

# Towards a Quality Culture in Language Education

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## Abstract

This paper explores the concept of *quality assurance* and its application to university language education programs. It begins by surveying approaches to external and internal quality assurance at leading universities around the world and among institutional organizations involved in the formulation of educational policy in order to understand recent developments in quality assurance internationally and in Japan. It then proceeds to consider the relationship between quality assurance and the notion of *quality culture*, taking the position that formal and structural measures for implementing quality assurance cannot lead to a higher quality in educational outcomes within institutions of higher education unless attention is also given to developing a quality culture. Finally, it considers the importance of developing a quality framework at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) in light of the Top Global University (or SGU) project and provides recommendations on how to address the issue of quality in language education programs at APU.

**Key Terms:** Top Global University project, External Quality Assurance, Internal Quality Assurance, Assurance of Learning, Quality Culture

## 1. Introduction

An important initiative of the Top Global University (SGU) project at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) is to improve the quality of our educational programs in order to deliver better learning outcomes for our students. Until now, however, the issue of improving the quality of education has received little systematic attention at APU. The College of International Management (APM) at APU has begun to address the issue of quality to some extent through a focus on *assurance of learning* (or AOL) as part of their efforts to obtain business school accreditation through The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (or AACSB), however, the results of this initiative have yet to extend to other colleges or centers at APU. With this in mind, the objective of this paper is to consider how a focus on quality can be embedded in the educational system at APU in order to improve the quality of our programs and, ultimately, to improve student learning outcomes. It will begin by exploring the notions of *assurance of learning* and *quality assurance* as they apply to higher education contexts globally, in Japan and at APU. It will also consider the concept of *quality culture* and its role in the implementation of quality frameworks in higher education. It will then proceed to consider how quality processes could be integrated into the operation of language programs in the Center for Language Education (CLE) at APU as part of our response to the requirements of the Top Global University (or Super Global University) project.

The notion of *quality* or *quality assurance* (hereafter QA) is not a new concept in higher education. In recent years, however, organizations and institutions of higher education have been giving greater attention to quality assurance, partly as a response to the impact of globalization and its effects on higher education worldwide. This shift involves the emergence of a global market in higher education, concern for university rankings, increased competition for students and funding, and concerns about accountability (Hazelkorn, 2013, p.1). These trends have also influenced educational policy in Japan and have led to government interest in developing a national quality assurance framework (MEXT, 2009) and funding

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for programs such as the SGU project, a recent initiative which is aimed at enhancing the international compatibility and competitiveness of higher education in Japan (MEXT, 2014).

Discussions of QA in higher education are frequently associated with the related concept of *assurance of learning* (or AOL) and attention to AOL is an important component of international accreditation processes, such as the business school accreditation system overseen by The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (or AACSB). Under the AACSB system, AOL refers generally to the process of evaluating how well a school accomplishes its educational goals (AACSB, 2016a). This can be compared with the use of the term QA in higher education which, like AOL, aims to ensure high standards in educational experiences and learning outcomes for students (see for example, UQ, 2016).

At an institutional level, approaches to AOL/QA involve a detailed and systematic focus on linkages between the mission of the university or school and the educational programs and resources that are deployed in pursuit of that mission. They also involve developing formal processes and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating how well the institution is meeting that mission as well as developing systems for reporting the results internally and externally, as will be outlined in more detail below. For the purposes of this paper, I will include AOL as one element of QA and refer to all processes which address the quality of planning, implementation and review of educational goals and standards in higher education under the term 'QA'.

In many countries around the world, national QA frameworks have been developed and, in some instances, regional organizations have been established to coordinate QA policies across the higher education sector and to regulate their implementation. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (or ESG) and the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) in Australia are examples of these kinds of developments. In Japan, a comprehensive QA framework has yet to be developed at a national level although, as will be explained below, attention to QA forms one component of the university accreditation process administered by organizations such as the Japan University Accreditation Agency (JUAA). Under the Japanese system, individual universities or institutes of higher education are required to develop their own internal QA systems.

As experience around the world has demonstrated, however, simply creating formal systems for QA are not sufficient to ensure their successful implementation. Increasingly, institutions and organizations involved in higher education are proposing that attention needs to be given to developing a *quality culture* within institutions in which faculty and staff are involved in the creation of “shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality” as well “defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts” (EUA, 2006, p. 10). These organizations argue that without a focus on quality culture, quality issues cannot be successfully addressed and learning outcomes likely cannot be improved.

In the following sections, the terms QA, AOL and quality culture will be elaborated in more detail using examples from around the world to illustrate the approaches to and types of quality assurance processes employed in higher education contexts.

## 2. Definitions of Quality Assurance

This section surveys three major developments in quality assurance in higher education. It begins by exploring the notion of *assurance of learning* (AOL) as formulated by the AACSB. It then goes on to examine the concepts of *external* and *internal quality assurance* (QA) using examples from Europe and Australia to illustrate the development of quality assurance frameworks in those regions. Finally it compares the approaches to QA in Europe and Australia with the approach to quality assurance employed in Japan, in order to provide a context for discussions later in this paper of how QA processes might be implemented in the Center for Language Education at APU.

### 2.1 Assurance of Learning (AOL)

As mentioned above, the College of International Management (APM) at APU has been working, for the past several years, towards accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business or AACSB. According to its website, the mission of the AACSB is to advance “quality management education worldwide” (AACSB, 2016b) and it provides its members with various products and services to assist them in improving their business schools and programs. In order to achieve accreditation by the AACSB, a university business school must meet 15 standards, summarized as follows. For a full description of these standards, see the Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation, published on the AACSB website (AACSB, 2015).

1. Mission, expected outcomes, strategies for achieving outcomes, plan for future innovation.
2. High-quality intellectual contributions which align with the mission of the school.
3. Financial strategies to provide resources needed to achieve its mission and action items.
4. Policies and procedures for admissions, degree progression and career development.
5. Sufficient number of faculty and deployment of faculty.
6. Clear and well-documented processes for supporting faculty.
7. Sufficient number of professional staff and deployment of staff.
8. Processes for curricula management and assurance of learning.
9. Appropriate curriculum content.
10. Processes for student-faculty interaction.
11. Degree programs of the appropriate educational level, structure and equivalence.
12. Policies and processes to enhance the teaching effectiveness of faculty and staff.
13. Curricula that facilitate student academic and professional engagement.
14. Executive education programs (activities not leading to a degree).
15. Faculty who demonstrated significant academic and professional engagement.

In each instance, these standards are intended to contribute towards improving the quality of the business school and in achieving quality learning outcomes for the students. The AACSB also provides its members with examples of various *metrics* which schools can employ to assess the impact of their activities in the above areas and with learning outcomes.

In summary, under the AACSB standards for business accreditation, schools must be able to articulate a set of clear and coherent policies outlining their educational objectives, resources, curriculum, research and the deployment of faculty and staff and be able to define and measure achievement in these areas. By following these procedures an institution, in theory, will be able to provide a high level of assurance of learning within their business programs (AACSB, 2016c).

### **3. External Quality Assurance**

Turning now to the issue of QA, a distinction is frequently made between external quality assurance and *internal quality assurance*. External QA is concerned with how QA frameworks are designed and implemented on a national or regional level. Internal QA, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with the development and implementation of quality assurance policies within individual institutions. This section will present examples of external QA frameworks from Europe, Australia and Japan to illustrate the application of external QA in higher education contexts.

Internationally, approaches to implementing external quality assurance vary. In some countries external agencies and ministries issue standards which institutions use as a guide to developing external quality assurance policies. In other countries, these standards are more strictly enforced and agencies have been established to regulate quality assurance across the higher education sector. Examples of external QA systems are presented below to illustrate the different types of QA frameworks. The first example outlines the external QA framework developed in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which operates at regional and national levels. The second example outlines the national QA framework adopted in Australia, in which a national agency was established to regulate QA in higher education. For the purposes of comparison these examples are followed by an outline of the external QA framework employed in Japan.

#### **3.1 External QA in Europe**

In the case of Europe, European ministers of education initiated a project to develop common standards and guidelines in higher education in 2005. The result of these discussions was a set of standards now referred to as the *ESG* or the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The ESG serve as the basis for the development of a “common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders” (ENQA, 2015, p.6) and are intended to support the development of “national and institutional quality assurance systems across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and cross-border cooperation” (ENQA, 2015, p.6). According to the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA), national quality assurance agencies in at least 25 member countries now reference and meet the standards set out in the ESG. A full list of these national agencies is published on the ENQA website (ENQA, 2013).

The ESG are divided into three sections dealing with internal quality assurance, external quality assurance and quality assurance agencies. A brief outline of each section is provided below.

Under the ESG, internal quality assurance refers to a policy that is developed within an individual institution to address quality assurance. The policy must be made public, it should form part of the institution's strategic plan and it should be developed and implemented by internal stakeholders via appropriate structures and processes while at the same time considering external stakeholders (ENQA, 2015, p.11).

*External quality assurance*, on the other hand, refers to the process of external evaluation, by stakeholders, of the internal quality assurance policies of an institution. Stakeholders in this context might include ministries of education or other government agencies, quality assurance agencies, graduates, employers or other education professionals (peers from other institutions, for example). The ESG notes that external quality assurance may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance available to an institution (ENQA, 2015, p.18).

In terms of the third component, i.e. *agencies*, the ESG recommends that external agencies should be involved in external quality assurance. These agencies should be “established on a legal basis and should be formally recognized as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities” (ENQA, 2015, p.22).

The ESG have been continuously developed in collaboration with various stakeholder organizations and government ministries and according to EHEA officials, reflect a consensus among those involved on “how to take forward quality assurance in the EHEA and... provide a firm basis for successful implementation” (EHEA, 2014). As an example of external QA, the ESG are comprehensive; they provide clear standards and guidelines for member countries and institutions to follow in developing QA policies but at the same time recognize and permit flexibility in their implementation in different national contexts.

### **3.2 External QA in Australia**

Outside of Europe, one of the most comprehensive QA frameworks can be found in Australia. Under the Australian system, the quality of higher education is monitored, assessed and regulated by a national agency established by an act of parliament. This agency, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (or TEQSA) is responsible for registering and evaluating the performance of higher education providers against the Higher Education Standards Framework, Threshold Standards (HESF). The HESF framework provides a set of minimum or ‘threshold’ standards to be met by universities and institutes of higher education in seven main categories, including:

1. Student Participation and Attainment
2. Learning Environment
3. Teaching
4. Research and Research Training
5. Institutional Quality Assurance
6. Governance and Accountability
7. Representation, Information and Information Management

(TEQSA, 2015b)

Under this system, a higher education provider must meet the required standard in all of these categories in order to remain within the Australian higher education system (TEQSA, 2012a).

In terms of QA, the HESF provides detailed guidance to institutions (under Standard #5) on the requirements for institutional quality assurance which includes: course approval and registration; academic and research integrity; monitoring, review and improvement and; delivery with other parties, such as via placements or community-based learning (TEQSA, 2015b, pp.10-11). According to TEQSA (2012b, p.10), the HESF is designed to “facilitate internal quality assurance and informed decision making by students.”

### **3.3 External QA in Japan**

In the case of Japan, the evaluation and accreditation of institutions of higher education is mandatory and is directed towards assuring and enhancing the quality of academic activities. Under this system, all institutions of higher education are subject to external evaluation once every seven years by an agency certified by MEXT (MEXT, 2009). In contrast to the European and Australian contexts, in Japan external quality assurance in higher education is not addressed directly via an external quality agency. Instead, quality assurance forms a part of the university accreditation process administered by independent accreditation organizations. The Japan University Accreditation Agency (JUAA), for instance, is a voluntary organization of institutions of higher education modeled on similar organizations found in the United States of America. The JUAA’s mission is to “promote the qualitative improvement of higher education institutions in Japan” and it employs a “self-study” approach to accreditation by individual institutions (JUAA, 2016). In 2004, the JUAA was certified by the Minister of Education, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as (the first) certified evaluation and accreditation agency for universities in Japan and currently performs this role in seven fields (JUAA, 2016).

The JUAA approach to quality assurance is outlined in a document entitled “University Standards and Explanation [2010 revision]” (JUAA, 2010). According to this document, universities must fulfill ten standards to gain accreditation. These include developing a mission statement, establishing structures for education and research, organizing faculty and so on (for a full list see JUAA, 2010). Quality assurance occupies the 10<sup>th</sup> place on this list and can be summarized as follows (English translation):

[Internal Quality Assurance]

10. Universities must develop a system for assuring the quality of their education, regularly conduct self-studies, and publish information about their current state in order to realize their own mission and purpose.

These standards are further elaborated, as follows (full excerpt provided):

Taking into view the fact that universities are organizations entrusted by society, it is necessary for them to actively disclose information on the state of their organizational administration and various activities so that they can fulfill accountability to society. In order for universities to function as autonomous entities, they must check and evaluate their own activities, disclose the results, and be organizations capable of carrying out improvements and reforms. In as much as the primary responsibility for assuring the quality of universities lies in the universities themselves, universities must develop an internal organization for assuring their own quality (internal quality assurance) and clarify the policy and procedures related to internal quality assurance. In addition, in order for the internal quality assurance system to function fully, it is important for universities to establish creative measures to increase the objectivity and adequacy of self-studies, and to link the results of self-studies to improvements and reforms.

(JUAA, 2010, pp.10-11)

In terms of external quality assurance, the JUAA standards require institutions to develop a method of internal quality assurance which can serve as the basis for improvement and reform of educational programs and to publicly disclose their methods and results in an open and transparent manner. APU underwent an accreditation assessment by the JUAA in 2008 and was approved as a certified and accredited university for a period of five years from 2009.

In summary, at least three types of external QA frameworks appear to be in operation around the world, including regional QA frameworks such as the ESG, national frameworks regulated by certified agencies, such as in Australia, and independent frameworks overseen by certified accreditation agencies, such as in Japan.

#### **4. Internal QA**

As outlined above, an important component of external quality assurance is a focus on internal quality assurance. *Internal quality assurance* (internal QA) refers to policies that are developed within individual institutions to address quality assurance. Such policies typically include: a) the publishing of goals and standards for quality via a strategic or operational plan; b) periodic review of the quality of academic programs and administrative units within an institution; c) student and faculty surveys and; d) mechanisms for making improvements to quality based on data gathered from the above. Examples of internal QA frameworks are provided below and include approaches to internal QA developed at two Australian universities recognized as leaders in internal QA: The University of Queensland and Griffith University. The approaches employed by these universities are then compared with the internal QA framework presently under development at APU.

#### 4.1 Internal QA at the University of Queensland

At the University of Queensland (UQ), quality assurance is addressed at the highest level through the university's Strategic Plan. A key component of The Strategic Plan for 2014-2017, for example, is to improve the overall performance of the university by focusing on the quality of its "people and research outputs" (UQ, 2014, p. 10). These broad goals are further elaborated as sets of specific objectives, strategies for achieving the objectives and indicators for measuring success, as in the following excerpts from the *Learning* section of the UQ Strategic Plan (UQ, 2014).

LEARNING [section title]

Objective: We will provide an enriching teaching and learning environment where students are at the heart of what we do.

Strategy: To achieve this we will 1) Support innovative teaching practices to deliver better learning outcomes for students; 2) Develop and promote active learning pedagogies that encourage interactions between students and teachers and among students; 3) Provide high quality open access and other learning resources for students; 4)...Measurement: How we will measure our success: Increased market share of high performing students, with no decrease in overall market share; Increased participation of students with low socio-economic status; Maintain international student numbers while increasing diversity; Improved student retention; Leader in online learning; Increased student participation in outbound mobility programs, Improved performance in national teaching awards [For a full account of this and other objectives, see the UQ Strategic Plan (UQ, 2014, pp.7-8)].

In addition to the Strategic Plan, UQ has also developed review systems for monitoring and evaluating the standards of teaching quality. Examples of these systems include the UQ Curriculum and Teaching Quality Appraisal review, academic program reviews, reviews of schools and academic disciplines and reviews of academic and administrative services. For more details of these systems, see the UQ (2016) website.

The primary mechanism for assessing quality at UQ is the Curriculum and Teaching Quality Appraisal Review (or CTQA) which aims to ensure that programs and curricula are reviewed annually and are in alignment with the UQ Strategic Plan. The CTQA is a school-based system and is conducted annually by school teaching and learning committees, which are in turn overseen by an Associate Dean through the university Teaching and Learning Committee. The CTQA is noteworthy in that it employs a 'dashboard' or set of review criteria and an electronic template system for presenting and reporting on student and program data. For example, when completing the CTQA, schools use the dashboard data in conjunction with an electronic template to:



- 1) Summarize the outcomes of their review of their programs on the core teaching and learning indicators;
- 2) Identify the strengths of their teaching programs;
- 3) Identify areas for improvement;
- 4) Outline the proposed strategies and timeline to address the identified areas for improvement;
- 5) Describe any other proposed T&L initiatives; and
- 6) Report on a new program/s or sequence/s of study introduced in the past 2 years.

(UQ, 2012)

By means of the CTQA and other reviews, UQ is able to assess its progress with achieving its institutional goals, identify good practices for dissemination to the rest of the university and determine areas of weakness which require further attention.

#### **4.2 Internal QA at Griffith University**

A second example of internal QA can be found in the framework developed at Griffith University. As with UQ, Griffith's goals for quality are outlined in its Strategic Plan for 2013-2017 (Griffith, 2013) and include a strong focus on educational excellence. This includes providing an "excellent educational experience" to attract students who will become graduates of influence; improving research and training, attracting excellent academic staff (faculty); promoting sustainability and engagement with the region. Specific objectives are identified for each of the overarching goals and measurable targets are set.

In connection with the strategic plan, Griffith has formulated a "Framework for Quality Assurance" to ensure the quality of its programs. Within this framework, the management of quality processes and outcomes in the university are conducted according to a Plan-Implement-Review-Improve (or PIRI) model of quality assurance and improvement. The PIRI system consists of the following ten elements:

1. A planning framework
2. A systematic planning and review cycle
3. A budget model that supports implementation of the University's strategic priorities
4. Academic Element and Administrative Division reviews
5. Professional accreditation
6. Planning, delivery and review of programs, courses and teaching
7. Stakeholder surveying
8. Annual performance reviews of senior managers
9. Annual performance reviews of academic staff
10. Benchmarking (against other universities)

(Griffith, 2013)

As outlined above, reviews play a central role in the approach to internal QA at Griffith University. According to their university Review Framework, reviews play “an important role in fostering quality management and continuous improvement” in the university. Central to this process is a “continuing cycle of self-assessment, benchmarking, critical reflection, forward planning and external/internal peer review” (Griffith, n.d.). Reviews of schools and divisions are conducted annually as part of the university’s five-year organizational review system and are, in turn, reported to the University Council (Griffith, n.d.).

#### 4.3 Internal QA at APU

Comparing the above frameworks with APU’s approach to internal QA, some similarities and differences can be observed. As with the universities mentioned above, APU publishes a strategic plan outlining the university’s long term goals under what is referred to as the “APU 2030 vision” (APU, 2012). As shown below, the APU2030 vision is directed towards educating “individuals who can change the world” (APU, 2012, p.1). The desired characteristics of such individuals are articulated in the vision, as well as a set of strategies for cultivating such individuals. In contrast to the Strategic Plans of the Australian universities mentioned above, the term *quality* is not referenced directly in the APU2030 vision. Although it may be possible to infer quality outcomes from the APU 2030 vision, the emphasis would appear to be directed more towards influencing change.

#### The "APU2030 Vision"

*APU Graduates possess the power to change our world.*

In our global society of many different cultures and values, conflict and friction are bound to occur. APU strives to cultivate global citizens who will build a peaceful world by understanding and accepting cultural and historical differences. Fostering graduates with these abilities is at the core of APU’s ideals of Freedom, Peace, and Humanity; International Mutual Understanding; and the Future Shape of the Asia Pacific Region.

APU Graduates will pursue freedom and peace with a deep respect for human dignity. By acting for the sake of both individuals and society, they can change the world.

Individuals who can change the world:

- Cooperate and overcome conflict through dialog for the benefit of society.
- Tolerate cultural differences and unfamiliar challenges.
- Create new values incorporating diverse perspectives and ideas.
- Envision their own goals and continue to grow as lifelong learners.

To cultivate such individuals, APU will:

- Further utilize its preeminently multicultural campus to immerse students in a Global Learning Community that provides them with opportunities to grow.
- Create a new Global Learning standard by pursuing internationally compatible education and research.
- Strengthen ties with its invaluable stakeholders, from the local community to alumni around the world, working together to design the University and its educational programs.

—Individuals who experience APU's unparalleled Global Learning Community will develop the power to change the world.

(APU, 2012, p.1)

A second set of documents which have the potential to influence the direction of internal QA at APU are the Ritsumeikan 2020 vision (see Rits, 2010) and the yearly Academic Management Plans (see The Ritsumeikan Trust, 2015) which outline how the R2020 vision is to be operationalized across the Ritsumeikan Academy. The overarching theme of the R2020 is “Creating a Future Beyond Borders” in which the Ritsumeikan Academy seeks to “create a rich and sustainable future for humanity and the world” (Rits, 2010, p.2). This future is to be achieved by focusing on learner-centered education, strengthening the research foundations of the Academy and by emphasizing social responsibility in the administration and development of the Academy (Rits, 2010).

The yearly academic management plans elaborate on specific measures for achieving the vision and mention priority areas for development and improvement, including: admissions systems, infrastructure, education and research and so forth (The Ritsumeikan Trust, 2015). In the R2020 vision and the AY2015 Academic plan, however, quality is only mentioned once in relation to developing learner-centered education, as shown in the following excerpt from the R2020.

(2) Developing learning communities and learner-centered education

1) Ritsumeikan University: Creating Guidelines and Implementation Standards for Academic Affairs in the Undergraduate Colleges (Bachelor Degree Programs) and efforts to improve the quality of education based thereon [underlining added for emphasis]

(Rits, 2010, p.3)

Other than the APU2030 and R2020 vision statements, one area in which quality is referenced in more detail is in connection with the university accreditation process. In the 2007 Self-Assessment Report published on the APU website,

for instance, improving quality is mentioned on numerous occasions as an important goal for the university. For instance, Chapter 3, Section 15 of the report, which focuses on APU's efforts to improve Educational Content and Teaching Materials, outlines "Organized Efforts to Improve Education" at APU and includes one sub-section (4) which deals with "Organized Efforts to Improve Educational Quality" (APU, 2007, 3-1-20). Initiatives included in this section include establishing a faculty assessment system, student class evaluation surveys and faculty development (FD) activities. Other quality initiatives cited include improving the stringency of the grading system at APU, limiting subject registration, creating and reviewing course syllabi, internationalizing the student intake and encouraging good study habits among students as well as improving the screening processes for theses and dissertations.

More recently and in response to the issues raised in the accreditation project outlined above, APU has also established an internal self-assessment system which includes a focus on the issue of internal quality assurance. Self-assessments are conducted every two years, with the most recent assessment completed in 2012. According to the University Evaluation Committee Report for 2013 (APU, 2013), in light of the 2012 assessment internal QA processes need to be strengthened to ensure that self-reviews maintain and improve on current quality initiatives and actually lead to the development of quality assurance policies in the university (APU, 2013). Additionally, and as mentioned earlier, the College of International Management at APU has been working on their own internal QA policies by way of a focus on assurance of learning (AOL) as part of their AACSB accreditation project.

Considering these developments, it would seem that efforts to create an internal QA framework are still in the early stages at APU. The discussion of internal QA policy is in progress and some QA initiatives such as the faculty assessment system and class evaluation surveys are in operation; however, mechanisms for measuring the effects of these initiatives on quality and student learning outcomes have yet to be developed.

## **5. Quality Culture**

Turning now to the issue of Quality Culture, as mentioned in the introduction to this paper and despite the progress made so far in many institutions with the development of internal QA, the actual implementation of QA processes remains problematic. Concerns have been raised about whether QA frameworks are genuinely delivering the kinds of outcomes that they are expected to deliver in higher education programs. In a recent report on progress with QA in Europe, for instance, the European University Association (EUA) claimed that real progress towards quality outcomes cannot be achieved unless governments and institutions give attention to the development of what they term a "quality culture" in education (Gover & Loukkola, 2015, p.9). Quality culture, as mentioned previously, involves giving systematic attention to "shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality" as well "defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts" (EUA, 2006, p. 10). In short, simply creating formal and structural measures for implementing quality assurance will not lead to higher quality outcomes unless institutions 'breathe life' into their quality assurance frameworks by more closely involving those who are tasked with their implementation, i.e. faculty and teachers. As the EUA points out: "Quality can only be assured by those who are involved in the teaching/learning activity: everything

else is observation, commentary, facilitation (or interference)” (Gover & Loukkola, 2015, p.10).

Discussion of quality culture in the European context is ongoing and critics point out that an exact definition of the term remains elusive and is, at best, difficult to pin down, since quality cultures may differ depending on the context. Studies of quality culture have, to date, identified the following ten elements as indicative of quality culture. These elements can be divided into two main dimensions: structural and cultural/psychological.

Key elements of the structural dimension are:

- i. Embedded quality management strategies and policies
- ii. Training and development
- iii. Clear responsibilities
- iv. Effective communication
- v. Implementation time
- vi. Stakeholder involvement

Key elements of the cultural/psychological dimension are as follows:

- vii. Transformational & quality-supportive leadership
- viii. Shared values
- ix. Faculty ownership & commitment
- x. Teamwork

Research into quality culture also suggests that, leadership, commitment, and communication stood out as central binding concepts in the interaction between these elements.

(Bendermacher, Dolmans, Egbrink & Wolfhagen, I. , 2015, p.1)

## **6. Implementing Internal QA at APU**

As mentioned earlier, an important objective of this paper is to consider how the notions of QA and quality culture might shape the development of an internal QA framework at APU and, more specifically, in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs offered by the Center for Language Education (CLE) at APU. To date, very few studies have addressed the implementation of QA frameworks within individual programs and/or within language programs at a university level. Those that have echo the elements outlined in Section 5 above and emphasize the importance of identifying objectives, encouraging collaboration among teachers, making a commitment to continuous professional development and recognizing the role of leadership in the successful implementation of quality initiatives (see for example Muresan & Ursa, 2014 or Heyworth, 2013).

The notion of quality is starting to have an impact on training programs for language teachers and features in a

‘QualiTraining’ guide for modern language education published by the Council of Europe. In this manual, creating a quality culture is mentioned as an important component of developing internal QA systems, alongside leadership and self-learning. However, few details are provided as to the specific measures that might be taken to create a quality culture in a language program, other than involving all members, focusing on critical reflection and considering how individual members can contribute towards achieving a shared vision for the program (European Center for Modern Languages, 2008).

In view of these findings and considering the key elements of quality culture outlined in Section 5 above, what practical steps can be taken towards development a quality culture in language education at APU?

As a first step, the concept of quality needs to be placed ‘front and center’ and embedded in the policies and operational plans of the CLE. At an institutional level, an emphasis on quality also needs to become an integral component of the university’s strategic plan and the interaction between the strategic plan and the objectives of the CLE needs to be clearly articulated. At the center level, initiatives need to be introduced which address both formal quality processes, i.e. the procedures, mechanisms, schedules etc. required for implementing, assessing and reporting on the quality of our language programs, as well as initiatives which support the development of a quality culture within the center, including those which attend to the structural and cultural/psychological elements identified above. The CLE is well-positioned to take advantage of such initiatives, as we have already made substantial progress toward identifying and elaborating on our (language) program objectives and we operate in a highly coordinated environment that is characterized by cooperation and teamwork. Building on these qualities, it would be realistic to propose the following initiatives as first steps towards establishing a quality framework in the CLE:

*For developing internal QA processes:*

- i. Revise the center and language section objectives to include a focus on quality and link these to quality initiatives in the university’s strategic plan.
- ii. Identify key indicators/standards for quality in our programs and develop methods of assessing them.
- iii. Develop a systematic cycle for the review of quality outcomes.
- iv. Initiate a dialogue with teachers to improve the quality of teaching, for instance, by including performance reviews in contract renewal interviews.
- v. Conduct benchmarking activities by visiting other universities to study their QA initiatives.

*For developing a quality culture:*

- i. Conduct quality training for course coordinators so that they can provide quality-supportive leadership to teachers in their sections.
- ii. Hold annual Faculty Development (FD) workshops to discuss shared values for quality in our language education programs.
- iii. Increase faculty ownership by involving faculty in the design and implementation of quality initiatives.

- iv. Expand stakeholder surveying, including making more effective use of class evaluation surveys, teacher surveys and alumni surveys to identify areas for quality improvement.
- v. Improve quality by increasing the exchange of best practices for teaching, either by making such exchanges part of every course meeting or by holding additional workshops for this purpose.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to raise awareness of the issue of quality in higher education and offer recommendations on how to improve quality in the context of language education programs. It has explored the notions of external and internal quality assurance and the related concepts of assurance of learning and quality culture, as they apply to higher education. It has also provided examples of how quality assurance is being addressed by universities and organizations involved in higher education around the world. In terms of the conclusions that can be drawn from studying approaches to QA in these contexts, it would be safe to say that the quality of higher education is and will continue to be of great concern to educators, administrators, policy-makers and other key stakeholders in the wider community. Partly because of these influences and partly because of the forces exerted by globalization, universities will need to give urgent attention to how they address and communicate the issue of quality in educational programs. It is probable that governments and ministries of education will move to strengthen external QA mechanisms, which will in turn put pressure on universities and institutes of higher education to improve and enhance their internal QA systems. As this paper has suggested, however, the development of internal QA processes and procedures should be accompanied by initiatives to support the embedding of an internal quality culture to ensure that quality processes take root and become part of everyday practices in institutions of higher education. With these considerations in mind, this paper proposed ten measures which could be implemented in the Center for Language Education to address the issue of quality and begin our journey towards a quality culture in language education at APU.

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