

## **The Role of Students in Quality Assurance in an ODL Institution: The Case of Zou**

**Trust Nyenya**  
Zimbabwe Open University,  
Mashonaland East Region,  
Marondera, Zimbabwe  
nyenyat@gmail.com

**Gift Rupande**  
Zimbabwe Open University,  
Mashonaland East Region,  
Marondera, Zimbabwe  
grupande@yahoo.com

---

**Abstract:** *This survey was conducted to establish the role of students in quality assurance at the Zimbabwe Open University. Since the participation of students in quality assurance is the same throughout the university, Mashonaland East Region was used involving all the 300 registered students as the population. While a random sample of 20 students was selected for participation. Fifteen members of the past and present student representative council were selected through convenience sampling and these were interviewed individually. Document analysis was conducted on ZOU Quality Policy Manual and ZIMCHE and analysed qualitatively. The study established that ZOU has got a strong policy on student involvement in QA. Also ZOU QA has structures, which however, do not include students, such as at Quality Management Systems Review and Academic Committees to allow them to take part in the decision making process. ZOU QA systems provide for student participation through feedback mechanisms, but do not take part in internal reviews. Results also show that the feedback mechanisms do not include formative evaluation on overall student experiences of their university life. Furthermore, students are not conversant with levels and forms of student involvement in QA processes. In view of the above conclusions, it was recommended that the ZOU Quality Management System structures should involve students from the Regional structures to the National Centre structures. The SRC should also have QA representatives at Regional and National Centres and SRC QA representatives should take part in internal reviews. The SRC should also produce a formative evaluation at the end of year covering all the student experiences of their university life. There is also need for the SRC to work in partnership with the university staff produce a students' charter that will facilitate both service delivery and evaluation by students as they receive the service.*

**Keywords:** *Quality assurance, student involvement*

---

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Patil (2006:12) asserts that, "any Higher Education Institution needs to ensure that students have a voice at all stages of decision-making process..." While it is clear that there is need for student, Gibbs and Ashton (2005:55) observe that, "how and on which level students should be involved, is not fully understood yet by all actors in all countries." Crozier (2012) as the Director of the Quality Assurance Agency of the United Kingdom campaigns for "No Limits" to student involvement. The agency advocates for student involvement at local level [course/faculty], local level [university wide], national level [agency] and international level[[ European Standards Union]. In view of the international theory and practice of student involvement in quality assurance, this study was undertaken to stimulate a national agenda on the subject. The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) put in place a fully-fledged Quality Assurance Unit in 2010. This came as an effort to ensure that the university provides a high quality distance education. The ZOU Quality Assurance Unit put in place the Quality Management System, which promulgates the forms and levels of student participation in their university life. This is in tandem with international best practice as noted by Patil (2006:12) who points out that, "any Higher Education Institution needs to ensure that students have a voice at all stages of decision-making process..." Central in the Quality Management System is the student. The student is the focal point as he/she pays for the service and consumes the service. In that regard they are the experts who know what, how and where they should receive the service. This study thus explores the policy initiatives,

current practices, benefits and challenges of student involvement in Quality Assurance at the ZOU.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The ZOU quality management system provides for student involvement in quality assurance. This study however explores whether the ZOU's current quality policy and practice match international best practices in student involvement in quality assurance. The overarching question that this study addresses is: Can the current theory and practice of student involvement in quality assurance issues in ZOU be improved on?

## **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following are the research questions that guided the study:

- Are there any policy initiatives on student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU?
- How appreciable are the current forms and levels of student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU?
- Are there benefits of student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU?
- What are the inhibitors to student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU?
- Which strategies can be used to improve student involvement in quality assurance issues at the ZOU?

## **4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- Describe the policy initiatives on student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU.
- Evaluate the current forms and levels of student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU.
- Explore the benefits of student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU.
- Extrapolate the inhibitors to student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU.
- Identify strategies that can be used to improve student involvement in quality assurance issues at the ZOU.

## **5. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **5.1. Theoretical Framework**

#### *5.1.1. Student Involvement*

Student involvement encompasses taking students as active participants of the whole learning process, from planning, resource mobilization, execution, evaluation and appraisal of the learning programme, facilities and policies. Student involvement in this study focuses on the participation of students in the internal reviews processes.

#### *5.1.2. Quality Assurance in Higher Education*

Olusola (2011:3) defines quality assurance as, "the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project, service or facility to ensure that standards of quality are met." Olubor and Ogonor (2008:4) define quality assurance as, "a set of activities or procedures that an organization undertakes to ensure that standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service." From the above citations, quality assurance can be defined as a process of building-in quality by carrying out a set of activities to ensure that set standards are met. In higher education it means that students enrolled should acquire the requisite competencies and display them at exit. These can be achieved by employing appropriate policies, structures, resources and procedures (Gwarinda & Kurasha 2011). The following section examines literature on policies in place for students' involvement in quality assurance processes.

#### *5.1.3. Policy Initiatives on Student Involvement*

Serious implementation of any programme usually start with the political will on the authorities. In the university setting, policy initiatives provide the impetus for programme implementation.

Countries that have developed quality assurance (QA) systems have promulgated acts or policies, which provide for student involvement. The Spanish Universities Act, LOU 2006(Art 46) states that, “students must receive recognition for participating in university life.” It is through such provisions that students’ views are recognized and their participation in QA issues. Catalan Universities Act, LUC 2003 (Art 40) states that, “the involvement and participation of students in the sphere of associative activities is to be encouraged.” Student involvement in the QA of universities in such countries becomes mandatory. The two pieces of legislation indicate the seriousness with which student involvement in QA issues are treated with in other parts of the world.

Patil (2006:12) from the Asia-Pacific Region notes that, “students participate in formulating learning and teaching practices and that their views are to be considered as the primary evidence on which the quality of teaching and learning are to be evaluated.” In the Asia-Pacific Region universities have a policy similar to the acts of parliament in Spain and Catalan which also provides for student involvement as the critical standard of performance.

Bohrer identifies the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland as comprising the, “internal subject reviews, institutional level review, inter-alia, with a greater voice for student representatives in institutional quality systems... and a national programme of enhancement themes...” The QA framework in Scotland is well-structured and developed such that it cascades to institutions thereby ensuring that every institution has student involvement as a measurable QA milestone.

The Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) is the national quality assurance agency. While the national agency interfaces with the institutional QA units, by-and-large it deals with assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes. Lessons from the European Quality Assurance Agency would inform us that this would work with the national students union giving lessons to the institutions on student involvement.

ZOU quality policy manual provides for student involvement. ZOU Quality Policy Manual (2013:12) “ the council serves throughout their study period. Its operations are guided by institutional policy...” The quality policy manual goes further to provide for customers’ views which are valued and recognized in decision making. The Quality Policy Manual(2013:23) states that , “the university is committed to affording the customer an opportunity to raise and discuss issues with the respective Directorate of Student Management representative and or the Marketing Director. It would seem the university has a commitment to student involvement. The following section examines the literature on the levels and forms of student involvement.

## **5.2. Levels and Forms of Student Involvement**

The following is an example of a QA system presently in use at the University of Luton (Harris and Forsyth 1995).

Student involvement at Luton University is clearly at different levels of decision-making that involve QA issues. This way, students’ views are recognized in the decision-making processes. However, students’ involvement in the senate is not evident in this QA set-up. Though not explicit, it may be implied that students participate in feedback mechanisms of the institution. Patil (2006:13) provides a list of elements of levels and forms of student participation indicators:

- Representation of students in decision-making bodies [Academic Committees, Senate]
- Staff /student consultative committees [stakeholder satisfaction committee]
- Feedback mechanism [course/ module/tutor evaluation questionnaire]
- Adoption of students’ charter
- Grievance redressal [complaint forms/box]
- Alumni representation
- Representation of students in QA office

Evident is the fact that student involvement encompasses participation in decision-making much in the same manner as tabled for Luton. Patil(2006) however went further by pointing out the different forms of feedback mechanisms.

ZOU Quality Policy Manual (2013) provides for student involvement through the Regional SRC as alluded to earlier on. The policy manual goes further to provide for the participation of the Alumni Association. The provision for alumni is opening doors for proffering ideas for quality improvement in the institution’s services. While there is provision for participation there is little

| Student representatives  | Committee Structure  | Executive Structure   |
|--|--|---|
| Role:<br>Enabling students to influence decisions on academic policy | Role:<br>Deciding academic policies and priorities and judges quality. | Role:<br>Ensuring academic leadership and implementing committee decisions. |
| President and Vice-President[Education] of Students Union            | Academic Board   | Vice Chancellor   |
| President and Vice-President[Education] of Students Union            | Academic Standards Committee   | Dean of Quality Assurance   |
| 2 Students elected for Course/Field representatives                  | Faculty Boards   | Dean of Faculty/Head of Modular Scheme                                      |
| No representatives   | Faculty Academic Standards Committee                                   | Chairs of Faculty Academic Standards Committees                             |
| Minimum of 2 representatives elected by students on course/field     | Course/Field Committees  | Course /Field Managers  |

clarity on the forms and levels of participation. The following section examines literature on the benefits of student involvement in the quality assurance of higher education institutions.

**5.3. Benefits of Student Involvement**

Student involvement in QA issues has several benefits which are going to be explored in the following sections.QAA (2006:10) reports that, “the strengths identified by the student bodies primarily focused upon the notion of giving students a voice, and providing them with the opportunity to comment upon quality and standards and the student experience.” Essentially student involvement in QA is premised on ownership of the learning process. There is greater commitment to a quality culture, where the student, academic and administrative staff and the university management work towards a unifying goal.

Apart from ownership of quality, there is the added benefit as mentioned by Bohrer (2006) that a positive relationship with institutions is fostered through Students’ Written Submissions. The Students’ Written Submissions is one platform where the students give their summative evaluation of their university life in its totality. The evaluation provides a platform for the university to address the salient issues raised by the student body thereby fostering a mutual

relationship with the students. This relationship raises the status of the student from a customer to a mutual partner.

Bohrer (2006) also reports that audit teams seemed to have used Students Written Submissions as starting point for one or several of their enquiries. Where auditors seriously consider students' input into quality assurance processes, then both students and the university staff value such input.

QAA (2006:11) reported that many institutions had responded to the concerns raised through Students' Written Submissions and that the response had direct benefits to the student experience. The whole idea behind student involvement is for continuous improvement. Students contribute meaningfully if their views are going to be inputs to the change process.

Student involvement in QA is quite desirable to both the institution as it fosters the relationship between the two. The ownership of university life resides in students thereby making their contribution essential in the change process. The following section focuses on the challenges of student involvement in QA processes.

## **6. CHALLENGES OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QA PROCESSES**

While student involvement with quality assurance processes is desirable and has its own benefits, there are attendant challenges, which have to be addressed. These involve the increased student workload, lack of interest and competencies. The legitimacy and integrity of student experts are some of the challenges to student involvement in quality assurance issue as briefly discussed below.

Brus, Komljenovic, Sithigh, Noope and Tuck (2007) observe that the students' workload can dissuade students from taking part in quality assurance committees. The roles and extra duties over and above their student workload can be too much for student. Bohrer (2006:10) explains that,

Students are under more pressure than ever before due to the increasing fear of debt and a general feeling of loneliness and isolation and as such 1 in 4 students are having mental health problems. It would be unfair of HEIs and external bodies such as the QAA to contribute to this pressure unnecessarily by highlighting inclusion with quality assurance processes over and above academic studies.

This scenario may very much apply to ZOU students who are, in most cases adults, parents and employed. Each of the mentioned status has its own duties and responsibilities, which further exert pressure on the students to participate in institutional review processes.

Weiberg (2006) identified some of the challenges to student involvement as lack of interest, lack of the required competencies and lack of qualifications by aspiring students. With the already overloaded basket of duties and responsibilities, some students may lack the interest to take part in the QA internal review processes. Competencies required to take part in internal review processes may also be a challenge to interested students. These could be proficiencies in computers and report writing among others.

Weiberg (2006:10) points out that, "the legitimacy of student experts in the eyes of professors under evaluation also seems to present a challenge in some cultures." Where a student comes to the institution to receive lectures, then his/her participation in institutional review is not readily accepted. Students can be viewed as researchers in the making thus allowing them to take part in the internal review of the whole system.

Weiberg (2006:10) notes that, "Some countries have very politically-oriented student unions, and in those cases students' ability to set personal integrity over political agenda can be questioned." It is really a challenge where a student body is an appendage of a political party in the country of operation. Such an arrangement will lead to the political view dominating the operations of the student body. Dysfunctional conflicts are likely to arise between the institution and the student body where these two are in conflict. Should the student body be politically correct in the eyes of the institution, then the student body rubber stamps the decisions of the institution never mind their effect on the student body?

The prevalence of these challenges by implication calls for efforts to address them. Some of the measures applicable are discussed below.

## **7. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTIONS**

The discussion on literature review in last above section examined literature, which focused on the challenges with student involvement in QA. This section focuses on ways of mitigating the identified challenges.

In Scotland, Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS) is a body of students that, “assists and supports students, students’ associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality processes and provides advice to the funding councils and institutions on good practice in the engagement of students in institutions’ quality processes.”

The starting point is the unions approach to quality. This is an arrangement where the SRC have a quality assurance officer, just as they have representatives for education, sport and so forth. The institutional SRC would also have QA representatives at national level, which will participate in QA issues at ZIMCHE as may be the case in Zimbabwe. For example, the Zimbabwe National Students Union would have QA officers who participate in QA activities undertaken by ZIMCHE.

The above arrangement will facilitate national training of student representatives in institutional and national QA issues that will enable them to be effective in executing QA duties. The national unions could even merge to form a Southern African Development Committee Students Union with a QA office as the case with the National Unions of Students of Europe (ESIB). The skills, motivation and legitimacy issues could be dealt with by such a body through training of the incumbents.

It has been noted that the integrity of some students unions is questionable due to political affiliation. In Zimbabwe political affiliation of the student union is evident. For instance, at the formation of the MDC-T, several of the ZINASU executive joined the national executive of the party inter-alia, the late Raymond Jongwe and Nelson Chamisa. In such instances thorough training of incumbents and initiation to professionalism is called for. Training of incumbents will help them to separate politics from QA issues and remain apolitical in every undertaking.

Concerning increased workload and pressure on students appointed to participate in QA issues, Bohrer (2006:10) noted that, “some institutions do support elected student union sabbatical officers positions and some institutions provide financial assistance for employing union staff officers all of which can help to support participation.” In the case of the ZOU the national SRC might have union staff officers who then assist the SRC in its daily executions.

## **8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted both the qualitative and quantitative approaches underpinned by the empowerment philosophy. The focus of the research was to explore in depth student involvement in the internal quality assurance processes of ZOU (Creswell, 2007). Individual open-ended interviews were used to generate data from the SRC member participants. Themes guided the interviews. Also document analysis was conducted to gather data on the policy provision for student participation within ZOU and ZIMCHE documents. To enable triangulation, questionnaires were used in collecting data from selected ordinary registered students based on availability. Multiple data sources were employed to get a holistic picture of the process of student involvement and also to validate accuracy of findings. Findings were inductively analysed in themes. The findings were narrated and discussed also in themes.

## **9. POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

All the 300 registered students in Mashonaland East region made up the population for the current study. A random sample of 20 ordinary students was selected for participation and 15 members of the past and present student representative council also made it into the sample. Purposive sampling was employed for the current regional SRC members to come up with ten members and snowballing was carried out on previous SRC members to obtain another five participants. Total number of sampled participants was 35.

## 10. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study were presented and discussed in themes. Questionnaire responses were used to confirm interview findings.

### 10.1. Sub-Problem 1: Are They Any Policy Initiatives on Student Involvement in Quality Assurance at the ZOU?

Analysis of documents at the ZOU revealed that the ZOU Quality Policy Manual (2013:12) provides for student involvement by stating that,

The ZOU Regional Centres offer a platform for coordinating student activities...through the SRC. The council serves the students throughout their study period. Through the Alumni Association, students are offered the opportunity to suggest new programmes, innovative ideas on how to improve the institution's well-being in its quest to remain a world class open and distance learning institution.

These two positions clearly provide for student involvement in QA. There is acknowledgement of the importance of policy as described by Chiwaro and Manzini (1995:2) that policy, "gives direction to those managing," higher and tertiary institutions on issues of student involvement. The university thus affords students the opportunity to participate in QA through the SRC as active students and Alumni Association as former students.

### 10.2. Sub-problem 2: How appreciable are the current forms and levels of student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU?

An examination of the ZIMCHE structure in Garwe (2011) showed that the ZIMCHE Council, ZIMCHE Higher Education QA Committee and the Academic and Student Affairs Committee do not have student representatives. As the national custodian of the QA policy, the Council was expected to set the pace for higher education institutions by co-opting student representatives in its structures. Individual institutions may not be encouraged to have student representatives in their structures if the regulating body does not involve them in their undertakings.

Document analysis revealed that the ZOU SRC and Alumni Association do not take part in internal reviews as they give feedback as customers. This provision is clear that the student as a customer is entitled to airing their views and not taking part in reviews. The manual points out that Quality Management Systems Reviews are presided over by the Vice Chancellor where the Management Representative [QA Director], carry out secretariat functions. One would have expected the role of student representatives to be spelt out here, thereby making it real that student involvement in QA is confined to feedback only.

Interviews with the regional SRC confirmed the findings of the document analysis. One former SRC member pointed out that there were no structures for student involvement in QA issues in the region. To further examine the issue of levels of student involvement, respondents to a questionnaire were asked to rate the level of involvement in various aspects and their responses are presented in the table below.

**Table 2.** Respondents' Views on Student Involvement in QA Aspects

| Student Involvement   | Rating   |        |         |          |
|---|----------|--------|---------|----------|
|   | None     | low    | Average | High     |
| Representation of students in decision-making bodies[Academic Committees, Senate] | 20(100%) |        |         |          |
| Staff /student consultative committees[stakeholder satisfaction committee]        | 3(15%)   | 8(40%) | 9(45%)  |          |
| Feedback mechanism[ course/ module/tutor evaluation questionnaire]                |          |        |         | 20(100%) |
| Adoption of students' charter   | 20(100%) |        |         |          |
| Grievance redressal [complaint forms/box]   |          |        |         | 20(100%) |
| Alumni representation   |          |        |         | 20(100%) |
| Representation in Quality Assurance office  | 20(100%) |        |         |          |

Twenty (100%) of the respondents showed that there is no student involvement at all in academic committees, and in QA office. There is no students' charter. Staff/ student consultations are

average to below average. This is contrary to QAA in the UK as advocated by Crozier (2012) who points out that student involvement should transcend throughout all levels from local level [course/faculty], local level [university wide], national level[agency] and to international level[[ European Standards Union].

Student involvement in QA has been peripheral and confined to feedback. Evidently, structures to facilitate student involvement in QA are non-existent.

Concerning forms of student involvement in internal review processes, one respondent quipped, “Internal review is a new term to me. What happens in the internal review?” The other respondent explained, “We have always been contributing through tutor, module and programme evaluation forms, customer complaint forms, suggestion box, and as SRC gathering students’ views.” Students’ Written Submissions as reported by QAA (2006) are non-existent too. Clearly, the mentioned list zero-in on customer feedback. The status quo points to the fact that without regional QA committees the participation of students will remain peripheral. The role of students is further clarified in section 7.2.1 of the Quality Policy Manual (2013:23) which affirms that, “the university is committed to affording the customer to raise issues and discuss them with the respective Directorate of the Student Management representative and or the Marketing Director. Customer feedback shall be collected and analysed.”

Questionnaire responses in Table 2 above confirm interview and document analysis findings. All the respondents, 20 (100%) showed that grievance redressal, Alumni representation and feedback mechanism are very high. This finding confirms Dalton, Churchman and Tasco (2014) observation that student involvement secures self-confidence and institutional pride. However Patmor and McIntyre (1999) also note that student involvement requires a legitimate offer of real influence. In practice, students use one of several instruments that are available to register their feedback or complaints, among others the tutor, module and programme evaluation forms, customer complaint forms, suggestion box and through the regional SRC. Whilst this is commendable effort there is still room for improvement.

### **10.3. Sub-problem 3: Are they benefits of student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU?**

Both interviewees and respondents were asked the same open question, “Are there any benefits to student involvement in QA?” Their views on benefits of student involvement are presented and discussed in this section. Respondents pointed out that one of the major benefits was ownership of quality. One respondent pointed out that the footnote on ZOU’s quality assurance documents, “Quality is Everyone’s Business” captured the whole essence of student involvement. The respondent explained that if quality is everyone’s business then the student should also be owners of all the QA processes. The respondents’ view tallies quite well with Crozier (2012) who notes that quality can be enhanced by working in partnership between and among students and representative body, academic and support staff should the national agency and other stakeholders.

The respondents indicated that the benefit of student involvement would be, “changing the way things are done.” Some respondents pointed out that if their contributions were taken seriously then they would always be forthcoming with meaningful contributions thereby improving on the student experience in the university. This observation confirms QAA (2006) findings that institutions had responded to the concerns raised through Students’ Written Submissions and that the response had direct benefits to the student experience.

One respondent pointed out that if their contributions were taken seriously then students will have faith with the university authorities. This response seemed to confirm Bohrer’s (2006) and Dalton et al (2014) findings that student involvement fosters the relationship between the students and the institution.

### **10.4. Sub-problem 4: What are the inhibitors to student involvement in quality assurance at the ZOU?**

In an effort to establish the challenges to student involvement from the student’s perspective, respondents were asked the question, “What do you see as the challenges to student involvement in QA issues?”

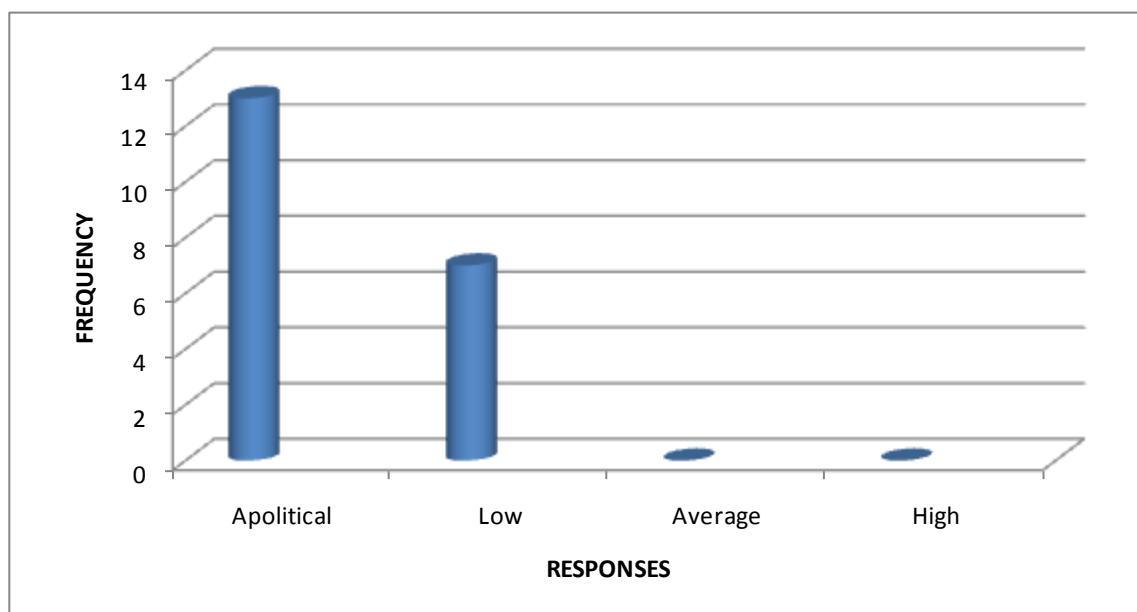


One respondent explained that they have been taking part to the extent they have been allowed by the university. Implied is that student involvement is enough as far as the university policy has provided for. Thus, policy does not allow students to take part in internal reviews. To that end, policy constraints have hindered participation of students in internal reviews.

Some respondents pointed out that, “over and above being students, most of our mates are adults with families to fend for and usually employed, church leaders and have other social commitments.” Add internal reviews and all the training and preparations needed for one to be an effective internal reviewer, students may not be able to cope. This finding from the interviews confirmed Brus, Komljenovic, Sithigh, Noope and Tuck’s (2007) observation that the students’ workload can dissuade from taking part in quality assurance committees.

Informants were asked to comment on how academics would view them as reviewers. They provided mixed reactions. Some mentioned by names academics that were likely to be uncooperative though they said the majority would be easy to work with. This finding could neither deny nor confirm literature review findings that academics view of student reviewers is an inhibitor to student involvement. The probable reason is that ZOU students have not been exposed to this role thus could not answer in anticipation.

Respondents were asked to rate the political orientation of the past and present SRC. Their responses are presented below.



**Figure 1.** Respondents’ rating of political orientation of the past and present regional SRC

The respondents’ views indicate that the past and previous regional SRC is largely not politically active. Their views confirmed the interview responses. Informants were also asked whether the present or previous SRC had active political members. The informants were not aware of such elements. They, however, conceded that if such elements ever existed, their views and engagement with the university on QA issues would definitely be affected by their political orientation. They sounded very much against such a scenario. The respondents view is that the SRC should be apolitical for them to be acceptable with the academics and express a fair view of the status quo of quality in internal reviews. The findings concur with the policy of the University of California (2002) Section 83.0 which states that, “Compulsory student government fees shall not be used to support political, ideological, or religious organizations or activities, including, but not limited to, lobbying of public agencies or officials.” This policy deters SRC political activism, although individuals can express their views outside the SRC. This creates space for impartiality in QA issues.

**10.5. Sub-problem 5: Which strategies can be used to improve student involvement in quality assurance issues at the ZOU?**

All the respondents to the questionnaire (20) pointed out that they had group representatives (course/field representatives). Their duty is to interface with Regional Programme Coordinators

on academic issues. Informants were asked to suggest strategies that could be used to improve on student involvement in QA at the ZOU. Some pointed out that the ZOU SRC was not involved with QA issues. They suggested that it should also be more involved as they are the direct beneficiaries of the QA processes. Even though they did not spell out in which way, it can be inferred that one way of involving students is through internal reviews.

One interviewee's response was, "We should also write a summative evaluation at the end of the year on the quality of service provision as SRC. If we do that at our work places we should also be able to do it for our university so that the following year will see some improvements." Such a report is similar to the Students Written Submission in European institutions as mentioned in the QAA (2006) report.

One respondent noted that there was need for SRC members to be trained in QA issues in order for them to gain the necessary skills and competencies in taking part in internal reviews and other QA processes. This response confirms the essence of SPARQS in Scotland and the ESIB in Europe. Over and above other responsibilities, these bodies train and support union members in QA functions. The training covers the skills, competencies, practices, attitudes and approaches in QA practices.

## **11. CONCLUSIONS**

From the findings above, it is concluded that:

- ZOU has got a strong policy on student involvement in QA.
- ZOU QA has structures, which however, do not include students, such as at Quality Management Systems Review and Academic Committees to allow them to take part in the decision making process.
- ZOU QA systems provide for student participation through feedback mechanisms, but do not take part in internal reviews.
- The feedback mechanisms do not include formative evaluation on overall student experiences of their university life.
- Students are not conversant with levels and forms of student involvement in QA processes.

## **12. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the above conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

- The ZOU Quality Management System structures should involve students from the Regional structures to the National Centre structures.
- SRC should also have QA representatives at Regional and National Centres.
- SRC QA representatives should take part in internal reviews.
- SRC should also produce a formative evaluation at the end of year covering all the student experiences of their university life.
- SRC should work in partnership with the university staff produce a students' charter that will facilitate both service delivery and evaluation by students as they receive the service.
- There is need to train members of the SRC in student involvement in QA processes.

## **REFERENCES**

Annual QAA report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England January (2006). Retrieved from [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/AnnualReports/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/AnnualReports/default.asp) ) on 23 January 2014.

Asia-Pacific Quality Network [www.apqn.org](http://www.apqn.org)

Bohrer, J. (2006) The Role of the Student in Quality Assurance Processes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Helsinki.

- Brus, S., Komljenović, J., Sithigh, D.M., Noope, G. and Tück, C. (2007) Student participation in QA: strengths and challenges. European University Association. Brussels.
- Gibbs, A. and Ashton, C. (2007). Student involvement in university life and quality processes – Results of thematic audit on student involvement in university governance and decision making. European University Association. Brussels.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. London: Sage Publications.
- Crozier, F. (2012). *Student Involvement in QA and Enhancement*. London: QAA.
- Dalton, L., Churchman, R., and Tasco, A. (2014). *Getting Students Involved in Creating a Healthy School*. ASCD, Alexandria.
- Garwe, E. (2011). *The Role of ZIMCHE: ZIMCHE Workshop on QA in HEIs*.
- Harris, R.W. and Forsyth, K. (1995), “AA Guide: Academic Advice for Students”, University of Luton, UK.
- Kurasha, P. and Gwarinda, T.C. (2011). *Financing A Sustainable Quality Assurance Model For National Development Through Open And Distance Learning In Higher Education: The Zimbabwean Experience*. *The Zimbabwe International Journal of Open & Distance Learning* Vol 1 No.1 2011.
- Patil, J. (2006). *Student Participation In Quality Assurance*. Asia-Pacific Quality Network.
- Patmor, G. L. and McIntyre, D. J. (1999). *Involving Students in School Decision Making*. *NASSP Bulletin*, 83 (607), 74-78
- University of California (2002). *University of California Policies Applying to Campus Activities, Students and Organisations*.
- Wiberg, L.K. (2006). *The Role of Students in the External Review of QA Agencies: A Comparative Reflection With the External Review of Higher Education Institutions*. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Helsinki,.
- Zimbabwe Open University (2013). *Quality Policy Manual*, Harare: ZOU.

### AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



**MR. TRUST NYENYA** is the Regional Quality Assurance Coordinator for ZOU's Mashonaland East Region. He is an educationist with vast experience spanning over twenty years in all sectors of the education from primary education to higher education. He holds a Certificate in Education (UZ), Bachelor of Education in Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies (ZOU) and Master of Business Administration (ZOU). He has published research articles in education and quality assurance. He is a DPhil student working on a thesis in quality assurance. His research interest is in quality assurance and

educational assessment and human resources.



**Mr. Gift RUPANDE** is an academician and an educationist who has vast experience in education spanning for over fifteen years. Gift is a renowned ODL scholar and presenter who has presented papers various international conferences. Gift Rupande holds a Masters degree in Educational Psychology (Midlands State University) and is currently a DPhil candidate with the Zimbabwe Open University. He is currently the Student Advisor/Counsellor at the Zimbabwe Open University stationed at the Mashonaland East Regional Centre. He is also a member

of the Zimbabwe Non-fiction Authors Association (ZANA).