

Institutional Structures and Effective QAA Implementation in Nepalese Higher Education Institutions.

Posta Raj Lamichhane



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Abstract

Posta Raj Lamichhane

Lecturer, Terhathum
Multiple Campus

Email:

posta.lamichhane@mrm
c.tu.edu.np

Orcid

[https://orcid.org/
0009-0003-0481-0422](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0481-0422)

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Quality Assurance and Accreditation or QAA is very important for improving the education institutions of Nepal. QAA helps these institutions to improve and become more accountable. This study investigates the role of institutional structures in the effective implementation of QAA practices in Nepalese higher education institutions. Interparitivist paradigm and qualitative research design were used in the study. It collects data from secondary sources such as Self-Study Reports, strategic plans, annual reports and QAA policy documents of four campuses i.e. Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus, Pokhara Campus, Purbanchal Campus and Purachaudi Multiple Campus. The study was analyzed through thematic and comparative based on the QAA indicators of University Grants Commission. The findings of the study present that leadership commitment, effective research management, systematic documentation, strong governance and functional Internal Quality Assurance Committees significantly enhance QAA implementation and accreditation outcomes. The study found that Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus have excellent the overall performance. Simialrly, Purachaudi Multiple Campus did notable community engagement despite resource limit. The study says that really make sure the quality of education is good the institutions need to be committed to QAA. Quality Assurance and Accreditation is crucial for the institutions to keep improving.

Keywords: quality assurance, a ccreditation, governance, documentation systems, continuous quality improvement

Introduction

Higher education institutions worldwide are increasingly expected to ensure academic quality, institutional accountability, research productivity, innovation, and global competitiveness. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation is very important, for Quality Assurance and Accreditation to make sure that schools are doing a job. Quality Assurance and Accreditation is used by schools to show that they are providing an education and that they are always trying to get better. Universities are now judged not on how many students enroll and graduate but also, on how well they are managed the quality of teaching and learning the amount of research they produce their facilities how happy their stakeholders are and how well they perform overall (Harvey & Green, 1993). So, quality assurance is now an important part of changing higher education in many countries whether they are developed and developing countries.

The concept of quality in higher education has evolved significantly for long time. Harvey and Green (1993) focused that the quality as excellence, fitness for purpose, value for monitory, perfection, and transformation. Among these dimensions, the higher education institutions are supposed to help students learn things get new skills think critically and get ready for their careers. SimiaLrly, Sallis (2020) claim that quality assurance is not only accreditation compliance but also concerted to on continuous progress through strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation, stakeholder feedback, and organizational learning. These facts are focused the quality assurance is most effective when regualrly embedded within institutional structures and cultures rather.

Institutional governance and organizational structures has played a critical role in effective implementing quality assurance systems. According to Ewell (2010), strong leadership, accountability mechanisms, evidence-based decision-making, and systematic

evaluation are major requirements for achieving the sustainable quality assurance. Likewise, Dimaggio and Powell (1983) pointed that organizations usually set up formal structures and committees to achieve legitimacy and meet external expectations. The higher education, structures of quality assurance committees, academic councils, research management units, planning committees, and documentation systems help the institutions be more effective and accountable, for the quality education they provide to the students.

In Nepal, the University Grants Commission (UGC) introduces the idea of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) system in 2007 as a strategy for improving higher education quality. The UGC create the QAA framework for evaluation of institutions including governance and management, teaching-learning and evaluation, curricular aspects, research and extension, student support services, infrastructure and learning resources and institutional best practices (UGC, 2024). After its implementation, many campuses (constituent, community, and private) have engaged in the accreditation process to able academic credibility and institutional performance. However, achieving accreditation certification not only not guarantee of sustained quality improvement but also the institutions have must establish capable and effective internal quality assurance mechanisms for continuous monitoring, evaluation to enhancement of academic and administrative.

Recent studies show that quality assurance works well when the leaders of an institution support it teachers are involved there are resources, good systems for keeping records are in place and the organization is committed to it. In countries like India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka research has found that institutions with management systems to ensure quality and plans, for the future tend to do better in accreditation and overall performance (Martin & Stella, 2007). India's National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) (2023) have established the strengthened institutional accountability

criteria through self-assessment reports, academic audits, and periodic accreditation reviews. Again, it reforms in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka through prioritizing in continuous quality monitoring, stakeholder participation and institutional self-evaluation as essential components of sustainable quality enhancement (University Grants Commission Bangladesh, 2018; University Grants Commission Sri Lanka, 2015).

Despite these different provisions, most of the higher education institutions in developing countries have continuously facing challenges in effectively implementation of quality assurance. The common barriers are limited research culture, inadequate fund, weak documentation systems, shortage of expert, insufficient infrastructure, and low stakeholder engagement.

In Nepal, several studies have primarily focused on accreditation policies, student satisfaction, institutional readiness, and challenges associated with the QAA process. These study findings show that many campuses have trouble with documentation management, research, resource mobilization and institutionalization of quality assurance practices. There is needed the institutions with strong leadership, strategic planning mechanisms, and active faculty participation to perform better during accreditation assessments. However, several existing literature focused on descriptive and policy-oriented, providing few empirical evidence does not really give us actual proof about how the structure of institutions affects how well Quality Assurance Agency implementation. This is a problem because we need to know more, about how institutional structures influence Quality Assurance Agency implementation.

Furthermore, to date, there is a lack of research that specifically relates institutional structures (e.g., IQACs/research management cells/etc.), academic audits, institutional planning, documentation processes, stakeholder involvement and other areas to successful accreditation. Also rare are publications using SSRs/accreditation reports

themselves as data for comparative institutional studies. Therefore, we know very little about why certain accredited institutions continue to outperform their counterparts in quality assurance follow-through/sustainability even though they are being accredited under the same country accreditation system.

To address this gap, study is therefore to look at the influence of institutional arrangements on effective practice of QAA in higher education of Nepal. The four campuses (Pulchowk Campus and Pokhara Campus which is under-going accreditation process through is and Purbanchal Campus, Purachaudi Multiple Campus) are chosen for this study which are under UGC accreditation. The study sites vary in organization context. Purbanchal campus is a large sprawling technical campus, Pulchowk campus is an engineering institute and Purachaudi Multiple Campus is a community managed campus functioning in a resource constrained set up. A cross-campus comparison will provide useful understanding of structures that support or inhibit effective practices of QAA.

This study aims to evaluate the impact of institutional aspects on Quality Assurance and Accreditation practices in Nepalese higher education context in order to determine how governance structures, quality assurance committees/reviews, research management, documentation practices, strategic planning, and stakeholder involvement influence accreditation outcomes and continuous quality improvement processes within Nepalese higher education institutions. It further seeks to identify institutional strengths, gaps, and best practices towards sustaining quality assurance initiatives in higher education.

Methodology

The study applied an interpretivist research paradigm as it seeks to explore how institutional structures influence the implementation of Quality Assurance and

Accreditation (QAA) practices in Nepalese higher education institutions. A qualitative comparative case study design was chosen to examine similarities and differences in institutional quality assurance mechanisms across multiple campuses.

Tribhuvan University: Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus, Pokhara Campus, Purbanchal Campus and Purachaudi Multiple Campus. Four campuses (constituent and affiliated) were selected purposefully. The campuses were chosen for their diverse characteristics, with two already accredited and two in advanced stages of the QAA accreditation process. Secondary data were collected from the Self-Study Reports (SSR), institutional strategic plans, annual reports, QAA policy documents, accreditation reports and other official institutional records.

Data were analyzed using content analysis, thematic analysis and comparative institutional analysis. The analysis was based on the major indicators of University Grants Commission (UGC) Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which include governance and management, teaching-learning and evaluation, research and extension, infrastructure and learning resources, student support services and institutional best practices. The study also examined institutional structures like Internal Quality Assurance Committees (IQACs), research management systems, academic audit mechanisms, strategic planning units, documentation practices and stakeholder engagement processes. The cross-case comparison study identified institutional strengths, structural gaps and best practices that contribute to sustainable and effective QAA implementation in Nepalese higher education institutions.

Results and Analysis

The study based on comparative analysis of SSR, institutional documents and QAA structural mechanisms of Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus, Pokhara

Campus, Purbanchal Campus and Purachaudi Multiple Campus found that effective implementation of QAA largely depends on institutional structural capacity, governance effectiveness, research culture, infrastructure readiness, documentation systems and leadership commitment. The findings are presented as per the main themes, following University Grants Commission QAA framework and institutional structural evidence.

1 Governance and Institutional Structural Mechanisms

The key finding of the study is that institutions with stronger governance mechanisms had better QAA implementation outcomes. The Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus had the most formal governance structure in place with a number of academic departments, research divisions, IQAC mechanisms, examination systems, planning committees and decision making bodies. Pokhara Campus and Purbanchal Campus also had functional governance systems which helped in institutional planning and academic management. The Purachaudi Multiple Campus had relatively fewer institutional mechanisms because of limitation of financial and human resources. But there was a lot of energy on the campus to develop internal committees, systems of documentation and habits of participatory governance.

Table no. 1

Governance and Institutional Structural

Institutional Structures	Pulchowk	Pokhara	Purbanchal	Purachaudi
IQAC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Academic Council	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
Strategic Planning Unit	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
Research Management Cell	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak

Sources: Field Study 2083

The findings suggest that stronger institutional governance systems directly support effective accreditation performance.

2 Teaching-Learning and Academic Quality Systems

The study pointed that teaching-learning mechanisms significantly influence the performance of institutional quality. The Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus has highly structured academic systems in the form of teaching plans; practical-based learning, innovation labs, project-based learning and continuous evaluation systems. Pokhara Campus and Purbanchal Campus also had good academic calendar, laboratory practice, student orientation system and internal examinations. Puruthaudi Multiple Campus achieved steady improvement in teaching-learning systems through remedial classes, academic planning and student counseling services.

Table 2:

Academic Quality Practices

Academic Practices	Pulchowk	Pokhara	Purbanchal	Purachaudi
Academic Calendar	Strong	Strong	Moderate	moderate
Internal Evaluation	Strong	Strong	Moderate	moderate
Practical Learning	Strong	Strong	Strong	moderate
Student Orientation	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak
Remedial Classes	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Strong

Sources: Field Study 2083

These findings indicate that academic quality practices contribute significantly to accreditation sustainability.

3 Research, Extension, and Innovation Performance

Research and Innovation have been significant aspects that helped the four campuses stand out from each other. The Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus has performed very high on Research & Innovations because of state-of-the-art laboratories, Research Centers, Innovation Hubs, and Postgraduate Programs. Pokhara and Purbanchal Campuses are average in their research participation. Purachaudi Multiple Campus had least position in research productivity due to financial constraints and lack of advanced facilities. But, it is leading stronger community extension and participation base activities.

Table 3:

Research Performance Comparison

Indicators	Pulchowk	Pokhara	Purbanchal	Purachaudi
Research Publications	High	Moderate	moderate	Low
Research Grants	High	Moderate	moderate	Low
Innovation Projects	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Community Extension	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Strong

Sources: Field Study 2083

4 Infrastructure and Learning Resources

The infrastructure has directly influenced accreditation readiness. Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus established advanced laboratories, ICT facilities, smart classrooms, libraries, hostels, and research facilities. Pokhara Campus and Purbanchal Campus also demonstrated relatively strong infrastructure systems. But, Purachaudi Multiple Campus faced major infrastructure limitations due to financial constraints.

Table 4:*Infrastructure Comparison*

Infrastructure Indicators	Pulchowk	Pokhara	Purbanchal	Purachaudi
ICT facilities	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Weak
Laboratorie	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak
Library Resources	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	
Physical Facilities	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak

Sources: Field Study 2083

5 Documentation and Quality Culture

Documentation and quality culture are really important for Quality Assurance and Accreditation implementation in institution of universities. The analysis of institutional Self-Study Reports presents that the institutions with good and systematic documentation practices do a lot better during accreditation because the University Grants Commission heavily emphasizes evidence-based verification during peer review process. Proper documentation is very essential for achieving transparency, accountability, policy consistency, and better decision-making. Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus has a good documentation culture by keeping adequate records like minutes of meetings, strategic plans, annual reports, academic records, policies, financial reports, performance reports of faculties, and research publications. Such records greatly contributed towards the preparedness of the institution during the process of accreditation. Likewise, Pokhara Campus and Purbanchal Campus kept fairly well structured documentation system comprising of academic calendar, exam records, departmental reports, students' record, and infrastructure records. In a similar way, Purachaudi Multiple Campus was making efforts towards improving the culture of documentation but found many hurdles in this

regard like inadequate use of digital facilities, lack of record management system, and poor archival system. In spite of having these limitations, there have been special efforts made towards improving the documentation process at this campus.

Table 5:

Comparative Status of Documentation Systems Documentation Indicators

	Pulchowk Campus	Pokhara Campus	Purbanchal campus	Purachaudi Campus
Meeting Minutes	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Emerging
Strategic Plans	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Emerging
Annual Reports	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
Academic Records	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Weak
Policy Documents	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
Research Reports	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Emerging
Research Reports	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Emerging
QAA Evidence Management	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Emerging

Sources: Field Study, 2083

6 Institutional Best Practices and Stakeholder Engagement

Institutional best practices and stakeholder involvement emerged as critical factors for QAA implementation in the selected HEIs. Based on the comparative analysis of Self-Study Reports, the HEIs that have adopted innovative academic practices, industry interaction, alumni relations, internships, academic workshops, and stakeholder involvement processes have better institutional quality systems. Institute of Engineering-Pulchowk Campus demonstrated best institutional practices through research innovation

activities, technical exhibition, industrial collaboration, internships and academic collaboration. Simialrly, Pokhara Campus and Purbanchal Campus HEIs also followed the practices such as guest lectures, practical training, alumni relations, workshops and stakeholder involvement which enhanced their academic quality.

On the contrary, Purachaudi Multiple Campus had better stakeholder relations despite having limited resources from the institution itself. The institution was involved in community outreach programs, social awareness campaigns, social services, and even meetings among others that helped in fostering stakeholder responsibility. The study reveals that institutions that sustain innovation and stakeholder relations are bound to sustain their quality c^aulture even after the accreditation process is over.

Table 6:

Institutional Best Practices and Stakeholder Engagement Comparison

Indicators	Pulchowk Campus	Pokhara Campus	Purbanchal Campus	Purachaudi Campu
Industry Linkages	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
Internship Programs	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
Alumni Engagement	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Emerging
Community Outreach	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Strong
Stakeholder Meetings	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate
Social Responsibility Activities	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Strong

Sources: Field Study 2083

7 Cells and Operational Support Mechanisms

One of the important findings of this study is that there has been an increase in the institutionalization of specialized QAA operational cells. In the reviewed institutions, some operational systems have been developed, for instance, IQAC, EMIS cell, Research Management cell (RMC), Student Counseling cell, Tracer Study cell, Academic Audit cell, Library Management cell, Documentation cell, Stakeholder Coordination cell and Examination Management Units. Among all these campuses, IEPC has the most evolved operational system followed by PC and PNC. PMC shows an evolutionary process of such systems.

Table 7:

QAA Management others Cells Comparison

QAA Cells	Pulchowk	Pokhara	Purbanchal	Purachaudi
EMIS	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Emerging
Academic Audit	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
Procurement cell	Strong	Moderate	Weak	Weak
Student support	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Weak
Tracer Study	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Weak
GRM	Moderate	Weak	Weak	Weak
Sanitation cell	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

Sources: Field Study 2083

8 Comparative Institutional Analysis

From this comparative study, it can be said that there is huge difference among the four chosen colleges in respect to the institutional ability of implementing QAA.

Institute of Engineering at Pulchowk Campus can be regarded as the best institution in which all the quality aspects have been well-established. These include good governance system, good teaching and learning processes, good research productivity, good infrastructural facilities, proper documentation process, and also the implementation of QAA process itself. The institutional structure of this college is a sign of matured quality culture with strong leadership, resourcefulness, and academic freedom. In addition, Purbanchal Campus and Pokhara Campus have also demonstrated relatively good performance in almost all dimensions of QAA. These two campuses have good academic system, moderate level of research output, proper governance structure, and adequate infrastructural facilities, but lag behind Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus regarding the intensity of research and documentation capability. The Purachaudi Multiple Campus has been able to demonstrate relatively average performance in governance, teaching learning system, and stakeholder engagement documentation, but lower performance in research and innovation, and infrastructure development because of financial constraints, geographic problems, and lack of human resources.

From the results obtained, it shows that the success in implementing QAA depends on the availability of institutional resources, leadership, structures, and documentation culture. In addition, the larger technical institutions have more structure advantages than the rural communities, but rural community colleges can also succeed in their quality improvement efforts.

Table 8:

Overall Comparative QAA Performance Analysis

Campus	Governance & Management	Teaching-Learning	Research & Extension	Infrastructure	Documentation	QAA Management Cell	Stakeholder Engagement	Overall Performance
Pulchowk campus	Very High	Very High	Very High	Very High	Very High	Very High	Very High	Very Strong
Pokhara Campus	High	High	High	High	High	High	Moderate	Strong
Purbanchal Campus	High	High	High	High	High	High	Moderate	Strong
Purchaudi Campus	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	Emerging	High	Developing

Sources: Field Study 2083

The above-stated table clearly illustrates that the size of the institution itself is not what decides whether or not it can get accredited; rather, it is the governance, operation, documentation, and leadership that play the most important roles in this regard.

Discussion

These findings of the study provide ample empirical support to the theories that have been mentioned in the literature review regarding the significance of institutional structure in implementing QAA process effectively. Similar to the theoretical standpoints held by Lee Harvey and Diana Green (1993), it has been demonstrated in the study that quality in higher education does not only comprise academic performance but also transformation, accountability, and continuous improvements. The results also coincide

with the views of Edward Sallis (2020), who argued those continuous monitoring processes, strategic planning, faculty development, and institutional improvement strategies were required for sustained quality. Through a comparative study, it was found that Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus, Pokhara Campus, and Purbanchal Campus scored high because of effective governance structure, academic structure, research process, and institutional planning process.

In addition, the results of this study support the propositions of Institutional Theory made by Paul Ewell (2010) and Paul Dimaggio and Walter Powell (1983). Both scholars have stated that there is a direct relationship between formal organizational structures and institutional legitimacy and effectiveness. According to the research results, those universities that had functional IQACs, Research Management Cells, EMIS system, Academic Audit Units, documentation systems, and strategic planning committees had effective implementation of QAA procedures. Such organizational structures helped to maintain accountability, organize academic activities and provide necessary evidence for accreditation processes. On the other hand, the study has shown that some of the institutions used these structures only to satisfy the needs of accreditation.

Similarly, the study also emphasizes the existing structural differences between rich technical campuses and poor rural community campuses regarding resources. Purachaudi Multiple Campus experienced difficulties in terms of research output, physical infrastructures, and documentation process due to its limited human and financial resource. On the other hand, it shows greater involvement of the community, stakeholders, and organizational commitment to improve the quality of education gradually. This indicates that quality assurance measures cannot be implemented using a standardized measure since there is a considerable difference among institutions in terms

of context. Thus, the discussion emphasizes the necessity of adopting an accreditation policy by UGC in Nepal in the context of the institution's diversities and sustainability of quality assurance improvement.

Conclusion

The study examined the impact of institutional structure on QAA in Nepalese institutions of higher learning through the comparative analysis of self-study reports of four campuses. The study found out that the success in QAA is determined by effective governance, good academic management, research, infrastructure, documentation, stakeholder involvement, and good QAA systems. In the selected institutions, the Institute of Engineering-Pulchowk campus showed the highest performance in the quality indicators compared to other two campuses; whereas Pokhara and Purbanchal campus came second and third in their performance respectively. However, the Purachaudi Multiple campus despite having constraints in terms of research, infrastructure and funds, showed its commitment in the areas of community participation and quality improvement. It has been found out that success in the implementation of QAA process does not entirely depend upon the size and availability of the resources within the institution, but the commitment of the leaders of the institution and faculty members plays an equally important role.

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