Assurance Units

Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) is critical to provision of checks and balances to the academic departments and quality degrees. There are well-defined quality processes and QAU supplements efforts of government regulators to assist HEIs in designing, maintenance, and enhancement of quality assurance processes (Anane & Addaney, 2016).

Mosaed (2017) supports the setup and management of quality assurance units as he commented in his article at Jouf University that quality assurance unit should have its own

vision, mission and objectives, organizational culture with its own team headed by unit head and deputy, preferably designated quality assurance director. Mosaed added that for efficiency, the unit should have sub QA units at college level, which includes Quality Academic Accreditation unit, Graduate and research unit, E-learning unit, Examination unit, and these units support the institutional QA unit in ensuring quality education.

Steps in Setting up QAU

Anane and Addaney (2016) came up with steps and the processes on how to set up a quality assurance unit in a university as a guide to HEIs and this can be used as a reference point for evaluating the functionality of the units. Anane and Addaney also advises that the Vice Chancellor and university Registrar should be at the forefront to guide the set-up of the QAU and the recommended process is summarized as follows:

- 1) Discuss who will be in charge of governance so that management buys in support for the need for quality assurance unit.
- 2) Establish a committee that will set up the QA U to effectively and efficiently manage the unit. The composition of the committee shall be academic and administrative staff and students with a minimum of five recommended members.
- 3) Experts inputs for the committee from quality assurance experts and higher education. At this point, a need to have a quality assurance policy that will guide management of the quality assurance in the university.
- 4) Brainstorming with Deans and Heads of departments to make suggestions on quality processes and procedures; stakeholders are involved at this point for their input in the processes

5) Objectives of the Quality assurance unit should be very clear and roles and responsibilities of staff should to be well defined while referring to the standards of the QA Unit.

The researcher has reviewed a number of quality assurance units developed by Anne and Addaney, Osun state university and Malawi Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework and noted that they are similar in nature in terms of composition and functions and this is presented in the following table:

Table 2.2: Recommended Quality Assurance Unit - Source (NCHE, HEQAS, 2019)

SN	Requirement	Definition
1)	QA Officer / Manager	The holder of the office shall be at management level and should be knowledgeable with quality assurance procedures.
2)	QA practitioners	Quality assurance practitioners should be well trained on quality assurance in higher education Should be able to perform their duties efficiently
3)	QA Coordinating Committee	The QA committee should be at the Centre of directing and oversee implementing of all QA activities
4)	QA goals objectives and strategic plan	QA department should have its own objectives and these are part of the institution's strategic plan QA section should also have its own strategic plan
5)	QA policies, Procedures	Quality assurance policies, procedures and systems should be incorporated in the activities of the HEIs at all levels.
6)	QA Instruments	The QA instruments include guidelines for self-assessment, student evaluation of teaching, peer evaluation of teaching, conducting graduate tracer studies and employer satisfaction Surveys

This Framework recommends that establishment of IQA is key in HEIs for quality improvement and that regulatory bodies are responsible for EQA. The Framework mentions of stakeholder

involvement and leadership support in ensuring that HEIs have well trained staff and support structures. The Framework further supports the researcher's observations that IQA

includes quality assurance elements such as leadership, governance, Stakeholder involvement,

and student support. The researcher recommends that this framework should be extensively disseminated to all public and public universities so that there is improvement in establishment of quality assurance systems.

a) Quality Assurance Instruments

Davies (2017) conducted a study titled “managerialism and the risky business of quality assurance in universities” to find out requirements for enhancement of academic quality assurance in higher education as a way of risk reduction driven by quality assurance systems. According to Davies (2017), managerialism is the management processes and instruments whose aim is to enhance efficiency through control. He concluded that managers were affected by quality assurance where academics became non-compliant to those quality areas as managers were said to have their own interest and intentions and not necessarily improvement of standards.

It is indeed evident enough that managers or leaders in higher education have a role to play in improving standards; However, Davies (2017) in his findings only faulted the managerialism as one of the negative outcomes and portrayed that as a challenge in ensuring quality. It could have been better if the author had sighted a number of challenges related to quality assurance frameworks. More realistically, managerialism may not be viewed as a comprehensive quality assurance tool but rather an instrument used by managers or leaders to enhance efficiency in improving quality.

In Malawi, it is evident through accreditation processes that the National Council for Higher Education prescribed that HEIs should use internal and external quality assurance frameworks through its assessment tools but there was a need to have a formal higher education quality assurance framework to guide the universities; hence, this QA framework will be used

as a reference point.

The implementation of the framework will require good leadership of the universities and there is a need therefore to focus on leadership and managerial roles in establishment and implementation of QA systems in higher education institutions including private universities. This study attempted to answer research questions related to the role of leadership of private universities in adhering to standards of education in relation to quality assurance systems.

Another challenge observed by the researcher is that there were a number of quality assurance frameworks developed at both regional and national but these have not been widely disseminated to HEIs for utilization in quality improvement. The researcher has therefore referred to leadership theories that contribute to quality assurance and quality improvement in HEIs and one such theories is Transformational leadership theory which is recommended to leadership in private universities and this is discussed under section on leadership.

The internal and external quality assurance systems are common to many countries though applied differently and quality assurance agencies are at the center of developing tools and implementing these systems to ensure standards are adhered to. There are recommendations made to ensure involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of these systems and also include external examination checks to ensure credibility and reliability of examinations being administered in the HEIs to ensure quality of graduates joining the labourforce. The study conducted by UNESCO brought to light advantages of both IQA and EQA systems in higher education and recommend that these should be used by universities to establish QA systems and understand that quality improvement is the responsibility of the universities and not external experts or governments. IQA seems to have been applied more in literature than EQA and a number of authors who have studied IQA as presented in this literature review evidences this.

In this study, the researcher adopted the IQA as a tool to improve quality in higher education institutions and that EQA comes in to assess how IQA has been established and implemented. A number of researchers including Martin (2018): Jingura and Kimusoke (2019); and Anne Gravells, (2016) have documented evidence that IQA can be used to improve quality in higher education institutions if well applied and implemented as evidenced in the Competency conceptual framework and its elements as indicated in table 3-1 above.

2.7 General Observations on Internal Quality Assurance

It is apparent that Internal Quality Assurance approach is highlighted more in this literature review as opposed to the External Quality Assurance Systems and this could be related to the fact that HEIs focus on quality culture through IQA to enhance quality prior to external assessment. There is a risk associated with quality assurance systems as some HEIs may dramatize or stage compliance to the requirements of the system instead of quality

improvement and this is a disadvantage of EQA hence IQA is strongly recommended to ensure a quality culture and continuous improvement within the HEIs (Kis, 2005).

As evidenced by HEIs in Germany where there is self-accreditation also referred to IQA and no EQA is applied. The UNESCO (IIEP, 2018) study also revealed that most countries preferred IQA systems to improve quality in their universities and recommend only inviting External experts to verify and monitor educational standards.

2.8 Quality assurance systems and quality higher education

This section defines quality education and how this is influenced by quality assurance systems to establish if there is a relationship between the two. A number of elements from both internal and external need to be evaluated through quality assurance systems and establish which factors affect provision of quality education. In this study, the researcher decided to define quality education in relation to factors that have a major impact on provision of quality education and these factors include infrastructure, learning and teaching resources, quality of teaching staff, leadership and stakeholder involvement. Other elements include quality assurance policy, instruments and structures that support the implementation and evaluation of quality education.

From the literature review on the quality assurance framework and definition of quality education, it may be a challenge to separate the two as lack of these critical elements and quality assurance structures may lead to poor delivery of education in the higher education institutions.

Mulwambo (2019) defined quality education as that education that gives students the competencies, knowledge and skills required for job market and their employability; academics relate quality education to teaching and learning that is related to skills and knowledge and availability of human, financial and learning resources. In this definition, the internal quality

assurance elements proposed by the researcher fits very well as prerequisites to offer quality education as these factors are critical to satisfying internal requirements for provision of quality education.

Quality assurance aims at improving higher education standards and ensuring that these are followed and maintained at all times, this is a process that supports provision of quality education. According to Matel & Iwinska (2016), quality education requires accountability to stakeholders such as government, students and society and that quality education and quality assurance are prerequisite for universal transformation. Matel and Iwinska further defined quality education as value for money, excellence and fit for purpose services while quality assurance ensures that mechanisms, procedures and processes that safeguards desired quality and related quality culture in the higher education.

As this study is focusing on quality education in private universities, where there is massive and rapid rising student enrollment amidst poor economic pressures, there is a need to ensure quality education as value for money and fit for purpose through quality assurance. This study focusses to prove if with proper QA systems, HEIs can provide and improve quality education; therefore, there should be a correlation between these two elements. In the conceptual framework and its interpretation in table 2.2 above, the researcher hopes that improvement in the IQA, through the improvement in infrastructure, governance, student and academic support in learning and teaching resources, stakeholder involvement and good leadership, the private universities should be able to offer quality education and attain accreditation status. According to Standards and Guidelines in European Higher Education (2015), the primary responsibility for quality assurance is with the HEIs and that quality assurance responds to both institution and its programs and ensures a quality culture.

This study therefore embarks to explore if these quality assurance factors relate to provision of quality education in private universities.

The following section will present the literature review in accordance with research questions.

2.10 Literature Review in relation to Research Thematic Areas and Research Question

2.10.1 Status of Private Higher Education Institutions

Having reviewed quality assurance frameworks used to improve quality of education in Higher Education Institutions, this section presents literature reviews that focuses on status of private higher education institutions and reviews what other researchers have done related to history, regulatory processes and challenges for private higher education. The areas of review mainly focus on four related sections mainly: Quality of education in PHEIs, challenges faced by PHEIs and regulatory processes for the private institutions. The quality of education is measured through institutional factors such as infrastructure, quality of teaching and availability of financial resources to sustain the quality of education. Infrastructural issues include availability and status of classrooms, library. Internet services, computer laboratories and student support services such as sports and recreational facilities, ablution blocks and university clinics among other services.

2.10.2 Status of infrastructure

Dangneua and Anderson (2007) made a recommendation for all HEIs to have well equipped and modern quality building, facilities, required furniture for quality higher education, and a need for modern and well-equipped building and grounds and recommends that the goals and values of an institution should be reflective by the physical environment and design. The authors further advise that

the structure of the institutional building should be conducive to learning with adequate lighting, suitable physical environment as it affects students and their memory retention. The environmental issues and infrastructures includes audio-visual equipment blackboards, well equipment laboratories supply ICT support.

2.10.3 Learning environment

Harvey and Kenyon (2013) also established that physical characteristics of a classroom, chairs, seating styles, furniture affect musculoskeletal disorders, poor posture, neck pain, back injuries to students and affect students learning. In addition, the Authors stated that students have an expectation to have internet services and computer laboratories, classrooms, quality furniture. QAU should have an interest to conduct surveys, check classrooms, seating design in terms of comfort, space, posture, learning engagement and type of furniture used.

The learning environment needs to be carefully selected and set up as psychologists observed that environment can influence human behavior and brings about relaxation, thoughtfulness and conducive to learning. Construction of building is therefore recommended to take into consideration issues of space, ownership and infrastructure to give room for expansion and creation of enabling teaching and learning environment. Harvey and Kenyon (2013) strongly advises HEIs to consider both psychological and physical environment that can effect learning and quality of teaching.

In Malawi, most of the private universities operate from rented premises that are not purpose built for higher education and therefore not conducive to learning and teaching. In this study, two universities were operating from such rented premises hence no room for improvement or expansion to meet the infrastructural requirements in line with minimum standards for higher education. As students have indicated in their responses from surveys and in-depth interviews, there is a need to improve classroom furnishings and ventilation. Environments can also affect both human physiology

and psychological factors such as temperature, lighting, noise fatigue and furniture can affect both students and teachers' performances on learning or teaching (Harvey and Kenyon, 2013).

In the status of classrooms, the National Council for Higher Education stipulated standards in terms of size, height, space and furnishings. The standards also define the height of the buildings, ratio of number of students to number of toilets and urinals to by gender and (Minimum standards for Higher Education, 2016). Most of these standards are recommended in the universities and there are new factors that are affecting the nature of classrooms required based on mode of delivery and other developments such as pandemics. These new developments and changes in the classroom set-ups in the higher education classrooms are due to high demand and distant learning arrangements in order to increase access to quality education. This calls for remote visibility through video conferencing of virtual classes for students who may not be able to attend classes due to other reasons (Harvey and Kenyon, 2013).

There are also collaboration classrooms and learning zones that help to empower students to select their educational needs and students learn and access quality education. These classrooms and learning zones are used to increase access to students in different zones instantly through use of technology. Teachers are able to move freely in the room without barriers as they use learning zone and collaboration classroom, as learners prefer instant access to information (Wambui, 2018).

Another technological innovation for classroom sharing and arrangements that assist in improving quality education is use of overflow classroom and this is very common in higher education as it allows students in another room to access the lectures. These teaching techniques assist in improving collaboration, creativity, communication and critical thinking among students.

Additionally, Kiley (2021) discovered a new way of teaching and recommend doing away with outdated classroom arrangements. Kiley (2021) reported that the seating arrangement in the current

space lay out do not require desks and chairs in a straight row because classrooms will use multi-zone learning areas using wireless access. This will mean that lecturers will not have to start in front of classroom for the whole time of teaching. The lecturers will enjoy use of instructors, helpers and facilitators in the learning zones and they will operate from different locations in the classroom while viewing access to various zones. Likewise, students will have an advantage to collaborate with problem solvers and content generators within their reach.

Psychologists established that environment influence human behavior and human perception of environment can induce stress, relaxation and thoughtfulness and that environment can be conducive to learning. There have been reports from students' research findings of the interviews that some classrooms environment has not been conducive to learning in terms of ventilation, space and light and this can affect learning of the learners. Environment has also an effect on human factor where there is an impact on human physiology such as temperature, lighting, noise, fatigue and furniture; this can affect students and teachers' functionality on learning or teaching.

Private universities should be encouraged to construct own buildings where issues of space, ownership and management of infrastructure including classroom space and furnishings gives room for expanding and creation of enabling environment for teaching and learning. The universities should take account into human psychology and physical factors that can be at stake and can affect learning and quality of teaching.

The advice of Curtin (2021), to consider effects of the Covid 19 pandemic is worthwhile because this study was conducted during the pandemic era where both private and public universities were gravely affected worldwide as well as locally. The Covid 19 led to closure of most universities and hence calling for remote learning and on line classes. This remote learning provided personalized attention to students using technology with support from teaching assistants and tutors on line. The

virtual classroom was popular, this has seen a number of universities providing e-learning classrooms, and Curtin encourages this type of classroom to be used even in normal situations to avoid classroom disruptions during pandemics

Harvey and Kenyon (2013) also reported that student learning is affected by various physical characteristics of a classroom, chairs, seating styles; furniture has an effect on musculoskeletal disorders, poor posture, neck pain and back injury to students. Additionally, seating arrangement in computer laboratories and classrooms has an element of students' expectations. It is recommended that students should evaluate classrooms using classroom seating ratings scale for students (CSRS-S) tool. A recommendation to conduct surveys to check a classroom seating design in terms of comfort and space, posture, learning engagement and type of furniture used. The authors include types of chairs recommended for classrooms such as modern mobile chairs, table armchairs, rectangle tables with standard chairs and trapezoid table and chairs, most students recommend modern mobile chairs.

The researcher supports the authors on the new classroom developments and finds this development as one way of looking at quality of classrooms and comparing traditional classrooms with modern way of classroom arrangement in comparison with mode of delivery and other factors such as pandemics that have brought in diversification of classroom arrangements. This calls for regulators to review their standards in terms of classrooms and the ratio or number of students per square meter and related these standards in accordance with these emerging issues.

2.10.4 Library standards

Another important feature in the infrastructure is the library and this is referred to as the heartbeat of the universities. There are national library standards developed by NCHE that stipulate minimum requirements for a university library should have its own strategic plan that

includes its own vision, mission and objectives. The library is to enhance accessibility to library material by students and researcher to build their work around collections. Library collection facilitate research and learning resources to have their work done.

The library buildings should be easily accessible by all users including persons with special needs and that the building should provide conducive environment to learning and teaching. The standards mention the inclusion of security services to the buildings using cameras and security guards (NCHE National library standards, 2018)

Dempsey and Malpas (2018) reviewed status of library and collection of print materials where a good library was viewed as a big library as it harbored a larger collection of print materials. In most institutions, a library was positioned at the center of the university for Easy Access to students, printing area and make collection of books easier for students. It is not recommended to associate the library as a building but as a service and conveniently situated at the center of the university. This means that as universities are setting up libraries they need to consider these structures, space and locality for easy access students.

2.10.5 Accreditation status

Although a number of private universities are improving in provision of quality and attaining accreditation in Malawi, the status of quality education being provided is not well established for those institutions that are registered but not accredited by NCHE. Kajawo and Dong (2020) established that in 2019, NCHE reported that there were 26 private universities and out of these 13 were accredited while the other 13 were registered but not accredited.

Perhaps, NCHE should revisit its regulatory processes where only private universities go through the registration processes prior to accreditation while public universities are established through their statutes without going through registration process (NCHE Act, 2011).

Ochwa-Eschel (2016) reported that in Uganda, there were private universities that were accredited but lacked financial resources as well as other teaching and learning resources such as classrooms, library, faculty offices and full time academic staff, as required by Ugandan National Council for Higher Education. This means that accreditation does not necessarily represent or guarantee quality of education and therefore calls for further investigations and come up with other mechanisms of quality assurance.

The Researcher finds this scenario to be similar with the private universities in Malawi based on the NCHE report (2018). This trend appears to be reported in many African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda as reported by their National agencies (Kajawo & Dong, 2020). This agrees with the World Bank report (2014) which recommended that MGDS II should work towards expanding enrollment and improve quality of programs in higher education including governance reforms and management capacity. In this regard, the World Bank report came up with a policy matrix for higher education for Malawi on issues to be addressed on access to education, quality improvement and enhancement, financial resources and institutional governance. The Researcher finds out that the quality enhancement element resonates well with this study's conceptual framework as it focusses on issues of internal

quality assurance systems related to insufficient qualified academic staff, weak internal quality assurance systems and insufficient teaching and learning resources. This agrees with observations made by other researchers that there were problems with quality education in private universities (Msiska 2015, Ryan, 2015, Zeleza 2018 and Kajawo, 2019).

2.10.6: Regulatory Processes for Private Higher Education Institutions

The Malawi National Council for Higher Education Act no. 15 (2011) stipulates regulatory processes for private universities (under section 19 to 23). As outlined in this section, private higher education institutions are required to apply to the National Council for Higher Education using prescribed forms and include fees and other support documentation in order to be assessed for suitability to operate. NCHE then evaluates and verifies if the private institutions are suitable and meeting minimum requirements for higher education and if they meet prescribed conditions. NCHE issues provisional registration certificate for a maximum period of one year while allowing private institutions to set up governing body, develop other physical facilities, publicize programs and mobilize resources (NCHE Act, 2011).

However, while holding provisional registration, private universities are not allowed to admit students until valid registration has been issued. Upon successful registration, NCHE shall issue a Charter and it is a requirement that ministry of Education, Science and Technology shall publish the Charter in the government Gazette (NCHE Act, 2011).

According to the NCHE Act (2011), Council may revoke the Charter in the event that the PHEI does not meet expected standards at any time and this indicates that there is a breach of the Charter. In addition, PHEI's shall be evaluated every Academic Cycle for purposes of accreditation and if

minimum standards are met, Council may issue Accreditation Certificate and as well as publishing results in the government Gazette or any other media.

These regulations may need to be reviewed to come up with uniform standards for both private and public HEIs, as there is a feeling by private universities in Malawi that the Council applies different yardstick and approaches to assess private universities and this perception of the private universities and could be confirmed by this provision in the NCHE Act.

Chandru (1999) mentions ISO 9000 concept of quality where employers and students measure quality through customer satisfaction. These employers look for professional and well-qualified candidates to be recruited for efficiencies of their organizations to offer services that meet acceptable standards. It would therefore be another area of study to find out the quality of students in private universities in Malawi.

2.10.7: Qualification of teaching staff

Some challenges included unexperienced lecturers, poor infrastructure, lack of teaching resources such as books, journals, lack of research and publication especially in private universities. Zeleza (2018) mentioned that some challenges faced by African HEIs included lack of institutional supplies, research outputs, research, learning and teaching resources and leadership. This is common to many African Countries including Malawi.

This research study strived to establish other new challenges that were being faced by private universities apart from the ones reported in this section. As the number of private universities continued to increase it is anticipated that there may be increased challenges, which may go unnoticed and unreported.

Another study was conducted by Kibukamosoke (2018) to investigate the quality of academic staff through recruitment, promotion, retention and development of staff in Uganda. The study established that private universities had developed policies on academic recruitment,

promotion, dismissal and development. However, the study also established that a number of private universities had their licenses revoked because of not meeting standards including issuing of fake degrees, opening illegal centers, over charging student fees and admission of students to unaccredited programs. The Study concluded that there were weak monitoring and evaluation systems to enforce quality. These findings are similar to Malawi situation where there were challenges as to regards to quality assurance systems as indicated by the National council for Higher Education (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2017). However, NCHE has allowed private universities to continue operating with such challenges hence this study intends to contribute to how such challenges could be addressed through well-defined internal quality assurance systems using proposed IQA conceptual framework.

2.10.8: Establishment of quality assurance systems

Chandru (1999) referred to the establishment of the National Commission in Higher Education (NCHE) in South Africa in 1995 as cause for establishment of quality assurance systems in higher education institutions. South African Universities accomplished this and these universities had to seek approval of NCHE in order to establish new programs, departments and new faculties to ensure that they meet required standards (Chandru, 1999). It is now a common practice that most of the countries in Africa, including Malawi and globally have well established National Quality Assurance Agencies to safeguard quality of education in both private and public universities and South Africa appears to be ahead in establishing the quality assurance systems in this regard.

Ryan (2015) reviewed literature related to quality assurance in higher education and focused on models that were used in assuring quality and he established that accreditation was one of the tools used to assess quality of education. Accreditation has been referred to by many researchers as one of the important quality assurance mechanism for both public and private

universities and is being used by the National Councils for Higher Education globally (Ryan (2015).

In Malawi, the National Council for Higher Education initiated accreditation of both private and public universities as one way of checking on quality of education and established a number of gaps including lack of teaching and learning resources, hiring of unqualified academic staff and poor infrastructure (NCHE Accreditation report, 2017).

Chang (2010) made a recommendation that it is important that universities and quality assurance agencies such as NCHEs should have good and professional relationships so that they both work towards meeting quality assurance requirements and that universities should have ownership and responsibility for the quality assurance processes. Quality assurance is there to assist the institutions of higher learning to improve and offer quality education in order to produce skilled, knowledgeable, professional and qualified students and not merely to attain accreditation status. This recommendation concurs with the situation in Malawi where many private universities do not appreciate NCHE 's role in improving quality of education and look at accreditation as a final point and status. It is therefore worthwhile to explore further on such relationships that may affect establishment of quality assurance systems in private universities.

Ryan (2015) outlined the importance of establishing quality culture in institutions of higher learning where the faculty and management should have a shared vision in order to improve and maintain quality of education. One way of ensuring quality teaching, for example is through peer reviews and this is not always favored by faculty members but it is strongly recommended in HEIs (Ryan, 2015). A lot has been written and recommended regarding the requirement for universities to have a quality culture in all its institutional, academic programs and in all activities and documentation. Universities are therefore advised and encouraged to have designated quality assurance directors who would be responsible for the establishment of quality assurance systems in both public and private institutions (NCHE, 2017).

In Uganda, Kibukamosoke (2011) reported that the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) was established in 2011 just like in Malawi, with focus on quality assurance of staff and students and achieve this through institutional and program accreditation. Like Uganda, the National Council for higher education in Malawi has strong structures and established systems that reinforce quality in both public and private universities. This includes conducting assessment of both private and public universities using trained reviewers from various HEIs in relevant fields based on the programs being presented for assessment. The process of assessment is robust and very comprehensive as it requires use of well-structured and approved assessment tools and frameworks with reference to minimum standards for higher education. The assessment reports are presented to the quality assurance committees of the National Council for Higher Education for recommendation for approval to the Council. Following the Council's approval, outcomes of these assessment are communicated to various HEIs and are also published in the public media and in the government gazette (NCHE Act, 2011).

The situation in Uganda is more or less the same as in Malawi and lessons learnt are that private universities could be compromising quality and offering unaccredited programs and operating from illegal centers if go unchecked. It is therefore strongly recommended that the Councils for higher education should continue conducting spot checks even after HEIs have been accredited to monitor the standards and compliance to quality of education. As mentioned by Simona (2015) that quality assurance is critical and that HEIs are accountable to their stakeholders to offer quality education at all times; such stakeholders include students, parents, guardians, and government.

This section has highlighted status of quality education with reference to infrastructural issues including learning environment, quality of graduates, teaching staff and learning resources. The section further looked at different quality assurance systems in different

countries but one common denominator is that the national quality assurance agencies take responsibility to ensure quality education mostly through accreditation. With the literature in this section, it is very clear that those institutions and national agencies in Africa including Malawi will continue to benefit from establishment of quality assurance systems that involve quality improvement for both institutional and program level. It is also established that most of the private universities in Malawi are working towards establishment of such systems but there is a need to have both internal and external QA systems and designated QA directors/managers to monitor progress and ensure a quality culture by both students and staff. The next section will present literature review on policies, structures and instruments related to quality assurance in the higher education.

2.11. Policies, Structures and Instruments relating to Quality Assurance

This section focuses on policies, structures and instruments that are related to Quality Assurance as equally important to enhance the delivery of quality education in higher education institutions. The National Council for Higher Education in Malawi, in its minimum standards documentation prescribed a number of policies and structures to be used in both public and private universities and developed instruments related to quality assurance systems and these are being used to assess higher education institutions (NCHE Minimum standards, 2016). The following section focusses mainly on how and why policies have been developed and the importance of such policies in the higher education quality assurance systems.

Policies relating to quality assurance are based on historical background of various African countries and based on political influence as established through a number of findings from some researchers as summarized in this section. Historically, in South Africa, the education system was based on racial apartheid policies which targeted black students and such policies were used by the South African Government to establish 36 higher education

institutions in the years 1953 to 1966 (Mekoa, 2018). Following the abolishing of apartheid, the South African Government then developed policies for higher education through a Committee called Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Schools (Mekoa, 2018).

It can only be anticipated that these policies were related to quality assurance, as this is silent in the literature of this article hence it will be important to find out how policies related to Quality Assurance influence quality of education. Mekoa emphasized on support for the needy students that were coming from the disadvantaged background and institutions to allow them access higher education. As pointed out, access to higher education is a social justice issue and students, regardless of background have a right to quality education. In Malawi, there is an institution that offers loan and grant to students both in public and private universities but lacks commitment and accountability to support for needy students in private universities. Only 7% of the funding is allocated to private universities as opposed to 20% that is allocated by the government. This trend denies the needy students access to quality education private universities. The researcher advises that private institutions is just like in South Africa should include financial support institution like loans board as their stakeholders to lobby for financial support to the needy students. This is one way of boosting resource mobilizations for the private universities.

Many governments in Africa, including Malawi, have established Councils for higher education, which ensures quality of higher education, by establishing quality assurance systems and this includes development of policies and instruments related to Quality Assurance.

Chang (2018) conducted a study to explore the higher education quality assurance and policy practices and established that higher education quality is government's policy, and that core higher education quality assurance of learning and teaching focuses on educating human resources and that it is important to balance structure for quality assurance in the government,

universities and the community. Comparatively, in Malawi the government is involved in policy making related to quality assurance as it has a department of higher education in the Ministry of Education Science and Technology that works with the National Council for Higher Education on policy development.

Quality Assurance policies in higher education comprise those policies that are developed to be used by HEI leadership to provide quality education and both administrative and academic policies and these have been well stipulated by the quality assurance agencies. Such policies include institutional and academic policies and aims at guiding the higher education institutions to offer quality education such policies include quality assurance policies, HIV and AIDS Policy, Research policies and assessment policies but not limited to these.

2.11.1 Structures Relating to Quality Assurance

1) Governance structures

Quality assurance requires well-established governance and management structures to support quality assurance systems and ensure quality education in the higher education institutions. As Nabaho et al. (2020) described standards and guidelines that encourage HEIs to include infrastructure, governance, QA policies and structures. Nabaho et al (2020) further recommend that quality assurance practices should include stakeholder involvement in the QA policy in order to enhance achievement of these standards. Additionally, these guidelines recommend structures to include monitoring and evaluation of quality as part of ensuring provision of quality education. Further, Martin (2018) supported the improvement of the IQA policies and structures in the HEIs that

included good governance structures, leadership, stakeholders and academic support through involvement of faculty, staff and students.

The study conducted by Chawinga and Zozie (2016), recommends an extension of increasing access to higher education through open distance learning at affordable rates as evidenced by increase in number of students at Mzuzu University in Malawi. Although ODL is being recommended to universities, it would be important to find out the position taken by private universities in ODL model and if they have structures and policies. Chawinga and Zozie (2016), cautions on quality of delivery of ODL programs hence the need to monitor the ODL centers in order to establish and address challenges that may be faced by students including geographical set ups.

This study was very important as most of the times, quality of ODL is not well documented and HEIs traditionally refer to face-to-face traditional way of program delivery. Although the idea of ODL was to increase access to higher education, quality should not be compromised and hence HEIs should include ODL in their quality assurance frameworks.

Quality assurance agencies have prescribed the structure of higher education in terms of institutional requirements such as governance, financial requirements, infrastructure, and student support including quality assurance structures. There is not much documented on how quality assurance structures should be implemented and how quality assurance units ought to be structured in terms of personnel, units, committees or directorates.

2) Quality Assurance Units

In Ghana, it is mandatory for all HEIs to set up quality assurance units that take up responsibility to spearhead quality assurance issues. A number of universities have established the quality assurance units that are functioning and take full responsibility of quality assurance issues (Anane & Addaney, 2016). This should be recommended to private universities in Malawi that they should have the establishment of QA units as a mandatory requirement to ensure delivery of quality education. Again, management acknowledged that satisfying the various stakeholders while maintaining academic standards can only succeed if the quality assurance unit measures what is

relevant to stakeholders in a manner that it can understand. On mandate, the unit was tasked to undertake evaluation and ensure that quality assurance in the university met international educational standards and outcomes. The unit was also tasked to develop specific protocols and procedures that would govern all core and support processes important in quality assurance activities and would allow the university to analyze its strengths and weakness and put interventions in place to enhance academic quality systems. Anane and Addaney (2016), further explain the process of establishing these QA units and recommends the how, who and when this can be accomplished. In summary Anane & Addaney (2016), recommends that quality assurance units should comprise features as summarized in Table 2.4 below:

Table 2.4: Quality assurance unit (Anane & Addaney, 2016)

SN	Structures and positions	Requirements
1.	QA Director	Job description: Reporting to the Vice Chancellor Full time assignment Designated department with support staff
2.	QA objectives	The main objectives of the quality assurance should be well outlined in the work plan
3.	QA Budget	All activities should be included in budget QA budget should have its vote in the annual budget
4.	QA Policies	All quality assurance policies should be listed including Internal quality assurance policy External quality assessment Academic quality management policy QA policy, Assessment policies
5.	QA Committees	Committees include Academic Committee Accreditation Committee Assessment Committee
6.	QA tools	Flow Chart, Histogram, Check list, Cause and Effect Chart, Self-assessment tool
7.	QA Monitoring Team	Monitoring and Evaluation Manager and support officers Inputs and outputs Indicators Monitoring tools

The report by Anane and Addaney (2016), focused on managing quality assurance units in higher education in Ghana, the Authors presented their discussion based on one public funded institution, which was newly established; hence could not have a lot of challenges and exposure to issues of quality assurance challenges. The paper however contains valuable information that could assist new private institutions to establish quality assurance systems with well-established quality assurance units and how these could be managed. This paper contributes to significant knowledge in setting up of quality assurance units in higher education institutions in Malawi that could also apply to private universities as well as public universities. Although the process of setting up QAU faced some challenges, Anane and Addaney (2016) only focused on what worked well.

This is very important as it highlights importance of being focused in the implementation and setting up of quality assurance systems. The Authors presented a well-planned stepwise process setting up the QAU. However, the authors mentioned challenges faced but provided solution on how these were addressed by the institution. Overall, the paper was very important in this study as it encourages HEIs to appreciate that quality assurance requires concerted efforts by key stakeholders including the government and regulators of higher education and the need for QAU in all HEIs for best practices and quality enhancement.

The researcher recommends establishment of such quality assurance units in private universities as one way of ensuring all quality related resources, systems and structures are in place and that the University is assured of delivery of quality education. According to Martin (2018), the increase in institutional capacity for internal quality assurance leading to improvement in IQA policies and structures in higher education institutions.

2.11.2 Quality Assurance Policy

Kilimanjaro Christian Academy (2018) stated that Quality Assurance policy is a document that is developed and disseminated for effective and efficient quality assurance processes in order to address deficiencies and inaccuracies and to ensure high quality standards. The intended goal of Quality Assurance Policy is to support HEIs commitment to maintain a high standard of quality service delivery, enhances university relationships with staff and stakeholders, and ensure continuous improvement, best value and hence best quality of outputs and outcomes.

The QA policy developed by KCMU indicated commitment to maintain an effective and efficient quality assurance process and high standards of service delivery. The policy included key principles, policy statement, purpose and objectives, quality framework that includes internal and external quality assurance and an administrative structure, which includes quality assurance systems and management. The QA system is the main body of the policy and included an independent QAU, quality teaching, learning and research, outreach professional services, collaboration, innovation, quality assurance structure and structural framework for QA systems. The structure includes the university organogram and various committees.

The QA policy has a well-stipulated QAU, which includes the constitution, functions, directorate and its duties and responsibilities and includes QA Committee, financing, stakeholder roles, responsibilities, and linkages with other units. The Researcher finds this policy to be comprehensive and guiding where private universities in Malawi can learn from and use it as a reference point, hence, the researcher decided to include QA policy in this study as one of the important elements in the QAU and this can be used as a guide to Quality assurance personnel. In Malawi, now, there is no literature on QAU and QA policy that clearly give directions to establishment of QAU

in HEIs. The policy further includes both internal and external quality assurance systems as major drivers of quality in the universities; the policy is well structured and easy to follow its contents, and it states benefits of the QA policy. One of the research area in this study dwells much on structures, policy and instruments related to quality assurance, this policy ably included all these, and most commendable, Anane and Addaney (2016) included nine quality assurance instruments used in quality evaluation as adopted in this study.

The internal QA factors include leadership support, stakeholder support that involve faculty, staff and students and internal governance. This supports the IQA conceptual framework developed by the researcher and fits well in the QAS at institutional level. It is therefore understood that internal Quality assurance policies and structures respond to Internal Quality Assurance requirements and therefore these two elements support each other and are both critical to the quality improvement in higher education. These elements are critical to establishment of quality assurance units in private universities and the conceptual framework that will guide the improvement of the internal Quality assurance systems.

2.12 Quality Assurance Instruments

Quality assurance instruments have been developed at national and international level to support the quality assurance systems and universities, national agencies and international agencies as quality improvement mechanisms can use such instruments. According to Wambui (2018), a number of quality assurance instruments were analyzed and were recommended for use by universities as one way of quality enhancement. These tools are critical for the collection of data from students, staff and management that is very important to university leadership to use in terms of improving programs, teaching and learning strategies and resources, relevancy of programs, resource

mobilization and stakeholder involvement. These instruments apply to both internal and external quality assurance and contribute to quality enhancement.

One such instrument is African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) tool that is used for self – assessment in HEIs for improvement and not for ranking universities. This tool guides that EQA should strengthen IQA and that African HEIs should be able to share good practices and therefore strengthen networking and collaboration of QA trainings and improve external quality procedures (University of Barcelona, 2019).

This instrument can easily be used as a reference point in fostering partnerships with other universities in encouraging EQA to support IQA. Although the tool does not really focus on private universities in terms of IQA, the framework can be applied to similar situations to encourage trainings and strengthen partnerships among private and public universities.

Bernhard (2008) provided a perspective of issues and problems of the Austrian Accreditation Council as a Quality Assurance Agency that was responsible for accreditation of private universities. The Bologna Declaration of the European Union Ministers of Education in 1999 called for visibility, transparency and comparability of quality in Higher Education expects to be achieved through accreditation by Quality Assurance Agencies such as Austrian Accreditation Council. Bernhard (2008) further established that Accreditation was a main instrument used to assure quality in private universities and their academic programs. As alluded to by many other national agencies, accreditation has been highlighted as one of the main quality assurance instruments are used to assess quality of education for both private and public universities.

2.12.1 Students Survey/Questionnaires

In a different report, Chung Sea Law (2013), reviewed literature on how quality assurance practices can be improved, and reviewed approaches to check on student's evaluation of teaching effectiveness, students experience satisfaction, service quality and quantitative instruments. The findings revealed that the students' survey using self-report questionnaires could transform external and internal quality assurance systems. Chung Sea Law therefore reported that student feedback questionnaires (SFQ) is another effective instrument that can be used to collect student feedback and has become very common for QA system in many HEIs aiming at improving teaching and supporting staff appraisals, quality monitoring (Chung Sea Law, 2013)

Ramsden (1991) developed a Course Experience Questionnaires (CEQ) as an instrument used to assess quality of programs and compare the performance of academic organizations. The importance of this instrument (CEQ) is that it was adopted and is being used to measure perceived quality of degree programs in National annual survey in the Austrian Higher Education systems. This instrument was used to develop National Student Surveys (NSS) in United Kingdom and was administered to final year students in England since 2005.

The University of Sydney in Australia developed an instrument called student Course Experience Questionnaire in order to enhance students' experience, providing academic staff and twelve indicators of teaching and learning quality while using internal performances. According to Beerkens and Udam (2017), students define purpose of quality assurance and ensure that universities offer quality education that is relevant to labor market. However, it was observed that these tools such as CEQ exposed limitations related to time gap in surveying students and related program after graduation and it is therefore important to establish how best these instruments can be used to contribute to quality in the higher education including the appropriate time for data

collection. However, the researcher supports the development of such evaluation tools administered to students to give feedback on quality issues and recommends these tools be adopted by private universities.

2.12.2 Benchmarking

Paliulis and Labanauskis (2015) explained that benchmarking calls for competitors or companies that are leaders in a certain field with purpose to provide owners of the company with information on its quality and measurement costs measurement is achieved by using an external standard to determine improvement of the activity or an imitative. The authors further explain that benchmarking is a structured methodology for implementation changes that occur in an organization or a practice searched to find the best way of implementing activities.

Paliulis and Labanauskis (2015) reported that, out of the instruments that were developed for quality assurance in higher education, with reference to the Bologna Declaration processes, benchmarking was one of the QA instruments used to improve quality. Benchmarking is defined as an instrument used to assure quality and is applied in order to search an identification of best practices, systematic learning from others, change on activities and areas to be benchmarked include organizational procedures, services, processes and activities. According to Paliulis and Labanauskis (2015), benchmarking is a structured method that is used for the implementation of changes in an organization and it is a practice that suggests the best way to implement activities or processes.

The article on benchmarking has been fundamental in describing and articulating the processes and protocol of benchmarking as a quality assurance instrument. The authors have also outlined published works in Europe, Australia including the European Commission whose work was tapped from benchmarking article. In addition, the article has been useful for sharing best practices and

the publication has been applied in universities and by executives of HEIs for making decisions in advancing their institutions.

The Researcher has identified pitfalls in this publication by Paliulis and Labanauskis, in that the method of literature review does not appear to be sufficient to provide a holistic understanding of the context and opinion taken. Qualitative data collection could have added people's experiences, opinion, and challenges encountered. As a result, the article has presented benchmarking as seamless and without flaws in improving quality performance in HEIs. Secondly, Paliulis and Labanauskis (2015) used external quality assurance as an instrument for regulations, assessment of programs and institutions for attaining accreditation. External quality assurance focusses more on stakeholders and yet benchmarking put much emphasis on evaluation of internal processes and systems; hence external quality assurance appears to be inadequate. The Researcher would have recommended both internal and external quality assurance approaches related to benchmarking.

What weakens the external quality assurance methodology in this article is that the literature review methodology was based on self-assessment reports by HEIs. As such, self-assessment reports are prone to subjective bias and hence difficult to apply to other scenarios as authentic publication.

2.12.3 Teaching and learning tools

IQA should be able to enhance effective learning and teaching methods, infrastructure, facilities and resources' adequacy. Evaluation tools for students are also commonly used for assuring quality teaching. Wambui (2018) analyzed a number of quality assurance instruments and recommended that they be used by universities as one way of quality enhancement. These tools are critical in collecting data from students, staff and management that is very important to university leadership to use in terms of improving programs, teaching and learning strategies and resources,

relevancy of programs, resource mobilization and stakeholder involvement. These instruments apply to both internal and external quality assurance and contribute to quality enhancement. The instruments are summarized in Table 2-5 below:

SN	Instrument	Explanation / definition
1)	Student and course evaluation	Surveys, questionnaires to collect information from students on teachers' punctuality, attendance, preparedness for class and competency in subject matter including promoting learning interface with students and feedback to questions
2)	Academic staff assessment	A thorough supervision and peers to monitor the quality of academic staff performance Annual performance appraisals by immediate supervisors Classroom supervision of academic staff conducted by head of departments
3)	Teaching supervision system	This is a new system used to improve teaching and learning which involves administrators, teachers and students in classroom observations of teaching.
4)	Unit self-evaluation	This tool aims at encouraging departments to improve educational research
5)	Programme evaluation tool	This tool is used to assess adequacy of learning objectives and modes of delivery and resources and is performed by academic staff, students and external stakeholders, professional bodies and Quality Assurance Agencies such as National Council for Higher Education
6)	Student Satisfaction Survey:	This is a common tool used by many universities and is applied to new and graduating students to evaluate their satisfaction with the programs curriculum, assessment methods and students experiences ;
7)	Teaching analysis poll (TAP)	This tool is qualitative in nature and mainly used for lectures detailed activity oriented feedback during the course usually the analysis is done by a consultant and students are consulted on learning related issues. This tool is recommended for use with other instruments for modification of IQA tools as another way of improving IQA.
8)	Student workload assessment	This instrument is used to assess each course and students' workload in terms of number of classes, courses and requirements for assignments completion. Martin (2018) supports this tool and he recommends that it is important for the universities to appreciate the workload for the students in order to improve efficiency in teaching. The tool also helps to assign hours of study in terms of assignments, library and contact hours.
9)	Monitoring of students assessment	This is another important tool to assess standards used for student assessment and monitoring students' performances including assessment procedures in line with minimum standards for higher education and International standards.

Table 2.5: Quality Assurance instruments (Source: Wambui, 2018)

Additional QA instruments are presented in the following section 3 that are recommended by Wambui, (2018)

i. Graduate Tracer Study

A graduate survey is a standardized survey of graduates from education institutions, which takes place sometime after graduation or at the end of the training (NCHE Tracer Study Report, 2018). The main aim of conducting tracer studies is to establish the relevance and quality of programs and labour market and this data is crucial for improvement of programs and employer involvement.

The topics recommended in the tracer studies can include questions on the following areas as adopted from NCHE Tracer study report (2018): Individual background, course of study/training, transition to work or further education/training, employment experience within two years after graduation. In addition, employability of graduates and labour market information should include key related topics such as, employment situation, time to get the first employment, duration of job searches, position, main work tasks/duties, and job satisfaction, use of competencies and required competencies and usefulness of study/training program.

ii. Employer Satisfaction Survey

Just like student satisfaction survey, this survey is compiled by employees on specific university graduates and comparatively with graduates from other universities related to their

strengths and weaknesses. The employer recommends essential skills for labour market specific preferences to certain HEIs over others and work place performances of recent graduates hence it is imperative to engage employers and identify their needs. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) recommends that HEIs should involve stakeholders such as employers at the curriculum development stage for their input to ensure that the content covers their labour market (NCHE Curriculum guidelines, 2017).

iii. Governance and Management

Use of key performance indications of National Governance Reforms, IQA is key in designing the governance structures. The conceptual framework includes governance as one of the essential elements. There is a need, therefore, to involve all academic and administrative staff in governance issues related to IQA policies and practices.

iv. Managerial IQA Tools

These tools include service level agreement and mainly concerned with employment terms of conditions, employment evaluation and dismissal procedures. The tools also include Target level agreement, which involves monitoring, and evaluation of set objectives at unit or individual level and these targets are agreed between units and university management. The agreements are developed based on the university strategic plan and can be combined with incentives related to staff development in order to encourage staff involvement in the target agreement (Martin 2018).

It is therefore clear that there are policies, structures and instruments related to Quality Assurance and these are well established by quality assurance agencies. Students to check the quality of teaching and learning while quality assurance desk officers use other instruments. It is however not clear how the quality assurance structure or quality assurance units are set up in private universities. This is evidenced by lack of substantive literature on the same hence a need to explore this area further.

2.13 Stakeholder Involvement in Quality Assurance

Other than quality assurance structures, policies and instruments in improving quality education as presented in the previous section, another area of ensuring quality in higher education is stakeholder involvement. This section presents stakeholder involvement as oneway of ensuring quality education in higher education with a focus on quality assurance. Beerkens and Udam (2017) defined stakeholders as any group of individuals who can have aneffect on the achievement of an organization's objectives. Hungary (2016) considers anyone who directly takes part in or has the ability to affect the achievements or performance of highereducation institutions should be considered as a stakeholder, and therefore relevant for and directly or indirectly involved in quality assurance. Stakeholders can be internal to higher education institutions and this include university leadership, teachers, researchers, administrators, and students. Stakeholders are external to higher education institutions and these include external agencies, employers, industry representatives, government or funding agency, alumni, local governments, prospective students and parents, public and media.

As Private Universities continue to improve in provision of quality education it is strongly advised that universities should involve stakeholders such as students, government ministries, industry, prospective employers, alumni, parents and guardians and the community in general. Beerkens & Udam (2017) defined these external stakeholders to include employers, prospective students' government ministries and they have an interest on the credibility of an institution.

Kilimanjaro College Academy (2018) stipulated that different stakeholders have their ownpart to play in quality assurance as one way of enhancing quality education. The Government of a state is responsible for financial support; the QAAs develops and implements QA procedures.

Parents provide technical support; HEI leadership is responsible for establishing good relationship with regulators. Staff are responsible for quality improvement and providing feedback that is suggested for improvement.

2.13.1 Importance of stakeholder involvement in quality assurance

Stakeholders provide checks and balances, contribute to relevant and quality programs, and assist at evaluation of products, gives feedbacks to both internal and external quality assurance systems (Matel & Iwinska, 2016). According Standards and guidelines in European Higher Education (2015), quality assurance ensures accountability to stakeholders such as government, students, guardians and society as a whole in terms of needs and expectations, value for money, employability, and productivity. Kis (2005) emphasized on different interests and conceptions between diverse stakeholders with different approaches such that government's approach is summative while HEIs approach is formative and that the interest of government is accountability and improvements while HEIs aims at quality improvement.

2.13.2 Involvement of Employer and Industry

Hall and Thomas (2005) reported on a study that explored the links among employers, the higher education, vocational education and training sectors. They focused on the Malawian context a need for Sub Saharan Africa in terms of policy implications. They further examined the implications for higher education in strengthening the links between stakeholders through an Association for Tertiary Education Management.

It is important for higher education institutions to involve stakeholders including employers, as these are the recipients of higher education products. Gluber (2017) recommends that community involvement should access academic library through provision of resources,

research and partnerships; this may also include physical and online resources to the community. Gluber, further encourages HEIs to educate students so that they should engage the public as a social responsibility

Wong (2012) supports the importance of involving private industry to assess quality through accreditation processes although he does not give details of the private industry that should participate in assessing quality education.

The industry is also very critical in quality assurance and improving quality education and in Malawi, there has been reports that universities especially the public HEIs involve the industry through student attachments, review of curriculum and dissemination of research but not much is documented to establish the extent of involvement in the quality assurance activities. This was evidenced by the accreditation report by the National Council for Higher Education in Malawi as it identified gaps in this area (NCHE Accreditation report, 2016).

2.13.3 Involvement of Communities

Community is one of the major stakeholders and recipient of services from the universities' programs and projects within their communities and gives opportunities to their students to implement and practice their skills, knowledge related to their projects. Bonginkosi(2019) focused his study on the importance of community involved and on goals such as hunger and poverty with reference to sustainable development goals. These undertakings were demonstrated by the students at University of Cape Town who contributed to communities in the Eastern Cape to address poverty and hunger, which was affecting vulnerable population that was aggravated by poor nutrition among other local challenges that resulted from lack of guidance on food production. The students implemented a farm project by planting vegetables such as potatoes, tomatoes carrots and implemented chicken and egg farming and this in turn provided the community with manure, vegetables and improved nutrition status of the community.

The researcher attributes such innovations to universities leadership where community involvement can have an impact on the communities around the universities. The minimum standards for higher education stipulate community outreach as one of the requirements by HEIs and in Malawi and other countries in the Sub-Saharan region there are many such situations where universities can reach out for transformation of lives in various ways including farming. Private universities should therefore be encouraged to undertake such community involvement initiatives, which can also lead to some sort of resource mobilization if implemented at a larger scale.

2.13.4 Involvement of Regulatory and Professional Bodies

Shaba (2014), established that higher education institutions in Malawi were not offering quality education to address national needs and therefore produced poor graduates and had programs that were not relevant to the needs of the country and attributed quality of education to lack of stakeholder involvement including the industry in the quality assurance processes. With the establishment of the Malawi National Council for Higher education in 2011, Shaba strongly recommended that there should be a development of vigorous quality assurance systems and improving governance structures in both public and private universities. The researcher observed that there has been a gap in the development of such vigorous quality assurance system in higher education institutions in Malawi to address the challenges of poor graduates and irrelevant programs offered in private universities. The establishment of NCHE in Malawi marked an important expectation to address these challenges through establishment of quality assurance systems that have the potential to contribute to quality education improvement in the HEIs.

2.13.5 Involvement of Government

One of the critical external stakeholders in higher education is the government as it enhances governance and quality as a regulator itself because it has interest in the graduates as they contribute to the national socio-economic development. For example, government officials are involved in serving on university boards to give policy direction (Beerkens and Udam (2017). Government bodies often play an important role in the quality assurance of higher education as they serve on national agencies boards. In the US for instance, the United States Department of Education, a federal agency is one of the two institutions, next to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation that carry out the recognition of accrediting agencies (Eaton, 2004). Similarly, in Japan independent evaluation bodies are recognized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology (Hungary, 2016).

In Malawi, the department of higher education in the ministry of education looks into issues of both public and private institutions in areas of regulation through the National Council for Higher Education. Additionally, the private universities have an association called Association of Private Universities that takes care of educational systems and issues related to private universities in Malawi. This association works with the Government to lobby for support and collaboration in matters to do with private universities. The Ministry recognizes the presence of these Associations as acknowledged by Zimpita (2021) that Private institutions complement government's efforts to increase access to higher education and strengthen the higher education system. However, Zimpita cautions private universities not to offer unregistered programs that are not relevant to the demands of the Malawi nation and warns on loss of business and competition among private universities since there are now many private universities striving to attract students into their institutions. Zimpita further referred to national policies such as Sustainable Development Goal no.4 on issues of inclusive and

equitable quality education and promotion of life long opportunities for all and emphasized on the fact that private universities need to embrace such policies (Zimpita, 2021).

The Researcher perceives great opportunity for the APUMA to work well with the government through the department of higher education in the Ministry of Education where issues of quality assurance stands a good chance of being strengthened in addition to lobbying for support. This is a platform where government policies such National Educational Policy, National Educational Sector Investment Plan (NESIP), Africa Agenda 2063 among other policies can be disseminated to private universities as these focus on relevance, inclusiveness, quality, equitable access, governance and management of higher education Zimpita (2021). The ~~relationship~~ between government and private universities should be encouraged because these issues are critical to the growth of higher education in Malawi. This gives an opportunity to lobby for establishment of functional quality assurance systems in higher institutions.

Champirun (2017) agrees with examined the involvement of stakeholders in higher education in Cambodia to find out if stakeholders contributed to successful collaboration and identified four important categories of stakeholders to be government, development partners, higher education institutions and the industry.

Further, stakeholders could be analyzed in terms of their contribution to the issues of quality based on definitions of internal and external quality assurance where external stakeholders influence external quality assurance and internal stakeholders contribute effectively to internal quality assurance. In some cases, students can play both roles as internal and external during evaluations of lecturers and program evaluations and as external during tracer studies.

Ryan (2015) gave an outline the Quality Assurance agencies and the importance of having a relationship between a university and Quality Assurance Agencies in order to have a quality

assurance mechanism that adheres to the QAA standards and this relationship ensures ownership and responsibility for the quality assurance processes.

2.13.6 Involvement of Students

The National Council for Higher Education in Malawi developed minimum standards for higher education that prescribed that students should have their legal committee, referred to as students' union and that students should be allocated in some committees as part of good governance structures. Such recommended committees include University Council, academic committee and the Senate (NCHE Minimum standards, 2016). This study will try to find out if indeed students are involved in these committees as recommended by NCHE.

Noha (2015) established that not many studies have been done on quality from the students' perspective in Africa and yet this is another important area in defining quality education. Ryan (2015) emphasized on the importance of involving students in QA processes in order to evaluate and enhance quality education through interviews and questionnaires and include students' evaluation of the academic programs as an important tool for quality improvement; also involvement of stakeholders to share a vision on quality. The findings by Ryan are very helpful and strongly supports the approach being proposed in this research where the researcher interviewed students to establish their involvement in quality assurance processes. Beerkens and Udam (2017) supports this finding by Ryan (2015) as he commented that students should be seen as one of the key stakeholders and therefore be involved or be allowed to participate in university affairs and not to be seen as consumers.

In Europe, students' union are powerful stakeholders as they are involved in designing and implementation of quality assurance systems and revisions of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA. Additionally, the students' voice is critical for both internal and quality assurance, as they are involved in external reviews at national level. Students are also involved in annual students' surveys in ranking students' satisfaction with the quality of

their programs and support systems (citation; EHEA). This can be compared with Malawi setting where students' evaluation is conducted but not much involved at national level as external evaluators and there are no reports on annual national students' surveys in Malawi. Perhaps this one area could be considered to involve students in national evaluations of quality of programs and institutions by NCHE and other professional bodies.

Oni and Adetoro (2015) examined student's involvement by university leadership, decision-making processes and its impact on leadership in Nigerian universities. The study established that the culture of students' involvement in decision-making has not been well accepted in Nigerian universities because of organizational structures and nature of educational systems; as not all administrators allow students to participate in decision making in their universities.

Fajana (2002) agrees with Oni and Adetoro that student participation in decision making was problematic as students are regarded as minors, immature and lack of technical knowledge. Oni and Adetoro (2015) established that a few vice chancellors who involved students in decision-making did not really understand the basic principles and therefore resulted in many staff strikes and demonstrations caused by poor decision-making mechanisms. However, Oke et al. (2010) warns that failure to involve students in decision-making could result in challenges with planning and implementation of institutional goals leading to challenges in human respect, materials, financial and physical resources. Similarly, in Malawi most of the universities including private institutions have established students' Unions as one of key stakeholders but it is not evident if these students are involved in quality assurance hence one of the reasons that this study was rolled out.

In line with the conceptual framework on internal quality assurance that has been developed by the Researcher, stakeholders play a significant role in strengthening and supporting private universities to offer quality education as indicated by a number of authors in this section. Stakeholders have a great role in quality education in the higher education and each of these stakeholders has various contributions towards private universities. In addition to quality improvement, stakeholders may assist HEIs in ensuring transparency and accountability to the students, parents and the government.

Students tend to give a true representation of the quality of education being offered by HEIs without bias, as they are the recipients of quality education and desire to always access good and quality education. The students therefore seek ways that can improve their education, their interest is to give a true picture of what the real situation is regarding the situation on the ground, and this is a way of drumming support from relevant stakeholders. Additionally, the information given by students can therefore be reliable and credible, as students who have been in the university for more than two years tend to have experience and understanding of the real situation of education in terms of elements of quality.

Quality Assurance Agencies are also regarded as one of the external stakeholders and it is strongly recommended that there should be a good relationship between these two partners. However, in this study, the researchers did not focus on external stakeholder involvement by private universities but they mainly focused on internal stakeholders' students, staff and management. This has led to a development of research gaps and this calls for follow up and to conduct further studies in this area in order to come up with a conclusion on how private universities may be involved in both internal and external stakeholders that would include employers, industry and development partners. The tone of the major tasks in this study was to establish how private universities might involve both internal and external stakeholders in the quality assurance systems.

2.14 Leadership Role in Private Universities

“Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations and actions of others” (Cuban; 1988).

Having established the perspective of stakeholders on quality assurance systems in private universities, this section reviewed literature on the role of leadership in private universities and its impact on quality education in Malawi and other countries to compare the roles, models and styles of leadership in HEIs. There are several types of leadership styles that have been recommended for improvement of quality education and these will apply in recommendations for private universities.

Dimitri (2009) examined the influence of leadership roles on the quality of services provided in higher education where 134 faculty and administrative staff were interviewed at an institute of Larissa in Greece. The author used structured questionnaire, which was designed to measure leadership roles, quality roles in services and internal processes. The study established that leadership was involved in the implementation of quality assurance system and that leadership plays a big role at faculty and administration.

2.14.1 Leadership Theories and Styles

One of the critical elements in the Internal Quality Assurance conceptual framework that the researcher is addressing is the role of leadership in quality improvement in private universities. This is also an area of focus being addressed by one of the study research questions as leadership is key to guide and monitor quality of education in higher education institutions. The researcher believes that leadership theories, styles and models have a great impact on driving the private universities to promotion of quality education and establishment of quality assurance systems. The following sections discuss a number of leadership theories

that are identified with leadership in higher education.

a) Strategic leadership theory

This theory views leaders as those people that have an ability to anticipate, innovate and be able to mobilize others to become responsive and be flexible to institutional demands. Strategic leadership is also described as a set of procedures that result in performance assessment of an organization to establish its capacity in networking, technology and business opportunities. This networking refers to social, economic, intellectual capital of stakeholders, society and employer (Khalid et al 2021).

This theory relates to educational strategic leadership in empowerment, team development, innovation and cultural development. The Researcher agrees with this theory of leadership that these attributes can positively influence leadership in private universities to bring about change.

As Cuban (1988) reported that leadership with change and management as being involved in activity based but both being important in the educational sector. Bush (2007) stated that leadership ought to include the concept of vision in contrast to managerial leadership which focuses on actions. Leithwood (1994) summarized transformational leadership as the ability to focus on building a vision, establishment of goals, offering of individual support, ensuring that best practices and organizational values exist. These models can be recommended to higher education leadership in order to improve management and leadership styles. There is not much literature on leadership roles that is related to quality assurance in private universities specifically in Malawi to compare with other countries.

Moral leadership focuses on values, beliefs and ethics of leaders to influence what is right or good (Leithwood et al. 1999). Mbiga (1997) cited Ubuntu by stating that collective personhood and collected morality is more pronounced in black African cultural heritage and it focuses on being a good person. Mbiga recommends that leadership style to educational sector and Ubuntu per se is linked much to democracy and is said to contribute to moral stability.

These leadership models among others are crucial to the educational sector and therefore recommended to be applied to higher education as way of ensuring effectiveness and efficiencies with the aim of improving quality. This study sought to establish some of the leadership models and theories that play a role in private universities, which may be recommended to other HEIs in Malawi.

There are leadership theories that are most relevant to improvement of leadership in the higher education institutions that can contribute to delivery of quality education and ensure establishment of proper and well-defined systems. The researcher identified four leadership theories that could be applied to the topic of this study.

b) Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership has been described as that leadership that can transform or change people. According to Northouse (2016) motivation is the ability to satisfy the needs of followers and handling them as human beings. Dzimbiri (2015) quoted Bush (1977) who stated that this type of leadership entails visionary leaders that promotes people's awareness about importance of outcomes. Northouse (2016), presented factors related to transformational leadership as those leaders that have an interest in performance improvements for its followers and developing them to their full potential; these factors are to do with influence, motivation, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration.

There are a number of theories associated with transformational leadership such as Bass Transformational Leadership Theory, Charismatic leadership theory and Burns Transformational leadership theory. Bass transformational leadership theory as explained by

Bass (1985) explained that followers go after the leader mainly because of the influence of the leaders' attributes such as honesty, trust, and other similar qualities; it is indicated that the leader therefore transforms the followers because of such qualities. Bass further described the aspects of transformational leaderships to be an individual consideration where the leader puts more emphasis on what an employee of a follower needs and acts as a role model, mentor or facilitator for motivating them. Bass also describes a transformational leader as one who brings intellectual stimulation and seeks ideas from the followers, encourages them to contribute and allow some independence. This theory describes the leader as an inspiration where the leader gives meaning to the followers on a task and provides a vision or goal.

Leadership in private universities can adopt this theory in order to encourage and motivate their followers, thus, administrative and academic staff to bring ideas that will assist to improve quality of education.

The second transformational leadership theory is Burns Transformational leadership theory that was developed by Burns (1978) and the theory addresses the importance of being a leader and the goal of leadership. He focused on motivation and values of a leader and believed that leadership should change character of an individual. In this transformational theory, the leader guides followers with reference to the existing values, goals, capabilities and other resources of the organization. This theory stresses the importance of bringing change through motivation with reference to the values of a leader and this improves follower's character. The leader focuses on changing the character of the employees from negative to positive outcomes.

This type of leadership has challenges because sometimes leaders may assume that character of the followers has gaps requiring improvement and this may not be the case. However, this theory can also be applied in private universities where leaders can capitalize on certain characters and motivate them to have positive outcomes.

The third transformational leadership theory is known as Charismatic theory suggested by Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) that charismatic–transformational leaders transform the self-concepts of their followers and that these leaders build personal and social identification among their followers with the mission and goals of the leader and organization. The followers feel that they are involved, they become committed to their work, and therefore there is improvement in performance. Northouse (2016), describes charisma a special gift that some people possess that enables them to have capacity to do great things. Northouse attaches personality characteristics of a charismatic leader as being dominant, having strong desire to influence others, self-confidence and having one's own moral values. These leaders demonstrate specific behaviors such as role modelling and encourage followers to adapt.

The researcher finds transformational leadership to be appropriate and relevant to leadership in higher education where leadership in private universities should refer to this type of leadership in order to improve quality of education. Leaders in higher education can use transformational leadership theories and styles to inspire and motivate students and staff as their followers to be intellectually stimulated and achieve their educational ambitions. Additionally, the transformational leadership can also be referred to in establishment of proper quality assurance systems through motivation and inspiration to their followers at the same time supporting them by listening to their needs. This type of leadership produces positive outcomes and results in great performance of the followers.

C) Situational leadership theory

Situational leadership theory is referred to as a 3-D management style and applies to leadership application according to situation and it assumes that different situations require different type of leadership where it can direct or support at that point in time

(Northouse, 2016). In addition, Dzimbiri (2015) agrees that situational leadership focuses on followers' readiness and put emphasis in leadership effectiveness.

The researcher also finds this type of leadership suitable for private universities as leaders face different situations and challenges requiring different approaches to resolve and manage those situations.

d) Servant leadership

Northouse explains that servant leadership inspires leaders to serve first, putting other people's needs first. This type of leaders may not fit well in the higher education scenario of the customers, mainly students and other members requiring leadership to make decisions. Unlike transformational leadership, servant leadership puts priorities on others first and this may delay in implementation of some important and priority activities in the universities which may also delay in quality improvement.

Hanson and Leautier (2011) conducted a review of literature in Zimbabwe with a focus on institutional leadership in African Universities. The main aim of the review was to interpret leadership competences into intellectual capital, strategic planning and knowledge transformation. The researchers observed that some countries in Africa continue to have economic and development challenges ascribed by poverty as indicated in the UN Millennium Development Initiative. Hanson and Leautier (2011) indicated the importance of leadership at the individual, organizational and institutional level, equipped with creativity and innovative skills and committed to the continent's growth and prosperity. Hanson and Leautier (2011) further stated that leadership roles of universities include ensuring that there is research, ICT and good learning environment.

Hanson and Leautier (2011) further identified a need for further studies in order to find out more approaches that can enhance institutional leadership in African Countries. Hanson and Leautier (2011) then recommended that African Universities should be proactive in

fostering institutional leadership in order to translate leadership competencies into strategic management, intellectual capital and decision-making, knowledge transfers that aim at quality services. Leautier (2009) advised that leadership capacity enhancement requires investments in resources such as time, finances, materials and equipment for learning and its staff.

The study conducted by Hanson and Leautier (2011) was very important, it came up with relevant observations and recommendations to the Malawi set up with focus on improving quality education including issues of resource mobilization and monitoring of educational standards. As reported earlier on, lack of financial resources is one of major challenges in almost all private universities as they rely on tuition fees, which is affected by enrollment of students, and therefore not reliable hence resource mobilization is critical as one of the focus areas by the leadership. However, the study was generalized and did not focus on private universities hence findings were universal for African Countries and not specific countries such as sub Saharan region. Gaps were therefore related to both leadership and quality improvement in private universities hence a need for further exploration on relationship between leadership and quality education in private universities.

This study engaged leaders in private universities in central region of Malawi to explore how leadership roles impact on quality education with reference to some critical areas highlighted in this literature review such as capacity building for institutional leadership. The researcher recommends reference of institutional leadership to leadership theories that can enhance and promote efficiencies in quality improvement as presented in the following sections.

Sharra (2017) conducted a review of leadership in university education in Malawi with focus on politics and academics. Sharra (2017) questioned whether vision and mission statements of the Malawian universities were being applied to the management of the universities as most of these universities had very good ambitions in both vision and mission statements but failed to translate them into reality. Sharra then recommended that universities in Malawi, both public and private, should promote leadership with transformational qualities and have mentorship skills so as to act as role models to their staff and students and that universities should focus on governance and leadership models that will ensure participatory decision making that includes students and therefore produce competent graduates. According to Mary Nell (2015), the transformational leaders are those that influence, inspire and motivate followers and act as role models while encouraging intellectual stimulation for followers and focusing on specific goals.

These leaders assist their followers to fulfill self-actualization needs and empowering them through individual motivation. The researcher finds these recommendations useful and agrees with transformational leadership theories where leaders require to work and motivate their followers as stipulated by Northouse (2016). If indeed leadership in universities, including private universities adopt such type of transformational leadership, universities can tremendously improve in many dimensions including delivery of quality education and establishment of proper quality assurance systems.

Nabaho et al. (2020) emphasized on the importance of having leaders who can take control in administrative and academic issues when an institution is facing challenges and uncertainties, and allocate limited resources in such a way that the university is able to achieve its goals. Nabaho et al. (2020) further advised that institutions should have well qualified leadership who are competent and experienced to instill a quality culture in the universities. These qualities of a leader are crucial in the private universities where there are many challenges and uncertainties caused by inadequate resources and requires strong leadership to manage at the same time to meet the demands of quality

education. As warned by Zeleza (2018), who pointed out that some challenges faced by African universities included learning and teaching resources and leadership, there is a need to have strong leadership to address such challenges in order to keep up with quality education.

Oni and Adetoro (2015) conducted a study on university leadership with focus on effectiveness of student involvement in decision making in South west in Nigeria. The authors used descriptive survey and collected data from students and staff from 12 HEIs both public and private universities. According to Adetoro (2000), the culture of students' involvement in decision-making has not been well accepted in Nigerian universities because of organizational structures and nature of educational systems as not all administrators allow students to participate in decision making in their universities.

Oni and Adetoro (2015) established that a few vice chancellors who involved students in decision-making did not really understand the basic principles and therefore resulted in many staff strikes and demonstrations caused by poor decision-making mechanisms. Oni and Adetoro also established that Nigerian students' union have complained about lack of involvement in decision making on students' admission, tuition fees, allowances, students welfare and other disciplinary matters. The findings of this study revealed a significant relationship gap between student involvement and decision-making and leadership effectiveness. The study also established that there was no significant relationship between the management–student relationship and leadership effectiveness (Oni and Adetoro, 2017).

This was an important study in understanding the importance of involving students in decision making, however the study unpack the elements that supported the actual areas of involvement and did not involve other members of the academic team to have their input in student involvement. However, the study revealed that some vice chancellors who did not involve students in decision making faced a number of challenges such staff strikes. On the other hand, students lamented lack of

involvement in critical decision-making areas such as tuition fees, admission policies and welfare issues.

There appears to be contradictory views on involvement of students in the decision-making processes. Fajana (2002) commented that participation of students in decision-making might be problematic as students may be seen as immature and lacking expertise and technical knowledge in the decision-making processes related to the universities. On the contrary, Oke et al (2010) warned that lack of involvement of students in decision making in HEIs could lead to difficulty in the planning and implementation of planned goals, leading to insufficiencies and ineffectiveness related to human, material, financial and physical resources. The research tends to support the view that the students need to be fully involved in decision making related to their learning to promote needs based solutions (Beerkens and Udams, 2017 and Ryan (2015).

Bush (2007) stated that the leadership in universities includes Board of Trustees, Senate, Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Committees, and Heads of departments, Deans and senior lectures. Tonga (1977) mentioned that governance of the universities has been facing challenges all over the world and particularly in Nigeria because management had been facing challenges including poor academic performances, examination malpractices, unresolved conflicts and indiscipline among students. This type of governance challenges requires situational leadership to be applied to resolve those challenges as recommended by Northouse, 2016. Leadership needs to apply leadership styles depending on the situation or the challenges being faced at that point in time.

Leadership and governance play a big role in universities in ensuring smooth running of the universities and enhancing performance in the institutional and academic areas to ensure equality and productive graduates; hence a need to explore these factors in the study.

e) Social Justice Leadership

Another theory related to leadership is social justice leadership that calls for inclusive practices where players such as lecturers, students and other members of staff are involved in

governance, quality issues and in regular reviews of teaching and learning activities (Abawi, 2018). This type of leadership also outlines how these staff members can be encouraged to be committed to inclusive practices (Zemblas, 2012 cited by Abawi, 2018). This theory involves working together to support and engage stakeholders and key players in a meaningful learning journey and requires a holistic approach to include students and other individual groups who are critical to quality learning and teaching (Abawi, 2018). Social justice leadership mainly focusses on three elements for inclusive practices and structures; social justice, quality education and quality assurance as pointed out by this author. This involves providing feedback by students to lecturers and other members of staff and leadership should refer to this leadership theory to establish quality assurance structures using team approach and collaboratively contribute towards quality education and attainment of accreditation status.

In line with this study, leadership in private universities should adopt this leadership approach to build knowledge and skill development related to quality assurance cycles while also ensuring socially acceptable teaching practices and policies by continuously engaging staff in self-evaluations, expectations, practices and attitudes. Private universities should therefore focus on the complete educational system to effectively establish quality assurance systems that focusses on infrastructural structures, good governance, and financial resources in order to offer the expected quality education.

This Transformational leadership theory fits very well in this study as the focus is quality assurance and quality education and includes stakeholder involvement as one of the key players in achieving and improving quality education in private universities. Social justice ensures inclusion of students and other groups in the governance structures. This supports the call for such inclusion as stipulated in the minimum standards for higher education to involve students in committees and decision-making, as these are key beneficiaries of quality education (Minimum standards, 2016). Leadership in private universities should adopt this leadership style in order to ensure inclusiveness and therefore involving as many key players and stakeholders as possible in coming up with quality

assurance systems. This inclusiveness ensures that there is involvement in both internal and external quality assurance systems that gives leadership in private universities a wide range of contributions towards a number of elements affecting quality education.

Higher education institutions are advised to have a quality assurance culture and students should be involved in the quality assurance culture and that there should be monitoring mechanisms for compliance of the standards. Quality culture involves supporting the individual students, partnership and sharing of experiences and team working. Leadership should be at the forefront of quality at all levels at the institution (Pala, 2018).

The researcher buys in the importance of quality culture in universities so much that once all stakeholders, leadership, students as well as academic team understand the importance of quality in all the activities and ~~process~~, the university will be geared to provision of quality education at all times. Further, the researcher agrees with the author that leadership in universities should lead and be supportive to promotion of quality culture in private universities. The issue of quality culture underscores its importance in higher education as presented by a number of academicians and researchers.

The leadership of universities plays a number of roles in improving quality education as established by many researchers both in Africa and at international level, such roles include good governance, managing employees, empowering other leaders and students, inclusion of ICT, research and requires effective leadership skills. The Literature review also revealed that leaders should be able to manage challenges and conflicts faced by universities. Lumbly (2012), recommends that leadership in universities including private HEIs, should meet the public expectations and their goals while maintaining their businesses and keep up the pace of change.

Leadership styles and theories can be applied to enhance leadership in private higher education institutions in order to improve quality of education and ensure proper quality assurance systems.

2.15 Contribution to knowledge

2.15.1 Theoretical Contribution

The researcher has found this literature review useful and relevant to the study, however there have been challenges in identifying relevant and current research on quality assurance in Malawi creating a gap in this type of research study. It is envisaged that these study outcomes will contribute to growing but limited body of literature on quality assurance in Africa and Malawi specifically. Such contributions in this literature review include defining of proper quality assurance units in higher education institutions that should have its own directorate, budget, policies and adequate staff and committees. The study also gives updates to current challenges being faced by private universities that may require attention of leadership and further studies.

2.15.2 Practical Contribution

Another major contribution is development of a new internal quality assurance conceptual framework that can be adopted by private universities to improve IQA systems; this conceptual framework includes major internal quality assurance elements that contribute to quality education and attainment of accreditation status in higher education institutions. The establishment of quality assurance units in private universities will be a major contribution and will be an indicator to adherence to higher education quality assurance framework.

2.16 Research focus and main studies

The following table gives a summary of some main studies reviewed in this literature that have contributed to formulation of research questions based the research problem;

Table 2.6: Summary of main studies

SN	Study	Main findings	Research Questions	Implementation
1.	Simona (2015) Studied a theoretical framework on Internal quality assurance in education	Importance of quality assurance and adapted the concept of education audit for online learning environment - Contribute to accountability of financial resources Contribute to Quality education	Research question one and four (Status of quality education) (Accountability of financial resources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning and teaching resources - Availability of financial resources - Provision of quality of education

2.	Ryan (2015) Reviewed quality assurance systems in global higher education	Concluded that accreditation is a mechanism used to ensure quality - Focus on regional and International framework	Research question Two (Quality assurance structures)	Included on conceptual framework as an outcome
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3.	Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College (2018) Developed external Internal quality assurance mechanism generated at departmental level	Established quality assurance functions , Quality assurance units	Research question Two (Quality Assurance structures)	Recommended to private universities to establish QAU
4.	Jingura and Kimusoko (2019) IQA in building professional competency for higher education	Planning, activity, evaluation and implementation to assess skills, knowledge and attitudes of competencies	Research question four (Leadership skills in professional competencies)	Recommended to Leadership in HEIs
5.	Martin (2018) Internal quality assurance in more than 300 HEIs (94 countries)	IQA manages quality cycle Involving University teaching, research Support to infrastructure	Research question one (quality of teaching)	To improve quality of teaching and research Support infrastructural issues as an element of Conceptual framework

6.	Swanzy and Potts (2017) Investigated Internal Quality strategies in Ghana Polytechnics	Focused on improving graduates IQA focused on staff and students in evaluating quality	Research question three (Stakeholder involvement in quality evaluations)	To improve quality of graduates through involving stakeholders to evaluate quality
7.	Martin and Emaran (2017) Conducted a survey in 400 universities	IQA used to prepare for national EQA Addressed issues of employability	Research question three (Evaluation of IQA by stakeholders)	Strengthening IQA Producing quality graduates for employability

2.17 Chapter summary

This section looked at several quality assurance frameworks that have been applied in quality of education research across the world. A number of authors have used IQA frameworks, EQA frameworks and others both internal and external frameworks. The pros and cons of these frameworks and scenarios for their application have been outlined. Based on these quality assurance theoretical frameworks by Ann Gravells (2016), SADC (2018) and Jingura and Kimusoko (2019), this study explored the factors of quality assurance systems on quality education and developed the conceptual framework that best suit enhancement of quality education in private universities in Malawi.

Implementation of quality assurance frameworks can improve establishment of quality assurance units in private universities, although sometimes the frameworks may pose managerial risks that may threaten academic as well as professional autonomy in higher education. There is therefore a need to relate to and apply leadership theories and styles that may augment leadership skills and roles in improving quality of education. This study used a theoretical framework that involves internal quality assurance systems and there is tremendous evidence that IQAs were used to assess quality as evidenced under literature review section above. A number of researchers recommended IQA as a powerful tool to improve quality education as this forms the basis for external quality assurance systems and that includes establishment of quality assurance units.

Policies and quality assurance instruments are key to enhance quality of education in both public and private universities as documented by a number of authors. There are however a number of gaps in this subject in Africa. Historically, policies and structures have evolved from political backgrounds and hence a need to explore the current situation to appraise such systems and the impact on quality education. There is not much literature on QA policies and structures in private universities hence the justification to have this as a major focus area in this study.

From this literature review, it is very clear that there are no recent studies that link challenges faced by private universities with the issues of quality assurance; hence, this study is very important as it focusses on the quality improvement through establishment of proper quality assurance systems. The researcher has unpacked the quality assurance systems in terms of what it takes to have well-established quality assurance units to ensure establishment of the internal QA. Additionally, the QA structures have been well defined from the global level to the higher education level as an indication that QA is a vast and critical area at global level calling for higher education institutions to embrace the importance of quality assurance.

Chapter 3

Research Methods and Data Collection

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses research methods used to explore factors that affect delivery of quality education and how quality assurance systems contribute to quality enhancement in private universities in Malawi, specifically in the city of Lilongwe. The chapter includes data collection processes, research approaches and design, population and sample size of the research, research instruments and ethical considerations. The Researcher has used mixed research methods by using survey and interviews. Crowther and Lancaster (2009) defined research methodology as a way of determining the research approaches to data collection and that a major distinguishing feature between different methodologies is the different approaches to the data collection. Further, this chapter includes methodological choices that assist the researcher in deciding the best methods to use in order to be systematic, specific, objective and well-focused on the topic. Another area of focus in this chapter involves research instruments used for data collection and discussion that focused on developing and piloting questionnaires and interview guides. In order to come up with appropriate research approaches and design, the researcher included the research philosophy and paradigms that provided guidance. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations that mainly deal with research ethics approvals, informed consenting processes, issues of confidentiality and data management issues. Finally, this chapter includes data collection processes and data analysis techniques for both surveys and interviews as data collection methods.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015), Qualitative research approaches refer to deductive and inductive approaches. *Deductive approaches* refer to scientific principles

that explain causal and effect relationships between variables that are mainly used for collection of quantitative data and ensures data validity. On the other hand, *Inductive approaches* are involved with an understanding of the meanings that human attributes to events and is mainly used in qualitative data collection as it requires a close understanding of the research context (Saunders et al., 2009).

This research mainly used the inductive approach because of the nature of the topic of the study, which used qualitative research methods where there is commonest interaction between the researcher and interviewees. This method was preferred because the researcher had the ability to investigate and obtain the required descriptive information related to the quality assurance issues through the structured interviews that were conducted with respondents of the three universities under study (Rahman, 2010). The deductive approach was not considered for use in this study principally because there was no hypothesis testing involved (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). The following section refers to research philosophy and paradigms that guide the research approaches.

3.2.1 Research Philosophy and Paradigms

The Researcher perceives research philosophy as the truth, reality and knowledge that outlines the beliefs and values guiding the design, data collection and analysis in research study (Ryan, 2018). Additionally, Ryan described a number of terminologies to supplement definitions of research philosophy as he defined epistemology as the belief about how one may come to know the world. It is important to be explicit regarding the philosophical assumptions that triggered a researcher's study for the simple reason that each researcher brings to their research study a set of interconnecting theoretical assumptions and positions (Green and Carcelli, 1997). These assumptions are known as

paradigms and there are two research paradigms that are recommended by several authors, and these are positivism and

interpretivism (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). A paradigm determines a study design by following the researcher's plan and set up of the study (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019).

The two main research paradigms or philosophies are further elaborated below

3.2.1.1 Positivism

According to Ryan (2018), positivism is related to experiments and therefore refers to quantitative research and dwells much on cause and effect approaches. The positivist approach is a deductive method of analysis and focuses on facts as it looks at the generality to the specific and mainly focuses on facts and the subsequent operationalization of concepts that can be measured and uses quantitative research tools. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015), pointed out that this position of positivism is based on the idea that scientific knowledge is the only acceptable knowledge of the world and that it is characterized by the testing of the research questions originating from the existing theory and body of knowledge. However, application of the positivism paradigm in this study was limited because quality assurance issues are associated with human behavior and how quality can be improved; the study therefore investigates perceptions and deeper understanding of quality assurance factors related to education by students, staff and management in private universities.

3.2.1.2 Interpretivism

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015) explained that Interpretivism helps a researcher to understand differences between humans as social actors and therefore appreciates the difference between research among human and research among objects. Bloomberg & Volpe (2019 p. 45) stated that the central assumption of interpretivism is that 'reality is socially constructed that individuals

develop subjective meanings of their own personal experience...’and this gives to multiple meanings.
It therefore becomes the researcher’s role to understand
the multiple realities from the perspectives of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Ryan (2018) argues that interpretivism differs from positivism in that it disputes that truth and knowledge are subjective as culturally and historically situated and is based on people's experiences and their understanding of them. Further, Bryman (2008) defined approaches to interpretivism research as interpreting and understanding deeper meaning of texts or documentation, exploration of understanding and perception from the points of view of research participants to understand their behavior and symbolic interactionism where people's behavior is based on their meanings generated from social interactions.

Based on above explanations and supportive literature, interpretivism appeared to be more realistic and relevant than positivism and best suits this research study and was therefore adopted as research philosophy for this study. This is because this study focuses more on qualitative research method by exploring the experiences and understanding of factors affecting quality assurance systems and quality education.

Interpretivism assisted in the explanation of how quality factors enhanced or inhibited delivery of quality education and assisted in identification of such factors of which some were new and unexpected although these were not exhaustive hence use of surveys to augment the findings.

3.2.1.3 Pragmatism

Research focusses on methods, researchers put emphasizes on the research problem by using different available approaches to understand the problem (Saunders et al, 2009). It is argued researchers can use both positivism and interpretivism by integrating different perspectives to assist in interpreting data. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the research problem is more important than the methods and that study methods can combined in a creativity

way within the same study. In this case, pragmatism adopts multiple methods of data collection and data analysis methods. However, this study used interpretivism more than other philosophical assumptions.

3.2.1.4 Realism

This philosophy is based on the fact that reality is independent of a human mind and assumes a scientific approach (Saunders et al, 2015). Krauss (2005) explained that realism concerns multiple perceptions about a single fact and reality and believes that perceptions have a certain plasticity and that there are differences between reality and real people. However, this philosophy was applicable to this study because the researcher believes that once the quality assurance factors that inhibit provision of quality education are identified, respective mitigation measures would be applied; this relate to issues of perceptions about any reality and real situations related to the topic of this study.

3.2.2 Research Design

Some of the common research designs or strategies that may be used, according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), include experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research. In accordance with the objectives of this study, the researcher decided to use exploratory research design.

According to Saunders et al (2009), a research design or strategy is the general plan of how the researcher intends to go about answering the research questions. Saunders et al (2009) further stated that the choice of the research design is guided by the research questions and objectives, the extent

of the existing knowledge on the subject matter being investigated, the time and resources at the disposal of the researcher as well as the theoretical background of the researcher.

Greener and Martelli (2015) explained that a research design is a plan on how to approach a research topic and there is no one right way of conducting research but that the researcher needs to proceed with a specific design. This depends on a number of factors such as the research topic, number of participants and stakeholders to interact with as well as time and resources available for the researcher. The following subsections describe research designs and how they apply to this study.

3.2.2.1 Exploratory study design

In this study, the researcher used exploratory technique or design because of the nature of the research topic under the study. This technique enables the researcher to explore a new area that has not been studied before and where a researcher plans to develop new ideas with a more focused approach (Saunders et al 2009). Saunders et al further explains that an exploratory study attempts to find out what is happening and seeks new insights, to ask questions and to assess the topic further. In this study, the researcher further attempted to find the status of quality education, availability of quality assurance systems and to assess how these systems were being implemented in terms of provision of quality of education in private universities. In Malawi, quality assurance phenomenon is quite new especially in higher education, let alone, in private universities (Ryan, 2015). There has been little literature established in this area of research for Malawi, making it worthwhile to explore such factors and its impact on quality education. Hence, an exploratory study design was appropriate and applicable to this research study. This design allows a researcher to investigate the causes of a particular phenomenon that is understood as a new area while explaining possible causes for deficiencies in the establishment of proper quality assurance systems without necessarily describing them.

3.2.2.2 Explanatory study design

This study design involves discussion of results using concepts and researchers' perspectives or can refer to previous research. A researcher can comment with reference to research questions, referring to views, plans, discussions, reflections or speculations about possible explanations of the findings (Gronmo, 2020). According to Gronmo (2020), this design explains that data can be analyzed systematically to come up with different possible ways of explaining a social condition being studied.

In this study, the explanatory study design fits well because there was a need to explain and come up with an analysis related to the topic under study because there was a certain degree of clarification on causal relationship between any two social phenomena.

3.2.2.3 Grounded theory

Grounded theory involves development of a new theory in a qualitative research design. This theory enables the researcher to generate an overall explanation (theory) of the interaction formed by views of participants. The grounded theory enables the systematic development of a theory followed by systematic research. A limitation of grounded theory to this study is that it makes it difficult to collect data and saturate all areas of quality assurances, as it is a very broad area of study. Grounded theory also recommends previous knowledge should be ignored in order to come up with new theory (Creswell, 1998). In this study, the grounded theory makes this to be a limitation since the researcher has already determined the theoretical elements that can be applied to quality assurance in the literature review. Additionally, the researcher has vast knowledge of higher education institutions

regulation in Malawi since 2014. This design was therefore not applicable to this study, as the researcher had no intention to generate any theory from the findings.

3.2.2.3 Surveys

Surveys are used for collecting instrumental data about attitudes, values, experiences and behaviors through face-to-face interactions, telephone or tele questionnaires and online surveys (Gilbert, 2008). Surveys are data collected using questionnaires or interviews with the purpose of generating data from a sample of a population and involves collecting data from a large number of participants. Crowther and Lancaster (2009) stated that surveys are used in exploring relationships between variables while establishing analytical data and supports the idea that surveys are suitable for exploring relations between variables. In this research, survey data collection strategy using a structured questionnaire was appropriate and was therefore used to collect quantitative data from students, staff and management related quality assurance factors that affect provision of quality education in private universities in Malawi.

3.2.2.4 Case study

This design includes collection of data through observation and interviews. Collis and Hussey (2003, p. 68) explained that “a case study is an extensive examination of a single instance of a phenomenon of interest and focuses on understanding the dynamics within a single setting; case studies can also be referred to as an exploratory research”.

Case study research is a methodology used by both qualitative and quantitative approach. The case study approach gives an opportunity to combine different data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, questionnaires and focus group discussions. In a qualitative approach a case study refers to an in depth analysis of a single or small number of units like a group of individuals or an organization. The collection of data in a case study research includes interviews and observations

and can offer a thorough and deep exploration of a situation or phenomenon and provide grounds for generalization of data (Collis and

Hussey, 2003). Case study approach therefore allows the researcher to use multiple data sources and research methods (Denscombe, 2007). In this research, study the data collection techniques used were in-depth and face-to-face interviews with students, staff and management in the three private universities. The case study therefore does not fit into the design of this study because the factors related to quality education are not studied in a single setting of a case study but rather multiple settings involving three private universities.

3.2.2.5 Action research

This approach requires a researcher to identify a problem, suggest solutions for the problem and monitoring results. This study aimed at developing a framework for practices internal quality assurance in order to improve quality education. Further, Action research focusses on management of a change and involves collaboration between implementers and the researchers (Saunders et al, 2009). In this method, many different data collection methods are considered including observation, interview and focus group discussion, it calls for people to share productive inquiry in a stepwise fashion and assumes that all affected stakeholders should be involved to undertake appropriate action (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019). However, this design was not used in this study, as the aim of this study was to explore factors that are critical to provision of quality education in private universities, establish impact of quality assurance systems, and therefore do not relate to action research, as the stakeholders require no action. Another reason why Action research is not suitable for this study is that it calls for identification and solving of a particular problem as this study aims at exploring on a number of internal quality assurance factors.

3.2.2.6 Ethnography

Creswell (1998) defined Ethnography as a research methodology where research concentrates on studying a specific cultural over a period through collection data through observation of a group in its natural setting. Collins and Hussey (2003, P.68) states,"

ethnography is a research method where a researcher uses socially acquired and shared knowledge to understand the observed patterns of human activity". They further explained that ethnography helps the researcher to interpret the social world in the individual of a particular group behavior. In this study a researcher did not use this method because it requires the researcher to be with the particular group for longer periods to understand their patterns hence not applicable to this study. This study design is therefore not applicable to this study because there is no relationship to interpretation of how individuals behave in social world. Additionally, the researcher is not studying a cultural group in its natural setting. Studying quality assurance factors might be sensitive to the higher education therefore not recommended for the researcher to stay with participants for a long period.

3.3.1 Methodological Choices

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), there are essentially three choices of research methods that one can use in the course of a research study and these are as follows:

- 1) Mono method – this method entails the use of one research approach in a study such as deductive approach that involves collecting quantitative data or inductive approach that involves collecting qualitative data (Collis and Hussey, 2014 pp 5-6);
- 2) Mixed methods – this method entails the use of two or more approaches especially when the approaches are drawn from different paradigms (Collis and Hussey, 2014 pp 72); or where the choice contains methods from both qualitative and quantitative scopes and where they are applied to produce a set of results (Benekel, 2014).
- 3) Multi methods – this applies when there is a wider selection of approaches in the course of the research study but being within either a quantitative or a qualitative research domain (Benekel, 2014).

The research strategy adopted in this study is the mixed method as it is line with the philosophical paradigm adopted for this research study that is interpretivism. Creswell (2014) defined the mixed methods approach as a collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a better understanding of a research problem than using the mono –method only. Gronmo (2020) explained that the mixed methods combine qualitative and quantitative data and this is referred to as triangulation and it complements an understanding of the research problem.

This study has chosen this mixed methods approach in order to facilitate and complement each other so that the results from the quantitative data analysis facilitated the qualitative research study. According to Mohammad (2013), triangulation helps to strengthen validity of data evaluation and findings and it is advisable to collect data using several sources such as questionnaires and interviews.

3.3.2 Research Methods

The research methods included data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results that was designed for the study in order to investigate factors related to quality assurance systems that affect delivery of quality education in private universities. The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to complement data collection methods to have enriched data.

In this method, the researcher first conducts one phase either qualitative then quantitative or vice versa or the researcher decides to conduct both quantitative and qualitative studies at the same time.

Alternatively, the researcher may want to conduct a study in one setting and use smaller component of the study using the other research method. Mixed method was

appropriate for this study because this is an explorative study requiring an understanding of both in-depth interviews and surveys.

According to Saunders et al (2009) data analysis for quantitative data can be qualitisend and the same with qualitative data can be quantified thereby converting it into numerical codes and analyze it statistically. Saunders et al (2009) further recommended multiple methods because they give opportunities to answer research questions extensively.

Mwangala (2015) mentioned that mixed methods comprehensively examine the research problem and comes up with an understanding of the topic being studied and can therefore withstand opposition as it allows the research problem to be examined from more than one perspective. This study was conducted in two stages involving a survey using a questionnaire, the outcomes came up with variables, and second stage involved in-depth interviews using structured interview guides. These two methods were applied to where quantitative research was used to compliment qualitative research in establishing quality assurance factors in private university that influence delivery of quality education. The following section will present quantitative research methods and this will be followed by qualitative methods.

3.3.3 Quantitative Research Methods

Quantitative research method involves data collection through use of questionnaires to collect responses from respondents and this depends on how well the questionnaire was formulated. Quantitative approaches aim at testing objectivity of theories by exploring relationship between two or more variables that can then be measured based on different research tools such as questionnaires in order to analyze numerical data using statistical procedures (Gronmo, 2020).

In terms of sample sizes, quantitative studies, the sample size is larger than qualitative studies because of the nature of data being collected for analysis. Quantitative results are said

to be objective since the data is analyzed by software (SPSS) by using descriptive analysis of the variables.

a) Questionnaire Design and Structure

A questionnaire is a data collection instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for gathering information from respondents and was invented by Sir Francis Galton (Abawi, 2014). The preparation of the questionnaire involves construction of the questionnaires based on the research questions and this involves formulation of the questions and response options that are used while determining the order of the questions and layout of the questionnaire (Gronmo, 2020). The researcher had to determine how the survey would be administered and who would be the interviewers. This followed pretesting of the questionnaire for improvement purposes and orientation of the interviewers on the questionnaires to buy in their understanding of the questions.

The questionnaire was designed in two parts; the first part was to collect demographic data from the study participants and the rest were questions structured based on the research questions aiming at eliciting information related to quality assurance and quality of education. Canals (2017) also explained that surveys can be used for a wide range of interviews and that the questions in the questionnaires should make respondents feel comfortable. The researcher was therefore guided to select instruments and reporting of such study instruments if used in quantitative study and have psychometric properties that are defined by the instruments' reliability and validity (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

b) Implementation of the Questionnaire

This is the actual administration of the questionnaire to study participants. The researcher engaged and oriented three enumerators before data collection. The enumerators

and the Researcher used informed consent forms to brief the study participants about the research and conducted structured personal interviews, some questionnaires were sent to participants because of Covid 19 preventive measures (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019). In some instances, there was a need to remind the participants to fill and return the questionnaires. There were however some challenges in the administration of the questionnaire as this study was conducted during the Covid 19 peak months in Malawi hence it was challenging to arrange for interviews with students.

In line with the research questions, the questionnaire was designed to collect data related to factors affecting quality assurance systems and was designed to collect demographic data of respondents and related quality issues through responses to the designed questions (refer to Appendix B to E). The questionnaire included questions with different responses such as Yes / no, poor, good, very good, excellent; frequency once a year, three times, four times and more than four times; slow, fast, fluctuates and reliable and consistent.

3.3.4 Qualitative Research Methods

“Qualitative research is an approach that promotes deep understanding of a social setting or activity from the research participants’ perspective and emphasizes on exploration and description of the study (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019). Qualitative approach involves data collection, analysis and interpretation in order to give meaning and an understanding to people’s thoughts and ideas and that data collection is accomplished through observations, interviews of individuals or small groups of people (Unicaf, 2017).

Rhodes (2014) explained that in qualitative approaches, the researcher focuses their attention on describing a phenomenon in deep and comprehensive manner when gathering information. The researcher uses interviews, open-ended questions and focus group discussions

and usually a small number of participants is recommended. The following section discusses the data collection methods for qualitative approaches.

Qualitative data collection methods involve in-depth interviews as a common source and offers an opportunity for the researcher to elicit additional information. This study interviewed students, lecturers and management to collect data related to the research questions. Interviews were used in this study in order to objectively explore factors that are either enhance or hinder provision of quality education and establishment of quality assurance systems seeking and describing real situation on ground in respective universities.

Interview guide was developed to be used for interviews in order to collect qualitative data and was structured in two parts; the first part was also to elicit demographic data while the rest of the open-ended questions to source views of participants on quality assurance and quality of education in their institutions. Burns (1999, p. 118) supports that, “interviews are a popular and widely used means of collecting qualitative data and helps the researcher to collect firsthand information directly from some knowledgeable informants and interviews.

a) Observations

Observation is a preplanned research tool, which is carried out purposefully to serve research questions and objectives. When using this method, the researcher observes the “classroom interactions and events, as they actually occur” (Burns, 1999, p. 8). Observational data represent a firsthand picture of the events, is carried out in a natural field setting and enable the researcher to obtain contextual factors this is why this was not suitable for this study.

b) Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussion (FGDs) is another data collection method that can be used in research study as a research tool and provides insights into how people think and they give a

deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Flick, 2009). The opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of participants regarding the problem under investigation is expected to be gathered from the group discussions.

Canal (2017) observed that in Focus groups, the participants are invited to talk about their views, attitudes and beliefs in relation to a particular subject, concept or idea and this might include questions to guide the informants on talking about certain aspects to be considered for each subject or sub-topic. The type of data that can be obtained in this way include opinions, assertions about beliefs, expressions of agreement or disagreement with other participants, and processes in which individual or group identities are built.

This study has mainly used interviews and questionnaires as research instrument in line with the topic, objectives and the nature of the research designs; Questionnaires were used to collect data related to quantitative data while interviews were used to gather qualitative data. The other research instruments were not applicable because they could not fit well in the study design and the study topic, for example, focus group discussions could not fit in well. This is because issues of quality affect individual universities at different levels; hence could not bring together different universities or students and staff or staff and management to discuss quality of education. Although focus group discussions could be arranged for one group in an institution but there was another challenge of Covid 19 pandemic where most of the people were working from home.

Focus group discussion also form part of data collection for qualitative research method and involves interviews with a number of separate groups where group discussions are facilitated or moderated by the researcher and or enumerators. Focus group discussions could be another important way of sourcing feelings, opinions and ideas related to quality of education factors in private universities. Participants are selected because of shared certain aspects of cultural and social experiences while focusing on a single theme (Bloomberg &

Volpe, 2019). However, in this study the focus group discussion did not take place because of the Covid 19 pandemic and therefore relied on the interviews as qualitative data.

c) Preparation for data collection

This involved constructing the interview guide with a focus on the topic and research questions. Gronmo, 2020 advises that the interview guide should be comprehensive to allow the researcher to collect information that is relevant to the study while keeping it simple so that interviews should be conducted with flexibility. Just like the questionnaire, interview guide was pretested to clean up and correct the identified areas accordingly.

The data collection process started with informed consenting and after respondents agreed to be interviewed evidenced by signing of the consent form. During this session, respondents were assured of confidentiality and how the researcher would manage data. The actual interview followed using the interview guide as a basis for interview. The interviews were tape recorded while taking additional notes where necessary. The recorded information was then transcribed in preparation for data analysis. New challenges were encountered with availability of study participants due to Covid 19 pandemic as it was at peak during time. Interviews could sometimes be cancelled and arranged at some place and not necessarily at their universities.

Further, it is important that in qualitative studies, validity should be established as regards to the specific qualitative design and ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the research design and research processes (Lipscomb, 2012).

“Qualitative data is always in the form of descriptive explanations of observations or data which is classified by type; this means that qualitative data cannot be subjected to numerical analysis as in quantitative approaches” (Crowther & Lancaster 2009, P. 75,). “Once

data is collected, interpretation analysis is done by using coded themes extracted from the data collected through interviews” (Bryman & Bell 2007, p. 391).

Qualitative approach is further characterized by its subjectivity in interpretation of research findings and this observation is said to be more of a researcher’s view than study findings. Another characteristic of qualitative data is that, it is difficult to reproduce and that there are challenges to generalize findings because of the small numbers of study population. Thirdly, in qualitative approach there is lack of transparency in that in some cases it is difficult to establish the Researcher’s involvement and approaches in order to conclude the study findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Qualitative method was therefore appropriate for this study as the researcher focused to explore factors related to quality assurance and quality education and therefore relied on experiences and practices from the respondents on their understanding of the factors to be well explained in order to address research problem and answer research questions.

3.4 Population and Sample Size of the Research Study

3.4.1 Study Population

A study population is defined as “a complete number of components or organizations, individuals, or items chosen to be measured as the sample of the study (cited by Chinthenga, 2019, p. 100). A study population is further defined as a collection of items or a body of people under consideration for statistical purposes (Collins and Hussey, 2014). In this study the study population included a team of twelve (12) students both male and female who are in their second year or above will be eligible to participate in this study. This means each registered private university had four

students each recruited into the study. These students had gone through learning processes for at least two years and were therefore be able to come up with

insight into the problem of quality education and identify factors that they think may enhance quality.

Another team comprising twelve (12) members of staff, four (4) from each of the three institutions and two management team from three private HEIs (totaling six members). In addition, a structured questionnaire was being administered to 70 participants (40 students, 20 members of staff and 10 management teams) for quantitative data collection to enrich the qualitative data.

These students would have experiences at the HEI of at least two years and therefore had an insight into the challenges of quality assurance and were in a position to identify factors that might enhance or hinder quality education in their institution. The staff and management team were those that have worked in their institutions for a minimum of two years and were therefore be able to analyze and describe their experiences in relation to quality of education being offered in the particular institution. Management comprised mostly Registrars, Vice Chancellors or Deputy Vice Chancellors.

The researcher selected three universities that were solely privately owned as opposed to faith based universities as 90% of the privately owned are the ones facing challenges and struggling to meet minimum standards and therefore offer quality education as most of the faith based universities were registered and appeared to be improving in offering good standards (NCHE reports, 2016). As stated by NCHE Report (2018), a number of such typical private universities, which failed to meet minimum standards for higher education, were closed and most of these institutions were private owned institutions. Faith based private universities are those that are owned, managed, affiliated and supported by religious institutions and these include Catholic university, Anglican university, Nkhoma university, University of Blantyre Synod among others. These universities are well supported by their church communities and are well resourced in terms of financial and material

resources. As a result, the faith-based universities tend to offer better quality education than the privately owned universities as these mostly solely depend on students' fees for survival.

All the study participants were based in the Central region specifically in the City of Lilongwe. The exclusion criteria were the unregistered private higher education institutions that were outside the Central region of Malawi and those study participants that had less than two years' experience in their universities. This allowed the researcher to access private institutions and it accorded affordability in terms of transport and reaching out to participants.

3.4.2 Sample Size of the Study Population for interviews

According to Shari (2012), sample size for qualitative studies for using in-depth interviews should be smaller than sample size used in quantitative research. Mason (2010) recommends the concept of saturation as an important factor in qualitative research. Mason further defined saturation as a point where data collection process no longer brings a new or relevant data. Sharif (2012) further recommended 20 to 30 participants as minimum sample size for saturation in qualitative research. Rhodes (2014) stated that researchers use interviews, open-ended questions and focus group discussions to collect qualitative data and usually a small number of participants is recommended for this kind of activity.

Mason (2010) observed that while the above sample size numbers are presented as guidance, the authors did not tend to present empirical arguments as to why use of these numbers and not others were preferred. Further, the issue of why some authors felt that certain methodological approaches called for more participants compared to others was also not explored in any detail.

This study interviewed 30 participants in total for qualitative data collection, which includes 12 students, 6 senior management and 12 members of staff as recommended by this literature.

Guassora (2015) proposed the concept of information power, which guides adequate sample size for qualitative studies, and it indicates that the more information the sample holds

relevant for the actual study, the lower number of participants is required. Guassora further suggested that a concept of sample size in qualitative studies of information power depends on the aim of the study, sample specificity, quality of dialogue and analysis strategy.

According to Onwuegbuzie and Sechelski (2019), qualitative data analysis approaches help to enhance what we refer to as analysis saturation and this occurs when the researcher can assume that her/his emergent theory or research question is adequately addressed to fit findings. Guest (2020) added another concept of data saturation, which is mostly employed for estimating sample sizes in qualitative research and guides the researcher on how many qualitative interviews are adequate but does not necessarily provide qualitative researchers with a simple and reliable way to determine the adequacy of sample sizes for data collection.

3.4.2 Sample size determination and selection for surveys

3.4.2.1 Sample size determination

The number of respondents targeted for the survey was 70 from the three universities. The sample size for surveys comprised 40 students, 20 lecturers and 10 management members. Determination for the survey was based on the entire population of the eligible students, lecturers and management of the three private universities and these were individuals that had studied or worked in the institutions for at least 2 years and above. This population formed the eligible and important group to provide useful information regarding issues that affected the quality assurance factors and issues related to

quality education. The required information from the respondents was based on the researcher's knowledge of various private universities and gaps in quality assurance and quality of education. The population for the students, lecturers and management that was considered in the research was based on the individual university records of 2018/19 academic year. University registrars

from their institutional staff and students' records shared this information, as they are custodians of such records in their institutions; this information is summarized in the table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1 Student population

<i>SN</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>No.</i>
1.	Students	University A	235
		University B	125
		University C	86
2.	Staff	University A	23
		University B	14
		University C	15
3.	Management	University A	12
		University B	9
		University C	8
		Total population	527

Sample size determination was based on the table for determining the minimum required sample size for a selected population size for continuous and categorical data as developed by Bartlett et al (2001) as indicated in the table :3.2 below:

Table 3.2: Sample size determination for surveys

	Sample size	
	Continuous data (margin of error=	Categorical data (margin of error=

Population size	.03)			.05)		
	alpha=.10 t= 1.65	alpha=.05 t= 1.96	alpha=.01 t= 2.58	p= .50 t= 1.65	p= .50 t= 1.96	p= .50 t= 2.58
100	46	55	68	74	80	87
200	59	75	102	116	132	154
300	65	85	123	143	169	207
400	69	92	137	162	196	250
500	72	96	147	176	218	286
600	73	100	155	187	235	316
700	75	102	161	196	249	341
800	76	104	166	203	260	363
900	76	105	170	209	270	382
1,000	77	106	173	213	278	399
1,500	79	110	183	230	306	461
2,000	83	112	189	239	323	499
4,000	83	119	198	254	351	570
6,000	83	119	209	259	362	598
8,000	83	119	209	262	367	613
10,000	83	119	209	264	370	623

Source: Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins (2001)

3.4.2.2 Sample selection

The Researcher selected sample to ensure a representative sample for the private universities through purposive and random selection of the population as indicated in table above. The researcher made

deliberate effort to make sure that there was a proportion of students, lecturers and management representation.

3.4.2.3 Sampling Methods

Sampling is concerned with the selection of a subset of individuals from within a statistical population to estimate characteristics of the whole population because it is not possible for a researcher to study the total population (Chinthenga, 2019). Sampling is important because studying an entire population may be time consuming and costly in terms of resources (Thomas, 1995). Sampling also guides the researcher to select appropriate populations that are suitable for the purpose of the study, for example, the researcher can choose respondents of a particular age, race and or gender (Tansey, 2007).

It is therefore important to select a representative population of a larger group to reduce on time, costs and have a size that will aid in findings of a particular study through sampling. This study therefore used for both quantitative and qualitative sampling methods. This study used purposive sampling method in order to provide a broad representation of the population. This sampling method is a non-probability form of sampling where the researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This method therefore targets a particular population of interest to the researcher and only uses those that are suitable and applicable to the study (Tansey 2007). Gronmo (2020) explained that purposive sampling dwells on selection of information rich cases in order to produce insight and understanding of the topic being studied as the researcher has a purpose for selecting specific participants, events and processes.

The advantage of purposive sampling is that the researchers can use their own judgment to choose individuals that are of special interest to the topic and is usually recommended for small samples, hence suitable for small groups of populations. In this study, the researcher used her own judgement to select and interview students, staff and management in the three universities who were interested in the study.

Purposive Sampling method therefore assist the researchers to use their judgment to choose individuals that are typical of a special interest for the study. According to Chinthenga

(2019) a purposive sample refers to a non- probability sampling technique whereby the researcher is involved in the determination of the sample based on their understanding of the elements selected in terms of their ability to render responses that in the views of the researcher, will be relevant to the study and satisfy the research questions.

Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, Hoagwood, et al (2015) argued that purposive sampling is a technique that is used in qualitative research for identification and selection of rich information for most effective use of limited resources. Purposive sampling involves identification of individuals or groups that have special knowledge or experiences with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2011). According to Bryman and Bell (2010), the goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases or participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being posed.

In view of the above definitions and explanations related to purposive sampling and based on the study problem and research questions for this study, this sampling method was suitable since the three private universities operated in three separate locations and their different categories of people could have different experiences that would inform factors related to quality education in their universities.

Sample size

The sample size of students, staff and management was determined based on the total population of the three universities. The eligible population formed an important group to give useful

information related to quality assurance based on their experiences. This information was based on the researchers' knowledge of the quality assurances in private universities (Kulemeka, 2016).

According to Mason (2010), there are many factors that can determine sample sizes in qualitative studies and many researchers are not forthcoming in suggesting what constitutes a sufficient sample size in contrast to quantitative studies for example. According to the numbers of students, staff and management provided by the three universities, the sample size and study population be based on these numbers summarized as follows:

Table 3.3: Data sources

SN	Category	Quantitative	Non response questionnaires	Questionnaires returned	Qualitative	No. participants interviewed
1)	Students	40	1	39	12	12
2)	Staff	20	2	18	12	12
3)	Management	10	2	8	6	6
4)	Total	70	5	65 (92.9%)	30	30 (100%)

Data collection from the individual respondents took place in the three private universities and took almost 6 months to complete the whole process due to challenges with booking of appointments as this was during the Covid 19 pandemic. There were two categories of data collection, thus in-depth interviews and questionnaires. In both interviews and questionnaires, students were those that were in second year of their studies and above. The lecturers and management that included registrars and vice chancellors who had been working in the universities for more than 2 years. This was done with a focus of exploring their experience in higher education quality issues. In addition, Vice Chancellors and Registrars were interviewed because of their leadership roles in managing universities including resource mobilization strategies for sustainability. The period for each interview lasted from one to two

hours and these were mostly conducted in universities and some in arranged venues due to Covid 19 preventive measures.

3.5 Quantitative Sampling Methods and Population

In this study, qualitative data collection was used to facilitate and enrich quantitative research data through a selection of individuals interviewed and selected from the three private universities. According to Bryman and Bell (2011, P. 635) cited how Scase and Goffee (1989) used a representative sample of eighty (80) managers from results of 374 questionnaires for in-depth interviews. In this study, a questionnaire was administered randomly to students, staff and management of the three private universities and targeting a total number of seventy (70) participants.

In using random selection for quantitative method, each member had an equal chance of being selected. According to Dattalo (2010), in random sampling process, whoever is selected is a true reflection of the entire population. In this study, only eligible individuals in their categories were randomly selected based on the calculated numbers above.

Random sampling was used in this research where every member of the population had an equal opportunity of being selected as a study participant and did not allow an investigator to have an influence on the choice.

Response rate

There was a high response rate as only five participants were non-responsive to questionnaires meaning that they refused to be involved in the study. According to Neumann (2005) cited by Collins and Hussey (2003) active response is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Active response rate} = \frac{\text{Total number of responses}}{\text{Total number of responses}}$$

Total number in sample – (ineligible + unreachable)

In this study therefore, the active response rate was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Active response rate} = \frac{65}{70 - 0} \times 100 = \frac{65}{70} \times 100 = 92.8\%$$

Gronmo (2020) recommended that a response rate of 80% and higher indicates a good result as response rate can be affected by unreliable answers influenced by respondent's willingness to answer or could be a result of animosity towards a particular study. Gronmo further explained that response rate can also be affected by respondent's understanding of the questions and hence can lead to not responding to the questions.

As indicated above, this study had a good response rate based on the questionnaire used for surveys in quantitative research.

3.5.1 Materials/Instrumentation of research tools

This section focuses on research instruments used for both surveys, interviews data, and included instruments used in the mixed research method. Research instruments consist of closed-ended, open-ended questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations in order to gather information that can supplement each other and therefore enhance the validity and dependability of the data (Mohammad, 2013). The following section describes reliability and validity of the research instruments.

3.5.1.1 Reliability and Validity of Research Instruments

This section identified and analyzed issues related to validity and reliability of research instruments used in this study and the researcher described how measurement of the instruments have met the validity and reliability.

Taherdoost (2016) indicated that a questionnaire is a most used tool to address reliable information in a valid manner ensuring the accuracy and consistency of the forms and therefore addresses both validity and reliability. In this study, the researcher used instruments (interview

guides and questionnaires) that were valid and reliable for both qualitative and quantitative data collection as explained in the following sections.

3.5.1.2 Validity

According to Golafshan (2003), validity is the degree to which a test measures what is claimed to measure and that it is important for research results to be accurately applied and interpreted if a test is validated. Validity is divided into internal validity, which refers to the validity of the measurement and test itself, whereas external validity refers to the ability to generalize the findings to the target population. Both are very important in analyzing the appropriateness, meaningfulness and usefulness of a research study. Validity can be measured in multiple ways. If valid, researchers can be confident in the score interpretations and that the measurement is indeed measuring the desired concept. The process of establishing validity involves collecting various forms of evidence to support that the score interpretations are accurate. Validity therefore is very important because it helps the researcher to have instruments that have been tested in order to measure what the researcher wants to find out. Additionally, validity also reflects on how a selected sample of a population is represented and this is known as population validity. The Researcher is always confident in generalizing results from the sample to the population if the sample is well represented (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006).

Oluwatayo (2012) cited by Taherdoost (2016) classified validity into five categories as follows: Face validity deals with researcher's subjectivity on presentation of assessment and relevancy of the instrument in terms of reasonableness, clarity and ambiguity and this type of validity only evaluates appearance of the questionnaire.

Content validity deals with evaluation of a new study instrument to ensure that all items are included and therefore removes undesirable items. In this study, the researcher worked

closely with the supervisor to develop and clean up the research instruments, where a number of undesirable items were removed during the development stage. Checking went through a number of revisions before approval by the University's Research and Ethics Committee.

In addition, the interviews, using semi structured interview guides, applied to selected respondents to get more insights into the quality assurance issues related to quality education and the interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture all information in preparation for thematic content analysis. This also assured the consistency of data based on the research questions and the researcher detected data saturation from the respondents meaning that qualitative instruments were indeed consistent and reliable.

Construct validity refers to evaluation of how well a concept, idea or behavior is translated or transformed and that construct validity justifies an existence of relationship and this happens especially if the relationship has its cause and effect. Construct validity is critically substantiated under the following validity; face validity, content validity, concurrent and predictive validity, and convergent and discriminant validity (Kubai, 2019). In this study, research instruments were evaluated to ensure that the respondents through pilot of the questionnaires before data collection understood the concepts.

Validity was assured by administering the questionnaires face to face to study participants in order to discuss and clarify the questions where necessary (Greener, 2008) cited by Mwangala (2015). The researcher and enumerators conducted the study efficiently based on their previous experiences in conducting similar data collection in previous studies. The researcher went through intensive revision in data collection methods prior to the actual data collection including required skills such as good listening skills, being knowledgeable the study, flexibility to new situations, being sensitive and responsive to negative responses and reactions and asking good questions with guidance from research instruments (Bloomberg and Volpe 2019).

3.5.1.3 Reliability

Mohajan (2017) explained that, reliability refers to the consistency, stability and repeatability of results in quantitative research; in other words, a researcher considers results to be reliable if consistent results have been obtained in similar situations under different circumstances while in qualitative research it is referred to as a researcher's approach is consistent across different researches and different projects.

Mohajan (2017) defined that reliability as the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results that are free from errors and indicates that the observed score of a measure reflects the true score of that measure. Kimberlin & Winterstein, (2008) defined reliability as the consistency of scores reported by participants and validity therefore refers to the accuracy of the scores. Mohajan (2017) further explained that reliability refers to the consistency, stability and repeatability of results in quantitative research. In other words, a researcher considers results reliable if consistent results have been obtained in similar situations under different circumstances while in qualitative research it is referred to as when a researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects.

It is recommended that reliability should be reassured when one person to all study participants administered the same instrument. However, in a study the data was collected by more than one person therefore, one person did not necessarily administer instruments but the researcher assured a high level of interview schedules and arrangements to reduce threats to reliability (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

In addition to validity and reliability of research instruments, the researcher used triangulation technique of data analysis as another way of ensuring validity and reliability of the of research findings and therefore enhanced accuracy, reliability and validity of data (Mwangala, 2015). In a study both

interview guides used to collect qualitative data and questionnaires used to collect quantitative data were thoroughly checked and applied to

enhance validity and reliability of the research findings throughout the process. Where participants were not clear, the researcher provided clear explanations of the particular meaning of questions or statements in the research instruments to ensure consistency. Having discussed validity and reliability of research instruments, the following section discusses pilot test for the research instruments.

3.5.1.4 Pilot Testing of the Research Instruments

Majid (2017) explained that pilot studies are very important and useful procedures in preparation of a full-scale study, regardless of the paradigm and can be used to address potential practical issues in the following research procedures and assist in trying out the questions. Additionally, pilot study can be used to strengthen interview guides by identifying any errors, limitations and misrepresentation within the interview guides and thereby allow modifications and improvement to the major study areas. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) recommend that pilot testing should be done to test the questionnaires by collecting data in order to refine the questionnaires and avoid or reduce challenges for respondents.

In this study, pilot testing was done at African Bible College; the questionnaire was administered to students, staff and management before rolling out to the three private universities. The main aim was to check the duration, clarity, unclear and ambiguous questions. After this, the questionnaires and interview guides were refined to make it clear and improve on ambiguous questions and there were not many issues rectified during the piloting stage. In addition, the Research Ethical Committee approved the research instruments after being refined.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The proposed data analysis techniques were defined and explained in detail to differentiate between qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research questions guided

the data analysis techniques used in order to get the relevant data. Data analysis is the process used by researchers to explain data into a story and interpretation by reducing large amounts of collated data to make sense of the findings (Kawuch, 2015). According to Silverman (2010), data analysis begins as soon as data collection starts through transcripts for qualitative data and data entry from questionnaires for quantitative data.

3.6.1 Data Analysis Techniques for Quantitative Data

Quantitative data analysis involves Statistics and Descriptive statistical analysis by using software. Statistics is the systematic collection and interpretation of numerical data while Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data that have been collected in a study (Burns & Grove, 2005 P. 752). Gronmo (2020) further explained that Descriptive quantitative analysis focus on relationships or structural patterns for a particular group of units and the analysis is used to compare different groups of units, societies and enterprises.

Quantitative data analysis techniques that was used to convert the collected data into information including graphs, charts and statistics. These assisted the researcher to explore, examine, present and describe any relationships and trends within the collected data (Saunders et al. 2009, pp.414).

Data collected using structured questionnaires was analyzed using computer software known as Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) in order to describe the data using descriptive statistics by examining relationships between variables. SPSS is comprehensive and compatible with almost any type of data and can be used to run both descriptive statistics and other more complicated

analyses, as well as to generate reports, graphs, plots and trend lines based on data analyses (Field, 2013). Before the data was analyzed using any of the above software, packages, the researcher prepared data with quantitative analysis in mind and was

aware of when to use different charting and descriptive techniques. Specifically, this study data was analyzed using Descriptive Quantitative Analysis to analyze and compare quality assurance factors with quality education and these factors were derived from the research questions and included issues related to infrastructure, QA policies, and structures, stakeholder involvement and leadership roles as described by respondents. Descriptive datatables are attached as appendix in tables E 1 to E 27.

3.6.2 Qualitative Data Analysis Techniques

There are two main approaches in data analysis i.e. Deductive approach involves using research questions to group the data while looking for similarities and differences and is mainly used in quantitative studies (Saunders et al 2009). Inductive approach involves a major design using evolving framework to group the data while looking for relationships and mainly used in qualitative studies (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This study used inductive approaches by designing frameworks to group qualitative data with reference to research questions and deductive approach for quantitative data.

In addition, the researcher used a Thematic Analysis Approach also referred to as Content analysis which was defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p79) as “a method of identifying, analyzing and reporting themes within data”. Content analysis is an attempt to quantify data by noting for frequency of events, words and actions (Crowther and Lancaster, 2009).

Qualitative data analysis is the range of processes and procedures whereby one moves from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations that are being investigated” (Boyatzis, 1998)

Boyatzis (1998, p. 31) defines the 'unit of coding' as the most basic section of the raw data of information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon and

emphasized on how good thematic codes can capture the richness of qualitative information of any occurrence. The Researcher makes a decision in advance on what data to look for and this is measured through qualitative research (Kulemeka, 2016). Data was then organized using the inductive approaches.

Qualitative data refers to all non-numeric data or data that have not been quantified and these can be because of research strategies. This data can range from the responses to open-ended questions based on administered questionnaire to more complex transcripts resulting from in-depth interviews (Saunders et al, 2009).

The analysis can use Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo, and Excel (Saunders, 2009). However, this study used none of this computer software because the data being analyzed was small and therefore not warranting computer aided analysis. The qualitative data was therefore analyzed through content and thematic analysis techniques where data was condensed and summarized, this followed data categorization into meaningful themes (Saunders et al, 2009).

1) Preparatory Process for Qualitative Data Analysis

The initial data analysis started as soon as interviews were conducted and data collected was prepared for analysis by transcribing i.e. reproduced as a written word-processed account using the actual words uttered by the interviewees. This was done as soon as possible after data collection in order to avoid a build-up of audio recordings requiring transcription. The researcher ensured that the data was anonymized by using different codes as labels for both participant and interviewer; data was duly transcribed, stored separately per file and continued analyzing or transcribing data on a continuous basis in order to explore areas that required change of approach in subsequent interviews.

In this study, data collected from students, staff and management of private universities was audio taped and transcribed into texts. Following transcription of the audio taped interviews where data was captured verbatim of what the respondents actually said during interviews, the researcher read through the transcripts to make meaning and understanding of the data.

According to Kawuch (2015), data analysis should include research questions and the study topic in order to make sense of the data and advises that the researcher should be familiar with the collected data while looking for patterns, themes that were used in the analysis. The following research questions as presented in chapter one of the study were referred to during data analysis processes.

- 1) How are private higher education institutions progressing in the provision of quality higher education?
- 2) What are the nature of the policies, structures and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems that are being used in the selected higher education institutions?
- 3) What is the stakeholders' perspective on quality assurance systems?
- 4) What is the role of leadership of private universities in adhering to standards of education?

In this study, the following thematic analysis steps were followed in qualitative data analysis immediate after completion of data transcription (Braun and Clarke, 2006):

- 1) Familiarization with the data
- 2) Development of codes

- 3) Reviewing and revising codes
- 4) Searching and Reviewing themes
- 5) Producing the report using Excel

2) Developing categories

Based on the research questions, the thematic areas were developed into categories and this was supported by the responses from the respondents in each area. After developing categories, the researcher provided descriptions for each category using excel sheet to align similar responses into one category according to source of information and this process was combined with coding. Bloomberg & Volpe (2019) defines coding as a system of classification or noting what is of interest and labelling it accordingly. The actual words, sentences of the respondents support each category in respective of each research question. This involved copying and pasting of the actual quotes from the respondents and the actual content analysis as indicated in chapter 4 in presentation of findings.

3.7 Operational Definition of Variables

This section defines operational variables and variable types as applicable for quantitative research methods used in this study. A variable is defined as anything that changes from one instance to another and can reveal differences in value, strength or direction (Zikmund and Carr, 2013, p.118). Variables can either be categorical or numerical membership where categorical variables represent quantities or a small number of values and sometimes described as a classificatory variable. Categorical data's variables cannot be measured numerically but instead the data can be classified into sets or 'categories' according to the characteristics that identify the variable; or placed in rank order (Berman, Brown and Saunders (2008) cited by Saunders, (2009 pp. 417)

Numerical data is quantifiable data whose values are counted numerically as quantities. Numerical data can be analyzed using personal computer based analysis software

such as Excel, to more sophisticated and advanced software packages such as SPSS for Windows and Statview (Saunders et al., 2009, p415).

This study used both categorical and numerical data because of the nature of the topic of the study to quantify data or categorize data that was collected using questionnaires and thereafter was analyzed using SPSS. Following the descriptive statistics data was then analyzed based on variables that were developed from the research questions and presented in graphs. However, Bryman and Bell (2007) recommends that after data entry variables should be well defined before the researcher generates a frequency table before actual analysis. The following section therefore defines variables as used in this study.

3.7.1 Defining Variables

Dependent variable is a predictable variable that is explained by another variable as a process outcome while independent variable is expected to influence a dependent variable. Demographic data variables were defined in accordance with each question of the structured questionnaire and these were mainly numerical data whose variables had to do with difference intervals or ranges between data values such as age, qualifications and year of study. The variable of gender was categorized as dichotomous data as this only divided into two categories. The first four questions of the structured questionnaires responded to demographic questions and variables are defined in the Table 0-4 below:

Table 3.4 Demographic Data

	Variable	Expected Responses	Data type	Level of Measurement
Q1	Gender	Male / Female	Categorical	Dichotomous data
Q2	Age	Range	Numerical	Continuous
Q3	Highest Qualification	Range	Numerical	Ranked
Q4	Institution	Mention	Numerical	Continuous

Research Question 1: Status of Quality Education in Private Universities

Variables related to this research question had to do with quality of education in private universities hence these variables were mainly categorical. These are variables to do with infrastructure learning and teaching standards, and general challenges and achievements of quality education. The infrastructural standards included classroom, library, computer laboratory, clinic, sports and recreational facilities as one way of establishing status of quality in the private universities and these have been presented in table 3.5 below:

Table 3.5: Variables for Research question one: What is the status of quality education

	Variable	Data type	Level of measurement	Expected Responses
Q5	Classroom furnishings	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention Furnishings
Q6	Status of Library	Categorical	Ordinal	Very poor, poor, good
Q7	Library resources	Numerical	Dichotomous	Yes / No
Q8	Qualification of Lecturers	Numerical	Dichotomous	Well qualified, not qualified,

Q9	Quality of learning	Categorical	Ranked	Very poor, poor, Good, very good
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Q10	Formal lecturer's Evaluation	Numerical	Dichotomous	Yes /N
Q11	Challenges with quality of education	Numerical	Dichotomous	Yes /No
Q12	Main achievements	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention achievements data cannot be quantified
Q13	Areas of improvement	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention a number of areas for improvement

Table 3.6: Variables for Research Question 2: Structures, Policies and Instruments Related to Quality Assurance.

	Variable	Data type	Level of measurement	Expected responses
Q7	Understanding organogram	Categorical	Ordinal	Very clear, clear, not very clear
Q8	Availability of Committees	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention committees
Q9	Frequency Committee meetings	Categorical	Nominal	Number of times
Q10	Frequency Management meetings	Categorical	Nominal	Number of times
Q11	Approved policies	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention policies
Q12	Functional Students Union	Categorical	Dichotomous	Yes /No
Q13	Approved Conditions of service	Categorical	Dichotomous	Yes /No
Q20	Quality Assurance structures	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention

The next set of variables were to do with structures, policies and instruments that are related to quality assurance and these include governance structures such as conditions of service, organogram, committees, policies, students' union, management meetings, structures. These variables are defined in the Table 3.7 below:

Table 3.7: variables for Quality assurance structures, policies and instruments

QN 19	Variable	Data type	Level of measurement	Expected responses
	Quality assurance Budget	Categorical	Nominal	Tick responses
	Responsible officer for quality assurance	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention
	Quality assurance officer	Categorical	Nominal	Tick
	Quality assurance policy	Categorical	Nominal	Tick
	Quality assurance committee	Categorical	Nominal	Tick

Research Question 3: Stakeholder Involvement

The variables in this research question could not easily be quantified as most of the respondents indicated that there were not many stakeholders involved in quality assurance. The main stakeholder mentioned were students and regulatory bodies hence this questioned relied mostly on qualitative data. However, two variables were identified and defined in the table: 3.8 below:

Table 3.8: Definition of Variables for research question 3

QN 20	Variable	Data type	Level of measurement	Expected Responses
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1)	Stakeholders Involved	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention
2)	Area of involvement	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention

Table 3.9: Research Question 4: Role of Leadership in Quality Improvement

<u>QN 21</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Data type</u>	<u>Level of Measurement</u>	<u>Expected responses</u>
	Role of leadership in quality improvement	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention roles
	Resource mobilization	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention strategies
	Monitoring of standards	Categorical	Descriptive	Explain
	Support	Categorical	Descriptive	Mention type of support

3.8 Study Procedures and Ethical Assurances

Ethics is important in research as Resnick (2015) summarized that ethics promotes aims of research and values that are essential to collaborative work, ensures that researchers are held accountable to the public and builds public support for research and therefore promotes a variety of other important moral and social values". This study followed ethical procedures and guidelines throughout the research process. The Unicaf Research Ethics Committee (UREC) approved the study prior to data collection to allow the process of conducting

interviews and administering questionnaires. The Research Ethics application forms used for the approval process included the data collection instruments, informed consent process, confidentiality, data management

and study population. The study participants were reassured of confidentiality through

the information contained in the consent form and that no names were attached to the consent forms. Participants signed the consent forms indicating that they were freely engaged into the study. The study had no risks attached through the process of all study procedures. All participants were given adequate information about the study through the informed consent and they signed the consent forms with someone as a witness.

The Ethical review boards such as UREC and Interview Review Boards (IRBs) are said to have a powerful position as they act as gatekeepers and have the responsibilities to ensure that studies meet ethical requirements before approval and therefore if not approved, the research cannot move forward until all ethical issues have been addressed (Marshal 2003, p. 271).

Marshal further emphasizes that one of the important ethical requirements is the informed consent that includes “the purpose of the study, duration and procedures, risks and harms associated with the study, benefits, protection of confidentiality, compensation of injury, who to contact if there are questions or concerns”. Marshal further explains that the informed consent should include such statements that participation in the study is voluntary and therefore refusal will not affect any negative consequences and that participants have the freedom to withdrawal from the study at any time of their choice.

Participants were identified using random sampling methods and those interested were engaged following the informed consenting process. The consent form included the purpose of the study, duration and procedures, risks and harms associated with the study, benefits, protection of confidentiality, compensation of injury and contact person if there were questions or concerns. Once

the participants understood the information provided, they were requested to sign a consent form without being coerced by the researcher or enumerator. After agreeing and

signing the consent form participants were then enrolled in the study and their information obtained as per interview guide and structured questionnaire.

3.8.1 Privacy and Confidentiality

Every person has rights which need to be protected when conducting research; in this study, the researcher adhered to all ethical standards to ensure that all the information obtained from the participants was kept confidentially in lockable cabinets and no information was shared with any another person without participants' prior written authorization. Confidentiality demands that only the researcher should handle data collected and identifies participants using codes or, numbers. The aim is to protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss and theft (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019). In addition, the researcher ensured anonymity of information that was collected from the study participants and this anonymity was extended to the study sites; this means that responses from respondents were not linked to names, age, location and addresses (Gronmo, 2020). These ethical assurances are supported by a study conducted by Greenwood, 2016) who established that research ethics involves protection of participants' dignity, privacy and freedom; this is achieved by following standards on ethical research guided by both national and international research agencies (Greenwood, 2016). All procedures in this study were ethically followed including interviews were conducted in private settings to uphold their respect and right to privacy.

3.8.2 Data Management and Ethical Approval

Institutional review board of Unicaf University, Unicaf Research Ethics Committee (UREC) reviewed and approved the study before data collection, as the board is responsible for checking the studies for ethical requirements and fulfilments. According to Bloomberg and

Volpe (2019), data security is critical with the access to information through technology and on line studies and data, storage may also be a challenge as most of the data is electronic; this poses a risk of leakage of information through social media and internet. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) further advises that data security should be well managed by the researcher to avoid compromise and access to data by unauthorized persons.

In this study, the Researcher created separate files solely for research documents with secret identification password and confidential emails communicated only to the study supervisors. The Researcher privately logs in into the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) all the time and this VLE is provided by the university to allow students access the study material, library and communication among students and their tutors ensuring confidentiality.

Informed consenting process was applied prior to conducting interviews and surveys to allow participants understand the purpose of the study, duration, procedures, risks or harms associated with the study and other information included benefits, protection and confidentiality related to the study. The consent forms included contact information of the researcher and her supervisor so that participants can communicate if there are questions and or concerns related to the study (Marshall, 2003; Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019).

Once the study was approved, data was collected using appropriate research methods from participants. Names of participants were not released to the public or any person for use or references where possible codes rather than names were used as identifiers.

3.8.3 Risks and Damages

Issues of risks were addressed in the informed consent where participants were given information by disclosing that there were no risks associated with this study. Some risks could be unforeseen and the participants were therefore given contact details of the researcher in case they want to find out more information or report any risks that they might encounter in the

course of the study. This study is classified as low risk as it mainly involved interviews with staff, management and students in private higher education institutions.

This study was reviewed by the University Research Committee of Unicaf University (UREC) and was rated low on risks as the study mostly involved interviewing students, staff and management and no any other procedures were performed on the participants.

3.9 Data Collection Processes

This process involved the steps to be followed by the researcher to gain entry into the data collection institutions and the actual interviewing of the participants summarized as follows.

3.9.1 Identification of Participants

Introductory letters that were already approved and sent to the three private universities were resent as a reminder and this time for purposes of identifying actual participants to be interviewed. The researcher contacted the vice chancellors of the three universities requesting them to allow the appropriate students and academic staff with reference to the criteria in the sample size and study population to participate in the study. Alam (2005) recommends first making contact with interviewees through phone, fax, and email to introduce the researcher and data collectors, assure them of anonymity and at the same time ensuring that they understand the purpose of the study and types of information to be collected for research purposes.

The researcher and enumerators first asked the participant to confirm verbally that they agreed to participate in the study after briefing them about the study. The Researcher and enumerators used written informed consent form, which covered all the areas of the study, and participants were asked

to sign if they had understood what was in the consent form and agreed to participate in the study.

Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study

any time when they want and this information was stated in the consent form. This information was available during the consenting process, before data collection and during the debriefing session after collecting data.

3.9.2 Conducting Interviews

The researcher engaged and trained enumerators to assist in administering questionnaires and conducting interviews. The researcher oriented the enumerators on ethical issues including consenting processes. All participants signed consent forms and no names were attached to the questionnaires. Once participants were identified, the researcher and enumerators used an interview guide upon approval by the ethics committee in all three universities. The interview guide helped to ensure uniformity and systematic way of data collection and therefore efficient data analysis as it also assisted in ensuring reliability of qualitative methods.

In this study, interviewees refer to students; management and academic staff and interviews were conducted using an approved study guide with specific questions while probing as the interviews proceeded. The interviewers were oriented in the data collection and communication skills for effective interaction with participants. Alam (2005) recommends about an hour interview as reasonable time allocation to get required information from each participant. Participants were allowed to expand their explanations and all interviews were taperecorded with documentation of notes.

3.9.3 Role of Enumerators

The enumerators were involved in data collection through administration of interviews using interview guides and questionnaires. Thereafter the enumerators assisted with transcription of qualitative data from audio tapes from the three universities. Each enumerator was assigned to one university for consistency and confidentiality.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed various research methods and philosophical issues. The study adopted the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The study opted for mixed methods approach for data collection of quantitative and qualitative research instruments using interview guides and questionnaires (Collins and Hussey, 2003). The researcher and enumerators used in-depth interviews to collect qualitative data while questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data from the three private universities.

The researcher preferred to use an exploratory study design to explore factors that related to quality assurance and quality education in the three private universities (Saunders et al, 2009). The three HEIs were interviewed as separate institutions but were treated as one population. The ethical considerations were discussed to address issues for approval by the University Research Ethical Committee and support from the participating private universities, informed consenting, and issues of confidentiality (Marshall, 2003). Finally, proposed data analysis methods have been discussed for both quantitative data (use of software SPSS) and content thematic analysis for qualitative data (Saunders et al 2009). The next chapter will concentrate on the actual data analysis and interpretation of the findings to make sense of the data collected for both surveys and in-depth interviews.

Chapter 4:

Presentation of Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore factors related to quality assurance systems that have an effect on the delivery of quality education in private universities in Malawi. This chapter presents key findings obtained from both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods through in-depth interviews and surveys. The chapter also discusses the trustworthiness of the data through the process of data collection including its reliability and validity. Major findings, related to the four research questions of this study, are presented in the following sections and each research question provides for its specific research findings to avoid confusion in data presentation. The following are the four research questions that were used to address both quality assurance systems and quality education issues in the three private universities (see section 1.7 above):

- 1) How are private higher education institutions progressing in the provision of quality higher education?
- 2) What are the nature of the policies, structures and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems that are being used in the selected higher education institutions?
- 3) What are the stakeholders' perspective on quality assurance systems?
- 4) What is the role of leadership of private universities in adhering to standards of education?

4.2 Trustworthiness of Data

In this section, the study discusses issues of trustworthiness of data obtained from both qualitative and quantitative data collecting methods as an important part in presentation of study

findings. Trustworthiness refers to the true value of data collected through qualitative and quantitative research methods and supports the integrity of the findings through transparency in the conduct of the study (Connelly, 2016).

Similarly, Daniel (2019) explained that trustworthiness depicts quality in qualitative research and portrays the transparency in the research processes while enhancing the understanding and interpretation of research findings and therefore creating confidence by other researchers in the outcome of the research.

In this research, the issues of trustworthiness for qualitative data included the elements of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability of the data while validity and reliability was a focus for quantitative data. Additionally, triangulation, which was also used in this study, is discussed as another dimension of ensuring trustworthiness of data. Further, the elements of trustworthiness were applied throughout research process and it is confirmed that the findings were reliable as categorically explained in each element below:

4.2.1 Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

4.2.1.1 Credibility

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) informed that credibility involves matching of the participants' perceptions with the researcher's presentation and advises that researchers should present what the participants think, feel and not what the researchers think. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019, p 202) "Credibility addresses the researcher's ability to take into account and explain all the complexities and address patterns, themes and issues that may not be easily understood".

In this study, credibility was further maintained by prior briefing regarding the nature and form of research instruments to the data collecting teams by the principal researcher; and prior briefing to the research participants by research assistants to ensure that the study participants

understand issues such as the study aims, research questions and areas of focus. Study participants were further reassured of the confidentiality and their anonymity in the research process so that they should be free to express themselves during the interviews.

Lemon and Hayes (2020) stated that credibility ensures that the researcher has confidence in the findings based on the study topic. In this study, following the orientation of enumerators and briefing of study participants including informed consenting process, the researcher was confident that data collected would present what the participants presented as evidenced by the tape-recorded and transcribed interviews.

4.2.1.2 Dependability

In this strategy, the researcher confirms that the data process was clearly documented with logical processes and therefore could easily be traced as supported by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) who stated that dependability refers to stability and consistency of data over time.

Data collection from study participants involved appointments with management of the three universities to facilitate entry, seek permission to access, and interact with interviewees. Individuals were met mostly in their university campuses and some were met in various pre-arranged locations. There were three categories of study participants namely: students, staff and management. Both qualitative and quantitative instruments were applied to the three categories. In this study, all the data collected was voice-recorded, documented and kept by the researcher for ease of retracement.

The rationale for the research methods provided a thorough explanation of how data was collected and how data was analyzed including transcripts and field notes as audit trail. It is advisable to ensure that the research data is made available for review by other researchers (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Data collected in this study by the researcher will be kept for a minimum of five (5) years before being destroyed. The data being referred to include, interview guides, questionnaires, consent forms, coding of interview transcripts by secondary peers and other colleagues as well as study findings.

4.2.1.3 Confirmability

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), defined confirmability as an establishment that the researcher's findings and interpretations are resulting from data that could be objectively concluded by the researcher. In other words, the researcher should clearly demonstrate that study findings are not biased by subjectivity of the researcher and that data can be traced back to its origins.

In this study, the researcher confirms that data collected for this study was documented and transcribed to present all findings to prevent bias and ensure objectivity. Qualitative data was thoroughly checked, coded into meaningful themes with guidance from the related literature on qualitative research methodology, which was approved by University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). This process enables the researcher to interpret the data and to confirm that the findings being presented in the study are based on the original data from research participants.

The qualitative data was collected using research instruments that were approved by UREC. Only qualified and experienced enumerators and the researcher conducted both in-depth interviews and delivered the questionnaires.

4.2.1.4 Transferability

Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), refers to transferability as making connections across studies and establishing applicability of the research in qualitative research. Transferability is not concerned with sample representation but how the study made it possible for the researcher to decide on whether similar processes would work in their own settings. Lemon and Hayes (2020) clarified, that transferability ensures trustworthiness by addressing issues of external validity and generalizability of study findings, which could also apply to other contexts and settings. In this study, validity was reassured through administration of face-to-face interviews

and questionnaires where participants were able to respond to the quality issues and had a chance to discuss and clarify meanings of the questions being asked (Greener, 2008).

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling techniques to ensure that the selected participants were representative of the variety of views of private universities for comparative analysis across the different groups and this can be used in any university setting for similar studies.

4.2.1.5 Trustworthiness in Quantitative Data

In quantitative research, generalization depends on statistical representation thus, the extent to which the study results can be related to broader population. Validity and reliability is therefore used to validate quantitative data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In collecting data that is valid and reliable the researcher came up with a number of variables and constructs related to quality assurance and quality education issues as explained in the following section.

i. Variables and Constructs

Rays (2015) defined variables as factors or aspects that can be measured such as demographic data, health status and independent variable presumes to be a cause of the dependent variable and that construct refers to an abstract idea on something concluded from an observable occurrence. In this study, variables and the constructs being referred to were related to quality assurance systems in private universities. In qualitative data, some of the constructs being investigated might have been imagined, but in reality, they do not actually exist. It is imperative to develop a scale that would consistently and precisely measure the intended unobservable construct.

Reliability and validity form psychometric properties of measurement scales that are very important in estimating such constructs (Kubai 2018 cited Bajpai and Bajpai, 2014). In this study, respondents due to the nature of the study topic have reported a number of such constructs but with use of quantitative tool, the data collected from surveys has been well

analyzed to give meaningful findings. The quantitative variables refer to demographic data, quantitative data related to learning resources, infrastructure, quality assurance policies, evaluation feedbacks and leadership roles in private universities.

ii. Statistical tests assumptions

The main assumptions of statistical tests assume that the data are normally distributed and that groups being compared to have similar variances and that data are independent (Saunders et al, 2009). In the study the data collected through surveys was analyzed using the identified variables to interpret the constructs using SPSS. This data included participants' demographic data and other variables measured related to quality assurance systems in three private universities mentioned above.

Bevans (2020) stated that statistical test is used to calculate a test statistic, a number that describes relationship between variables and extent of the relationship. Statistical Test calculates probability value (p- value) which estimates the likelihood of the difference determined by the test statistic that there is no relationship with the null hypothesis.

Statistical tests can also be performed on data collected through questionnaires and therefore requires large sample in order to present true distribution of the population under study. In this study, sample size of 70 respondents were analyzed to determine the statistical test and check if there is a relationship between quality assurance and other variables such as quality of education.

In this study, quantitative data collection involved construction of a number of variables based on the research questions in order to meet statistical tests that would give meaningful interpretation of the results but also identify potential weaknesses. Discriminant validity refers to a situation where latent Variable A discriminates from other variables and helps to test that constructs have no

relationship and convergence validity tests that constructs are related. Criterion validity refers to the extent to which test scores predict specific criterion variable to

differentiate between one functional variable group from other groups through variable test scores (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019).

The statistical significance depends on the alpha value selected by the researcher and the most common threshold is $p < 0.05$ meaning that the data is likely to occur less than 5% of the time under the null hypothesis. When the p-value falls below the alpha value then the result is statistically significant i.e. $p < 0.05$. An assumption of this study findings is based on this fact that the statistical test will portray this significance of $p < 0.05$ (Rays, 2015). However, this study did not refer to the statistical significance as data was analyzed using Descriptive quantitative analysis because of the nature of the data collected and the study topic hence the researcher used descriptive tables to analyze the frequency of the related various being referred to under internal quality assurance elements as described in the conceptual framework.

Bevans (2020) explained that assumptions about the quantitative data include normality of data when it follows a normal distribution. The researcher used categorical variables of ordinal data on rankings and nominal data on groups while binary data was used on “yes” and “no” on outcomes. In this study, the researcher also referred to correlation tests, which addresses whether two variables namely quality assurance and quality education are related without assuming cause and effect relationship based on research questions.

4.2.1.6 Triangulation Strategies

Triangulation strategies also addressed issues of trustworthiness of the study findings and included different types of triangulations such as methodological triangulation. Lemon and Hayes (2020) stated that one way of ensuring trustworthiness of data is triangulation as this enhances credibility of the data collected. In this study, data triangulation was used to examine both in-depth

interviews and surveys as data collection methods in order to capture multiple perspectives and experiences. Saunders et al (2009) defined triangulation as use of multiple

data collection tools in one study to ensure the data can be confirmed as true reflection of the findings. Both qualitative and quantitative data contributed to the elements under study including the demographic data and therefore eligible for triangulation with verifiable data from research participants. Onwuegbuzie (2007) explained that triangulation could also be extended to data analysis approaches and tools to improve meaning of data and trustworthiness of the interpretations.

In addition, this study used a separate triangulation strategy by involving several institutions referring to three private universities to reduce the effect of those factors that could be peculiar to one institution (Shenton, 2004). In the interest of anonymity and confidentiality to avoid bias, data from the individual universities and its respondents was presented as one finding without mentioning a particular university's actual findings. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) supports issues on anonymity in that study does not include any identifying information of individual's participants and that the study does not link any responses to participants' identities and instead the researcher uses codes or pseudo names.

This study has applied elements of trustworthiness throughout the data collection process and analysis and presentation of findings guarantee issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Trustworthiness has been applied in all stages of data collection therefore supports that the findings being presented in this chapter are credible, transparent and dependable and confirms issues of honesty and fidelity which conforms to ethical research processes. The following sections presents the actual findings following data collection from both surveys and interviews to complement each other and ensure.

4.2 Study findings

This section presents study findings using data collected from surveys and interviews as a triangulation method chosen for this study in order to complement the study findings. Mohammad (2013) supports this method as he stated that triangulation helps to strengthen

validity of data evaluation and findings and it is advisable to collect data using several sources such as surveys and interviews. The results from surveys were used to facilitate data collected from questionnaires related to quality assurance systems and quality education in private universities. Quantitative data findings are presented first and included illustrations and graphical presentations and this is followed by qualitative data findings in the following sections.

4.2.1 Quantitative Research Findings

This section presents study findings from surveys as part of the triangulation process where data was collected through questionnaires that were administered to seventy (70) participants and was analyzed using relevant tools (SPSS) to give meaning of the data. Quantitative Descriptive analyses were applied in the process of analyzing data from the structured questionnaires. Prior to presentation of actual findings, the following section presents background and demographic data of study participants:

4.2.1.1 Background and Demographic Data of Respondents

The demographic data included gender, age, qualifications and year of study for students, staff and management and actual descriptive analysis tables are presented in Appendix F.

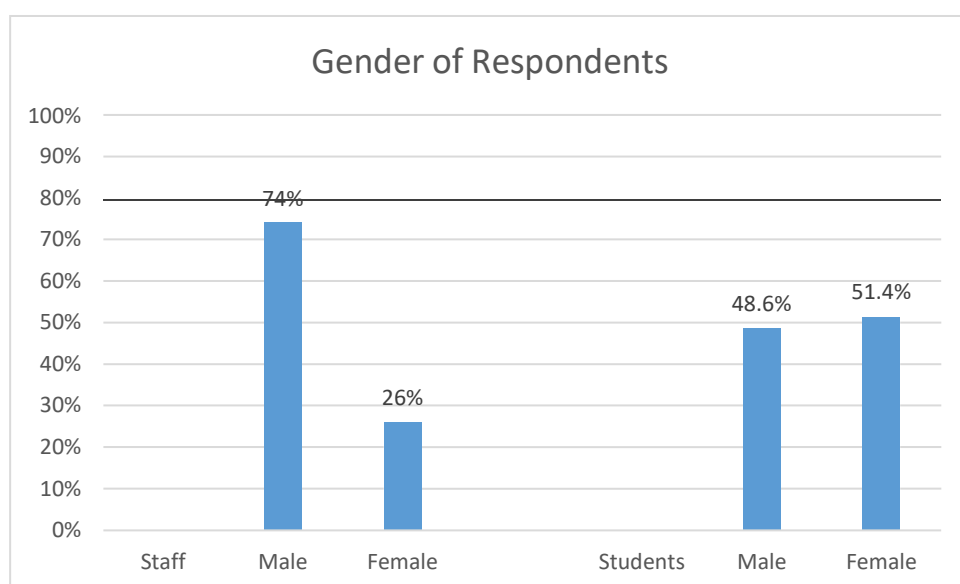
i. Gender Distribution

Respondents were more males than females and this might be alluded to the fact that generally most academicians and executive leaders in the higher education are leaders are males. The sustainable development goal number 5 advocates for gender equality in all sectors and this goal emphasizes that it is important to promote equal rights in land and property, sexual and reproductive health, technology and internet. The goal points out that there are more women in public offices than ever before hence a need to encourage more women leaders to achieve the gender equality in all sectors including the universities (Sustainable Development

Goal Report, 2017). One of the policies required in the NCHE minimum standards is gender policy and gender based violence in higher education to support women. The HEIs are encouraged to develop and implement the gender policy and protect women from sexual harassment.

The following figure 4.1 presents the gender distribution of gender equality in the three private universities in this study and indicates 74% were males and 26% were females for staff while most of the students were females representing 51.4 % while males represented 48.6% and this trend applies in all the three universities.

Figure 4.1: Gender Distribution

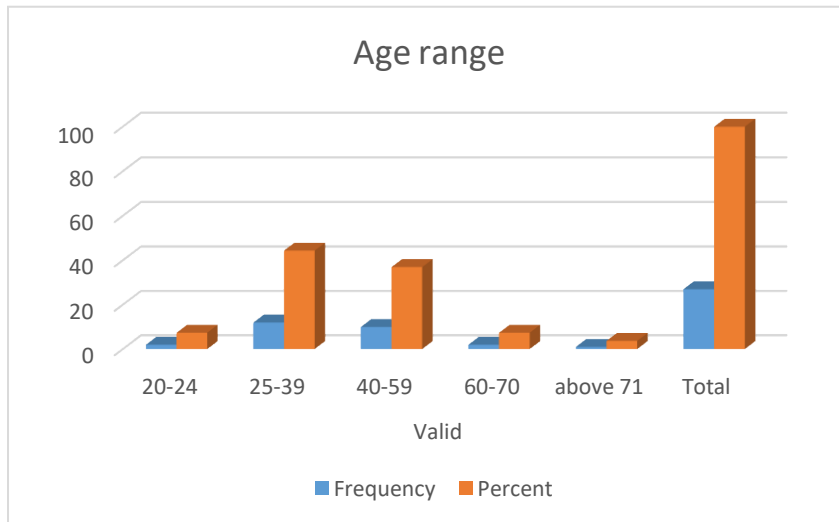


ii. Age of Respondents

The age ranges of 20-24, 25-39 and 40-59 were recorded for responding students with the highest number of participants ranging from category 20-59 years and that the majority of the staff were within the ages 25 and 60 years. In higher education sector there is flexibility in terms of age limit for academic staff where members can work up to 75 years of age as compared to the civil service

where the mandatory retirement age is 60 years. The age range in this study was therefore within normal acceptable limits of 20 to 71 years.

Figure 4.2: Age ranges for respondents



It is normal for HEIs academic staff to teach or conduct consultancies at the ages above 60 years and the normal practice is that the maximum age can be 75 years. In other universities especially at international level, there are professors teaching at the ages above 75 years due to their expertise and experiences in the subject matter and this is adopted from conditions of service for academic staff working in higher education (Turkish Universities), while in France retirement age limit ranges between 60 and 62 years in HEIs (France Universities).

iii. Qualifications of respondents

The study highlights varying qualifications requirements, from Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) for generic students and Bachelor's degree for those students studying Masters Programs. Of the 30 students who were respondents, 13 students had MSCE and 13 had Diploma each while seven had Bachelor's degrees.

Staff and management recorded different qualifications with the highest having attained PhDs and the lowest owning a bachelor's degree but studying at Masters' level; however, the recommended minimum qualification to teach in higher education is a Master's degree (NCHE Minimum standards, 2016). Figure 4.3A below presents qualification of staff and management in the three universities.

Figure 4.3A: Qualification of staff and management

Figure 4.3A: Qualification of staff and management

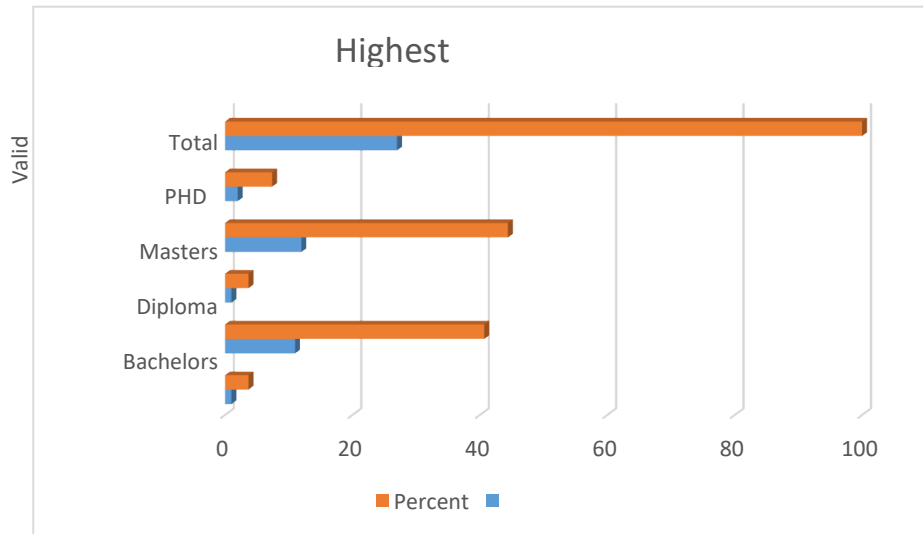
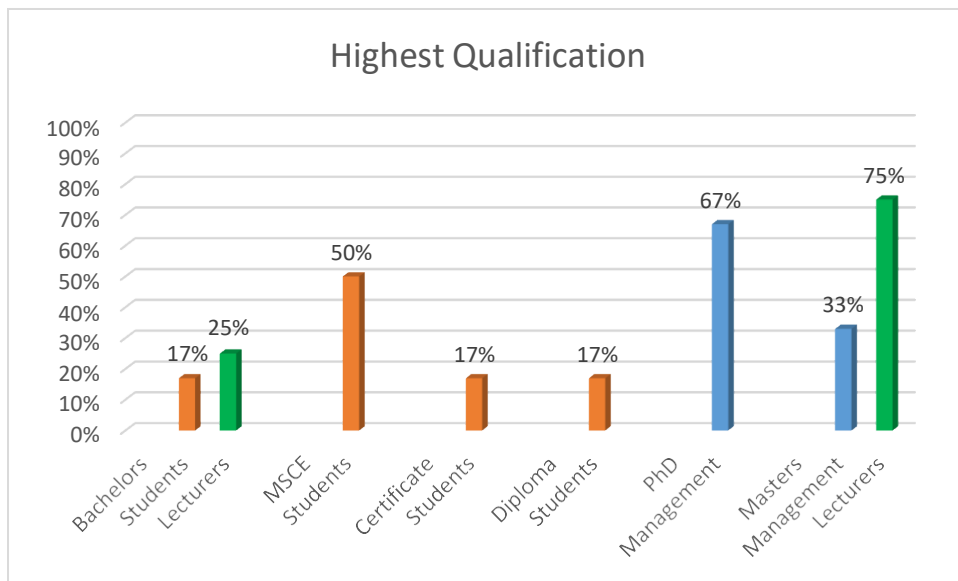


Figure 4.3B: Qualification of staff and management



Year of Study / Duration for students

The findings indicate that majority of the students were in 4th year, recording 44.4%, seconded by those in second year, at 25% and lastly those in third year at 5% each while most of the staff had worked for more than two years at their institution. The study planned to recruit those students who had been at the institution at least 2 years and above and this represents the

true picture of eligible participants. The respondents were eligible for the study, as 90% had stayed in the institutions for more than 2 years and therefore had exposure and experience related to issues of quality.

The following section presents study findings according to the research questions and the first research question focused on status of quality education in private universities in terms of infrastructural issues including library and classrooms, learning and teaching resources and quality of teaching staff.

4.2.1.2 Research Question 1:

How are private higher education institutions progressing in the provision of quality higher education?

This section presents some of the general findings on the quality of infrastructure, learning resources, and quality of teaching and therefore gives a general picture on how private universities are advancing in terms of quality education. The areas of focus on infrastructure includes classroom furnishings, computer laboratories, and library resources including internet, clinic, cafeteria and recreational facilities. The respondents quantified their observations of the universities based on the questionnaires and therefore findings may differ in some aspects.

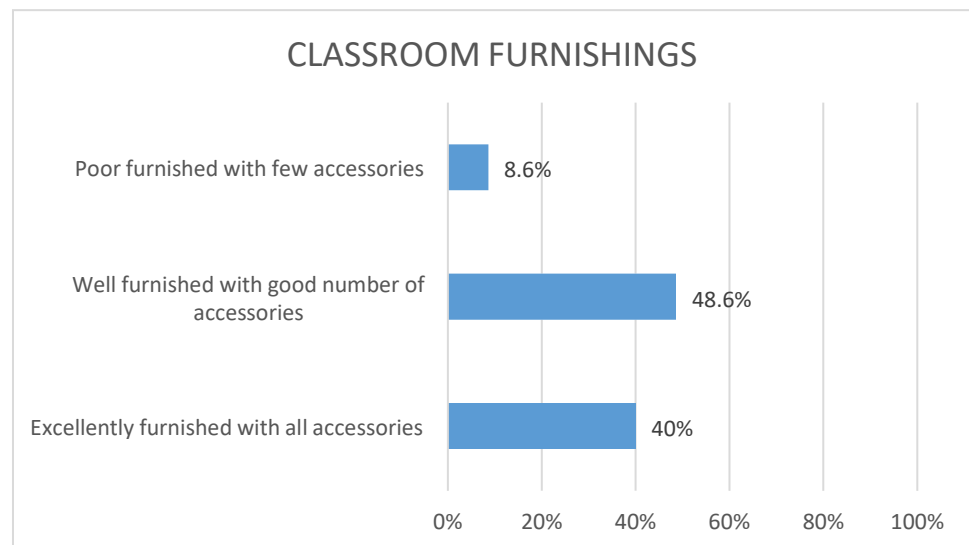
i. Classroom Furnishings

Respondents mostly shared positive remarks about classroom furnishings, with most students indicating availability of furnishings. This is supported by 40% of the respondents (students) who indicated that classroom furnishings were excellent with all accessories, as 48.6%

of the students indicated that classrooms were well furnished with atleast good accessories and 8.4% mentioned that their classrooms were poorly furnished and had a few accessories as summarized in figure 4.4 below.

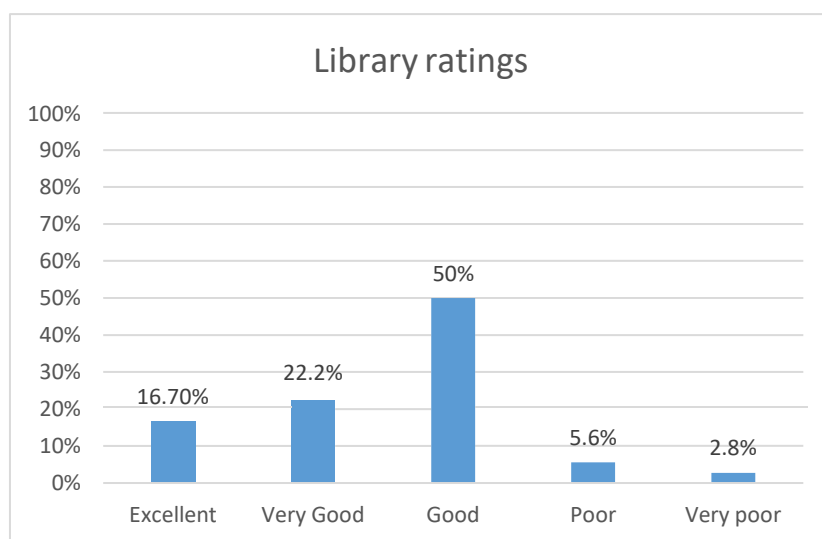
Figure 4.4: Classroom Furnishings

iii. Classroom Status



The library and it was stocked with relevant books had a direct bearing on the quality of education that is offered at the institutions. Students were asked to rate their library from very poor to excellent. Students (50%) rated the library to be in good condition, stating the availability of free WIFI in the library as well as presence of enough computers within the library for students use. Students also applauded the presence of online books that they could access for their studies. Others rated the library as excellent (16.7%) with only three rating it at poor (5.6%) and very poor (2.8%) as indicated in Figure 4.5 below.

Figure 4.5: Library Ratings



iv. Recreational Facilities

Almost all respondents (students) from questionnaires mentioned that they had access to recreational and sports facilities although 14.8% indicated that these facilities were not available on campus. Table P - 17 shows that 44.4% respondents commented that they had very good facilities, 25% indicated good facilities while 15% indicated that there were no recreational facilities at their university and only 4% rated their facilities as poor excellent. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 confirm and summarize these findings. Pala (2016) supports recreational entertainment as a requirement for students and that the recreational entertainment play a very critical role in free time for students and is one way of assisting students to be physically fit. Pala further indicates that female and male participants have different preferences in their recreational entertainments as evaluated in her study. World Health Organization emphasizes on the importance of being socially and mentally well and not only being physically fit and Pala (2016) supports the statement in that recreational activities enrich

people with complete satisfaction and fulfillment of being physically, mentally and socially well. This recreational entertainment serves for better utilization of free time, which needs to be well organized by

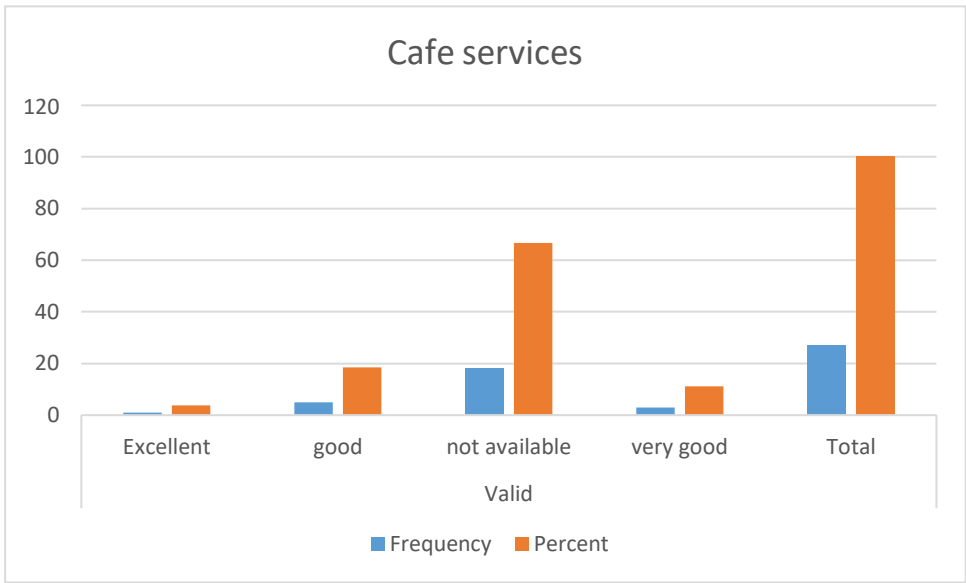
universities to benefit the students. The university should therefore provide suitable environment for sports and recreational activities for students during their free time and points out that the entertainment activities are usually cheap.

Figure 4.6: Ratings of Recreational and Sports Facilities



Figure 4.7 below presents ratings of quality of cafeteria pointing out that in 60% of students from two universities indicated that there were no cafeteria facilities and 5% of students from one university rated their services as excellent, 10% rated it as very good while about 20% rated it as good.

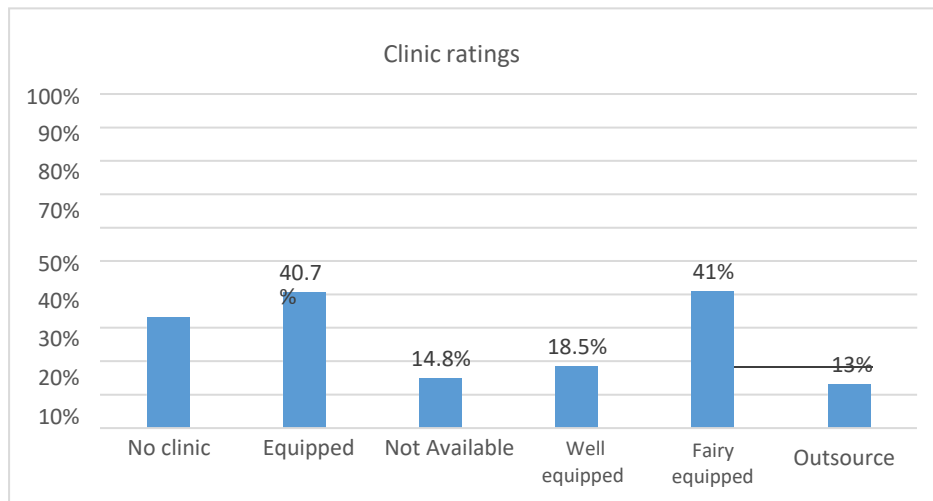
Figure 4.7: cafeteria ratings



v. Clinic Standards

Figure 4-7 above indicates that 40.7% of the students pointed out that their clinic was fairly equipped while 14.8% mentioned that the clinic was not available and 18.5% indicated that they had well-equipped clinic. These findings are supported by table E-17, which indicated that 11 respondents out of 27, rated clinic status as being equipped, representing 41% while 18.5% showed that their clinic was well equipped and 33% indicated that there, was no clinic at their university.

Figure 4. 8: Clinic Ratings



vi. *Learning Resources*

Figure 4.8 above indicates that there were mixed reactions on the availability of learning resources. Whereas 55.6% of students from the surveys indicated to have enough learning resources, 41.7% indicated that these were inadequate. For those students stating that there were enough resources, reasons behind it included availability of a library and computers for use; free Wi-Fi availability in the library as well as some books therein. There were lecturers who were well qualified; library had enough books online as additional to the hard copies in the library.

Figure 4.9A: Learning resources

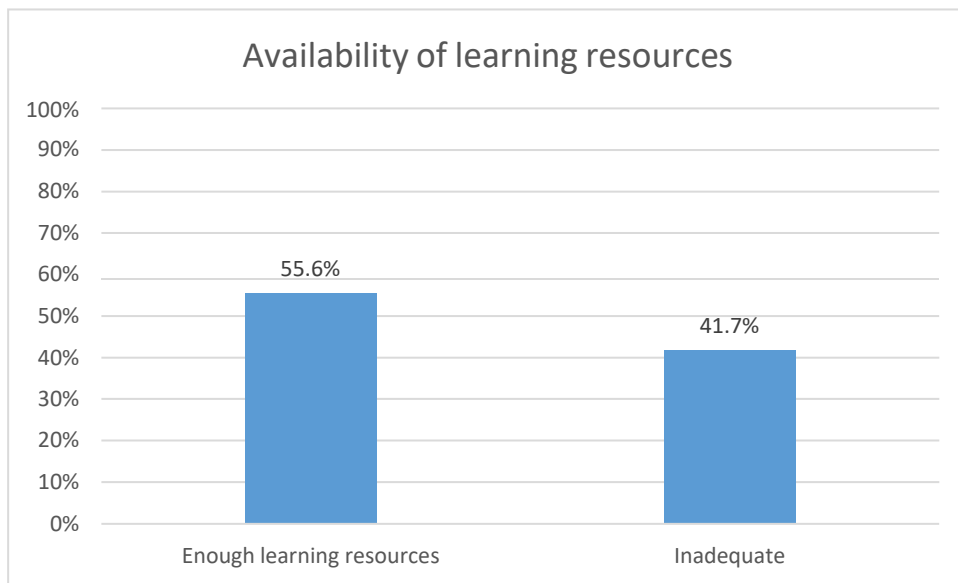
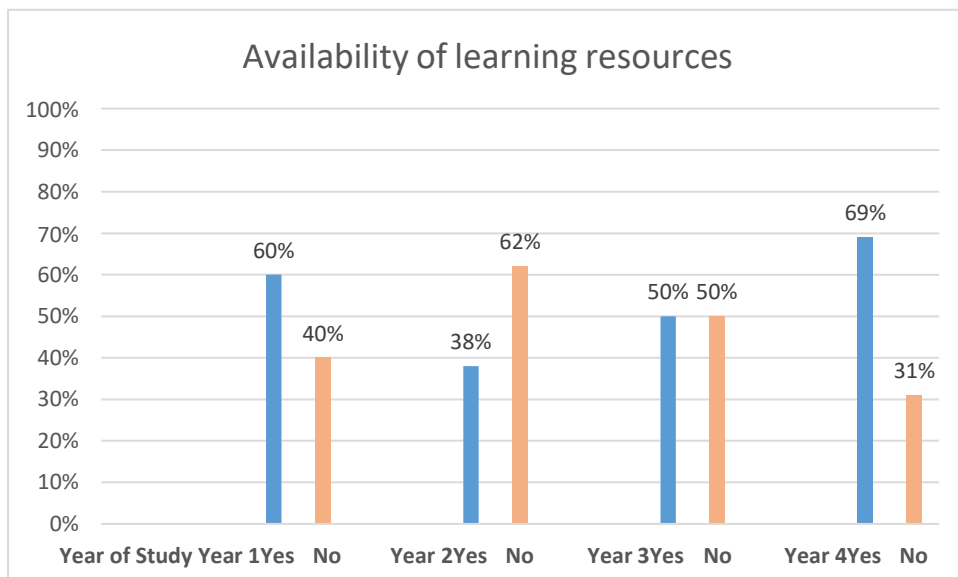


Figure 4.9(B): Availability of Learning Resources



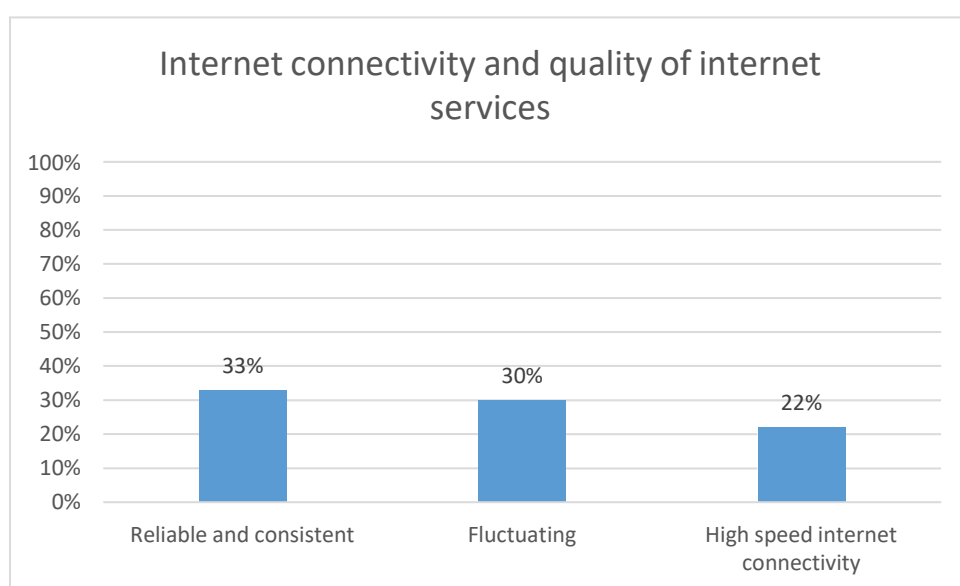
Other respondents (students) had different views indicated on lack of resources and reported that there were challenges with number of projectors, few computers, Wi-Fi ranges, few books, no access to web-based resources among other challenges.

vii. Internet Connectivity and Quality of Internet Services:

Table P-18 in appendix P shows that 33% students showed that internet in computer laboratories was reliable and consistent, 30% indicated fluctuating availability of the services while 22% rated high-speed internet connectivity. This gives a general picture that at least there were internet services at the universities with variant ratings on quality of services.

Figure 4.10 summarizes ratings on status of internet connectivity as mostly being available and reliable while with some students indicating slow and fluctuations with internet connectivity.

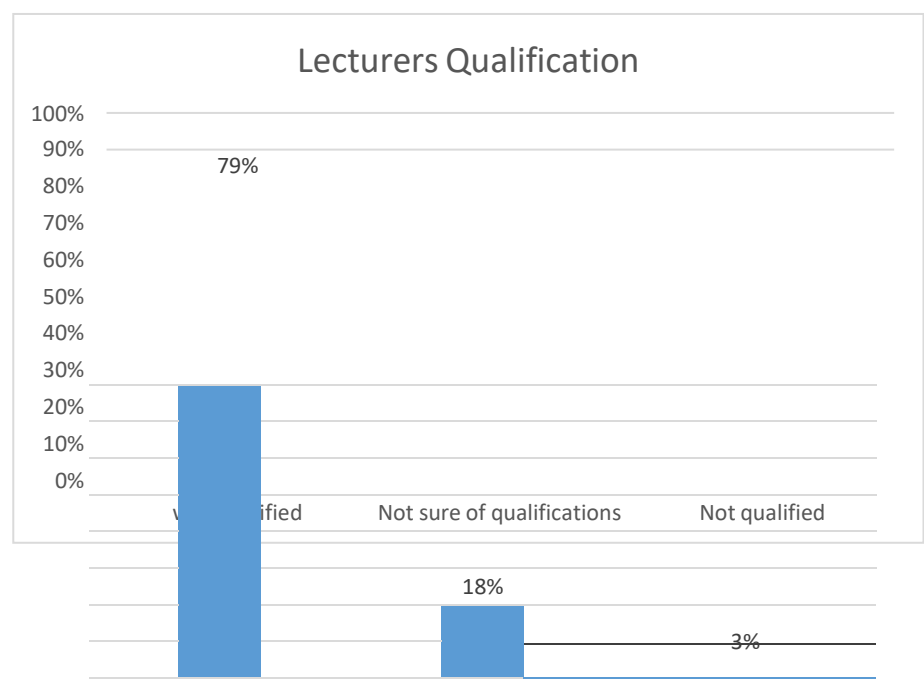
Figure 4.10: Internet connectivity



viii. Lecturers' qualifications

Table P -14 indicates that 79% of the lecturers were well qualified, 18% were not sure of the qualifications of their lecturers, while 3% indicated that their lecturers were not qualified. These findings are supported by Figure 4.11.

Figure 4.11: Qualifications of Lecturers (Responses from Students)



ix. *Quality of Teaching*

Despite inquiries on the presumed qualifications of lecturers, the study also looked into how students rated the quality of teaching rendered by these lecturers. Table P-10 shows that 51% rated the quality of teaching as being good, 22% rated the quality as being excellent while 26% rating showed very good quality of teaching. These findings are presented in 4. 12.

Figure 4.12: Quality of teaching

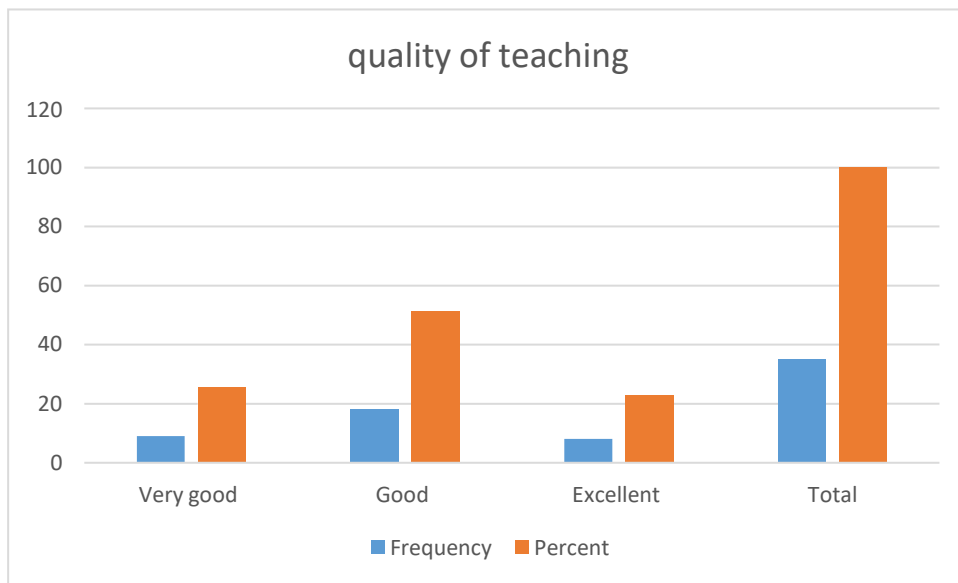
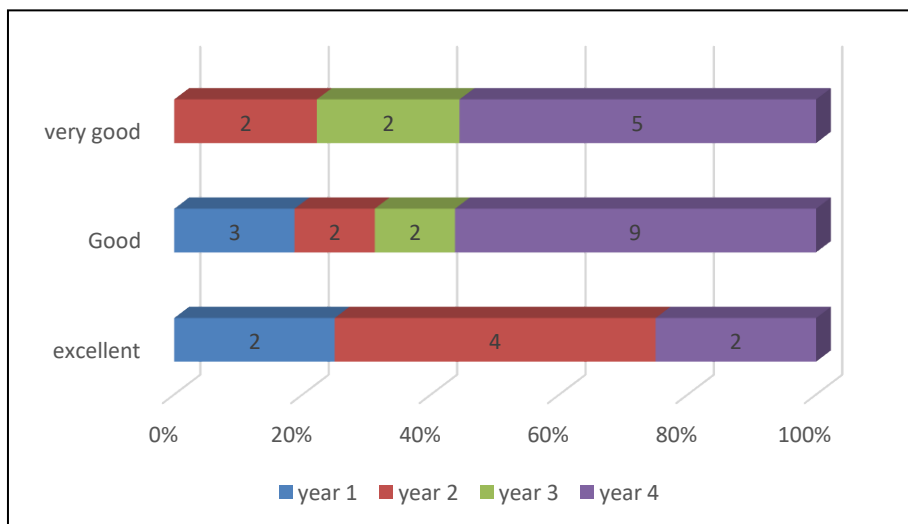


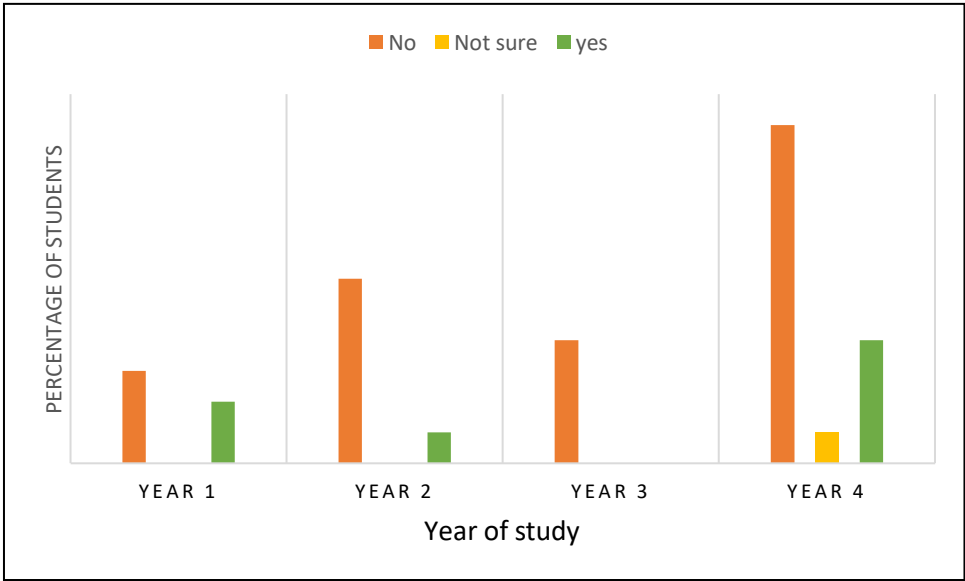
Figure 4.13: Quality of Teaching by year of study



Quality of Teaching by Year of Study

Evaluation of teaching by students: Table E-11 indicates that 73% of the respondents indicated that there was no formal evaluation while 24% indicated that there was formal evaluation and 3% were uncertain as presented in figure 4.16 below.

Figure 4.14: Formal student Evaluation



x. Challenges reported by students

About 61.1% of the students reported that the institution had recorded different challenges in its operations, whilst only 38.9% indicated that there were no challenges and these reported challenges included the following;

xi. Lecturer Related Challenges

These included absenteeism and poor preparation of lessons; some lecturers had problems in delivering lectures; lecturers lacked transparency regarding student's grades. Lecturers lose students grades a lot. Most lecturers lack industrial experience; due to unqualified lecturers, students tend to get less information; lecturers not available for weekend classes.

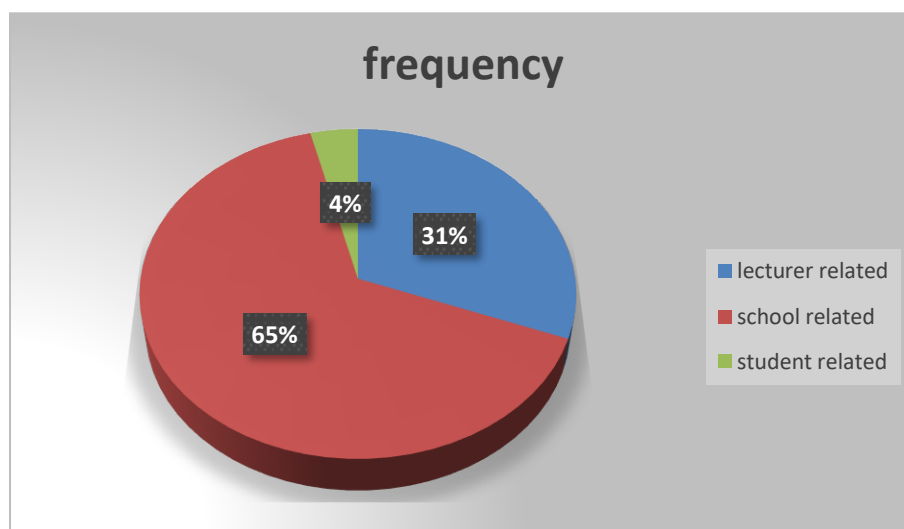
The researcher finds these to be common among universities especially students' grades brings many controversies including lack of transparency and loss of students grades. These could be attributed to poor record keeping and lack of quality assurance policies to ensure efficient procedures for handling examination and other related academic records (Kis, 2005). The gaps in industrial experience continues to prevail in private universities as reported by the

respondents both students and lecturers that there are no operational policies for industrial attachment for the students to acquire experiences related to their area of study.

xii. Suggested Areas for Improvement

Students and lecturers for quality improvement suggested a number of areas to management and the researcher grouped them into three areas: lecturer related issues; school related issues and student related. As indicated in figure 4.15 below, most of the issues (65%) were recommended for improvement of the school and (31%) lecturers and very few issues were raised on students,

Figure 4.15: Areas of Improvement



Under each area, the following issues were recommended for improvement:

xiii. Lecturer related issues

Students recommended to management to look into recruitment of lecturers who were experienced in teaching and recommended that the lecturers should attend all classes. Students also recommended that lecturers should be transparent in sharing the grades and

should not take bribes from students in order to award them undeserving grades. Another recommendation was for improvement on active learning

xiv. School related issues

Respondents raised areas on improvement on fulltime to part time lecturer ratio as it was observed that the universities employed more part time than full time lecturers did. Minimum standards for higher education recommended a ratio of 70: 30 as full time to part time ratio indicating that there should be more full time than part time lecturers should.

Another challenge recommended for improvement was to do with collecting and analyzing feedback from students for the purposes of improving teaching and learning; this information is mainly reported through students' evaluation forms at the end of each semester. Respondents also recommended for improvement on provision of adequate learning resources; these were mainly to do with books, internet, material, and advocated for all academic programs to be accredited by the NCHE.

4.2.1.3 Research Question 2:

What are the nature of the policies, structures and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems that are being used in the selected higher education institutions?

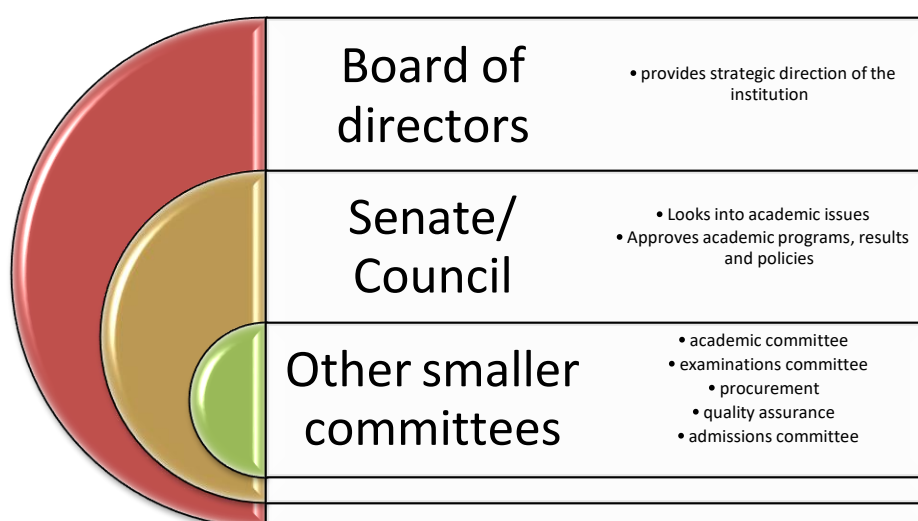
The institutional governance set up contributes to quality assurance systems as it includes structures, administrative policies and instruments used in ensuring quality education. Clear communication by understanding organogram, Committees, student's involvement, clear policies augment quality assurance systems in universities for efficiency.

i. Institutional Governance Set Up

All (100%) of the respondents were aware of availability of some governance structures in the institutions. On the other hand, all management members were sure of the presence of such committees and in all institutions management alluded to following educational requirements as

prescribed by NCHE with regard to governance setup. Though the setup seems to vary for each institution, there were common elements present for all the institutions. At least respondents indicated that they had well set governance structures and commonly, they had university councils / boards, senate, committees and management teams as presented in figure 4.16 below:

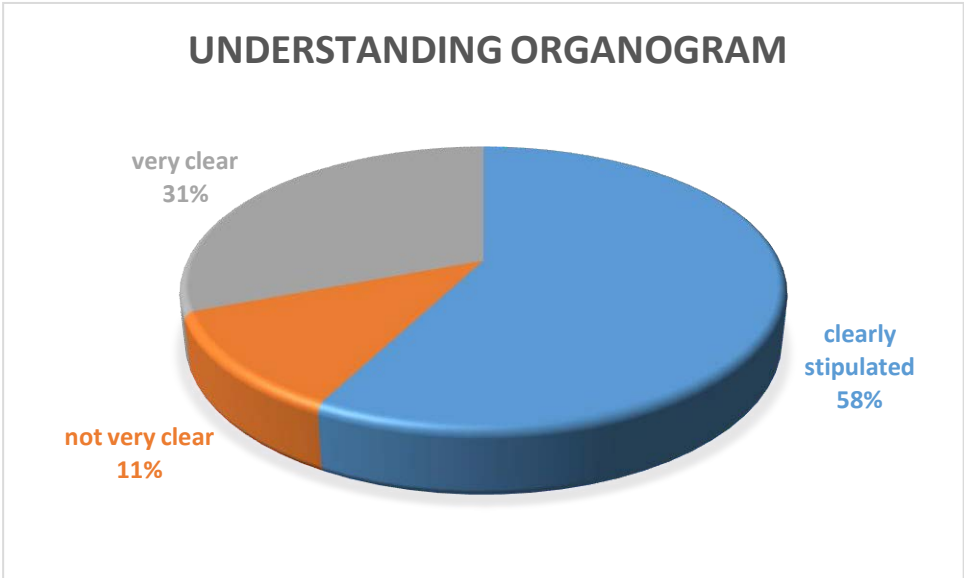
Figure 4.16: Common governance set up



a) Understanding the Organogram

Fifteen respondents (management and lecturers) pointed out that they clearly understood the organogram while eight respondents indicated that the organogram was very clear and only three respondents indicated that the organogram was not very clear as indicated in the figure 4.17 below

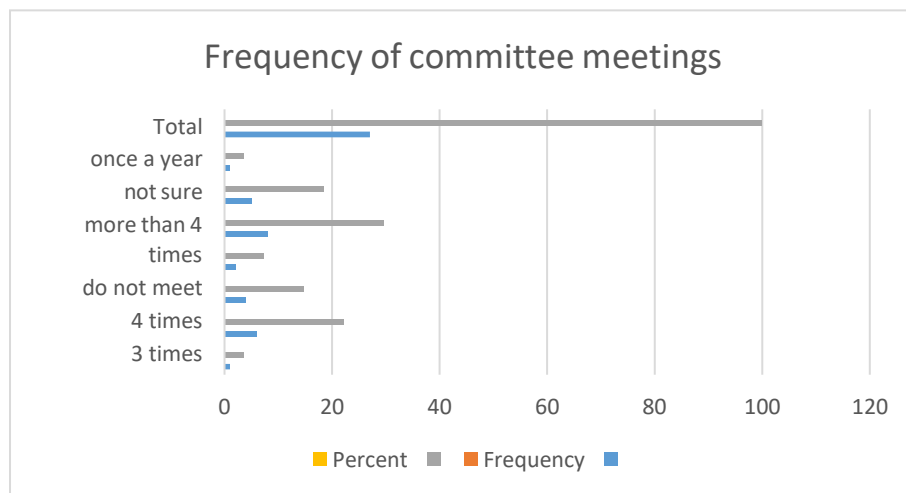
Figure 4.17: Understanding the Organogram



b) Committee meetings

Figure 4.17 indicates the frequency of committee meetings per year and gives a clear picture that most of committees meet at least four times and this looks good for governance. More than 50% of lecturers pointed out that a number of committees meet three to four times a year or more while the rest indicated that committees meet less than three times a year and 19% were not sure about these committees.

Figure 4.18: Frequency of Committee Meetings

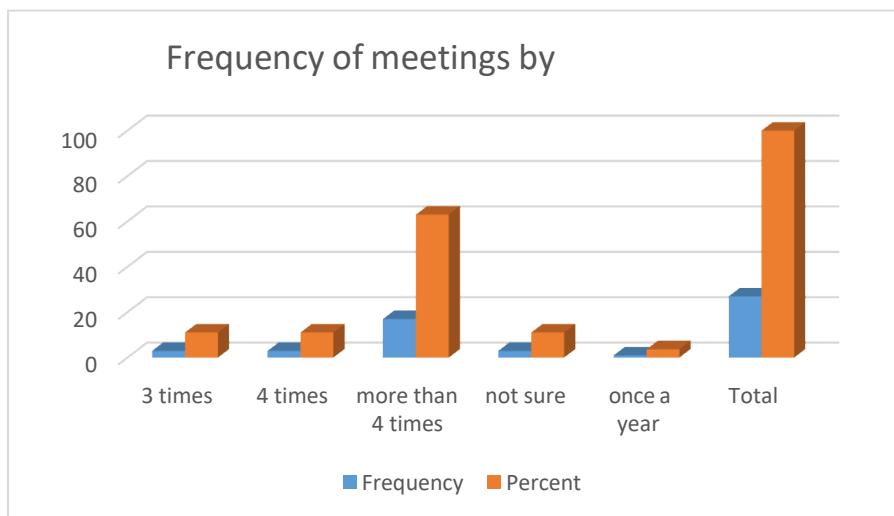


c) Management Meetings

Figure 4.19 below shows that 63% of respondents indicated that management meets more than 4 times a year while 3% indicated that they see management meeting at least three to four times a year and another 3% was not sure about such management meetings.

Table P-23 presents ratings related to frequency of management meetings in a year. Results show that 63% of the respondents indicated that management meetings took place more than 4 times in a year, 11% showed management meeting 4 times a year and 11% were not sure of such meetings. These findings are graphically presented in figure 4. 19 below.

Figure 4.19: Frequency of meetings by management



ii. Quality Assurance Structures

Figure 4. 20 portrays that most of the respondents indicated that they were not sure what structures were in place related to quality assurance. At least 33.3% indicated that they had no idea

of what QA instruments were, while 18.5% mentioned budget, committee, policy, officer and these are the important structures to be available in higher education institutions.

The rest could mention at least one structure related to QA structure though not very sure.

Figure 4.20: Quality assurance structures

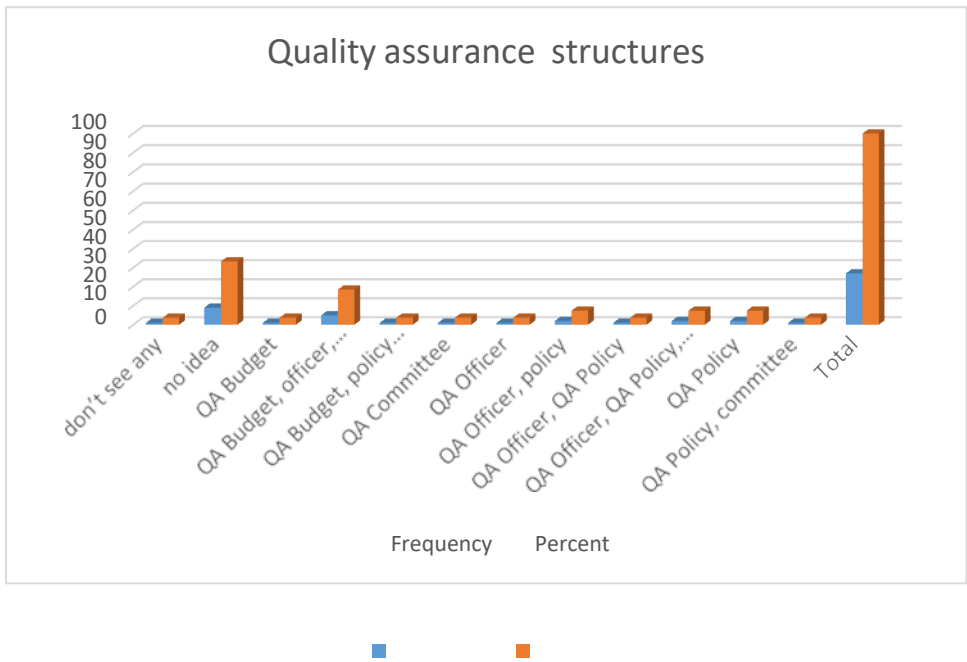


Table P-19 in appendix P shows that 33% of respondents indicated that they had no ideawhat quality structures were 18.5% indicated that there was QA budget and QA officers while4% indicated availability of QA budget policy.

iii. Quality Assurance Policies

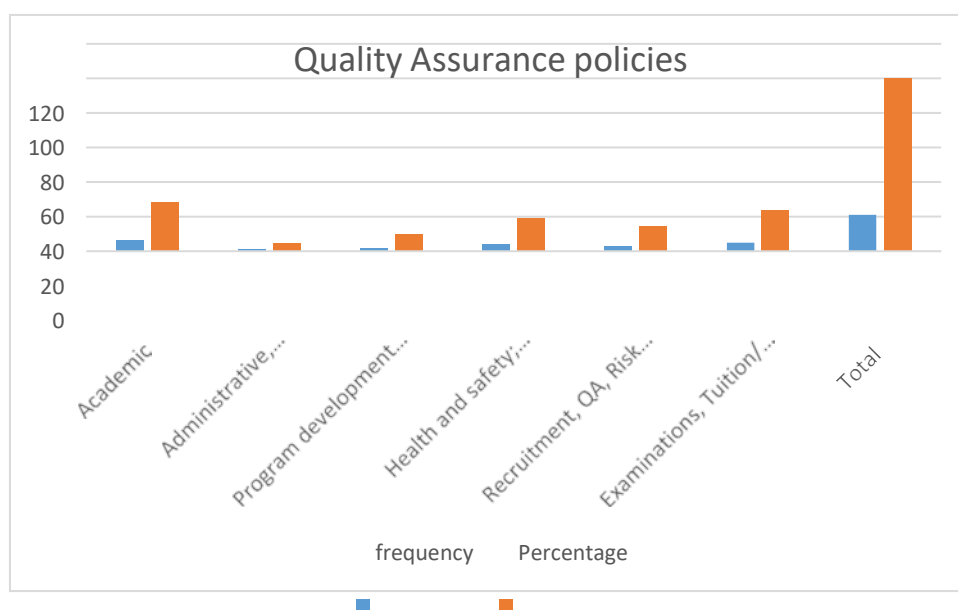
Availability of quality assurance policies, structures and instruments assist to ensure that QA systems are working well in the provision of quality education and these include academic and administrative policies in addition to the actual QA policies and instruments. Table 4.1 below presents some policies available at private universities.

Table 4.1: Approved academic and administrative policies

Identified Academic and Administrative Policies	Frequency
Academic	6

Administrative, recruitment, Covid 19, distance learning, library, admissions, gender equality, drug policy, research, health care for staff	1
Program development and review; staff training and development; textbook, Theft	2
Health and safety; qualitative assessment, students welfare	4
Recruitment, QA risk management, employee welfare, it, HIV/AIDS	3
Examinations, tuition/ financial policy	5

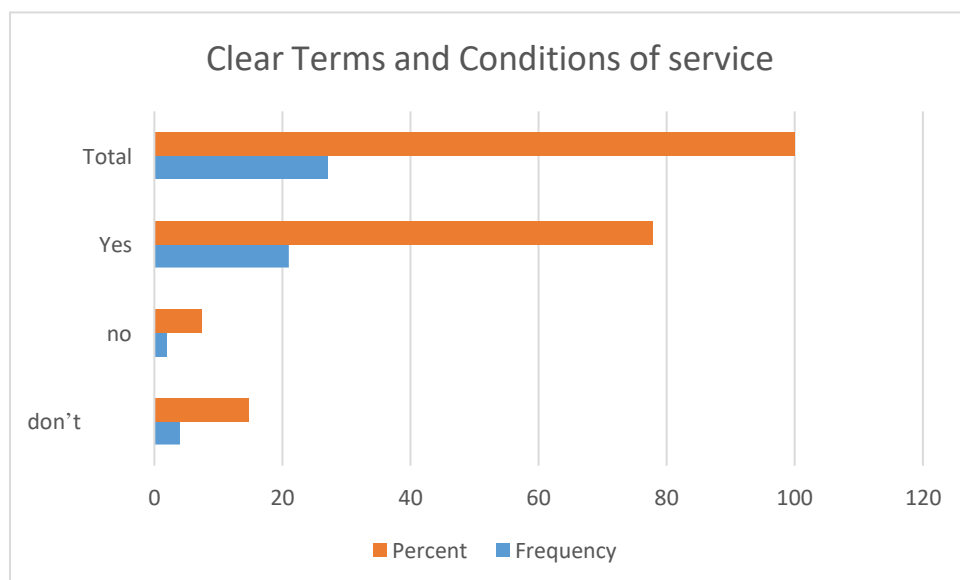
Figure 4.21: Quality assurance policies



Terms and conditions of services

Figure 0-101 indicates that almost 70% of respondents agreed that their conditions and terms of employment were clear although a few indicated that their conditions were not clear and very few mentioned that they were not sure of availability of such conditions of services.

Figure 4.22: Clear Terms and Conditions of Service



4.2.1.4 Research Question 3:

What is the stakeholders' perspective on quality assurance systems?

Stakeholders are considered as one of the key elements in the conceptual framework that contribute to provision of quality education in the higher education as they play a big role in development of programs and quality check through consultations. This question on stakeholder involvement was not well managed, as most respondents were not sure about involvement of

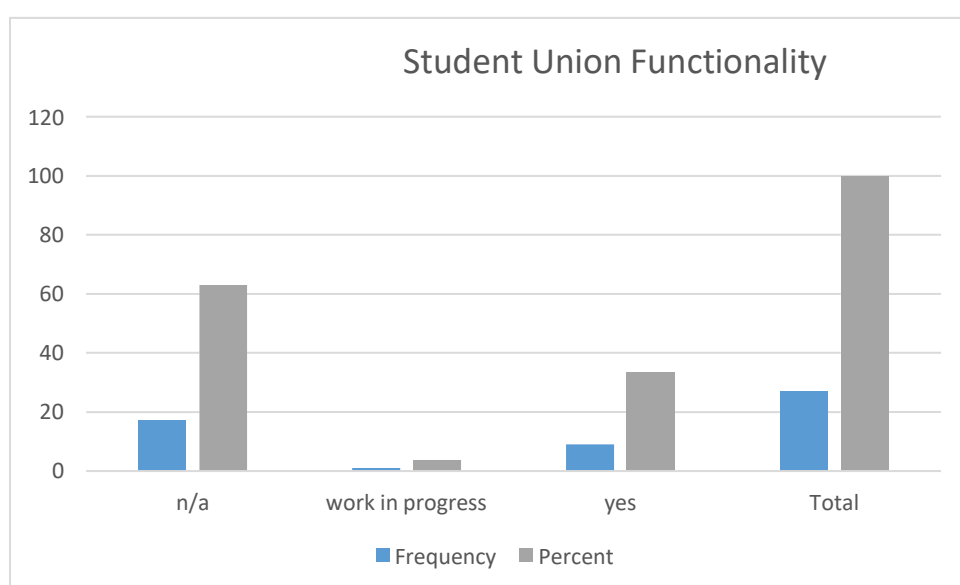
stakeholders as related to quality assurance. However, a few respondents mentioned students as one of the main stakeholders and they referred to students' council while others mentioned government ministries who support them with fees and industrial attachments.

i. Students' Union Functionality

Table P-24 indicates 17% were student union functionality, an increased number (63%) of students indicated that they were not sure of availability of functional students union, 33.3

% confirmed availability of the students' body while 3.7 % reported as work in progress. These findings are well presented in figure 4: 23 below.

Figure 4.23: Functional Students Union



The students were considered one of the major key informants as they give a true representation of the quality of education being offered by the universities and hence seek support from relevant

stakeholders. The researcher included students as one group of study population to have reliable and credible findings as recipients of quality education in the private universities.

Stakeholders are involved in quality check as reported that there was a mention of Parent and Staff Association in one institution, which acts as a main stakeholder in terms of

checking quality of education. However, data on stakeholder involvement could not be quantified and therefore the researcher relied on qualitative data findings only for this finding. This area will need further investigation in other universities to explore the stakeholders' perspective towards quality education apart from just engaging them as partners or supportive structures. The main areas where stakeholders are involved are program review through, community outreach activities, benchmarking of programs and review of programs. Different stakeholders have different roles in ensuring quality in HEIs and in return, HEIs are accountable to stakeholders in terms of offering quality education.

4.2.1.5 Research Question 4:

What is the role of leadership of private universities in adhering to standards of education?

This question was approached differently and had challenges to quantify the role of leadership through respondents' responses. Almost all respondents attributed the role of leadership through achievements and challenges faced by the universities and made recommendations to management for improvement as indicated in the following sections.

i. Challenges and Recommendations to Management

There were many challenges highlighted by students, staff and management to be addressed by the universities and generally and commonly applying to all the universities. These challenges included lack of resource mobilization strategies to improve financial capacity, communication with students and staff on quality assurance issues, unqualified lecturers, lack of resources such as internet and, books.

ii. Challenges Faced by Leadership

Some challenges faced by leadership included staff issues, administrative and financial issues. Some lecturers were teaching courses not related to their fields, inadequate staffing and unqualified lecturers where there were more part time lecturers than full time. Recruitment of non-academics, no support to capacity building, lack of control over quality issues, inadequate learning equipment, appointment criteria not clear; and recruitment policy not followed. Other challenges included unstable budget, low salaries, late payments, and lack of operational funds.

iii. Areas for Improvement

Table P-22 presents a number areas mentioned by respondents that required leadership improvement of quality education and mostly highlighted need for additional learning resources, increase number of lecturers, clear guidelines on improving standards and well supported libraries. The responses indicate that there were areas that need improvement by the university leadership and these responses are from students and ~~lecturers~~

4.2.1.6 Section Summary

The findings from the surveys portrayed similar findings in most responses from the three universities as indicated in the presentations in this section. Data on stakeholders' perspective and

role of leadership could not be quantified; hence, findings relied mostly on qualitative findings as presented in the following section.

4.3 Qualitative Research Findings

The previous section presented quantitative data collected from surveys and this section presents qualitative research findings obtained from the in-depth interviews based on the topic of this research and complements the findings from the surveys. While the survey findings produced worthwhile data that was rich in content, researcher had no opportunity to explore emerging issues; hence, qualitative interviews were conducted to compensate such gaps. The interviews therefore search for respondents' experiences and allowed them to describe their

observations and feelings about the subject matter. The researcher used semi-structured interview guides to explore emerging issues and control the response. The major findings of these qualitative interviews are presented in accordance with four research questions. The findings of this study addressed the research problem, which was related to quality assurance factors affecting quality education in private universities.

4.3.1 Demographic Data

The sample size comprised 30 study respondents for qualitative data and these comprised students, lecturers and management from three private universities within Lilongwe, Malawi. Out of these, 49% comprised seventeen females and 51% were males. The age ranges of 20-24, 25-39, 40-59, 60-70 and beyond 71 were recorded for responding students, staff and management.

Mostly, lecturers and management had a minimum of Bachelors and highest of PhD qualifications, however recommended qualification to teach in higher education by NCHE is a Masters' Degree qualification. The required criteria for students' participation was those with more than two years' experience. This data indicated that sixteen (16) students were in fourth year representing 46%, five (5) students were in third year representing 11% while nine (9) students were in second year representing 26%. The key for respondents from the three private universities and their respondents is provided in table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Key for respondents

Institution	Respondents	Comments	Institution	Respondents	Comments
University A	Students (SNT) 1-1 Student 1-2 Student 1-3 Student 1-4 Lecturer (Lctr) 1-1	Respondents in this university are coded as (1 -)	University C	Students - Stnt, 3-1 Stnt 3-2 Stnt 3-3 Stnt 3.4	Respondents in this university are coded as (3)

	Lctr 1-2 Lctr 1-3 Lctr 1-4 Management (Mgt)1-1 Mgt 1-2 Mgt 1-3			Lecturer (Lctr) Lctr 3-2 Lctr 3.3 Lctr 3.4 Management (Mgt) 3-1 Mgt 3.2 Mgt 3-3 Mgt 3.4	
University B	Students (SNT) 2-1 Student 2-2 Student 2-3 Student 2-4 Lecturer (Lctr) 2-1 Lctr 2-2 Lctr 2-3 Lctr 2-4 Management (Mgt)2-1 Mgt 2-2 Mgt 2-3	Respondents in this university are coded as (2 – 1)			

4.3.2 Findings from the qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews

The overview of data transcribed from the interviews with students, lecturers, management is presented in accordance with their responses, the following sections present the actual findings of the qualitative data in line with the four (4) research questions and only interesting and relevant codes were quoted in these findings.

Research Question 1

How are private higher education institutions progressing in the provision of quality higher education in Malawi?

4.3.2.1 The points of view of students from private universities

The main objective of this particular question to students was to understand their evaluation of quality education being offered by their various institutions based on the thematic areas. The researcher regarded students as key informant as they tend to give a true representation of the quality of education being offered by the university without bias, as they are recipients and beneficiaries of the educational standards. The information given by students who had been in the university for at least two years and above can therefore be reliable and credible. The following section presents some of the responses from students as directed from the interview guides.

i. Information Related to Quality Services

This finding confirms thematic areas that supported information sharing among the respondents in the three universities as supported by their comments indicating that some said they had received adequate information while others did not have much information and another group indicated that they had no information related to quality assurance systems. "...Was given enough information in terms of how we would be studying; how we should use the library" (student 3-3). Similarly, another student supported the information sharing aspects "...yes, a lot of information was provided during orientation sessions." (Student 2-1. On the contrary, some students indicated that they were not given adequate information as one of the students said "... not much information was given, the information wasn't well communicated. Sometimes had to figure out things on our own." (Student 1-3)

ii. Overall Quality of Education

A question was asked on this thematic area: Has the overall quality of higher education provision improved, gone down, or stayed about the same over the last year? Please explain. This question aimed at establishing the overall quality of education in the three universities through interviews and surveys.

Generally, quality of education was not improving in all the three universities although a few respondents mentioned that standards were maintained or going down but on specific issues. This was evident by the fact that all the three universities were registered by NCHE and that a number of their programs were registered with one university being accredited.

iii. Quality of education

The findings from students on quality of education was critical for this study to form a basis for issues related to quality assurance. Generally, the responses indicated that 90% of the students indicated that quality of education was good in their universities. However, a number of areas were highlighted for improvements while mentioning challenges being faced in their universities. The researcher came up with thematic areas in trying to respond to the questions related to status of quality education such as infrastructural issues, overall quality of education, areas for improvement, availability of learning resources and quality of teaching. The students responded to these thematic areas as follows:

4.3.2.2 Infrastructural issues

This area deals with issues of classrooms, library and computer laboratories and includes support structures such as clinic and recreational facilities. Students in the three universities' had their perspectives on quality of these structures; this could be attributed to the fact that the

three universities were operating at different levels in terms of size and period of establishment. However, the findings indicated more or less similar experiences and observations as regards to their universities. When asked to describe the quality of infrastructure in their universities, 90% of the students indicated that they had good classrooms as narrated by student 1-2 who said “.....Classrooms, library, support services are good. ... we are able to access books online. Internet is also available at the school”. This was supported by another student from university B who said that “ ... they have good classrooms, provide air-conditioning and fans when it is hot. ... internet is also good and library is good (Student 2-2). Similar responses also came from student from a third university who commented on library “...Library is good and we have enough resources... the school has adequate chairs and books” (Student 3-4).

i. Infrastructural Quality Status

Infrastructure is critical to contribution of quality education in universities and this is categorized into classrooms, computer laboratory, library, internet services and related learning resources. When asked to describe quality of infrastructure, one lecturer from university B said “... excellent. Rates ourselves as at the top of all private universities in the country right now. We have one of the best infrastructures around” (Lecturer 2-2).

Ninety percent (90%) of the interviewed students mentioned that classrooms were generally good as commented by one student who said “...there are enough classrooms and they are conducive at the moment...” (Student 1 -2). Similarly, another student complemented this finding by saying “...classrooms were ok, though for some they were too small. Have now moved to new premises” (Student 3 -3) while a few other students (10%) recommended a need for bigger classrooms especially

when there were combined courses. Some students pointed out a need for some classes to provide air-conditioning facilities or fans during hot weather.

Another finding in this thematic area was related to quality of the library. A library is reported to be the heartbeat of a university and therefore critical to functionality and quality of education in higher education. All students interviewed attested to their libraries being functional and adequate as responded by a student who said that "... Library is much better equipped, library and lecturers are also ok though could always be improved otherwise Library and computer lab were also ok." (Student 1-2). At least most (90%) of students interviewed echoed that e-library services were complementing the physical books and therefore had no challenges with books.

4.3.2.3 Overall quality of education

This is another thematic area that was considered in order to find out the students' perspective on overall quality of education in their universities. Students were responding to a question, 'Has the overall quality of higher education improved, gone down, or stayed about the same over the last year? At least 60% of the students were able to describe what was going on in their universities. For instance, Student 3-1 indicated that overall quality was good and that lecturers were hard working as pointed out that "...quality is good and there is great improvement, lecturers are hard working too". Agreeing to these sentiments, student 2-2 supported this observation by saying "... quality is improving by the year and enrollment is increasing and the university tries to abide by NCHE guidelines. However at least 40% of the students were able to comment on quality in their universities as not improving, this was captured from student 1-4 who said "... overall quality is going down, especially this year because of Covid 19 ..." This was supported by student 3-3 who narrated that "... not many improvements have been recorded...this could be as a result of Covid 19 pandemic and limited resources".

4.3.2.4 Areas of quality improvement

The researcher came up with this thematic area to learn from the students which areas needed improvement in order to improve quality of education. Students were asked to describe such areas where they felt needed improvement by management. At least 80% of the respondents were able to describe areas that required improvement. This responsiveness is an indication that students were able to identify gaps or challenges faced by their universities and therefore wanted to see improvement in areas such as quality of lecturers as student 2-4 recommended, "... there is a need to invest in good lecturers and not just recruiting people who have the know-how in the field but are not lecturers". Similarly, another student had similar remarks and pointed out that there was a need to improve on the library resources as indicated by student 3-2 who pointed out that "... library needs to be improved as it has many old books,...also need to have many full time lecturers and permanent staff as opposed to part time lecturers. These statements seem to suggest that there were major weaknesses on quality of lecturers and other learning resources. These areas are critical for quality of teaching and learning in the higher education institutions.

4.3.2.5 Quality of teaching and teaching

Students were responding to the question “What are your recommendations to management on improvement of quality services related to learning and teaching and any other area?”

In this question, the researcher wanted the students to make recommendations to management of their respective universities. One of the areas mentioned for improvement was teaching and learning resources as student 2-4 suggested that capacity building for lecturers and other staff members should be conducted after observing gaps in performance and lack of commitment by staff. This was supported by other students from University A, who strongly recommended on employment of experts in specific fields by saying “... there is a need to employ experts in specific fields. ...need to have specialists for some areas and not just allocating courses to lecturers”.

These two recommendations suggest that students observed serious gaps in the way lecturers were conducting business and this could be a common trend in the typical universities and was of great concern to students. The researcher cautions that these comments from students should be taken seriously as students’ interface with different lecturers and are able to pick up such challenges.

i. Points of view from Lecturers

Quality of education affects not only students but the lecturers as well and using the same thematic areas as applied to students, the lecturers had their own stories to tell. First, the researcher wanted to know if the lecturers were actually involved in quality assurance activities. In responding to a question ‘What is the extent of your involvement in quality issues of this institution?’ The Lecturers indicated positively that indeed, they were involved in different assignments such as development of curricula, moderation of examinations; this is supported by statements like “...contribute through examination administration exercise - to ensure they are of good quality (lecturer 2-2) “... we are very much involved in quality of work; setting of curriculum, student welfare (lecturer 1-1). “...involved in

issues of curriculum development; course outlines ...involved in recruitment of lecturers as well as the delivery of lectures ... (Lecturer 3-3).

4.3.2.6 Quality of education

Similar to responses from students, lecturers made observations and reported on gaps but generally they portrayed a picture that quality of education was good as mentioned by one lecturer who explained that” ... quality is excellent ... Library is not big enough. Can be an issue of resources. Comparing with government institutions, there are many things that need to be done. There should also be guidelines and minimum requirements for establishment of a university (Lecturer 1-1).

A lecturer from University B had a different view who indicated that there were a number of gaps affecting quality of education as supported by statements like ‘Quality education does not reach expectation. There are a number of issues missing for a university, for example, lecturer rooms not enough; very few students; majority of students come from outside; students' activities are not there; staff common rooms; students' rooms that can enhance interaction not there (2-4).

i. Involvement in Quality Assurance Issues

The question asked on this theme was “*what is the extent of your involvement in quality issues of this institution?*” In their responses, a number of respondents had different experiences depending on their institutions. One lecturer responded “...Schools provide a platform in which every student can be involved and can contribute towards quality through making available point persons for quality issues but also allowing for the existence of students’ unions.” (Lecturer 1-1).

4.3.2.7 Quality improvement areas

In this thematic area, lecturers were responding to the question ‘Has the overall quality of higher education provision improved, gone down, or stayed about the same over the last year?’ One lecturer from University C commented that quality was going down but alluded this to Covid 19 pandemic. Such statements are similar to comments made by students’ observations

in some areas quality was not improving. This suggest that the universities were operating at same level in terms of quality.

4.3.2.8 Recommendations to management

This thematic area was calling for lecturers to suggest areas requiring improvements and make recommendations for the attention of management. One critical observation made by lecturers was

that private universities were focusing on business model while sacrificing the service delivery quality as observed by one lecturer from university B who made a recommendation that "... management should improve...should redirect from running the school as a business and focus more on service delivery (Lecturer 2-2). Interestingly, fellow lecturers also picked this up observation from University C who recommended that "... there is a need to invest in good lecturers. Not just recruiting people who have the know-how in the field but are not lecturers (Lecturer 3-3). Similarly, other comments from another lecturer recommended on expansion of infrastructural issues and commented that "...as a growing institution, there is a lot that can be done; for example, continue expanding, both in infrastructure and curriculum. Adding more programs, increasing enrollment (Lecturer 1-4).

i. Points of view from management

Using more or less similar thematic areas, management staff had different responses to these areas related to quality issues as they were mostly seen to be saying all was well and good. Almost all management members from the three institutions indicated that there was good quality of education in their universities; they justified this by the fact that the universities were registered by NCHE. This is a different picture portrayed by students and lecturers as commented by management from the three universities. This is evidenced by statements made on infrastructural issues as commented by one of the management team members from

University B "... infrastructure is there and it is currently being grossly underutilized. Because of protracted systems from NCHE, the university has failed to enroll to capacity. Currently the infrastructure is above board. We can have student teacher ratio of 1:1, which is optimum though it is also at the same time inefficient- and all this is blamed on NCHEs processes. (Management 2-1). Agreeing to the fact that there were not many issues related to quality gaps, similar comments came

from university C by indicating that they had adequate resources “ ...there are enough library resources for each of the programs. ...these were even verified by NCHE. Computer rooms; student support services, infrastructure- classrooms, hall, Common room; sickbay. We have tried to meet all the minimum standards. Students connect free to the internet- there is also a computer room (Management 3-3).” This was also supported by the third institutions as it was established that management commented that they had very good resources as picked in this statement “...the university has excellent resources-library, IT facilities and staff. Internet is also there all day accessible by staff and students as well” (Management 1-2).

ii. Involvement in quality assurance activities

Similarly, one member of management confidently mentioned involvement of some staff in quality issues by saying that: “management is at the Centre of quality issues- took part in the initial design on NCHE quality assurance standards so is at an advantage.” (Management 3-3).

4.3.2.9 Areas for improvement

Another thematic area was assigned to areas of improvement although management did not identify any areas requiring improvement or challenges; there was a recommendation to strengthen internal systems. (Management also mentioned issues financial resources as

requiring improvement “...systems- need to be strengthened so that they are established and flow even when you are not looking (Management 1-1). In the same way, a similar comment came from university C “...financial resources- this is important for the institution to have absolute quality since they are growing, now important to consider recruiting more staff; more programs to meet demand; even building own structure (Management 3-1) .

Similarly, management from University B had more or less the same recommendations to have NCHE’s support as narrated “...in fulfilling the institutions’ vision, improvements are required in increased enrollment. However, all these require enabling instruments, which come from NCHE. ...NCHE should support universities in a timely manner, as this is not the case now (Management 2-1).

From the comments from the students, lecturers and management above, the issues of status of quality were clearly presented from their perspectives to indicate that there was a consensus on the understanding of quality education in their universities. The respondents presented both gaps and strengths in the status of quality education being provided in the various universities.

Research Question 2

What is the nature of the policies, structures and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems that are being used in the selected higher education institutions?

This research question looked at the nature of policies, structures and instruments used in quality assurance systems. Availability of these structures, form a quality assurance unit and the researcher wanted to establish if these were available in the three universities. The researcher decided to include availability of governance structures as these form and guide internal quality assurance systems and serves as a backbone of the universities. These governance structures include Independent Council members and relevant Committees, Management and their committees, students' council / union. The responses from students were very clear that they had little knowledge of these structures as indicated in the following thematic areas.

4.3.2.10 Responses from students

i. Establishment of Governance Structures

What governance committees are available at your institution and how do they function? Responses from students to this thematic area clearly indicated that almost all students knew what these structures were but they were not sure how they function. Student from university A commented that "...not sure of any governance issues. ... Simply comes into class and leave, I don't pay attention to other issues" (student 3-4). This response indicates that some students were not interested to know about other issues apart from studies and therefore may not know the governance structures. Management should orient students as they join the university on this important information.

On the contrary, some students knew the availability of board members and their functions as explained by student 1-2 "...board of directors provides strategic direction of the institution; management committee, implements the strategy; there are also other several committees in relation

to the academic section that ensure things are run as they should. ...the key committees are in place. Similarly, student from university B supported the sediments on the structures as he said that "...yes there are structures, for example, there are deans for each department, also other directors available according to area of concern such as finance department (SNT

2-4). Additionally, a student from university A agreed with the fact that there were structures even in the academic department such as committees as commented "...there is an examination board committee, which looks at standards for examinations (SNT 1-3).

ii. Availability of Committees

A question that guided responses on availability of committees was 'What governance committees are available at your institution and how do they function?' In response to this question, almost all universities under study reported that they were well organized and that they had committees in place where students also participated in some of the committees. A response from one student on this question was that; "...there are committees at the schools but I do not take part in any committee" (Student 3-3). Results indicated that 58% of interviewed participants mentioned that committees were clearly stipulated while 31% interviewees mentioned that committees were very clear and 11% pointed out that some committees were not clear as evidenced by one student who said that; "...there are various committees established to support management such as welfare, finance, library committees." (Student 2-3).

iii. Availability of students' union

Students union is regarded as a main forum where students meet to discuss and interface on governance issues. Students were responding to a question 'Is *there a students' union at your university?*' and student from university A responded positively that there the students' union was established and that there was a president and students as members "... *yes... there is a president who sits between university and students*" (Student1-1). A student from university C

and from university B as they both had similar responses indicating that they had students' bodies established supported this.

Additionally, another student commented on availability of students' union in their institutions as part of governance structures by responding that there was a students' union "...Availability of Students Union" (Student 1-1). Similarly, another student supported this finding from two of the three institutions who indicated that there was functioning student unions while one institution was setting up structures for the same. "...Yes there is a student council there is a president who sits between union and students" (Student 3-2). This was anticipated to start operations by the time schools opened as positions had already been filled and the union was awaiting management approval for the presented union guidelines.

iv. Involvement in committees

The researcher wanted to find out if students were part of the committees of the universities by asking a question 'Which Committees do you take part or do other students attend?' Students from two universities A and B responded that they were not involved in committee "...does not take part in any committee, but there are committees at the schools (SNT-1 1)

Similarly, some indicated that "...does not take part in any. Most of the activities are done within the work and weekend. On contrary, some students were happy to report that they had an opportunity to participate ...student takes part in the student council committee (SNT3-2). While others do not have the time to attend because they were employed elsewhere. "... Students fail to attend as some may also be employed" (SNT 3 -3).

v. Responsible officer for QA

Is there anyone who is in charge of quality assurance in your institution? If yes, explain their roles in managing quality issues

In responding to this question, almost all students indicated that they were aware that there was some officer responsible for quality assurance in their universities as commented by all

universities “...yes. there is a QA manager (SNT 1-1). This was supported by student from university B “...dean of academics is responsible for quality assurance (SNT 2-3). Similarly, a student from university C also supported this by saying “...there is (name forgotten) there is both lecturers and a board that looks into quality issues (SNT 3-3).

4.3.2.11 Responses from lecturers

Though the setup seems to vary for each institution, there were common elements presented for all the three institutions as commented by one of the lecturers who said “...Board at the top- has shareholders and owners- investors; Then the governing council-group of professionals that do not work for the university” (Lecturer 3, University C). These responses were similar in nature, supporting the finding that there were good governance structures available in all the three universities as it is perceived that all interviewed staff and management indicated that they had well set governance structures and commonly, they had boards, senate and committees.

Similarly, a lecturer from another institution supported this observation on availability of students’ union by saying that “...there is an operating union, though this is not yet active. People were in positions now just waiting for their constitution to be approved once council meets” (Lecturer 2-1).

vi. Responsible officers for quality assurance

Is there anyone who is in charge of quality assurance in your institution? If yes, explain their roles in managing quality issues. The lectures indicated that there were staff assigned as quality assurance officers from the academic team as quoted one lecturer from University C "...president and dean work together to see to it that there is quality at the institution e.g. now that students are learning online, these two are constantly checking on lecturers to ensure

quality is maintained. There is also a committee headed by the Assistant administrative officer leads on quality issues. This office looks into quality issues. The office gives a talk during orientation to also inform all students of their role” (SNT 3-3). This response gives a clear picture that there was no designated quality assurance in the university and this was the trend in all the three universities.

4.3.2.12 Responses from management

The focus on the interview was to determine the extent to which private universities had set up governance issues to support quality assurance systems and quality of education. All interviewed respondents were aware of availability of some governance structures in the institutions. On the other hand, all management members were sure of the presence of such committees and in all institutions management alluded to following requirements as prescribed by NCHE with regard to governance setup. This was supported by responses from managementsuch as “...University council; senate- looks at academic issues and provide guidance and reviewing academic quality” (Management 2-2). Similarly, management from another university agreed with management from university B on the availability of governance set upby saying that “...Policy designing, tracking and implementing body of the university; this works through committees- finance, recruitment etc. This is a powerful structure in terms of governance (Management 1-1).

Research question 3

What is the stakeholders’ perspective on quality assurance systems

in Malawi?

4.3.3 Responses from students

Students are considered as key informants in this study as they are seemingly giving critical information on quality issues without any biases. The researcher came up with thematic areas in order to find out if students were involved in quality assurance as a stakeholder.

The respondents in the three universities, students, lecturers and management indicated gaps in stakeholder involvement in quality assurance issues. Private universities need to work with different stakeholders to improve on quality of their education. Such stakeholders include students, industry, employers, government ministries, public universities, professional bodies and private sector.

From the interviews from students, indicated that most of the stakeholders were not involved in ensuring quality education and engaging in quality assurance systems in private universities as commented by some students. One student from university C commented that he was not sure of stakeholder involvement as quoted saying that; "... I am not sure which stakeholders...it is between school management and the stakeholders, not shared with students" (student 3 -4).

i. Understanding role of NCHE

What is your understanding on the role of the National Council for Higher Education as regards to quality issues?

Additionally, a number of students also had similar observations about NCHE as one student responded “... NCHE ensures universities and schools are providing good quality education, through supervisions.” (Student 3-3). “ ...body instituted to ensure that institutions provide the necessary education. ... institutions are maintaining standards of education” (SNT 2-1). A number of students commented that they were aware of NCHE’s roles in ensuring quality education as commented by few students “...regulators for institutions. They are there to enforce quality requirements pertaining to higher learning institutions (SNT 3-2). “...there to ensure that quality of education provided in higher universities is up to a standard (SNT 2-1). “... NCHE champion any reforms being implemented in the higher education sector. ... has a big role to play in ensuring quality for the higher education level (SNT 1-3). “ ...looks at delivery of education/ infrastructure of institution and how organized the institutions are (SNT2-2)

On the contrary and surprisingly, there were still some students who were not sure of NCHE’s roles and who responded that “...I have partially heard about it- it’s the institution that works with private institutions” (Student 1-1). This shows gaps in orientation of students on these issues, as it is important to ensure that students understand the higher education stakeholders including their regulators. However, most students were aware of NCHE’s role as indicated by other students from the universities who explained that “ ... NCHE is supervisor general of higher education...it is a government arm that monitors quality of education in this country (SNT 1-1). “... NCHE is a regulator of education standards in the country (SNT2- 3). Although at some point, they were acting like a police- they were bullying schools. They at least now ensure that there is quality in standards of higher education systems, as well as ensuring these schools have proper governance structures (SNT 3).

4.3.3.1 Responses from lecturers

Lecturers understood role of students as a stakeholder and in ensuring quality of education as commented that “...students are also involved; they have a students’ union in place, they have class representatives who take issues to management deans; they also fill in a routine survey at the end of semester where they are able to share ideas/ queries (LTR 2-2). This was supported by another lecturer who said “...they play a role. Are able to present queries to the dean. They provide checks and balances. (LTR 3-2). This response confirms the importance of students as stakeholders in ensuring adherence to standards of education.

i. Understanding role of NCHE

In agreement with this observation, some lecturers indicated that they were not sure of government’s involvement in support for private universities as one lecturer said: “...the Government does not support private universities...” (Lecturer 1-4). One lecturer commented in responding to interview questions commented that “.... NCHE helps to bring discipline so that people adhere to right standard of universities” (Lecturer 3, University C).

From these responses, it shows that at all lecturers were aware on the NCHE’s role in regulation of higher education and ensuring adherence to standards.

4.3.3.2 Responses from management

i. Responsible Persons for Quality Assurance Matters

A question was raised to find out if there were any persons responsible for QA matters. Management explained that “... All institutions have officers responsible for handling QA matters although they had different titles of the quality assurance desk officers” (Management1, University

A). Similarly, another institution agreed with finding on availability of QA officers who said, "... yes- there is an office for this (QA officer). To ensure that all systems are working... makes sure systems put in place to enhance quality are working" (Management3, University C).

ii. Understanding the Role of NCHE

Understanding the role of the National Council for Higher Education is crucial, because they are the main regulators of higher education institutions. Students, staff and management needed to appreciate their role and contribution towards quality of education in the country. The majority of interviewed ~~staff~~ staff and management indicated that they understood the role of NCHE, a few students (2) indicated that they did not know much about NCHE and others indicated to have only partially heard about NCHE as indicated by coding of thematic areas related to NCHE. Similarly, management was of the view that NCHE was at the center of regulation of higher education in Malawi to enhance quality education explaining that "... NCHE is at the Centre of regulating higher education in Malawi. Making sure all higher education institutions are adhering to minimum standards in order to enhance quality education." (Management 1-2). This was supported by management from university B who indicated that the role of NCHE as a regulator by responding that "...this is a government arm that regulates higher learning institutional measures...NCHE is mandated by government to make sure that government standards are being followed (MGT 2-3).

This was supported by management from university C in explaining the mandate of NCHE who narrated "... NCHE is mandated to regulate higher learning in the country, that is, how are universities set, who is on top, how qualified are the lecturers...so that these adhere to set minimum quality standards of education in the country to make sure we have quality education" (MGT 3-2). Management from university A further supported this "... NCHE has supervisory role in terms of program delivery; involved in quality checks of courses/ programs so that these adhere to minimum standards (MGT 1-2).

From the above findings, it is clear that there were a number of gaps and different in the stakeholder perspectives towards quality assurance all the three universities. All the respondents had similar observations related to stakeholders' perspectives.

Research Question 4:

What is the role of leadership of private universities in adhering to standards of education?

4.3.4 Responses from students

i. Role of leadership

There were some sentiments and recommendations on leadership from students on leadership “...management needs to be professional. Sometimes the decisions that are made lack consultations. ...there is a need for proper management/ governance issues (Student 2-2) Another student supported this that leaders are on top of quality, improvement by saying “...believes leaders molds what the institution should be. He believes the leadership is good,from what he has seen, there was integrity and good discipline” (student 1-4). Some studentsapplauded the leadership for ensuring standards are upheld as pointed out “...specifically the vice chancellor- the standards are better and they she is leading very well. ...believes leadersshould be part of the quality team since they are on top”. (Student 3-3).

A number of students appreciated leadership in their universities as commented by another student from university B "...where leadership is good, then quality is fostered, and if these are compromised then the same will follow. Leadership should be at the forefront of enhancing quality" (Student 2-4).

ii. Areas for improvement

Students came up areas that required improvement as reported by students, "...the speed at which issues are handled could be improved so that frustrations are not accelerated." "...theschool should work on having more full time lecturers as opposed to part time lecturers". "...could consider improving on air conditioners in classes. Important that school shares adequate information of the available services, for example, presence of a full time dispensaryat the school."

iii. Recommendations to management

Management also made recommendations meant to be addressed by the leadership such comments included "...online education should be taken seriously. Online learning should also be prioritized...should be good if they added other things, such as projectors." (Management 1-1). Another comment from University C was directed towards visibility of their institutions, "...there is still room to market the training institution. A lot more needs to be done such as important to explore other marketing strategies, especially for those outside of town." (Management 3-1)

4.3.5 Responses from Lecturers

Describe the role of leadership in relation to quality improvement in your institution

From the responses from Lecturers, there was a clear indication that leadership in the three universities worked closed with lecturers and their lecturers were able to understand how the quality issues were being handled by management as responded by a number of lecturers "...there is a business oriented approach. Sometimes can lead them to lose foresight of the

initial goal of university. Leadership is also very committed in providing quality services (LTR1-2).

On the contrary, leadership in university C was commended for its good leadership as supported by LTR 3-2 “...Leadership is respectable and able to share direction. Leadership has a strategic direction, which has been shared with other staff to run with it. Another lecturer from University B also indicated that there was good leadership in their institution by saying “...There is good leadership. Able to give direction on how to improve etc. for example, standards for examinations, for lecturing. She is able to set the bar... setting the standard in which we all must abide to (LTR 2-3)

i. Areas requiring improvement

Q. Describe the areas where you feel requires improvement or strengthening

Lecturers were also asked to describe areas that required improvement by management and these were clearly pointed out as recommended by a number of lecturers from the three institutions. A lecturer from university A stated “... management should redirect from running the school as a business and focus more on service delivery (LTR 1-3). While lecturers from university C made these recommendations “A number of areas, since it’s a new institution, for example, should have more full time lecturers. Library - need for hard copies as well and latest editions of books are required. Support staff - need strengthening if the institution is to move ahead especially if numbers were to improve (LTR 3-2).

Similarly, university B pointed out areas such as improvement in the library resources and recruitment of full time staff as stated "...Library needs to be improved. It has many old books.School tour guide also needs to be improved, many people get lost or some fail to locate the school. Also, need to have a lot of full time staff/ permanent staff as opposed to part time

lecturers (LTR 2-1). Another lecturer from University A recommended having good lecturers“... there is a need to invest in good lecturers. Not just recruiting people who have the knowledge in the field but are not lecturers (LTR 1-1)

These sediments are a clear indication of poor quality of teaching staff and teaching resources as recommended by the lecturers requiring the attention of management.

4.3.6 Responses from management

i. Role of leadership

As management, they understood their role in quality improvement as noted from their responses saying “...leadership involved in the planning for enhanced quality. Similarly, in the implementation of these activities as well so that they are delivered on time. Making sure there is accountability from staff as well. Leadership also looks into performance management of the institution-peer assessments are also done between staff (MGT 2-2). “...Leadership needs to be exemplary in exhibiting quality standards for the institution. They have had to fire a dean because of not doing well on this... therefore, they take leadership qualities very seriously (MGT 1-2).

Agreeing to this observation, another comment from university C supported the fact that leadership takes quality issues seriously as indicated in this statement, “...leadership listens and makes recommendations on quality related issues. There is a family approach to the way management works; they do things together in ensuring quality standards are maintained at the school”. (MGT 3-2).

In addition, leadership was seen to be responsible for giving direction towards guiding on quality issues and good standards; this was indicated in comments from respondents as indicated by management from university B, who narrated “...Leadership provides direction towards good quality. Leadership needs to set the mark. A leader should also advise the

institution making sure that people are following the set standards. These could be from the curriculum; infrastructure...it is the obligation of leadership to get all these things sorted out including financial management ...Leadership takes this very seriously. On the forefront of ensuring, this is in place (MGT 2- 1)

ii. Availability of resources

Resources are required in order to ensure quality is adhered to or enforced. For example, you need academic staff who are qualified and this requires money so sometimes lack of resources led to compromises on quality. Instead of having full time members, you end up having part time lectures. To run a private institution, you also require a lot of money. NCHE has set up standards that require money- e.g. having lecturers that are highly qualified, which is expensive MGT (1-3).

Another positive comment from management on ensuring quality and accountability in the private universities and commented by management from university A, as quoted saying "...leadership is involved in the planning for enhanced quality. Similarly, in the implementation of these activities as well so that they are delivered on time. Making sure there is accountability from staff as well. Leadership also looks into performance management of the institution-peer assessments are also done between staff." (Management 1-1).

Resources are important if an institution is to achieve quality. At the same time, the management of these resources is also important. for example, where tuition is a source of income, and u rely on it, then payments need to be done on time or this can affect the quality output- e.g. where resources are minimal the institution may not be able to pay lecturers in good time thus quality may be compromised. An institution also requires proper financial

management systems so that gathered resources are used according to plan, thus enhancing quality services provided (MGT 2-2).

iii. Areas requiring improvement

As observed in the challenges related to infrastructure, a number of private universities operate from rented premises and the set-up is not meant for higher education. Some members of the management picked this and they recommended that universities should have a purposefully built center for study. This should become a place to serve the whole community of the university. Well stocked with books etc. that can be accessed by not just students, but even outsiders, young and old (Management 2-1). Another recommendation was related to improvement of students' support for both academic and social life "...there is also need to improve student compass life. Students just learn and go. However, there needs to be more to it...students need to build relationships or partnerships for meaningful interaction. This is what the school needs to create as it is also a big aspect of an educational experience" (MGT 1-1)

On a different note, a recommendation was made on teaching resources as suggested by management from university B "...if there was a good user friendly internet facility.... currently with the e- learning, in light of the pandemic, it is becoming difficult to operate, and students are equally affected (MGT 2-1).

The focus of this question was to find out the role of leadership in ensuring quality education as one of the critical areas and these roles included leading and guidance in ensuring standards of education are met through involvement of students and staff, resource mobilization and commitment and monitoring of QA systems. The findings were established through feedback by responding to the question:

4.3.7 The role of leadership in relation to quality improvement in your institution

There was a general feeling that leadership in the universities were doing well in improving quality of education as supported by respondents from the interviews as indicated in the findings. Responding to this question from one of the lecturers from university B said “.... Leadership is also very committed in providing quality services.” Lecturer 2- 2). This was supported by another lecturer from university A who said “.... there is good leadership and able to give direction on how to improve quality, for example, standards for examinations, for lecturing. She is able to set the bar” Lecturer 1- 1).

One lecturer recommended that management should improve on resource mobilization as quoted saying “...institutions need to look for other sources of income/mobilizing resources and not just students’ enrollment or those that will infringe on quality, for example, capitalizing on research; looking at incubation enterprises- having small business that can bring in more income. Apart from teaching, they can also venture into businesses” (Lecturer 3-3).

In summary, findings from in-depth interviews have revealed a similar picture of the three universities with minor differences among them. The responses from students, lecturers and management were similar with indications of challenges and gaps in delivery of quality education as indicated in both qualitative and quantitative findings. These results were anticipated, to a certain extent as far as the responses were narrated and as these universities were seemingly to be operating at the same level with minor differences. The findings were also similar to those from quantitative findings but gave more insights in terms of explanations and observations related to issues raised their institutions.

4.4 Evaluation of Findings

The previous section presented findings from the perspective of surveys and interviews using the data collected from the three private universities. The results obtained from this data

presented a general expected picture with some conflicting and unexpected results. This section aimed at evaluating these findings in line with the research questions and based on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as established through literature review.

Quality of education covers a wide range of area in higher education institutions and the focus of this study was to explore both internal and external quality assurance systems factors that affect delivery of quality of education. The areas that have been reported in this study were related to internal quality assurance systems including infrastructural issues, teaching and learning resources, quality assurance policies, instruments and structures, role of leadership and stakeholders' perspective in the contribution to quality education in private universities.

The theoretical framework that has been used in this study focused on internal and external quality assurance frameworks. Internal quality assurance (IQA) involves processes that ensure quality of internal environment including governance, leadership, academic support, students learning and support. External quality assurance involves external stakeholders during the development and review of standards such as regulators, industry, government ministries parents/ guardians and other higher education institutions, employers, national agencies, ministries and other professional bodies (NCHE Quality Assurance Framework Report 2019). Private universities involve professional bodies to regulate specific programs such financial, legal and health regulators to assess their institutions and related academic programs and this is in line with NCHE requirements. Having reviewed a number of frameworks, the researcher focused on internal quality assurance systems and developed a conceptual framework that outlines internal quality assurance elements that may influence quality education. Evaluation of findings is organized by research questions as presented in the following sections:

4.4.1 Research Question 1:

How are private higher education institutions progressing in the provision of quality higher education?

A number of quality assurance factors were taken into consideration in order to address this question as quality could be interpreted in so many dimensions. These factors are in line with the elements as illustrated in the IQA conceptual framework and these included infrastructural issues, learning and teaching resources, governance issues, student support, leadership and key stakeholders in the provision and monitoring quality of education.

4.4.1.1 Institutional Status on Infrastructure

i. Infrastructure.

Ninety percent (90%) of management indicated that they had adequate resources in terms of infrastructure. "... Have enough library resources, computer rooms, and students' support services (Management 1-1). On the contrary, it was also indicated that sometimes management strived to meet minimum standards for higher education "...as management they strive to meet all the minimum standards" (Lecturer 2-1). Infrastructure was there and viewed to be grossly underutilized. "...Infrastructure- the school is quite good. Would want to have more infrastructure and this is on the plan" (Lecturer-2-3).

Generally, the comments from all respondents indicated that they had good infrastructure and two of the universities had their own campuses while one was operating in rented premises. "...the standards are better than other schools... they have even built own structures which are of good quality than other schools (Management 3-1).

ii. ***Classrooms.***

Almost all respondents indicated that classrooms were of good quality although there were a number of minor gaps requiring improvement. Almost 90% of students commented positively "...classrooms are enough and conducive at the moment" (Student 1- 1) on classrooms with a few (10%) recommended for improvement.

"...have quality classrooms "(Management 1-1) "...classrooms were ok, though some indicated that they were too small. Library and lecturers are also ok though could be improved on the lecturers" (Lecturer 2 -2). "...library and computer laboratories were also ok" (Student3-1).

As indicated by Harvey and Kenyon (2013), Classrooms should be established in such a way that the physical characteristics including furniture can affect learning and teaching, private universities should take into consideration all these issues and pay attention to quality of chairs types to prevent musculoskeletal disorders such as neck pain, back injuries and other physical challenges. Students should be comfortable during class sessions as they spend more hours and therefore universities should consider all factors including seating styles. This is also supported by Harvey and Kenyon (2013) who reported that students have an expectation of classroom seating arrangement as well as in computer laboratories and that physical characteristics of a classroom, chairs, seating styles, furniture can affect musculoskeletal disorders, poor posture, neck pain and back injury to students. In light of pandemics, Curtin (2021) advises to consider effects of the Covid 19 pandemic in setting up of classrooms to address issues of social distancing, ventilation for both private and public universities.

iii. ***Library Status.***

All the three universities had well-organized libraries with furnished resources in line with minimum standards for higher education. "...University has excellent resources- library, IT facilities; (Lecturer 1-1). Similarly, students also supported the availability of library resources "...these are excellent (referring to library services). They have all the facilities. Books, journals, internet are also there (Student 2 -3)

These findings agree with the standards as defined by NCHE that the library should enhance accessibility to library material by students and lecturers so that library collection facilitates research and learning resources to have their work done. As Kajawo, (2019) investigated challenges faced by private universities and discovered a number of challenges with learning resources, library and inadequate books, computers and lack of free accessible internet requiring improvement. The standards also stipulate that the library buildings should

be easily accessible by all users including persons with special needs and that the building should provide conducive environment to learning and teaching. The standards mention the inclusion of security services to the buildings using cameras and security guards (NCHE National Library Standards, 2018).

Quality assurance factors should take into consideration issues of inclusiveness and social justice as recommended by Marcia, (2019) that quality education should be perceived as both a social need that requires social justice as all students have a right to quality education. This calls for HEIs to ensure that physical requirement such as ramps are available for persons with disabilities to access the library (Marcia, 2019).

4.4.1.2 Learning Resources

All interviewed respondents indicated to have books but some books were old and not adequate. "...Access to books etc. - not many books are there, but the few they have are relevant for the courses being taught. (Management 1, University A). On the contrary, some students interviewed indicated that some resources were not enough. "...There is only one projector; resources are not enough such internet is very expensive (Student 2-2).

These findings are critical as respondents presented the actual picture of quality in terms on infrastructure and learning resources in their institutions. To a certain extent, there has been a lot of quality improvement in terms of infrastructure and learning resources. However, the findings have also revealed some other challenges requiring improvement on learning resources, to have up-to-date books and infrastructure in all three universities.

i. Internet

Almost all respondents from interviews and questionnaires reported availability of internet services in their universities but the quality of the internet services in the three universities had some challenges. "...Students connect to free internet services - they also have a computer room" (Management 1 -1)". Similarly, lecturers agree that internet is indeed good. "... Internet is good as well" (Lecturer 2 -1) additionally management supported

the availability of internet “... Internet is also there all day accessible by staff and students as well”. (Management 3-3).

It appears that internet services were available in all the three institutions but with limited or intermittent Wi-Fi availability and this could be attributed to inadequate financial resources to provide sufficient internet services to learners and lecturers. Harvey and Kenyon (2013) cautioned that students have an expectation to have internet services and computer laboratories for their studies and therefore internet connectivity is a must for all private universities and should be available at all times.

4.4.1.3 Teaching and Learning Resources

As indicated by over 50% students in fourth year through surveys, mentioned that there were adequate resources while 40% indicated that resources were inadequate and mentioned lack of such resources such as computers, library books, and internet and LCD projectors. These findings agree with observation by Zeleza (2018) who pointed out that some challenges faced by African universities included learning and teaching resources and leadership. Lamberti (2020) also encouraged universities to ensure that teachers have access to resources for teaching, technology and understanding and comments that in most private universities lecturers lack teaching resources such as computers, LCD Projectors and Wi-Fi access as reported by students. Quality of teaching is compromised as indicated by these challenges and it affects the quality of graduates.

i. Quality of teaching and learning

The findings indicate that respondents reported good quality of teaching and learning even among challenges with qualifications of some lecturers and inadequate evaluations of lecturers.

Roy (2021) stated that quality teaching involves teachers' skills and learning environment that addresses students' learning needs. It requires adequate support to staff and

students including financial support, social and academic support and support to vulnerable students and counselling services. Quality teaching should aim at improving learning outcomes. Quality of education involves issues of social justice that requires equity and access by all as Wambui (2018) stated the importance of inclusiveness in order to include students and all persons who are disadvantaged in one way or another. From the findings of this study, it appears private universities take did not address issues of inclusiveness and equity as recommended by higher education policies. Such policies include issues of access to inclusive and equitable quality education for all as emphasized by Zimpita (2021)

The study conducted by Din and Nasfer (2011) revealed a number of weaknesses to do with teachers where there was no motivation to those teachers who were perceived to be good teachers by their students, there were no efforts for staff development, no proper teaching facilities and teachers were not even allowed to participate in conferences. A lesson from such studies require some scrutiny and review incentives for teachers and not only look at quality of teaching and learning outcomes. Private universities should make deliberate efforts in motivating lecturers so that they become motivated to offer quality education. The students however did not look at other factors that affect quality teaching such as teachers' skills, learning environment and financial support hence a need to follow up on indicators that define quality teaching by the respondents. The researcher advises that the universities should use appropriate evaluation tools to assess the quality of teaching and all other measurable indicators to define quality of education.

4.4.1.4 Qualification of Lecturers

The findings clearly indicated that there were a number of lecturers who did not have minimum qualifications to teach at higher education level as stipulated by minimum standards as such quality of teaching be compromised. This finding signifies and reveals that there are weaknesses with recruitment of qualified and experienced staff and the findings concur with

Msiska (2015, cited by Galafa, 2018) who established that some private universities in Malawi continue to recruit underqualified lecturers who were subjected to poor salaries and lack of incentives. This affects quality of teaching staff and therefore affects the quality of graduates who may be unemployable. Materu and Righetti (2010) also indicated that some employers complained about the graduates that were poorly prepared due to poor and low quality of education, therefore not ready for employment, and could be because of unqualified lecturers.

4.4.1.5 Overall Standards of Education Improvement

Almost all the three institutions reported some improvement in terms of standards of education as compared to where they had started from such as increase in student enrollments as evidenced by respondents; “...Quality of teaching has improved greatly, improved infrastructure, library services (Student 3-3). “...overall standards of higher education at the institution over the last year (Lecture 2 -1). “...Lecturers and students are well taken care of in terms of infrastructure; good computer laboratory for the students; size classrooms etc. even a clinic” (Management 1 -1)

Leadership was understood their role as being at the forefront of ensuring quality services but other key players included the Deans, Registrars and students as being involved in checking on quality. One of the members from management commented to say “...Director of QA spearheads issues of quality; the QA officer conducts orientation on quality issues and inform students their roles, ensures development of standards” (Management 2 -1), “QA officer respond to issues, concerns related to quality and ensure that standards are adhered to as set by the university and NCHE” (Management 3-3).

These findings related to information, involvement, placement and roles of quality assurance officers are critical and gives a picture that at least all respondents who were interviewed understood the roles of quality assurance officers in their universities.

A number of lecturers reported on improvement in staffing levels and their qualifications while some observed that quality had gone down due to Covid 19 pandemic. For this reason, students had to go for online studies while others reported insignificant improvement due to inadequate resources as quoted one lecturer saying; "... resources are not enough.... internet is there but very expensive, books need to improve as well as learning resources" (Lecturer 1-1).

The findings on overall quality of education in private universities gives a picture that there were some gaps requiring improvement and therefore suggestive that the standards of education in the three private universities seem to point towards poor quality in terms of findings from the respondents. These findings could be attributed to poor background and poor preparation for higher education as reported by Mgomezulu and Wamba (2014) who stated that one of the challenges is the poor quality of graduates attributed by the poor foundation in primary and secondary education as reported. The following section covers areas, which were recommended by respondents for improvement with an indication of specific areas related to both infrastructural, and academic related issues.

4.4.1.6 Areas Requiring Improvement

While all the three universities reported that there was improvement in provision of quality education, the general picture from the respondents was that a number of areas required quality improvement.

A number of lecturers mentioned some areas that could affect quality assurance systems and therefore requiring some attention such as strengthening coordination between administration and academic staff, staff training, stocking of updated books in the library, employment of full time and experienced lecturers. "...invest in infrastructure, increase enrollment and more academic programs" (Lecturer 2, University B). "... Not much

improvement has been recorded. This could be due to limited resources (Lecturer 3, UniversityC).

A number of students pointed out a few areas requiring improvement such as classroom conditions, sharing information of available services, full time medical services to students. All the three institutions mentioned a need to improve internet services, provision of teaching equipment such as projectors, involving students in decision-making and prioritize resources.

The issue of improvement on e- learning came out so prominently from students, who appreciated its importance during pandemics: “...Prioritize resources to students’ activities, internet and online learning too (Student 1-1).

The findings have revealed a number of factors facilitating quality of education such availability of good infrastructure, classrooms and library facilities and learning resources and some which inhibit provision of quality education related to inadequate resources and interrupted availability of internet services. Some of these findings were anticipated by the researcher and confirmed by the responses. The findings are significant as they give a quality status of the selected private universities and therefore helps the researcher to draw logical conclusions.

4.5. Research Question 2:

What are the nature of the policies, structures and instruments that relate to quality assurance systems that are being used in the selected higher education institutions?

i. Institutional Governance

All the three universities under study reported that they were well organized and have Committees in place where students also participate in some of the Committees, they had students’ union set up and that most of the students do participate in some committees of the Universities. Almost 50% of the interviewed students indicated to participate in committees whereas the other 50% from each university indicated not to be involved in any committees.

Two of the three institutions had functioning student unions with one university only setting structures for the same. All institutions had officers responsible for handling QA matters. The governance structures were in place in accordance with NCHE requirements and these included Chancellors, Board, senate, Committees, Students' bodies as well as faculty teams. However, not all the others were aware of the presence of some governance structures in the institutions. Senate, University Council- provides policy direction of the institution; senate- highest academic institution that looks at academics- approves release of results/ graduations, monitor academic processes. "Student union head is part of the senate (Lecturer 2-2)

On the other hand, all management members were sure of the presence of such committees and all institutions management alluded to following requirements as prescribed by NCHE with regard to committee setup. Though the setup seems to vary for each institution, there are common elements present for all the institutions such as Board, Senate, Committees and Students union.

In both universities where the students' union were actively present, worked with management of issues regarding quality of the institution. "...the students' union is invited on issues of governance where they are provided platform..." (Student 3-3).

"...there is an officer in charge of students' affairs and administrator who is the first point of contact. However, in the system, the registrar is the administrative head, so students are also able to link through the dean, depending on the subject matter. Important to note that it is not just grievances that students bring forward. Sometimes they also bring about ideas. (Student 2-4)

"...they have a speaker and he is the point of contact with management to bring forth issues from students. The students' union engages management on behalf of students when they have issues (Management 2-2).

From the findings, it appears that all the three universities under study had good governance structures in line with NCHE requirements; however, Martin (2018) support the improvement in the IQA policies and structures in the HEIs that included good governance structures, leadership and stakeholders support through involvement of faculty, staff and students. Additionally, Sharra (2015) advised that universities should focus on governance models that are participatory in decision-making and some institutions include students; this enhances quality education and therefore produces competent and well-qualified graduates. Although there were established students' union groups, these were less involved in governance and quality assurance structures as indicated by a number of students. All the study sites, reported that they had well established students' union and yet it was not functional; inclusion of students in governance structures portray good governance of the HEIs as students are the sole recipients of quality education.

4.6 Quality Assurance Policies

Majority of students were not aware of quality assurance policies while 20 % of surveys mentioned students' regulations and rules. Thirty percent (30%) of lecturers were aware of the policies but the rest were not sure what policies were in place "... not sure which policies are related to quality assurance" (Lecturer 1-1). Only management mentioned five policies related to quality assurance while the rest are general academic and administrative policies.

The quality assurance policy is critical to quality education and forms one of the requirements for a Quality Assurance Unit and its main purpose is to guide the quality assurance activities in the universities and ensure the implementation of quality services in all departments (Kilimanjaro Christian Academy, 2019). It is therefore a must have documents for all private university as they embark to establish quality assurance units as directed by the National Quality Assurance Framework developed by NCHE, 2020).

4.7 Instruments

From both the surveys and interviews, almost all students and lecturers indicated that they had no idea on what these quality assurance instruments were. Only 10 percent of management mentioned QA instruments in terms of QA guidelines, policies, /assessment tools. Some students commented that they were not sure of the QA instruments, saying; "... not sure what these instruments are" (Student 2-2).

This may promote periodic reviews in both standards for academic programs and delivery processes to ensure relevant program are offered to meet the national demands and produce quality, skilled and knowledgeable graduates. Management will also benefit from the QA tools and meet target- based on their service level agreement. Wambui (2018) came up with a comprehensive number of quality assurance instruments that should be used by universities in evaluation quality for both institutional and academics. The researcher recommends that private universities as well as public universities should use these QA instruments to enhance and evaluate the quality of both institution and programs as well as quality of graduates from their institutions. The major instruments include peer reviews, academic staff assessment, teaching supervision system, unit self-evaluation, programme evaluation tool, tracer studies among others.

4.8 QA Structures

The students and staff (lecturers) had no information on structures that were in place for quality assurance structures apart from having the QA officers and QA Committees "... I am not sure about such structures" (Student 3-1) these findings from both surveys and interviews give same picture that respondents had no knowledge of QA structures in their universities.

i. Quality Assurance Officers

This area was addressing a question on whether their universities had an officer responsible for quality assurance (*Is there anyone who is in charge of quality assurance in your institution? If yes, explain their roles in managing quality issues.* The responses from the interviews indicated that all the three private institutions reported that they had an officer designated for handling quality assurance matters as supported by students and lecturers who said: "...on designated officers, yes there is quality assurance manager (Student 3-3), "...there is a responsible person in place (lecturer 2-4). However, it was established that the universities differed in the way they assign the quality assurance responsibilities to a particular officer. In one university, they assigned a senior member while others assign academic staff or administrative staff as reported by one student saying; "...assigning members of staff, academic staff as quality assurance officers" (Student 2-4).

These findings suggest that there were responsible officers for quality assurance in all the three universities, although these officers were assigned to other quality assurance duties, and not necessarily designated as full time quality assurance directors contrary to recommendations by NCHE.

ii. Role of Quality Assurance Officers

The role of quality assurance officers was well understood by almost all respondents although a few students had different observations on the same. At least five respondents from the interviews reported that they were aware of existence of QA officers' roles as evidenced by one student who said; "...Quality Assurance monitors internal quality assurance as per NCHE's requirements" (Student 1-3).

It was very clear from the findings that the quality assurance officers were not designated as full time desk officers but used other academic team members to take responsibility of QA activities instead of assigning full time quality assurance directors. The

Osun State University (2020) indicated that QA units coordinate all processes and QA function based on university's vision and mission statements and advises that QA Director should report to the Vice Chancellor's office. As stipulated by Anane and Addaney (2020) that quality assurance directors are responsible for quality assurance units in the universities and should lead in quality assurance activities and take responsibility for both internal and external quality issues.

4.9 Quality Assurance Units

Only 10% of respondents mentioned the composition of QA units as QA officer, QA policies, QA Committee, QA guidelines, QA department and the rest 90% were not sure about composition of QA units. This area requires future investigation in private universities and public universities as it appears there are no structures specifically assigned on quality assurance systems in all the three universities.

In accordance with the theoretical framework on quality assurance framework and the research question, these findings have exposed a number of deficiencies in quality assurance systems in the private institutions such as lack of QA units and related structures. It is also clear that the quality assurance officer was not designated on quality assurance as they had other assignments in academic or administrative capacities.

With reference to the above findings, it is very clear that the private universities had not established QA units and this could be attributed by lack of National QA Framework to guide the HEIs. A QA framework for Higher education that was developed in 2019 by the National Council for Higher Education. The framework stipulates that all HEIs should have the QA units with appropriate staff and resources including its own budget and director (Anane and Addaney, 2020). The researcher has studied

different QA units from Osun State University, Nigeria and Malawi and observed that the QA units have common structures and functions as summarized in table 2.4 by Anane and Addaney (2016).

As the aim of the study was to establish the impact of quality assurance systems on quality education, this finding confirms that there were gaps on QA structures and systems in all three universities. However, the researcher may not conclude the effect of these gaps on quality education at this point but these findings will assist to make recommendations to policymakers, regulators and other HEIs to have well established QA units with relevant structures and resources.

4.9.1 Research Question 3:

What is the stakeholders' perspective on quality assurance systems?

Almost all respondents were aware of the stakeholders involved in both internal and external quality assurance and their contributions towards quality education in their universities. There was a mention by management that stakeholders' contribution to quality education was through assessment, accreditation, collaboration in research and teaching, training of faculty. Not all students were sure which stakeholders were involved by their universities apart from NCHE.

A few lecturers indicated that students and support staff were involved as stakeholders and were not sure which external stakeholders were involved apart from the industry. Few management staff were able to mention professional bodies, government ministries, traditional authorities and industry as being involved in quality assurance activities "... there are government ministries, professional bodies, employers and students' bodies as major stakeholders (Management 2-2)

Although some respondents, mainly staff and management, indicated that they were aware and were involved in quality assurance activities, findings have revealed gaps in stakeholders' involvement related to quality assurance systems worth making recommendations. These stakeholders include government ministries, industry and public universities. The study findings revealed little involvement of these stakeholders as private

university did not give a priority to engage them in quality enhancement or quality assurance issues. The students' union involvement was structural in terms of governance and not necessarily related to quality assurance issues. Although Fajana (2002, p 67) reported that there could be a challenge in involving students in decision making as students may be seen as immature and lacking expertise and technical knowledge in the decision making processes related to the universities. This agrees with a report by Oni and Adetoro (2015) who examined student's involvement in university leadership and decision-making processes in Nigerian universities noted that their culture would not allow students' involvement in decision making due to organizational structures and nature of educational systems as not all administrators allowed students to participate in decision making in their universities.

A number of researchers disagree with Oni, Adetoro, and Fajana's point of view and recommend students are one of the major stakeholders in quality improvement as other researcher strongly recommend involvement of students in decision-making through their governance structures (Beerkens and Udam, 2017). Students are also critical in community involvement and program evaluation. Bonginkosi (2019) and Ryan (2015) supports that the students are important in conducting evaluation surveys on quality education and lecturers' performances. Additionally, the NCHE Tracer study report (2018) supports the importance of students as key in tracer studies as they are key informant of their experiences in the employment and industry field for feedback to HEIs. Government of Malawi through Ministry of Education recognizes the presence of Private institutions and their efforts that complement government's exertions to increase access to higher education and to strengthen the higher education system (Zimpita, 2021).

Another key stakeholder reported as crucial is the employer who, as recipient of quality graduates as well as key to provide feedback to the HEIs on quality related issues and relevance of their programs (NCHE Report, 2017). Martin and Emaran (2017) emphasized that

stakeholder involvement plays a big role and contributes to critical internal factors for effective IQA as well as EQA as factors affecting implementation in higher educational institutions.

4.10 Understanding the Role of NCHE in Quality Improvement

At least ninety percent (90%) of respondents understood the role of NCHE related to quality and supervisory role in terms of program delivery as indicated by respondents; “NCHE is involved in quality checks of courses and programs (Management 1, University A). Ten (10%) of management had indicated some negative influence on the assessment processes with a general understanding that NCHE does not support the private universities as opposed to public universities especially their support on the business side through their regulatory processes. This agrees with findings from in-depth interviews on negative support to private Universities by NCHE team during assessments and related feedback mechanisms as quoted by management from University C. “...Because of protracted systems from NCHE, the school has failed to enroll to full capacity” (Management 2 B) ... “Currently the school’s infrastructure is above board. Can have student teacher ratio of 1:1 which is optimum though is also at the same time inefficient- and all this is blamed on NCHE’s slow processes” (Management 3-3).

These findings are from both surveys and interviews and indicate that at least 90% of respondents are aware of NCHE and its regulatory functions but that there was negative publicity in terms of NCHE’s approach to private universities. This is a new finding about the challenges with relationships between NCHE and private universities related to assessment processes requiring attention as this is the main regulator for higher education institutions in Malawi.

4.10.1 Research Question 4:

What is the role of leadership of private universities in adhering to standards of education?

i. Leading in Quality Improvement

Only findings from interviews were evaluated on these thematic areas as it was challenging to quantify findings from surveys on this research question. However, from the interviews, almost all institutions expressed satisfactory with the role of leadership in leading quality assurance activities “...leadership is good and on top of quality issues” (Lecturer3-4). The general picture and consensus was that leaders in their universities take leading role in setting up and benchmarking of quality assurance activities and programs “... management tries their best to ensure quality education (Lecturer 1, University A).

ii. Supervision Guidance in Quality Improvement

Findings confirmed that leadership in all three universities are responsible for quality improvement and that they make recommendations on quality related issues and makes sure people are following the set standards as confirmed by one of the lecturers “... there is good leadership, able to give direction on how to improve standards” (Lecturer 2-2).

iii. Commitment and Monitoring

In almost all the three institutions under study, leadership was very committed in providing quality services and share direction but need to improve on quality of teaching staff and evidenced by

interviewees as commented by management: "... we need to invest in good lecturers (Management 1-1).

iv. Resource Mobilization

Generally, all respondents interviewed made comments on importance of mobilizing financial resources if institutions have to achieve quality education. Universities require proper

financial management systems and ensure resources are well managed as commented by students too. "...resources are required for improving quality and these can be sourced through research, small businesses apart from student's enrollments. Management to add financial resources" (Student 3-3).

v. *Involvement of Students in QA*

Leadership involves students in some areas such as evaluation of quality teaching but some students reported a need to be involved in improving quality and quality assessments and information sharing on all these areas. Some students indicated that they were not involved in quality assurance activities as recommended by students from university C "... management to share more information on quality issues (Student 3-3). Another university reported that every student is involved and therefore able to contribute towards quality improvement "... leadership provides direction on quality issues ... (Student 1-2)

The findings in this section have come up with positive outcomes of leadership roles related to quality education and confirms that a lot of effort was being made by management of the three universities to meet minimum requirements for standards. This was evidenced by the fact that all the three universities were registered by NCHE and one of which was accredited. However, there was a clear picture from these findings that private universities have challenges affecting availability of critical resources in the institutions, hence a need for improvement in resource mobilization.

Sharra (2017) had questioned the application of vision and mission statements of the Malawian universities to issues of quality improvement as it was seen that there were a number of challenges as mentioned by respondents from surveys as well as interviews. Sharra (2017) then recommended to Malawian universities both public and private to promote leadership with transformational qualities and role modelling. These recommendations augur well with leadership theories that are related to the management of private universities to appraise

transformational leadership styles in order to improve delivery of quality education. As recommended by the researcher, the newly developed conceptual framework included leadership is one of the core elements of internal quality assurance systems and should be embraced to achieve quality of education.

These leadership theories that are relevant to improvement of leadership in the higher education that can contribute to delivery of quality education and ensure establishment of proper and well-defined systems. Transformational leadership theory is one of the recommended theories that can bring about improvement in both quality enhancement as well as resource mobilization as described by a number of authors which is associated with motivation to satisfy followers' needs and handling them as human beings (Northouse (2016) & Dzimbiri (2015) quoting Bush (1977).

In another scenario, Simona (2015) put much emphasis on importance and relationship of resource mobilization and quality assurance systems in higher education as one way of improving quality education. The researcher recommends that a research study could be conducted to establish the resource mobilization strategies in private universities and ascertain financial base for sustainability and quality enhancement mechanisms.

vi. Recommendations made to Management

Mostly, recommendations were made from all respondents surprisingly even some members of the management team also made some contributions. Students recommended to management to improve internet services who indicated that "... if there was a good user friendly internet... (Lecturer 2-2), similarly, another lecturer commented on limited space saying; "...because of limited space, the school fail to have outside activities and exchange programs (lecturer 1 -2), A student from university

B also recommended on prioritizing on resources "... prioritize resources to students' activities, internet" (Student 2-2). "... to have

more full time than part time lectures, provide resources to paying lecturers not to disrupt classes, add more classrooms and improve information sharing with students...” (Student 3-1).

4.11 Chapter Summary

The chapter presented research findings of both surveys and interviews data collected from the three private universities. The respondents were students, lecturers and management through questionnaires and structured interview guides administered by well-trained and experienced enumerators and the researcher. The findings presented summary of demographic data of the study participants in terms of gender, age, qualification and educational background. The main aim of the study was to explore the factors related to quality assurance systems on quality education in private universities. The findings were presented in accordance with the four research questions. Prior to the presentation of findings, it was imperative to deal with issues of trustworthiness of data for both qualitative and quantitative data with focus on credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Additionally, the chapter discussed issues of validity and reliability of both qualitative and quantitative the research instruments that were used to collect data.

The general picture of the findings was that there was a common picture of deficiencies of quality assurance systems and the quality of education in the three universities evidenced by the responses from the study participants. All the three universities were duly registered and the National Council accredited one for Higher Education (NCHE) and indicating that the three universities followed minimum standards of higher education in Malawi and were therefore allowed to operate as institutions of higher learning.

The quality assurance theoretical framework focused on internal and external QA systems to find out how private universities refer to this framework to ensure quality of

education. The study established a number of gaps in both internal and external systems and these have been highlighted in the specific findings.

The major findings were presented under specific thematic areas using content analysis for qualitative data while quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS in particular, used Descriptive Quantitative Analysis and not statistical analysis due to the nature of the data collected. The quantitative findings were mostly presented graphically in accordance with respondents' feedback. These findings were mostly similar in all the three universities. This analysis has enhanced presentation of the study findings and understanding of the situation in terms of factors affecting quality education in the universities and at the same time ascertained gaps in quality assurance systems. These findings are summarized in accordance with research questions as follows:

4.11.1 Research Question 1

i. Quality education status of Infrastructure and learning resources

There was general presentation of good quality of the buildings, classrooms, and library and computer laboratories in all the three institutions. A number of respondents presented a positive picture on availability of learning resources while a few indicated a need to improve on books and to have updated books. While internet was available in all the three universities, there was a general observation that there was a need for improvement as far as students were concerned.

Most students mentioned a gap in quality of staff (lecturers) in terms of numbers, qualification and experience and strongly recommended to improve on having more full time than part time lecturers.

These findings are similar for both quantitative and qualitative data related responses from both the questionnaire and interviews and the same picture portrayed in the three

universities as reported by students, staff and management.

4.11.2 Research Question 2:

Quality Assurance policies, instruments and governance structures

There was good governance set up in all the universities although institutional set ups were different from one institution to another but they all followed requirements by NCHE. Two of the universities had students' union set up and students participated in some committees although this could be improved by involving students in quality assurance activities.

Quality assurance required that information related to quality should be shared among all key players so that universities work towards achievement of quality culture but there was a consensus that mostly students and some lecturers were not given adequate information related to quality of education. This also meant that the involvement in quality assurance activities was not well coordinated and therefore compromised quality in some aspects.

All the three universities had no designated quality assurance officers being responsible for quality issues although some academic staff were also used as QA desk officers. None of the universities had a stand-alone full time position of QA Directors, a situation common in all the private universities worth exploring further as this has an effect on management of QA units and quality checks. Additionally, the findings revealed that there were no QA units established in the three universities and gaps on QA, instruments, structures, policies and systems in terms of set ups as most of the respondents were not sure what comprised the QA units in a higher education institution. This area requires a great deal of attention and further studies to include public universities as well to explore how QA units are set up.

These findings were more prominent in qualitative findings than quantitative because respondents were free to express their observations and status of set ups related to quality assurance

structures in their universities. There was not data collected from the questionnaires related to this research question hence qualitative data supplemented this finding.

4.11.3 Research Question 3:

Stakeholders' perspective

It was established that there was a need to establish stakeholder's participation in quality assurance it was observed that mostly all the three universities did not involve major stakeholders that would have contributed to quality of education. These stakeholders include government ministries, industries on attachments, prospective employers, guardians and parents and mostly public universities for benchmarking of programs.

The role of NCHE as main stakeholder in the higher education and as a regulator in ensuring quality of education was explored and all the three universities indicated that they were aware of the role of NCHE in checking and monitoring standards in higher education institution but presented a negative picture related to assessment processes by NCHE reviewers. This is another area worth exploring further as this was not one of the focus areas for this study but it came out strongly during interviews with management and staff of all the three universities. These findings were mainly derived from qualitative data, as the researcher could not quantify the data collected using questionnaire on this question. This supports the importance of using mixed methods so that there is enriched data from both methods and supplement each other.

4.11.4 Research Question 4:

Role of Leadership in Quality Improvement

All the three universities indicated that there was good leadership in ensuring that quality assurance systems were in place including assigning QA desk officers, developing QA policies, guiding and monitoring of standards among other responsibilities. However, most of the respondents highlighted the importance of improvement in resource mobilization in order to improve quality of education by employing qualified staff and providing adequate learning materials.

The major findings indicated that the quality of education had not improved to the expectation of NCHE in all three universities and that the universities strive to meet minimum

standards of higher education amidst other challenges. There were however areas requiring improvement on strengthening quality assurance systems and mobilize resources to improve quality education.

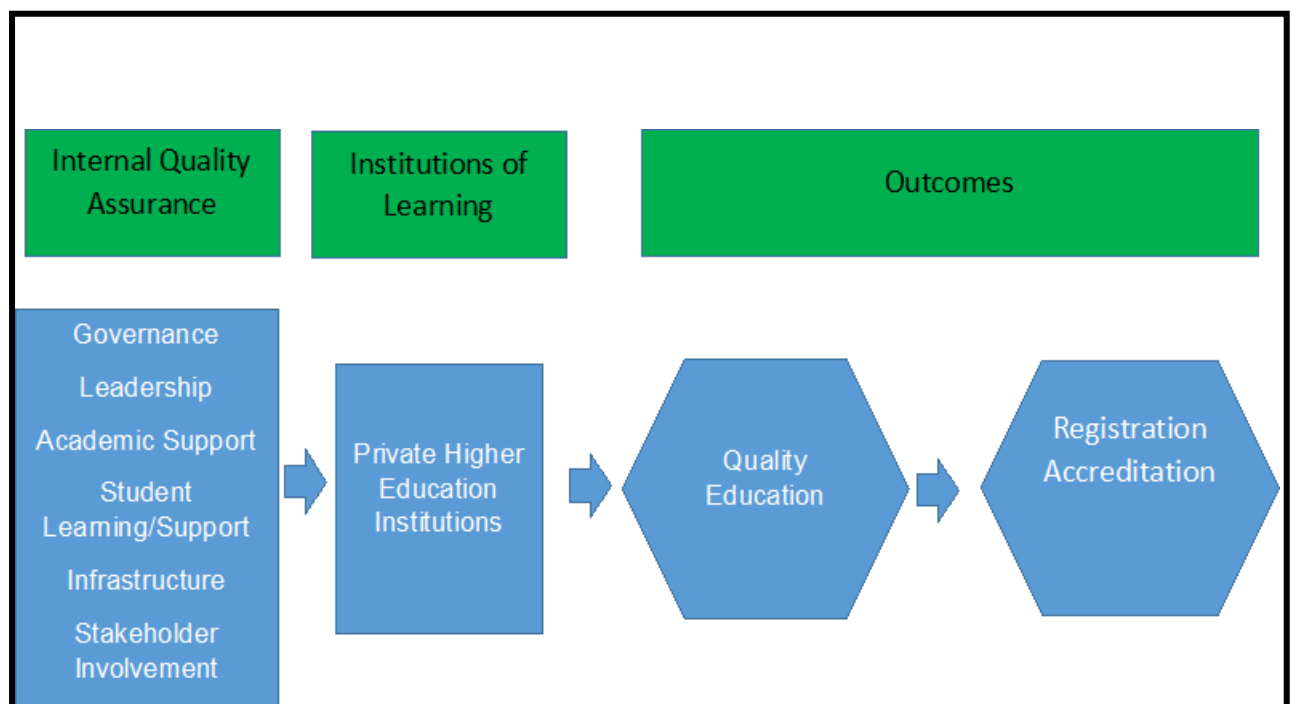
Quality Assurance Units take the responsibility to define objectives, structures, personnel, functions, Committees, policies, and financial requirements related to quality assurance in higher education (Anane Addaney, 2016). A number of recommendations were made to management on areas of improvement with focus on stakeholder involvement, establishing QA units to include designated QA Directors, Budget, instruments, structures policies and guidelines. The role of leadership was clear in management of institutions but was more business oriented than quality checks. A need to improve and understand the role of NCHE in establishment of QA units in private universities and improve professional relationship with private universities for a common good of improving quality of education.

4.7 Conceptual framework

Having presented findings according to the four research questions, this section presents further findings in the form of a conceptual framework. This framework is one of the major outcomes of this study and stands out as one of the key findings of this study. The researcher reviewed a number of quality assurance frameworks at the local, national and international level. The reviewed frameworks were adopted from Ann Gravels (2016), NCHE (2016), SADC (2018) and Martin (2018) as presented in chapter two. These four frameworks illustrate the contention that internal and external factors are key to assessing quality of education. Conceptual frameworks assist in aligning tools and study methods of a study with core concepts in the research questions and that they provide answers to the study

questions (Bloomberg and Volpe,2019). The researcher applied elements of internal quality assurance, which included governance, infrastructure, leadership, stakeholder involvement, academic support and student learning and support. There is sufficient evidence in the literature that suggests that internal quality assurance framework is adequate to offer quality of education in higher education institutions according to Wattananikom (2014), Martin and Emaran (2017), (Martin, 2018) and Jingura and Kimusoko (2019). The expected outcome is that once these higher education institutions adopt and implement the elements of quality assurance approach, quality of education is expected to improve. The researcher therefore adopted and developed a new conceptual framework as indicated in figure 4.24 below.

Figure 4.24: Internal quality assurance conceptual framework



Source: Author (Martha Mondiya)

In this conceptual framework, the researcher came up with elements related to internal quality assurance as indicated in figure 4.24 above and applied it to the research questions in this study. The application of the conceptual framework is explained with reference to the IQA thematic areas. The researcher unpacks the framework thematic areas with a number of elements related to IQA systems referred in this study as indicated in Table 4.3 below:

Table 4. 3: Application of IQA conceptual framework elements

Internal Quality Assurance areas	Elements of Internal Quality Assurance in Private Higher Education Institutions
Governance	Formulating quality assurance policies – Setting quality objectives – Implementation of quality management system Setting standards- Developing and documenting quality assurance processes, procedures and guidelines.
Infrastructural issues	Provision of suitable and purpose built infrastructure that includes classrooms, library, ICT Laboratories, cafeteria, lecture theatre, ablution blocks and disability friendly facilities
Academic support	Academic support to students involves teaching resources, qualified academic staff, Learning standards, Mentoring and Tutoring, Personal Academic development and timely feedback
Stakeholder involvement	Identification of relevant stakeholders to support quality education Stakeholder analysis to have clear supporting elements Involvement in programme development and reviews Benchmarking of programs
Leadership	Leadership is key in development and implementation of Quality Assurance systems including quality assurance units, Monitoring of standards, Registration and Accreditation attainment and Resource mobilization and sustainability strategies

Since the developed conceptual framework has not been implemented, it would be imperative and interesting to verify its usefulness by testing it in the private university setting. This conceptual framework can add value to quality improvement in the higher education sector as whole

and not necessarily in private universities alone. The researcher recommends to disseminate and test this conceptual framework in order to evaluate its impact on quality improvement.

The internal quality assurance elements included in the conceptual framework are stakeholder involvement leadership, governance, and teaching and learning support. All these factors relate to internal quality assurance systems and the researchers developed this conceptual framework that will guide private universities to use as reference tool as they implement and improve on IQA and therefore quality education. This conceptual framework was used to formulate research questions for this study. Literature has shown that establishment of QA units can work well as IQA systems to improvement of quality enhancement and assist in addressing those factors alluded to in the research questions.

4.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings of both qualitative and quantitative data related to factors related to internal quality assurance systems that affect delivery of quality of education in the selected private universities. The findings were presented in line with research questions with support from respondents' feedback on data collected from in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires. The triangulation of data enriched study findings as both qualitative and quantitative seem to be presenting almost similar findings of the research questions. The chapter also presented the trustworthiness of data, validity and reliability of

study instruments and data analyses findings for both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The researcher evaluated the findings and presented issues that were significant and worthwhile for recommendations on improvement based on the gaps or challenges as reported by respondents. There were similarities in almost all findings in all the three institutions as presented by interviews and surveys data indicating that the private universities were operating at the same level as regards to quality of education and quality assurance systems. In summary, the key findings portray that there was generally improved quality of education in the registered and accredited private HEIs but there were gaps related to infrastructure, learning resources and quality of teaching requiring improvement and financial resources for sustainability of the private universities. Secondly, findings for qualitative and quantitative data indicated that quality assurance units are not well established in these private universities hence requiring great attention in order to improve quality education. Thirdly, the study established that stakeholders were not fully involved in quality enhancement activities and it is therefore recommended that private universities should conduct a thorough stakeholder analysis and involvement. Finally, it is well proved that there was good leadership in the three institutions as far as quality education improvement is concerned as evidenced by the registration of the two universities and accreditation of one university. However, there is a need for improvement in leadership skills related to resource mobilization for financial muscle and sustainability of the universities. The next chapter presents the implications of these findings and recommendations for applications and future studies before concluding the research study.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations & Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This research study was conducted based on an assumption that establishment of good and efficient quality assurance systems can improve provision of quality of education in private universities and that there are quality assurance factors that inhibit or enhance such quality of education. The Researcher therefore aimed at investigating the factors related to quality assurance systems that have an impact on quality education in private universities. This chapter specifically discusses implications, recommendations and conclusions of the research findings. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in order to have enriched data and compliment findings towards the study topic; this was achieved through in-depth interviews and administration of questionnaires to students, staff and management of three private universities in Lilongwe, Malawi. A number of recommendations were made and logical conclusions were drawn based on findings to support the discussions.

The research problem was established from major challenges related to quality of education in private universities in Malawi as reported by the researcher while working for the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and assessing both public and private higher education institutions. Additionally, it was perceived from the accreditation reports that there were deficiencies in establishment of quality assurance systems in the universities (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2017). These challenges were mainly to do with lack of commitment by the proprietors to invest in resources in terms of governance, academic and administrative staff, and infrastructure, learning resources such as internet services, electronic resources, library books and library staff, Information, Communication and Technology (ICT).

The study had some limitations as the researcher had encountered situations that transpired contrary to anticipated expectations in the study design, for example, the questionnaire was administered to less than 70 participants in three institutions due to Covid 19 pandemic, which made it challenging to arrange for face-to-face interviews but the researcher managed to interview the participants. Additionally, a number of respondents could not disclose other internal challenges especially those pertaining to management and financial resources due to the nature of the study topic on quality of education. The researcher also realized during data collection sessions that the findings could have been different if a number of other stakeholders were interviewed and such stakeholders include NCHE, professional bodies, ministry of education and few industries to compare with what the respondents reported. Thus, the researcher focused on internal quality assurance systems and not external quality assurance systems, hence recommend to interview external stakeholders for any further future studies. As the study was conducted in three private universities which were all based in one district, the findings may not be generalized to all private and public universities and therefore recommend a similar study in future to be conducted to a larger number of private and public HEIs, covering all the regions of the country.

Another limitation was to do with issues of anonymity associated with the respondents from the three universities where it was necessary not to identify and associate individual participants as well as the universities. As a result of this anonymity, the sources of specific responses especially from students, staff and management of different universities were kept anonymous throughout the study and therefore made it difficult for the readers to relate findings of individual universities and their respondents. The researcher focused on outcomes of the study more than the findings from individual universities or respondents.

The researcher followed dimensions of research ethics, which included informedconsenting processes such as confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity and data management and was compliant with regulations of University Research Ethics Committee at each stage. The University Research Ethics Committee approved the study prior to data collection.

5.2 Implications of Study Findings

The presentation of these implications were drawn from both in-depth interviews and surveys research findings under each subsection as guided by the research questions thematic areas. The four research questions were used related to factors quality assurance andquality education in three private universities.

5.3 Status of Quality Higher Education

i. Information Sharing and Involvement on QA Issues

From the above study findings in chapter 4, it appears that almost all respondents had some knowledge of what quality issues existed in their institutions while a few other respondents expressed knowledge gaps in these quality assurance systems such as availabilityof quality assurance units, instruments and structures. This confirms the finding by Materu (2007) and Msiska (2015) who established that quality assurance was a relatively new area ofinterest in private universities in Malawi.

The outcomes of this finding appear to suggest that some students and staff lacked some information on quality assurance while some were not involved in the quality assurance activities and therefore did not participate in some quality assurance activities. These findingsconfirm the gaps in information sharing and involvement in quality related issues and agrees with Ryan (2015) who

mentioned the significance of establishing a quality culture in universities that gives an opportunity for faculty and management to a shared vision for quality enhancement.

In defining quality of education, the researcher referred to issues of social justice that requires equity and access by all and advocated for inclusiveness to take care of persons including students who are disadvantaged in one way or another (Wambui, 2018). It seems issues of inclusiveness and equity were not properly addressed in private universities. This is consistent with the Malawi Government observation on limited inclusiveness of persons with disability (Malawi Constitution, 2017). One of the QA instruments not commonly used in private universities is tracer study as recommended by NCHE. It appears that, globally, there are challenges with employability for those students or graduates graduating from the typical private owned universities (Martin, 2018), as employers solicit graduates who are well qualified from recognized faith based private and public HEIs especially those that are accredited by NCHE. Martin and Emaran (2017) supports this finding as they recommended that universities should focus on employability of graduates as they improve IQA systems through data collection on quality evaluation from graduates and employers.

ii. Quality of Teaching Staff

In accordance with the findings, it gives an impression that some lecturers were not qualified and were therefore challenged to teach as reported by a number of students. This was evident by lecturers who had bachelor's degree as their highest qualification contrary to the required minimum qualification of a masters' degree as stipulated by NCHE standards for higher education (NCHE Minimum standards 2016). Wambui 2018 supports this observation and recommends improvement on quality of teaching through use of quality assurance instruments such as students' evaluation tools,

students' surveys in order to address challenges reported by students. Additionally, Roy (2021) agrees with Wambui (2018) and advises that students learning and teaching should be enhanced through students' satisfaction surveys and that Quality teaching should aim at improving learning outcomes.

This finding signifies and reveals that there were major weaknesses with recruitment of qualified and experienced staff and this agrees with Msiska (2015 as cited by Galafa, 2018) who ~~also~~ ^{added} that some private universities in Malawi recruited underqualified lecturers who were subjected to poor salaries and lack of motivation. The quality of teaching staff affects the quality of graduates who may be unemployable as evidenced by Materu and Righetti (2010) who indicated that some employers complained about the graduates that were poorly prepared due to poor and low quality of education and therefore not ready for employment. Similarly, in Ugandan higher education sector, Kibukamosoke (2018) established and concluded that there were weak monitoring and evaluation systems to enforce quality that led to recruitment of unqualified staff. The revelation of unqualified staff gives opportunity for universities to revisit their staff returns and ensure that all teaching staff are experienced and have the expected minimum qualifications of a Master's degree.

iii. Regulatory Processes

Another area requiring attention and is key to quality education is the regulatory system that assures quality of education through national agencies responsible for registration and accreditation of academic programs and institutional set ups in higher education institutions. Bernhard (2008) established that Accreditation was a main instrument used to assure quality in private universities and

their academic programs. NCHE in Malawi had developed quality assurance instruments for both internal and external quality check through registration and accreditation processes.

The researcher confirms from the findings that all the three private universities were registered and one was accredited by NCHE but there were a number of gaps related to infrastructural issues, learning resources as well as teaching in terms of quality. Respondents mentioned a number of achievements and improved standards but there were also gaps such as qualification of lecturers and lack of teaching resources requiring attention for improvement of standards. This can suggest that registration or accreditation does not guarantee provision of quality education and hence requiring close monitoring by NCHE through periodic spot checks as one way of discovering some of such gaps and other challenges. Perhaps, universities should be given a period within which to attain registration and accreditation of all programs failing which those programs should not be offered and NCHE could also withdraw the registration and accreditation status.

iv. Infrastructural and Learning Resources

The availability of good infrastructure and learning resources plays a great role in ensuring quality of education and this study has revealed some achievements and challenges in this area. Students indicated availability of good infrastructural set up and well-furnished classrooms as indicated. This is evidenced by consensus on availability of good libraries and internet connectivity in all three universities.

Wambui (2018) commented that rapid expansion of enrollment in universities cannot be compared with the requirements for facilities, infrastructure and it raises concerns about quality of HEIs and programs.

Ngo (2010) in the study on promoting high quality education at small private universities made recommendations for future studies to conduct follow up studies on quality of education in private universities; to enrich academic resources and facilities; and to develop quality standards and assessments in order to promote total quality.

From these findings, it gives an impression that although the private universities provided good academic resources and had good infrastructure, there were still challenges within infrastructural issues and learning resources and as reported by respondents. The research took into consideration a number of quality issues and mainly included infrastructural systems, learning resources, quality of teaching as major issues to evaluate quality in private universities. Zeleza (2018) pointed out that some challenges faced by African universities included learning and teaching resources and leadership.

These findings were not expected but anticipated since the institutions were registered by NCHE, as these universities were quite new and had not established QA systems. The findings were also based on reports from previous studies and NCHE assessment reports. It may take a while to have the private universities attain full accreditation for both institutional and all academic programs and it is assumed that quality assurance systems may contribute to improving such standards.

5.4 Nature of Policies, Structures and Instruments Relating to QA Systems

The Quality assurance agencies have prescribed the structure of higher education in terms of institutional requirement such as governance, financial requirements, infrastructure, and student support including quality assurance units. There is not much documentation or recommendations on

how quality assurance structures should be done and how quality assurance units are structured in terms of personnel, units, committees or directorates.

A few management personnel and staff had little knowledge on QA structures and it appears that students and some staff members were not sure as to what these structures involve and had no information regarding such structures and therefore the researcher would recommend this as an area requiring inclusion in quality improvement. Malata (2016) defined Quality as the structures and characteristics of a product or service with ability to satisfy given requirements level in order to register or accredit the higher education institutions and regularly monitors standards.

In addition, Paliulis and Labanauskis (2015) reported benchmarking as one of the QA instruments used to improve quality. This finding revealed that respondents could not relate benchmarking as one of the instruments used in improving quality. Paliulis and Labanauskis (2015) strongly recommend benchmarking as one of the QA tools for quality improvement and HEIs are encouraged to benchmark their academic programs with other universities offering similar programs and other academic services. Students may also be involved in exchange visits to learn from each other. The authors recommend that benchmarking enhances a culture of quality in HEIs and is used for performances of quality improvement as it also complements quality management systems. Lithuania relies on external quality assurances as one of the instruments for quality check and focusses on external assessments both institutional and programs.

This study has revealed that students conduct evaluations on the quality of teaching and teaching staff as another QA instrument but most respondents indicated that these evaluations were not frequently done and in some cases were not done at all. Chung Sea Law (2013) agrees with these findings as he established that there were mixed reactions of students' evaluation.

It is evident that students' evaluation was done to a certain extent but not consistently but was not perceived as one of the instruments related to quality assurance. Swanzy and Potts(2017) who investigated on internal quality strategies in Ghana established that internal qualityassurance focused on staff and students in terms of evaluating quality and supports importanceof students' evaluation contributions.

The findings clearly indicated that there were no quality assurance units in the three universities. Although there were assigned quality assurance desk officers to carry out quality assurance activities, these were also allocated to other academic assignments. A number of institutions in Africa have developed well-established QAUs in line with quality assurance frameworks at regional and national level.

In this study, the researcher has presented three types of quality assurance units' structures from different institutions and observed that there were common elements in these units and therefore recommends to private universities in Malawi to adopt these QAUs. It is however not concluded that the absence of QAUs affects qualityof education but from the literature review findings, it can be argued that well established QAUs in HEIs might enhance quality education and attainment of registration and accreditation status. The importance of QAU and its functions have been outlined in this study as adopted from Kilimanjaro Christian Medical University College (2018) and Anane and Addaney (2016). The study also revealed that respondents mentioned gaps in quality assurance instruments as they mentioned a few instruments. The study has discovered a number ofQA instruments that can be used by HEIs to evaluate and improve quality education as presented in Chapter two of this study.

In contextualizing quality assurance, the researcher has presented the global, regional, national as well as local quality assurance structures and their functions; this puts the issues ofQA in perspective and allows HEIs to appreciate and comply with the set standards.

These findings depict the actual picture of quality assurance systems and related gaps in private institutions to be addressed and put the systems in perspective. The findings have revealed common but similar gaps indicating that these private institutions are operating at ~~an~~ ^a level.

5.5 Stakeholder Perspectives on Quality Assurance Systems

The study used quality assurance framework that focused on internal quality assurance processes as one way of ensuring that all factors are critically analyzed in the improvement of quality education. Internal quality assurance (IQA) involves processes that ensure quality of internal environment including governance, leadership, academic support, students learning and support. External quality assurance involves external stakeholders during the development and review of standards are met; such stakeholders include students, employers, national agencies, ministries and other professional bodies (NCHE Standards 2012). This study mainly focused on internal quality assurance systems as one way of ensuring quality because the researcher believes that external quality assurance systems is dependent on internal quality assurance systems. The IQA conceptual framework developed by the researcher in figure 2.5 supports this.

In the same vain, Jingura and Kimusoko (2019) came up with IQA concept which refer to institutional arrangement aiming at managing quality with focus on teaching, research and services supported by infrastructure. The researcher adopted this framework and came up with an internal quality assurance cycle (figure 2.2) as another framework that can be used to improve quality of education in HEIs.

There was a consensus that students, as stakeholders, play a great role in improving quality of education as reported by 90% of respondents. In addition, there were established students' union bodies and through their representatives, they reported issues related to quality gaps to management and deans. Some students served on some university Committees such as senate and QA Committee. Additionally, Sharra (2015) recommends that universities should focus on governance and leadership

models that ensure participatory decision -making that includes students and therefore produce competent graduates. Although there was established students' union, these were less involved in governance and quality assurance issues as indicated by a number of students in this study.

Findings also revealed that private universities did not really involve fellow universities in quality assurance perspectives although they networked through Private Universities Associations of Malawi (APUMA). There was also not much involvement of public universities in quality checks although a few had involved them in benchmarking of programs but to a lesser extent.

Generally, the Government seem not to have a major role in supporting quality improvement apart from its regulatory role through NCHE but does not support private universities to improve their QA systems. Could it be that private universities have not engaged the government in such type of support? Contrary to this finding, Kamchacha reported that the government supports private universities in funding the needy students, through an institution that was established by the government to support both government and private universities in offering loans and grants to the needy students and private universities benefit from such students.

This study reveals that private universities do not involve various stakeholders in their quality assurance systems as much as they could and hence there is a need to explore further the main challenges contributing to this cause. These findings signify the importance of involving stakeholders is critical to quality improvement because they form both internal and external quality assurance systems and contribute to improvement of quality of education; these stakeholders include students, parents, government ministries, private sector, employers and industry. Bonginkosi (2019) gives an example from his study where community involvement addressed hunger and poverty with reference to sustainable development goals through students at University of Cape Town who contributed to communities in the Eastern Cape, which was affecting vulnerable population that was aggravated by poor nutrition among other local challenges, which resulted from lack of guidance on food production.

The Role of Leadership in Quality Assurance

Leadership plays a great role in assuring provision of quality education and establishment of quality assurance systems in universities. This agrees with Dimitri (2009) who established that leadership plays a key role in the implementation of quality assurance system. The findings of this study has discovered a number of strengths and weaknesses in the role of leadership in private universities. As respondents indicated, leadership has the responsibility to ensure quality of education in their institutions and this requires leadership qualities and skills. Leith wood (1994) recommended transformational leadership that focusses on organizational values, productive culture and decision-making structure based on vision, establishing goals, and ensuring best practices.

The findings seem to reveal that there was good leadership in all the three universities, which ensures and monitors quality education and to a certain extent involves other key players within their institutions. The general picture and consensus was that leaders in their universities take leading role in setting up and benchmarking of quality activities and programs to a certain extent but could do more. Paliulis and Labanauskis (2015) referred to benchmarking as external quality assurance instrument for regulations, assessment of programs and institutions for attaining accreditation and yet benchmarking put much emphasis on evaluation of internal processes and systems. Hoosen et al, (2017) supports NCHE by encouraging benchmarking of programs and other academic activities at local and regional level for best practices under quality assurance mechanisms.

On the other hand, this finding supports Hanson and Leautier (2011) who identified and reported on gaps in university leadership and recommended further studies in order to find out more

approaches that may improve institutional leadership in African countries. This finding also confirms application of recommendation made by Sharra (2017) that both public and private universities in Malawi should encourage leadership with transformational qualities and have mentorship skills to act as role models to their staff and students.

The findings are encouraging as it was established that all the three institutions, leadership were committed in providing quality services and share direction among other challenges. These findings are remarkable and signify a real picture of how universities are progressing in terms of quality education and status of quality assurance systems.

A number of factors have been identified as enhancing as well as inhibiting provision of quality education as influenced by lack of robust quality assurance systems. This has affected provision of quality education, which has led to the universities not to attain full accreditation and only few programs registered by NCHE. Most of the findings are similar to private university settings and anticipated as the issue of Quality assurance is new in Malawi. At the time of this study, NCHE had not developed QA frameworks to guide higher education institutions to strengthen their QA systems and this could have implications on these findings. A number of recommendations based on key findings are presented in the next section to highlight issues as mentioned by study participants.

5.6 Recommendations for Applications

The study was carried out to identify factors related to quality assurance systems in private universities during the assessment outcomes from higher education institutions in Malawi. This was based on the challenges observed on quality education and quality assurance systems. These recommendations were made following findings emerging from respondents after data collection and analysis from both interviews and surveys. There are practical recommendations made following respondent's observations and remarks that could not be factors that inhibited provision of quality

education. This section presents the recommendations that are expected to be addressed by various key players in their universities and specific stakeholders including the National Council for Higher Education and Government ministries. The recommendations for applications are presented in line with the key findings of the research questions in the following sections:

5.6.1 Status of Quality in Education

A number of recommendations were made related to quality improvement such as information sharing of quality issues, involvement in quality assurance activities, infrastructural and teaching resources as respondents pointed out on the following:

Information Sharing and Involvement in QA issues

Management should improve on information sharing on QA issues and instill a quality culture within the universities so that everyone implements quality activities as most respondents indicated information gaps on these areas. The University leadership should improve on involvement of all key stakeholders in quality improvement through QA systems. NCHE should conduct capacity building events and dissemination on the Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework to all HEIs as it stipulates internal and external QA systems.

There is a need for improvement of regulatory processes for private universities in terms of registration and accreditation attainment and continuous monitoring of educational standards as way of ensuring quality at all times. There is a need for improvement on relationship between NCHE and private universities for a common good as it was so pronounced in the findings that private universities were not happy with the approach of some reviewers' attitude and level of understanding by NCHE including assessments reports and feedback from some reviewers (Kamchacha, 2021). Ryan (2015) agrees with Kamchacha as he recommended on the importance of having a relationship between

universities and Quality Assurance Agencies in order to have a quality assurance mechanism that adheres to the QAA standards and this relationship ensures ownership and responsibility for the quality assurance processes.

Infrastructural Issues

In order to offer quality education, private universities should be encouraged to have their own purpose built buildings for higher education that are built in accordance with minimum standards for higher education as prescribed by NCHE. This is because rented premises have limitations in terms of space, sizes and furnishings of classrooms, recreational and sports facilities, ablution blocks and health facilities.

The recommendations were made to specific areas as pointed out by respondents with the aim of improving standards. Respondents pointed out that classrooms should have adequate space to avoid overcrowding of students and should have good ventilation with good furnishings such as air conditioning facilities. Internet services should be made available at all times to students and staff. Recreational and sports facilities should be made available at the campus to students as part of entertainment and physical fitness apart from academic business. The Universities should provide good and well-resourced clinic services at the campus with good referral systems to nearby health facilities.

Learning and Teaching Resources

The findings indicated gaps in learning and teaching resources, specifically internet, library resources and teaching equipment. The private Universities should ensure provision, sustainability of adequate resources for learning, teaching at all times, and recruit qualified and experienced lecturers. The private universities should make deliberate efforts to recruit only qualified teaching staff with a minimum qualification of a master's degree in line with minimum standards for higher education (NCHE minimum standards, 2016).

There should be more full-time than part-time staff in accordance with prescribed ratios of 70:30 by NCHE. Lecturers should improve in service delivery in terms of seriousness, timely marking of assignments, reduce rate of absenteeism and efficient communication with students as recommended by students. The private University management should arrange for industrial attachments to give students an opportunity for adequate exposure and experience related to their fields of study before they graduate.

Registration and Accreditation of Programmes

The revelation that few programs were registered or accredited by NCHE indicates gaps in these programs and management should follow the curriculum development guidelines developed by NCHE and follow the processes required in coming up with new programs. NCHE should make deliberate efforts to follow up on those programs that were not registered or accredited within a specified time.

5.6.2 Policies, Structures and Instruments Related to QA

The findings to this objective revealed knowledge gaps in these areas as indicated by respondents, both students, staff and some management who were not very sure of these QA units, structures and instruments in their Universities. NCHE should make efforts that stipulate quality

assurance policies, structures and instruments that form quality assurance units and monitor the establishment of the same in HEIs. As Osun State University (2020) indicated that

QA units coordinate all processes in order to carry out QA functions based on university's vision and mission statements and advises that QA Director should report to the Vice Chancellor's office. The emphasis was made that these QA units aim at improving quality inputs and outputs of the University system to ensure quality.

NCHE developed higher education a National Quality Assurance Framework and should therefore disseminate and share copies of these to HEIs for reference. HEIs should have full time QA directorates and not assign deans or academic staff to take partial assignments of this position and the job description should be clearly stipulated in line with the duties of QA activities. NCHE should continuously monitor HEIs to ensure functionality of these QA units and ensure all QA requirements are in place as stipulated above.

Management should establish Quality assurance units in their institutions that will take responsibility in quality improvement. Management of the HEIs should recruit fulltime QA Directors with clear job description on QA duties and have a stand-alone QA department that will take responsibility of registration and accreditation processes with various regulatory and professional bodies such as NCHE, Malawi Accountants Board, Medical, Nursing Councils, and Council for Legal Education.

Specifically, university leadership should give guidance and lead in establishment of quality assurance units that will ensure availability of designated Quality Assurance Director, policy statement, objectives, Budget, instruments, monitoring team, Committees and relevant structures. Osun State University (2020) recommended that QA units should include policy development; annual evaluations, program reviews and those instruments should include checklist, evaluation questionnaires and assessment tools in addition to committees.

5.6.3 Stakeholders' Perspective of Quality Assurance Practices

It is evident from the findings that respondents recommended improvement of various stakeholders' involvement in many aspects of quality assurance practices and quality improvement. HEIs should conduct stakeholders' analysis to appreciate the stakeholder's specific roles and their contribution towards quality education. There should be deliberate efforts to involve students in governance issues by involving them in various committees and quality evaluations as recipients of quality education. Involvement of parents, guardians and community brings feedback that will contribute to quality of education; the feedback will be used to improve and offer relevant programs that will have an effect to the communities.

Ryan (2015) put emphasis on the importance of involving students in the quality assurance systems and demonstrated that this enhances quality education and he established that this could be achieved by interviewing students or administering questionnaires. Ryan also recommended that HEIs should allow students to evaluate lecturers' effectiveness in teaching. Student involvement also ensures transparency in the change processes and contributes to positive outcomes. The Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework (2019) developed by the National Council for Higher Education, recommends involvement of students, among other stakeholders as one of the crucial stakeholders in internal quality assurance. The recommendations made by Ryan are critical and pertinent as students are the main recipient of quality education and should be involved at all stages. The Researcher recommends that students in private universities should be involved much more in the quality assurance activities including registration and accreditation processes for their input and should there be given a lot of information related to the universities quality issues.

Further, NCHE should conduct an evaluation study to establish perception of private Universities on regulatory processes. NCHE should engage and train their reviewers or assessors on issues of professionalism, assessment objectives and improve relationships with private Universities as one way on ensuring quality education. Association of Private Universities in Malawi (APUMA) should engage their registrants, discuss regulatory challenges, and engage NCHE as one way of improving its relationships in the interest of higher education.

Community and outreach activities should be well planned to offer students an opportunity to show case their knowledge and skills in relevant programs. The establishment of students' union, as one of the stakeholders, is commended in all three universities but its involvement in quality assurance issues should open up to students in order to improve governance structures.

Another gap was seen related to collaboration with industry and employers and the researcher strongly recommend that private universities should strengthen collaboration and involvement with industry and employers from development of curricula, industrial attachment and employment opportunities. The government, through the Ministry of Education should make deliberate efforts to support private universities in terms of finances, capacity building and encourage them to offer relevant programs that will contribute to the economic growth of the country. Government ministries should work with private universities as employers of the prospective graduates and offer internship and industrial experiences in accordance with their needs. Although private universities operate as business entities, they contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation and therefore government should offer scholarships or students' loan to needy students to access education in accredited private universities.

Private universities should strengthen its partnerships at both local and international level as one way of benchmarking quality of both institution and programs. Encourage student

exchange visits at local and international level to give them an opportunity for exposure and appreciate quality of education in other universities; this is also in line with NCHE requirements as part of quality enhancement.

5.6.4 Role of Leadership in Private Universities Related to Quality Education

A number of respondents commended management of the universities as leads in ensuring quality of education and establishment of quality assurance systems in their universities. However, there were also recommendations made specifically to management to be taken into account for implementation and these could be generally recommended for application by all private universities. Leadership should ensure recruitment of qualified and experienced staff and increase more full time than part time lecturers increase. Leadership should also improve on resource mobilization strategies to ensure adequate financial resource that will sustain payment of staff salaries, procurement of teaching and learning equipment. Additionally, management should intensify involvement of various stakeholders for both internal and external quality assurance systems and strive to have all programs registered and accredited by professional bodies and NCHE to guarantee quality education and employability of graduates. Trustees and Directors of private universities should explore other means of resource mobilization strategies through partnerships, research grants and short-term trainings and not only rely on student fees as source of income for sustainability strategies. It is strongly recommended that private universities should operate in their own purposely-built infrastructure for quality improvement and sustainability of the universities.

There were strong sentiments indicating that these universities were not happy with NCHE's approach and attitude towards private universities during and after assessments for registration and accreditation; Management should continue to engage NCHE on such issues and resolve the issues for a common good. Lessons learnt from Covid 19 pandemic requires universities to improve on e-learning resources and delivery capacity to avoid disruption of

classes. Leadership to institute policies that will assist in management of pandemics such as Covid 19 to avoid transmission and ensure sustainable preventive measures.

The recommendations have been made to private Universities, in particular to leadership, specific stakeholders, government ministries and other partners, as quality improvement requires concerted efforts based on research findings. Major recommendations focused on quality improvement through establishment of quality assurance systems in private Universities and specifically quality assurance units to improve on quality enhancement in many areas.

Students and staff also made a number of recommendations related to gaps in provision quality of education and specifically issues of infrastructure, learning resources and quality of teaching. Additionally, knowledge gaps identified in QA policies and structures which draws attention of Ministry of education and NCHE to support private universities and ensure availability of quality assurance systems that will assist in registration and accreditation processes.

It is evident enough that leadership has taken active roles in leading universities to ensure adherence to minimum standards for higher education but there were still gaps requiring improvement. The recommendations also focused on improving involvement of various stakeholders to work with private universities as these contribute to internal and external quality assurance systems that contribute to quality of education. The next section will present recommendations for future research based on the findings and some recommendations that were made for applications.

5.7 Recommendations for future research

The study identified a number of areas for future research and made a number of recommendations based on findings. The findings were recommended for future research to be conducted on specific areas where both qualitative and quantitative results could be generalized

related to importance of establishment of internal quality assurance systems in all private universities. Additionally, the recommendations were made on the conceptual framework for internal quality assurance on higher education to ensure capacity building in both private and public universities. In order to relate to these recommendations, it is imperative to relate to the research problem and significance of the study and come up with critical areas that professional and academic organizations would be interested in the research findings of this study.

This research study was conducted on assumption that there is a relationship between quality assurance systems and quality education in private universities; this assumption was based on observations made by National Council for Higher Education after assessing in both public and private higher education institutions. NCHE established that there were a number of gaps for private universities in meeting minimum standards for higher education (NCHE Accreditation Report, 2017). These gaps mostly had to do with lack of commitment on the part of the majority of the proprietors to invest in resources in terms of governance, academic and administrative staff, infrastructure such as buildings, learning resources such as internet services, electronic resources, library books and library staff, Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) and on-line services. Despite efforts by NCHE to guide the higher education institutions to establish functional quality assurance systems as one way of building capacity to improved delivery of quality education, private Universities continued to face challenges to meet minimum standards for higher education.

With reference to the research problem, this study proposed to critically examine quality assurance systems in private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malawi and explore the internal and external factors that either facilitate or hinder quality assurance practices for improvement of quality education.

Kisanga et al (2014) recommended that graduates should be exposed to appropriate educational competencies and that leadership should deploy qualified supporting staff, administrative staff and librarians who should support to produce quality graduates and not dwell on private higher education as business but apply quality assurance best practices to address public concerns on quality education.

5.8 Specific areas for recommendations

This study has revealed a number of gaps in provision of quality education and establishment of quality assurance systems among other findings, which calls for further research and the following sections present the various specific areas pertaining to the recommendations. Specific recommendations for future studies are made in line with findings of each research question in the following sections:

5.8.1 Status of Quality Education in Private Universities

The findings could be a basis for future research in any university in order to establish and improve organizational set up of quality assurance systems and mitigate hindering factors to provision of quality of education. These findings could also relate to the comments from students on other recommendations on quality of infrastructure, resources and lecturers' capacity to teach.

Infrastructural Issues

The respondents mentioned a number of challenges related to infrastructural issues such as inadequate space, insufficient furnishings and use of rented premises. There is a need for future studies to follow up on status of infrastructure in private universities and perhaps compare standards with those institutions that are operating from their own buildings in terms of space, furnishings and availability of essential support structures such as recreational facilities, ablution block, cafeteria and clinic as required by NCHE minimum standards for higher

education. A study could be conducted to find out challenges associated with operating inherited premises.

Availability of Learning Resources

The findings revealed a number of challenges with teaching equipment such as projectors, computers and availability of internet services and adequate up-to-date books. This is a common finding in all the three universities as lamented by students and therefore recommending follow up studies to establish any improvements and effect on quality outcomes.

Quality of Teaching and Teaching Staff

Universities are expected to conduct students' evaluation, peer reviews and performance outcomes as part of evaluating quality of teaching. It appears universities that conduct such quality evaluations do not analyze the recommendations could enhance improvement if these recommendations were implemented. Unqualified lecturers also affect quality and their ability to teach as the findings revealed that private universities continue to engage lectures with Bachelor's Degree to teach undergraduate students contrary to NCHE requirements.

This agrees with findings by Galafa (2018) who established that most of private universities have underqualified academic staff and lack distinct research due to inadequate funding. Perhaps an investigation could be done in all private universities to establish the situation on the ground and evaluate the quality of teaching as one of the contributing factors to quality of graduates. NCHE should encourage the Reviewers to earnestly check on all qualifications, and experiences of lecturers during assessment to ensure minimum qualifications of master's degrees in relevant fields as per minimum standards for higher education. NCHE should work on enforcement of educational standards through

spot checks as EQA could be staged as a onetime presentation and apply penalties to those institutions

that persistently fail to meet educational standards such as recruitment of unqualified lecturers. As Mulwambo (2019) defined quality education as availability of both financial and learning resources, staff retention with emphasis on students' employability.

Registration and Accreditation Status

NCHE could also strengthen continuous monitoring of standards through spot checks and not only for registration or accreditation purposes but for continuous improvement and maintaining standards at all times. Practically NCHE should have an interest to conduct studies on effect of registration and accreditation on quality of education in private universities.

There was a possibility that private institutions continue to offer unregistered and unaccredited programs even after students complete their studies and it appears there was no cut off points for time lines given by NCHE to deregister those programs in order not to compromise quality. Perhaps, NCHE could conduct a survey to establish number and quality of such unregistered and unaccredited programs being offered in private institutions. As the study established, there were a number of unregistered and unaccredited programs being offered in private institutions, which could be compromising quality and recommend that NCHE could follow up on these programs and give a period for redress.

The issue of unregistered and accredited programs is a concern to students, more especially graduating students who complete their studies before their programs attain accreditation status. A future tracer study could follow up graduates' perspective especially those who graduated with unaccredited programs and its effect on their performances.

5.8.2 Availability of Quality Assurance Systems and Related Structures

The study also established that there were poor systems related to quality assurance, this contributed to weak monitoring, and evaluation systems as Kibukamosoke (2011) concluded. The researcher therefore recommends that, in future, after HEIs have established

well-structured QA units, studies could be conducted to evaluate and compare status of quality education and accreditation.

Loukikola (2010) reported on a survey, which established the involvement of students, external stakeholders in QA systems, establishment of QA units and the role of leadership on QA systems. The survey recommended ownership of quality through a quality culture within universities and empowerment of institutions to lead in ensuring standards.

The findings also revealed gaps or weakness in benchmarking of programs at both local and international level. This could be another area of interest to find out how benchmarking is done and perhaps come up with clear guidelines on the benchmarking processes. Although this study has not focused much on this area, it is apparent that most of respondents were not very sure on how the benchmarking processes are done.

The researcher recommends that private universities should strive to have their programs accredited before students graduate by adhering to internal and external quality assurance systems. Leadership and stakeholder involvement is critical to internal factors for effective IQA as well as National frameworks and external QA are some of the external factors affecting implementation in higher educational institutions. UNESCO recommended that more studies should be conducted on the EQA systems in African Universities and establish how IQA systems affect quality especially in private universities.

5.8.3 Stakeholders' Perspective on Quality Education

Ministry of Education in collaboration with regulators could come up with deliberate policies on quality assurance systems in higher education. Generally, this study has revealed a number of gaps and based on recommendations made by respondents, private universities could relate to their situations and conduct periodic or annual institutional surveys that aim at quality improvement. Chang

(2018) conducted a study to explore the higher education quality assurance and policy practices through literature and established that higher education quality

is government's policy and that higher education quality assurance of learning and teaching focuses on educating human resources and that it is important to balance structure for quality assurance in the government, universities and the community.

A number of observations made on stakeholders' perspective on quality assurance and involvement in quality improvement. These could be used as a basis for future study to explore further factors that could contribute to quality enhancement through stakeholders' involvement in curriculum development, industrial attachment, internship, benchmarking, employability and accreditation processes. This agrees with Martin and Emaran (2017) who recommended that universities should focus their interest on employability of graduates and their IQA systems, which focus on collection of information from graduates and employers.

5.8.4 Leadership Role Relating to Quality Education

Leadership roles are related to resource mobilization in order to improve quality assurance systems as Simona 2015 emphasized on the importance of quality assurance systems in higher education as one way of ensuring accountability of financial resources and improving quality education through assessments. An important research study could be conducted to establish the resource mobilization strategies in private universities and ascertain financial base for sustainability and quality enhancement mechanisms. Davies (2017) recommended that the role of management in Universities should be reviewed regarding quality improvement as a quality assurance tool. This study agrees with Lumbly (2012) who recommended further studies to enhance leadership in Sub-Saharan region to improve economic and development challenges in higher education institutions.

It appears leadership in the private universities may benefit from the number of leadership theories, as presented in Chapter two of this study, to enhance their skills in transforming their universities. One of the crucial areas requiring such transformation is

resource mobilization to assist in furnishing the universities with adequate teaching resources, qualified lectures and sustainability of the quality services.

General recommendations could be summarized on specific areas arising from study findings could be considered for future studies as one way of addressing factors that influence quality education in private universities. Studies could be conducted to evaluate establishment of quality assurance systems in both public and private HEIs and related effect on quality education. An investigation on involvement of stakeholders for both internal and external quality assurance systems and effect on accreditation processes could also be done, NCHE should evaluate its relationships with private universities as regards to assessment processes.

5.9 Conclusion of the Study

This chapter summarizes the research study and makes conclusions of the findings. The chapter also recapitulates the research problem, objectives and study methodologies. This section also reviews and summarizes the research process and includes the summary of theoretical framework and its application towards external and internal quality assurance systems. The findings and recommendations were presented in the previous section of this chapter but concluded in this section.

This study was conducted based on findings by other studies conducted in Malawi on challenges faced by private universities in Malawi and the researcher's observations when she worked as Quality Assurance Manager for the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) where it established that a number of private universities were struggling to offer quality education. This led to some institutions being deregistered or closed while a few that were registered failed to meet requirements for minimum standards for higher education and therefore failed to attain accreditation

status. As NCHE embarked on accreditation exercise in 2016, a number of gaps were further exposed even in public universities. Although a number

of these universities attained accreditation of both institutions and academic their programs, there were omissions in most private universities including inadequate financial and material resources, poor infrastructure and insufficiently qualified teaching staff among other challenges.

One of the objectives of this study was to find out the status of quality education being offered in few selected private Universities in Malawi. A second objective aimed at establishing the existence and nature of quality assurance systems including policies, structures and instruments in private universities. A third objective was to explore the involvement of stakeholders by Private universities in quality improvement. The fourth objective was to establish the leadership roles in provision of quality education related to QA systems.

The study used mixed research methods by using structured interview guides for in- depth interviews and structured questionnaires. Data analysis for the qualitative survey was performed by using thematic content analysis whereby a number of themes were coded and several thematic areas were derived that related to the research questions. Additionally, structured questions were applied to collect quantitative data and the data so collected was analyzed using SPSS software.

Among the questions in the semi-structured questionnaires, respondents were requested to explain the factors inhibiting and or facilitating provision of quality education in their respective institutions. The respondents also provided a picture of quality assurance systems within their institutions and made some recommendations to management of their respective universities.

This mixed research method enriched data collection and facilitated triangulation of the findings according to Saunders et al. (2009). It is the Researcher's corroboration that the findings of this research were credible and trustworthy as the interviews were conducted with those participants that included students, staff and management who had been in the

universities for a period of not less than two years with relevant experiences. Additionally, the research instruments were proved valid and reliable. University Research Ethics and Committees approved the study after reviewing the research ethics application form that comprised research ethical processes including informed consenting and data management. The following section concludes research findings in accordance with research questions:

5.9.1 Status of Quality Education in Private Universities

Information Sharing and Involvement in QA Activities

Provision of quality education in private universities involves information sharing on QA activities to all players so that there is a common understanding of quality education attributes at this level of delivery. From the study findings, it was observed that there were still gaps in information sharing as reported by respondents. These gaps appear to be influenced by lack of efforts by management to share with the rest of the staff as well as students on what is involved and what is expected in quality assurance.

Ryan (2015) recommended the importance of establishing quality culture in universities where the faculty and management should have a shared vision in order to improve and maintain quality of education. It is therefore critical that there must be a quality culture in the private universities so that all key players including students understand and contribute the provision of quality education.

The findings in this study revealed that some of the universities involved some players to a certain extent and it can be concluded that there is a need to improve on information sharing and involvement in quality assurance issues. The researcher recommends a quality culture that should

involve all people in the university from Management to the lowest level to ensure that quality assurance systems are well-understood and implemented at all times.

Infrastructural Issues

The provision of quality services is mostly dependent on good and purposely built infrastructure with well-furnished classrooms, library, computer laboratories, clinic, cafeteria and recreational facilities as determined by minimum standards for higher education (NCHE Minimum standards, 2016).

The findings of this study as presented in the previous chapter, concluded that infrastructural issues in the universities were good but required improved state of higher education infrastructural set up. Respondents mentioned gaps in space and furnishings of all these infrastructural requirements where in some instances students could be overcrowded in classrooms contrary to required space as stipulated by NCHE. From the findings of this research, the researcher can conclude and state that the universities under study did not meet the minimum requirements for this standard hence need for further improvement.

Availability of teaching and learning resources

Provision of quality education need adequate resources for teaching where, Pedagogue requires resources such as laptops, projectors, e-resources, up-to-date books and good Wi-Fi for wide coverage of internet. The research study concludes that private universities lacked some critical resources for teaching such as projectors, laptops as mentioned above. Additionally, the study concludes that there are challenges with availability of recommended qualified and number of full time teaching staff against number of learners. This is in line with the observation by Mgonezulu and Wamba (2014) that one of the challenges in private universities was the poor quality of graduates attributed to poor foundation.

Students lamented on challenges of having more part-time staff than full-time staff, and that some full-time staff had inadequate qualifications and experiences for the modules at hand and all

these observations led to the conclusion that there were serious omissions related to quality of teaching staff. This conforms to findings by Zeleza (2018) who indicated that some

challenges being faced by African HEIs included, lack of institutional supplies, research outputs, learning and teaching resources and leadership and that this is common to many African Countries including Malawi.

Another area not explored much in this study is research outputs and recommends that a study could be done to establish how private Universities are faring on research outputs including publishing of the research studies conducted by academicians in various universities. The findings also indicated that registration and accreditation status does not necessarily portray the actual quality of programs being offered by the universities, as it appears that there were serious gaps in delivery of such programs as bemoaned by students. It can therefore be assumed that some private universities continue to offer unregistered and unaccredited programs, which go unchecked by NCHE even after initial assessments.

The study further concludes that the status of quality education requires improvements as the registration and accreditation status only reflects the position that was obtained during the material time of registration and accreditation. This may not reflect the picture on ground; hence, NCHE would find it worthwhile to continue conducting continuous monitoring of educational standards in all private universities.

The study therefore established and summarized a number of quality issues affecting delivery of quality education in private HEI's and includes inadequate space for infrastructural set up, unfurnished classrooms, insufficient internet services, inadequate books and e- resources, Unqualified teaching staff, inadequate teaching equipment and Lack of financial resources. These findings are significant in that it has revealed all these gaps and challenges faced by the universities.

5.9.2 Nature and availability of QA Policies, Structures and Instruments

Attainment of quality in higher education involves well-established quality assurance systems to oversee the quality enhancement processes. This study concludes that there were

deficiencies in the setting up of QA systems that form Quality Assurance units in all the private universities that were sampled. It was also apparent that there was lack of well-established structures and that QA instruments were not well understood by most of the respondents as elaborated below.

I. Quality Assurance Instruments

According to the research findings, it was clear that QA instruments were being used by universities but that there were knowledge gaps in the understanding and relating of such instruments such as students' evaluation, benchmarking, quality surveys and self-assessments. The study concludes that the sampled HEI's had readily available QA instruments but there was no evidence of their implementation as there was no documentation on evaluation of data collected from using these instruments. The researcher has listed a number of comprehensive quality assurance instruments that are recommended by Wambui (2018) to be used in evaluation of quality education in private universities and these include student course evaluation, Academic staff assessment, student satisfaction survey, employer satisfaction survey among other instruments. The Researcher recommends that private universities should have all these tools in order to conduct evaluation of their institutions and programs and ensure quality services.

II. Quality assurance structures

The study has included the quality assurance structures and frameworks from the global, continental, regional, national, higher education institutions levels and ends with quality assurance units. The structures are well coordinated in that at each level there are descriptions of the functions and set up of quality assurance structures and that the structures at lower level are accountable to the next level and the higher levels are responsible for framing of quality assurance frameworks and functions for the lower levels. For example, HEIs are responsible for establishment of QA units and are accountable to national QA agencies; the national QA

agencies conform to regional QA structures that also report to continental QA agencies and so forth.

III. Quality assurance policy

The Quality assurance policy is one of the important documents in guiding quality assurance services and it includes key principles, policy statements, purpose, and objectives. The QA policy forms the main body of the quality assurance and includes documentation on quality assurance unit, quality teaching, innovation, collaboration and all the structural framework for QA systems.

IV. Quality Assurance Units

The gaps in establishment of QA units command the researcher to conclude that there were no such units comprising designated full time QA director with appropriate job description, no QA policy statement, no QA objectives, no budget for QA activities, instruments, structures with QA staff, Monitoring and evaluation tools and relevant committees. As the Osun State University (2020), Kilimanjaro Christian Medical University College (2018), Anane and Addaney (2016) and Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework in Malawi recommended and encouraged establishment of QA units that are inclusive of the recommended structures. The structures include directorate with appropriate job descriptions and adequate QA staff, budget, committee, instruments, policy, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms so that the unit is functional. Additionally, Mosaed (2017) advised that QAU should have its own vision, mission and objectives and that there should be a deputy director to support the head of the unit, as there should be subunits as well.

Having studied a number of structural and functional quality assurance issues, the researcher was very much interested in establishing an internal quality assurance conceptual framework that comprises elements that play a role in quality improvement; such elements

include governance, leadership, academic support, and infrastructure and stakeholder involvement. The researcher believes that if these elements are well established and resourced, private universities should be able to offer quality education and accomplish acquisition of registration and accreditation status of both institutional and programs.

The findings clearly indicated that there was lack of capacity on quality assurance activities as universities did not recruit stand-alone QA Directors or officers with appropriate job description and all the related support structures; hence, a recommendation to have a designated Quality Assurance Director as a full time employee on quality assurance in the universities.

This section summarizes that the quality assurance systems that include policies, instruments, structures and quality assurance units are critical to provision of quality education in the higher education institutions. A critical review of literature has shown that there are major gaps in establishment of quality assurance systems in private universities in Malawi and indeed if these systems have an effect on delivery of quality education in the higher education systems in general. The proposed conceptual framework for practicing and improving internal quality assurance system in private universities hopes to be used to improve the establishment of internal quality assurance structures and therefore delivery of quality education.

5.9.3 Stakeholder Perspectives on QA Activities

Involvement of stakeholders' contribution to quality education cannot be underestimated. The Theoretical Framework used for this study focused on internal and external quality assurance systems that depend on stakeholders' involvement, which influence either internal or external factors. Grant and Osanloo (2014) explained that theoretical framework is an important section of the research process and acts as a base on which to build knowledge and contribute to the research study.

Internal quality assurance (IQA) involves processes that ensure quality of internal environment including governance, leadership, academic support, students learning and support. External quality assurance involves external stakeholders during the development and review of standards; such stakeholders include students, employers, national agencies, ministries and other professional bodies (NCHE Standards 2012). Lessons could be learnt from Thailand where the Higher Education Commission developed an educational quality assurance database called “Higher Education on line” to record operational results and common data sets. Universities in Thailand submit annual reports, which are also referred to as Internal Quality Assurance Assessment reports through the database at the end of academic year within 120 days (Wattananikom, 2014).

The study findings revealed little involvement of key stakeholders that could augment quality enhancement and they were not giving a priority to the stakeholders as first line of quality enhancement or quality assurance issues. The students’ union involvement, for example, was related more to governance structures than quality improvement. It can also be concluded that government ministries were not involved much to work with private universities to assist in quality improvement. As Martin and Emaran (2017) explained that stakeholder’ involvement is critical to internal factors for effective IQA as well as EQA as factors affecting implementation in higher educational institutions. The study concludes that there was lack of well-stipulated stakeholder’s contribution through IQA and EQA systems in the universities and recommends application of stakeholders’ analysis.

The findings also revealed another critical area that needs special attention is the regulatory process and communication with private universities concluding that there were challenges affecting the relationship between NCHE and private universities related to quality issues. The study findings established that there was bitterness and apprehension in the way private universities understand the way NCHE conducts its duties in assessing the institutions

and that some assessors lacked professional approach in the process of communication with universities. This relationship could be harmful and affect provision of quality education as the two parties work with parallel antagonistic approaches that could be affecting quality outputs. As Chang (2010) recommended on the importance of universities and quality assurance agencies such as NCHES to have good relationships with universities so that they both work towards meeting quality assurance requirements and that universities should have ownership and responsibility for the quality education.

5.9.4 Leadership Roles in Quality Assurance Systems

This is an area where private universities were doing very well and trying hard to the best of their abilities despite financial challenges to offer quality education and meet minimum standards for higher education. However, the results of this study have demonstrated that private universities require additional financial resources to improve quality education and establish QA systems.

This concludes that Private Universities' leadership requires resource mobilization skills and not to rely students' fees only as a main source of income and not to focus on university as business entities more than academic institutions; this brings a serious gap in financial resources if the students do not pay adequate fees. The study also concludes that leadership should focus on governance issues, ownership of universities premises and recruitment of qualified and experienced teaching staff, well-furnished infrastructure and teaching resources. Leadership theories such as transformational, strategic and situational leadership can be applied in managing private universities and improving quality of education. More importantly, leadership should strengthen quality assurance systems to ensure that relevant personnel and structures are in place to lead in improvement of quality delivery of services in private HEI's and other universities. One recommended way to strengthen quality assurance is to establish quality assurance units that are functional and well resourced.

The study has contributed to the limited literature on private higher education institutions in Malawi but also Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole in terms of improvement of quality assurance systems to improve quality education through establishment of Quality Assurance systems. The findings agree with observations made by other researchers on gaps related to quality assurance systems and poor quality of education offered in private universities to a certain extent.

The study refers to related Quality Management Theory, which is based on principles of leadership related to customer satisfaction, decision making and continuous improvement (Wardman, 1994). The theory recommends that commitment by leadership, management has a very significant role to play on quality improvement, and this can be achieved by creating an enabling environment for learning and developing communication strategy for reporting of progress. The theory is based on assumptions that HEIs employ such Quality Management principles should be efficient and effective. This study therefore recommends this theory to HEIs to develop and implement student-learning outcomes and therefore uses accreditation as a tool to improve quality. In this study Quality Management theory augurs well with the Quality Assurance theoretical framework, which relates to internal and external quality assurance systems for continuous checking of quality (Green, 2014).

Another theory that can be used in this study is the service quality model that points out to understanding of customer expectations to identify service gaps and manage the expectations. Chukuakadibia, Nokulunga and Tumelo (2020) established a number of service gaps reported by students, being the main customer and recipient of quality education. This model applies to this study as students were able to report a number of service gaps such as quality of teaching and learning resources which the university leadership can use this service quality model to address students' expectations.

What are the factors related to quality assurance system that affect provision of quality education in private universities in Malawi? In order to address this research problem, the researcher came up with a number of internal quality assurance elements that contribute to provision of quality education in private universities in Malawi. These elements are infrastructure, Student learning and academic support, Governance and structural issues, stakeholder involvement and Leadership role. Based on literature review, a number of factors & elements were identified deriving from challenges faced by private universities that are related to internal quality assurance systems. The researcher concluded that there is a correlation between establishment of internal quality assurance and provision of quality education in private universities and this can also be applied to public institutions. The study has established that the internal quality elements that have major effect on provision of quality education are infrastructural issues, financial resources, student and academic support through, learning and teaching resources, stakeholder involvement, governance and leadership. The absence of these IQA factors can lead to poor quality of education. The researcher recommends that if these elements are adhered to at all times through a quality culture in the private universities, quality education will be assured.

The next steps of this research study is to disseminate the findings and recommendations to relevant stakeholders such as National Council for Higher Education, Ministry of Education as the government stakeholder on the quality education and employer; higher education institutions as interested parties in quality assurance implementation agencies and this includes students, academic staff, and quality assurance team. The researcher has made a number of recommendations to private universities on IQA, quality improvement and establishment of QA units that will be in control of quality assurance activities. The researcher will be interested in monitoring and following up on establishment of functional QAUs and

implementation of IQA conceptual framework and evaluation of quality education in private universities.

5.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided conclusions of this study and has highlighted areas to be considered by private universities for quality enhancement. The chapter has also provided an overview of research problem, purpose of the study and an application of these to the study findings and recommendations. It also concludes recommendations that were made based on the study findings in accordance with the study topic, research methodology, study limitations, contributions to knowledge and areas for further research have been highlighted.

Based on the four research questions, the study has concluded that there are gaps in the provision of quality education despite these private universities being registered and accredited by the NCHE. Secondly, there were no established quality assurance systems in all the three universities to lead in ensuring adherence to minimum standards of education. Thirdly, the involvement of stakeholders is not prioritized by the universities as part of contribution to quality education. Finally, the study has established that there is good leadership in all these institutions but a big gap in resource mobilization for the universities that would enhance availability of resources for quality improvement.

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge related to what constitutes quality assurance units in HEIs as new concept that could be adopted by private universities because no known researcher has carried out such studies in Malawi. The researcher has developed a conceptual framework related to internal quality assurance that could be adopted by private universities to improve quality education and attain accreditation status (figure 2.5). The study has also revealed the gaps in nature of quality education in higher education institutions as compared to registration and accreditation status of programs. The results of this study could

be beneficial to relevant stakeholders including students, employers including government ministries and regulatory bodies such that from these findings leadership of private universities and their academic staff will be able to review their internal QA factors as indicated in the conceptual framework resources to improve quality education. These findings could also benefit other public universities in Malawi, Africa and beyond. The researcher also unpacked the internal and external quality assurance systems in assisting different roles of stakeholders to contribute to quality improvement.

Further studies need to be conducted to evaluate, modify and improve the conceptual framework. Meanwhile the proposed conceptual framework will need to be tested in a few universities to assess its effectiveness in improving its effectiveness.

It is noteworthy that these findings may not necessarily be generalized to all private universities in Malawi since the sample used to derive the conclusions is from three institutions, however, it is believed that the general tendency within other private HEI's would most likely be in conformity to these findings.

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Appendix A: UREC Approval Forms



UREC's Decision

Name of Participant:

Martha Mondywa

Title of the Research project:

Impact of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of Quality
Education: A focus on private higher education institutions in Malawi.

Date:

08.08.2019

Comments

Approved without revision or
comments.

Approved with comments for
minor revision.

Not approved with guidance
comments for moderate revision and
resubmission.

Not approved with guidance
comments for major revision and
resubmission.

The student's project proposal is **Approved** by UREC
without additional comments.



UREC's Decision

Student's Name: Martha Mondwa

Student's ID #: A1702D2384721

Supervisor's Name: Dr Martha Kamwendo

Program of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Education

Offer ID /Group ID: O17470G16909

Dissertation Stage: 3

Research Project Title: Impact of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of Quality Education: A Focus on Private Higher Education Institutions in Malawi

Comments: In both questionnaires and the Interviews add the question about age of participant.
Questionnaire
• Provide the space for the answer for Q 10 in B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STAFF AND MANAGEMENT

Decision: B. Approved with comments for minor revision

Date: 11-Aug-2020

Appendix B
Informed Consent Forms



UU_IC - Version 2.0

Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Martha Mondywa

Student's E-mail Address: mondiwamartha@gmail.com

Student ID #: R17020D2384721

Supervisor's Name: Martha Kamwendo

University Campus: UNICAF University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Education

Research Project Title: Factors of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of Quality Education: A Focus on Private Higher Education Institutions in Malawi

Purpose, Aim and Significance:

The purpose of this qualitative and quantitative research is to study explore factors that may enhance or hinder provision of quality education in private universities. This study will use mixed research methods in order to have enriched data. There is a need to establish the relationship between establishment of quality assurance systems in private universities and provision of quality education. The main aim of this study is to investigate the factors related to quality assurance systems in the delivery of quality education in private higher education institutions in Malawi.

The significance of this study is that the findings of this research project may be used to improve the establishment of proper quality assurance systems in all private higher education institutions in Malawi and thereby improving the provision of higher education. The end beneficiaries of the quality education will be the graduates from these private HEIs and the output from the graduates and their contributions stand to benefit various employers who are key to economic development of the country.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, Martha Mondywa, ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have

t


Martha Mondywa



UU_IC - Version 2.0

Informed Consent Form Part

2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Martha Mondywa

Student's E-mail Address: mondiwamartha@gmail.com

Student ID #: R17020D2384721

Supervisor's Name: Martha Kamwendo

University Campus: Unicaf University Malawi (UUM)

Program of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Education

Research Project Title: Exploring factors of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of Quality Education:
A Focus on Private Higher Education Institutions in Malawi

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I

consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation to this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name _____

Participant's Signature _____

Date: _____

If the Participant is Illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name: _____

Witness's Signature: _____

Date:



Appendix C: Student Questionnaire

Name of Researcher:	Martha Mondywa
Doctoral Student:	Unicaf University Malawi
Research Project Title:	Effect of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of Quality Education: A Focus on Private Higher Education Institutions in Malawi

Instructions: Please circle appropriate response to each question and fill in required information where necessary.

1. What is your gender?

a) Male

b) Female

2. State your actual age

.....years

3. What is your highest academic qualification?

a) Malawi School Leaving Certificate

b) Diploma

c) Bachelors

d) Masters

e) PhD

f) Other (Specify)

4. Tick the year of your study in this institution?

a) Year one

b) Year two

c) Year three

d) Year four

5. How are the classrooms furnished?

a) White boards

b) LCD projectors

c) Air condition/fans

d) Furniture

e) Mention additional items available

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. Rate the status of your library

a) Excellent

b) Very good

c) Good

d) Poor

e) Very poor

7. Do you have enough learning resources for your studies?

a) Yes

b) No

Explain your answer:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

8. How qualified are your lecturers?

- a) Well qualified
- b) Not Qualified
- c) Not Sure

9. Tick the quality of teaching rendered by your lecturers

- a) Very Poor
- b) Poor
- c) Good
- d) Very good

e) Excellent

10. Do you have a formal evaluation process for your lecturers?

a) Yes

b) No

If the answer to question 10 is yes, explain how; if no, proceed to question 11.

.....

.....

.....

.....

11. Do you have challenges related to quality education in your institution?

a) Yes

b) No

Please comment.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

12. Mention three (3) main achievements related to quality education in your institution?

i.

ii.

iii.

13. Suggest three (3) challenges related to quality education in your institution.

a)

b)

c)

End of Questionnaire



Appendix D

Questionnaire for Staff and Management

Name of Researcher: Martha Mondwa

Doctoral Student: Unicaf University Malawi

Research Project: Effect of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of

Title: Quality Education: A Focus on Private Higher Education
Institutions in Malawi

Instructions: Please circle appropriate response to each question and fill in required information where necessary.

1. State your position at this institution

.....

2. What is your gender

a) Male

b) Female

3. State your actual age

.....years

4. What is your highest level of professional qualification?

a) Diploma

b) Bachelors

c) Masters

d) PhD

5. How many years have you been in this organization?

..... years

6. How long has this institution been in existence?

.....years

7. How do you understand your organizational organogram?

- a) Not available
- b) Not very clear
- c) Clearly stipulated
- d) Very clear

8. Mention five functional committees in your institution

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

e)

9. How often do functional committees meet per year?

a) More than four times

b) Four times

c) Three times

d) Once a year

e) Do not meet

10. How many times does your management meet in a year?

a) More than four times

b) Four times

c) Three times

- d) Once a year
- e) Never meets

11. Do you have approved academic and administrative policies? (Mention at least 5 policies)

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

12. Is there a functional students' union?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If, yes mention its 3 achievements and 3 challenges (If no, proceed to question 13)

Achievements

.....

.....

.....

.....

Challenges

.....

.....

.....

13. Do you have approved terms and conditions of employment?

a) Yes

b) No

14. Are all your academic programs registered by NCHE?

a) No

b) Yes

c) Other_____

15. Are all your programs accredited by NCHE?

a) No

b) Yes

c) Other

16. What is the status of the internet connectivity in your computer laboratory?

a) Slow

b) Fast

c) Fluctuates

d) Reliable and consistent

e) Other (specify)

17. Evaluate the quality of cafeteria services

a) Very Poor

b) Poor

c) Good

d) Very good

e) Excellent

f) Not available

18. What is the status of recreational and sports facilities?

a) Very poor

b) Poor

c) Good

d) Very Good

e) Excellent

f) Other (Specify)

19. How equipped is your clinic within the University?

a) Well equipped with new facilities

b) Well equipped with old facilities

c) Fairly equipped

d) Poorly equipped

e) Pathetic

f) There is no clinic

20. Are the following quality structures available at your institution? Tick appropriate responses from following:

a) Quality assurance Budget

b) Quality assurance officer

c) Quality assurance policy

d) Quality assurance /committee

e) Other (specify)

.....

21. Mention three main challenges related to quality in your institution?

i

ii

iii

22. Suggest three main achievements related to quality of education in your institution.

i

ii

iii

End of Questionnaire



Appendix E

Interview Guide for Students

Name of Researcher:	Martha Mondwa
Doctoral Student:	Unicaf University Malawi
Research Project Title:	Effect of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of Quality Education: A Focus on Private Higher Education Institutions in Malawi

Interview questions

The following questions have been generated to seek your views and you may not respond to certain questions if you feel you do not have answers and you can let me repeat a question if you do not understand it.

1. What is your gender?
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
2. What is your actual age?
3. What is your qualification? (Tick highest qualification earned)
 - a) Malawi School Leaving Certificate
 - b) Diploma

c) Bachelors

d) Masters

e) PhD

f) Other (Specify)

4. What is the year of your study in this institution?

g) Year one

h) Year two

i) Year three

j) Year four

5. How long have you been studying in this institution?

6. How much information have you been given related to quality of services offered at this institution?

7. How are you involved in quality issues of this institution?

8. What is your understanding on the role of the National Council for Higher Education?

9. Which Committees do you take part or do other students attend?

10. Is there anyone who is in charge of quality assurance in your institution? If yes, explain their roles in managing quality issues.

11. How can you describe the quality of education in this institution related to the following areas?

i Institutional resources (Classrooms, library, support services)ii

Academic (learning resources, internet, books and journals)

12. Has the overall quality of higher education improved, gone down, or stayed about the same over the last year? (Please explain)
13. Describe the areas where you feel requires improvement
14. What are your recommendations to management on improvement of quality services related to learning and teaching and any other area?

Thank participants for their availability and responses during the interview. Explain the next steps of data processing and analysis. Reassure participants of confidentiality and data protection.

End of Interview



Appendix Interview

Guide

Name of Researcher:	Martha Mondywa
Doctoral Student:	Unicaf University Malawi
Research Project Title:	Effect of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of Quality Education: A Focus on Private Higher Education Institutions in Malawi

Interview questions

The following questions have been generated to seek your views and you may not respond to certain questions if you feel you do not have answers and you can let me repeat a question if you do not understand it.

1. What is your gender?

a) Male

b) Female

2. What is your actual age?

3. What is your qualification? (choose highest qualification earned)

a. Diploma

b. Bachelors

c. Masters

d. PhD

e. Other (Specify)

4. What is your role in the university?

5. How long have you been working in this institution?

6. What is the extent of your involvement in quality issues of this institution?
 7. What is your understanding on the role of the National Council for Higher Education as regards to quality issues?
 8. What governance committees are available at your institution and how do they function?
 9. Is there anyone who is in charge of quality assurance in your institution? If yes, explain their roles in managing quality issues.
 10. How can you describe the quality of education in this institution related to the following areas?
 - a. Institutional resources (Classrooms, library, support services)
 - b. Academic (learning resources, internet, books and journals)
 11. Has the overall quality of higher education provision improved, gone down, or stayed about the same over the last year? Please explain
 12. Describe the role of leadership in relation to quality improvement in your institution
 13. Describe the areas where you feel requires improvement or strengthening.
 14. What role do students play in ensuring quality of education
- Please share any other issues that are related to quality in your institution.

Thank participants for their availability and responses during the interview. Explain the next steps of data processing and analysis. Reassure participants of confidentiality and data protection.

End of Interview



Appendix G Interview guide for Management

Name of Researcher:	Martha Mondywa
Doctoral Student:	Unicaf University Malawi
Research Project Title:	Effect of Quality Assurance Systems in the Delivery of Quality Education: A Focus on Private Higher Education Institutions in Malawi

Interview questions

The following questions have been generated to seek your views and you may not respond to certain questions if you feel you do not have answers and you can let me repeat a question if you do not understand.

1. What is your gender?

a. Male

b. Female

2. What is your actual age?

..... Years

3. What is your qualification? (choose highest qualification earned)

a. Diploma

b. Bachelors

c. Masters

d. PhD

e. Other (Specify)

4. What is your role in the university?

5. How long have you been working in this institution?

6. What is the extent of your involvement in quality issues of this institution?
7. What is your understanding on the role of the National Council for Higher Education as regards to quality issues?
8. What governance committees are available at your institution, explain how do they function?
9. Is there anyone who is in charge of quality assurance in your institution?

What is their position and explain how they function in managing quality issues in both administrative and academic areas?

10. How can you describe the quality of education in this institution related to the following areas?
 - a. Institutional resources (Classrooms, library, support services)
 - b. Academic (learning resources, internet, books and journals)
11. Has the overall standard of higher education provision improved, gone down, or stayed about the same over the last year? Please explain
12. Describe the role of leadership in relation to quality improvement in your institution
13. How are students involved in ensuring quality of education?
14. Is there a students' union? How is it involved in various committees and in decision making?

15. Describe the areas where you feel requires improvement and areas requiring strengthening.

16. Explain how you understand the level of mobilizing resources in relation to quality issues

Please share any other issues that are related to quality in your institution.

Thank participants for their availability and responses during the interview. Explain the next steps of data processing and analysis. Reassure participants of confidentiality and data protection.

End of interview

Appendix H Demographic Data of Students and Staff

Table P-1: *Gender of the Students*

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
--	------------------	----------------	----------------	---------------------

Valid	Female	18	51.4	51.4	51.4
	Male	17	48.6	48.6	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table P-2: Age of Students

<u>Age range</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative Percent</u>
20-24	14	38.9	38.9	41.7
25-39	14	38.9	38.9	80.6
40-59	7	19.4	19.4	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table P-3: Age range of management and staff

<u>Age range</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
20-24	2	7.4	7.4	7.4
25-39	12	44.4	44.4	51.9
40-59	10	37.0	37.0	88.9
60-70	2	7.4	7.4	96.3
Above 71	1	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-4: Qualification of students

<u>Highest qualification</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Bachelors	7	19.4	19.4	22.2
Certificate	1	2.8	2.8	25.0
Diploma	13	36.1	36.1	61.1
IGSCE	1	2.8	2.8	63.9
MSCE	13	36.1	36.1	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table P-5: Year of Study of students

<u>Year of Study</u>		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	1	5	13.9	14.3	14.3
	2	9	25.0	25.7	40.0
	3	5	13.9	14.3	54.3
	4	16	44.4	45.7	100.0

	Total	35	97.2	100.0	
Total		35	100.0		

Table P-6: Classroom furnishings

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>
Valid	1	2	5.6	5.6
	1, 2	4	11.1	11.1
	1, 2, 3	2	5.6	5.6
	1, 2, 3, 4	11	33.4	33.4
	1, 2, 4	7	20	20
	1, 3	1	2.8	2.8
	1, 3, 4	2	5.6	5.6
	1, 4	1	2.8	2.8
	2	1	2.8	2.8
	2, 3, 4	1	2.8	2.8
	2, 4	1	2.8	2.8
	3	1	2.8	2.8
	4	1	2.8	2.8
	Total	35	100.9	100.9

Table P-7: Status of clinic

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	Fairly equipped	11	40.7	40.7	40.7
	N/A	5	18.5	18.5	59.3
	Outsourced	1	3.7	3.7	63.0
	Poorly equipped	1	3.7	3.7	66.7
	There is no clinic	4	14.8	14.8	81.5
	Well equipped (new facilities)	5	18.5	18.5	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-8: Standards of cafeteria services

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	Excellent	1	3.7	3.7	3.7

	Good	5	18.5	18.5	22.2
	Not available	18	66.7	66.7	88.9
	Very good	3	11.1	11.1	100.0

	Total	27	100.0	100.0	
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Table P-9: Status of Library

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	Excellent	6	16.7	16.7	19.4
	Good	18	50.0	50.0	69.4
	Poor	2	5.6	5.6	75.0
	Very good	8	22.2	22.2	97.2
	Very poor	1	2.8	2.8	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table P-10: Quality of teaching

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
	Excellent	8	22.8	22.8	25.0
	Good	18	51.4	51.4	75.0
	Very good	9	25.8	25.8	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table P-11: Student formal evaluation

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>
Valid	No	1	3	3
	No	23	70	70
	Not sure	1	3	3
	Yes	8	24	24
	Total	36	100	100

Table P-12: Formal lecturer evaluation processes

	No	Not sure	Yes	(blank)	Grand Total
Year 1	3		2		5
Year 2	6		1		7
Year 3	4				4

Year 4	11	1	4		16
(Blank)			1		1
Grand Total	24	1	8		33

Table P-13: Rating of classroom furnishings

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
	No	15	41.7	41.7	44.4
	Yes	20	55.6	55.6	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Table P-14: Qualification of lecturers

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>
	Not qualified	1	2.9	2.9
	Not sure	6	17.6	17.6
	Well qualified	27	79.4	79.4
	Total	34	100	100

Table P-15: Students union achievements

	<u>Achievement</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	Able to associate with other universities, active members	1	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Conflict management between students and university; fighting for effective service delivery, communication	1	3.7	3.7	7.4

	Channel				
	Current president is cooperative	1	3.7	3.7	11.1

Discussing problems that students face; organizing extracurricular Activities	1	3.7	3.7	14.8
Holds elections for office bearers; been members of national students' union; attended annual general meeting from national students' union; bridged gap with students and management before migrating to e-learning from onsite Learning	1	3.7	3.7	18.5
Liaising with management on issue; cooperate social work on behalf of students;	1	3.7	3.7	22.2
N/a	17	63.0	63.0	85.2
Not sure	1	3.7	3.7	88.9
Successfully engaging management on Issues	1	3.7	3.7	92.6
They meet quarterly; they have functional	1	3.7	3.7	96.3

	sub committees; are organized to solve issues				
	They shared entrepreneurial skills	1	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-16: Comment on recreational and sports facilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
Valid	Excellent	3	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Good	12	44.4	44.4	55.6
	Not available	4	14.8	14.8	70.4
	Poor	1	3.7	3.7	74.1
	Very good	7	25.9	25.9	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-17: Status of internet connectivity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Fast	2	7.4	7.4	7.4
	Fluctuates	7	25.9	25.9	33.3
	High	6	22.2	22.2	55.6
	reliable and consistent	9	33.3	33.3	88.9
	Slow	3	11.1	11.1	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-18: Main challenges related to quality education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid		11	40.7	40.7	40.7

	A need to add some learning equipment, motivational allowances	1	3.7	3.7	44.4
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needed for working extra Time				
Budget not stable; policy not followed	1	3.7	3.7	48.1
Capacity, lack of control over certain things; lack of resources	1	3.7	3.7	51.9
Financial resources, inadequate staffing, street noise, lack of training, recruitment of non-Academics	1	3.7	3.7	55.6
Financial services, management, planning and implementation challenges; evaluation Challenges	1	3.7	3.7	59.3
Guidelines to follow not Available	1	3.7	3.7	63.0
Internet cost too high, not all lecturers are professional academics, technology adaptation ; more part time lecturers than full time	1	3.7	3.7	66.7
Lack of speaking with one voice compromises quality; lack of recognition from NCHE	1	3.7	3.7	70.4

on efforts being made by university; resources				
Lack of staff; finances, Infrastructure	1	3.7	3.7	74.1
Less members of staff; lack of operational funds; infrastructure not adequate; salary delays	1	3.7	3.7	77.8
Low salaries; late payments, little or no support to capacity building; no allowances for evening/ weekends	1	3.7	3.7	81.5
Minimal contact time with students; poor secondary education which affect performance	1	3.7	3.7	85.2
N/A	1	3.7	3.7	88.9
Not everyone understands it.it means diff things to diff people. Quality is difficult to maintain	1	3.7	3.7	92.6
Poor communication	1	3.7	3.7	96.3
Some lecturers teaching courses they haven't mastered; not knowing how to get relevant information; not having comprehensive library; academic data	1	3.7	3.7	100.0

	management system; appointment criteria				
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-19: Quality structures available in private institution

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	Don't see any	1	3.7	3.7	3.7
	No idea	9	33.3	33.3	37.0
	QA budget	1	3.7	3.7	40.7
	QA Budget, officer, policy committee	5	18.5	18.5	59.3
	QA Budget, policy committee	1	3.7	3.7	63.0
	QA committee	1	3.7	3.7	66.7
	QA officer	1	3.7	3.7	70.4
	QA Officer, policy	2	7.4	7.4	77.8
	QA officer, QA policy	1	3.7	3.7	81.5
	QA officer, QA policy, QA committee	2	7.4	7.4	88.9
	QA Policy	2	7.4	7.4	96.3
	QA Policy, committee	1	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-20: Accredited programs by NCHE

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	N/A	1	3.7	3.7	3.7

No	13	48.1	48.1	51.9
Other	10	37.0	37.0	88.9
Yes	3	11.1	11.1	100.0

	Total	27	100.0	100.0	
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Table P-21: Registered programs by NCHE

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	N/A	1	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Other	7	25.9	25.9	29.6
	Yes	19	70.4	70.4	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-22: Students Union challenges

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	Funds are not always enough	1	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Lack of funding; lack of coordination between university and students	1	3.7	3.7	7.4
	Lack of resources, some office bearers not active	1	3.7	3.7	11.1
	N/A	19	70.4	70.4	81.5
	No sports ground; no good support for lecturers	1	3.7	3.7	85.2
	Not organized; don't have a budget; don't follow chain of Command	1	3.7	3.7	88.9
	Not organized; not willing to follow protocol; not willing to learn;	1	3.7	3.7	92.6
	Seen by fellow students as	1	3.7	3.7	96.3

	being manipulated by staff but also abusing funds				
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		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid %</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
	Working under pressure; no team work	1	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-23: Management meeting frequency

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	3 times	3	11.1	11.1	11.1
	4 times	3	11.1	11.1	22.2
	More than 4 times	17	63.0	63.0	85.2
	Not sure	3	11.1	11.1	96.3
	Once a year	1	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-24: Understanding organizational organogram

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
Valid		1	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Clearly stipulated	15	55.6	55.6	59.3
	Not very clear	3	11.1	11.1	70.4
	Very clear	8	29.6	29.6	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-25: Terms and conditions of services

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
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Valid	Don't know	4	14.8	14.8	14.8
	No	2	7.4	7.4	22.2
	Yes	21	77.8	77.8	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-26: *Functional students' union*

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	N/A	17	63.0	63.0	63.0
	Work in progress	1	3.7	3.7	66.7
	Yes	9	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Table P-27
Functional committees meeting frequency

		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>
Valid	2 times	1	3.7	3.7	3.7
	3 times	6	22.2	22.2	25.9
	4 times	4	14.8	14.8	40.7
	Do not meet	2	7.4	7.4	48.1
	More than 4 times	8	29.6	29.6	77.8
	Not sure	5	18.5	18.5	96.3

	Once a year	1	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	27	100.0	100.0	

