Stakeholder experiences of the Quality Enhancement Project in selected South African Universities

by

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Abstract

This research explored stakeholder experiences of a quality enhancement project (QEP) in South African universities. Stakeholder views were considered regarding the impact of the policy shift embodied by the QEP on implementation strategies and the gains made since its inception in improving student retention and throughput. The study employed a multiple-qualitative case study research design involving four universities (one traditional, one university of technology, one comprehensive, one traditional merger) and purposive sampling. Data collection techniques involved document analysis, in-depth interviews with Deputy Vice Chancellors: Teaching and Learning, Directors: Teaching and Learning, quality assurance (QA) managers, quality enhancement (QE) coordinators, Council on Higher Education (CHE) officials and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) QA experts and focus group interviews with student leaders.

The theoretical framework for this study was drawn from Ball et al.'s (1992) theory on policy processes and it focuses on three contexts of policy processes: the contexts of influence, text production, and practice. The findings revealed multi-layered stakeholder perspectives of the QEP based on stakeholders' situated contexts in the higher education sector. The CHE and DHET viewed the QEP as an instrument (intervention) to capacitate institutions through promotion of best practice initiatives and collective engagement, shared practice and "learning from each other". The institutions, on the other hand, were divided on how they experienced the QEP as follows: i) as an essential and valuable process to address structural and transformational issues for institutional effectiveness and change, ii) as an ambitious, uncoordinated, expensive, and to a certain extent futile process for address teaching and learning issues across the sector, and iii) as a lens to evaluate progress in meeting institutional goals and creating graduate attributes. The students expressed feelings of frustration about their voices not being heard in policy and institutional decision-making processes.

The findings also revealed the complexities surrounding the shift from quality assurance (QA) to quality enhancement (QE), differences in approach and practice resulting from a lack of common understanding of what policy is, the role played by the QEP and the different understandings amongst the stakeholders about its intentions. At the same time, the lack of a theory underpinning practice translated to different experiences and interpretations of the shift from QA to QE. Strategies employed were informed by individual institutional visions located in the DVC: Teaching and Learning portfolios and not in the collective university community of practice. The findings also revealed that borrowing educational policy from other countries and contexts can have adverse effects for policy implementation owing to differences in political,

social, economic and cultural contexts and different institutional dynamics. Importantly also, the top-down approaches where policy makers design policy to fit their 'mandate' and 'philosophy' of policy resulted in a project mentality that was not useful.

Declaration of Originality

I, Mercy Sondlo (Student Number: 23276879), declare that this thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor in Education Management, Law and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria is my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree before at this or any other university. I have fully indicated and acknowledged all the sources I used or quoted as complete references.

Signature   _____

Date   _____

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Abbreviations

AfriQAN-INQAAHE	Africa Quality Assurance Network- Quality Assurance Network for African Higher Education
ANECA	Agencia Nacional de Evaluacion de la Calidad y Accreditacion
ATLAS.ti	Qualitative Data Analysis and Research Software
AUQA ADRI	Australian Universities Quality Agency Approach; Deployment, Results and Improvement Framework
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BSc Eng	Bachelor of Science in Engineering
BSc	Bachelor of Science
BTech	Bachelor of Technology
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EMC	Executive Management Committee
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions
FET	Further Education and Training
FINHEEC	Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HELTASA	Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HoDs	Heads of Departments
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPMS	Integrated Performance Management System
Kresge	The Kresge Foundation
LMS	Learning Management System
MBCHB	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education

NDP	National Development Plan
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVAO	Nederlands-Vlaamse accreditatie organisatie
ODeL	Open Distance eLearning
ODL	Open Distance Learning
PLTS	Personal Learning and Thinking Skills
PMDS	Performance Management Development System
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QC	Quality Council
QE	Quality Enhancement
QEF	Quality Enhancement Framework
QEP	Quality Enhancement Project
QMS	Quality Management System
SAAIR	Southern African Association for Institutional Research
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDS	Student Development and Support
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SoTL	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
SRC	Student Representative Council
STARS	Student Academic Readiness Survey
TDG	Teaching Development Grants
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training.
UCDP	University Capacity Development Programme
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USA	United States of America
VP	Vice-Principal

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Chapter 1
Introduction to the Study

1.1   Background to the study

Poor educational quality is currently a critical challenge facing South Africa. Consequently, calls for quality assurance (QA) to reassure the public about the quality of provision have increased with the mounting concerns around persistent low levels of quality in higher education (Wilson-Strydom, 2011; Van der Westhuizen & Fourie, 2002). Stakeholders are asking questions about the quality of provision and whether higher education institutions (HEIs) are meeting acceptable local and international standards (Materu, 2007). In fact, issues around the quality of teaching and learning, quality of educational output, and social and economic problems such as poverty, as well as the recent students' protests against increased tuition fees, access to education and equality of opportunity, are among the critical issues being foregrounded in South African higher education. Various reasons are cited for this state of affairs including: i) the apartheid legacy of the education system, ii) unprepared learners entering higher education, iii) the mismatch between increased enrolments and government funds, and iv) the structures that perpetuate educational inequalities (Moses, Van der Berg and Rich, 2017; CHE, 2010). This state of affairs has an impact on the skills set of graduates. In response to these issues, the role of the higher education sector has been expanded to meet the skills needs of society, including business, industry and government (National Development Plan 2030, 2012). In all of this, the one unyielding issue is ensuring that South African higher education produces highly skilled professionals in the critical and scarce skills domain. Yet, the post-school system is not adequately designed to meet the skills and development needs of either the youth or the economy (National Development Plan 2030, 2011: 316).

Poor educational quality is not unique to South Africa, however; it is a global phenomenon (CHE, 2016). Global trends point to an ailing QA mechanism that fails to enhance students' attainment of graduate attributes and assure student success (Martin & Parikh, 2017). Hence, some countries have turned to quality enhancement (QE) to focus attention on inward institutional enhancement processes (Crosling, 2017; Williams, 2016; Elassy, 2015; Gvaramadze, 2008). In Europe, the United States (US) and elsewhere, a QE movement has emerged which advocates for a student-centred, cooperative and collective approach to QA underpinned by trust, institutional autonomy, academics' ownership of internal QA processes, and increased stakeholder engagement in QA processes (Harvey & Newton, 2005; Hardman, 2005). This movement spread over time and has had an influence on QA practice in other parts of the world, including South Africa.

Over the years QA has taken a traditional role with some countries practising accreditation, external quality audits and subject reviews, whilst others undertake voluntary accreditation, assessment standards, and the assessment of internal systems and processes to measure outcomes and standards (Shah, Nair & Wilson, 2011). In most developing countries, the emphasis has been on external QA with QE taking a back seat. In South Africa, although QA was deemed to be credible and matured, it was found to be very costly in terms of the time and human resources required for undertaking comprehensive institutional audits (CHE, 2017). Besides, academics and scholars raised concerns that a bureaucratic, accountability-driven approach to monitoring quality provision in higher education stifles innovation and creativity and, more importantly, fails to address the quality challenges in teaching and learning (Pretorius, 2003). In fact, it is argued that little has been achieved through externally driven QA processes in Africa (Materu, 2007).

Following much debate in the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the South African higher education sector, consensus was reached that justified the move from QA to QE. The aim was to address systemic issues including, teaching and learning, institutional autonomy, student learning experience, academics' capacity development and training, accountability and increased student retention and throughput. Subsequently, the need for focused attention in QE was identified to strengthen initiatives aimed at transforming the curriculum to meet set targets of improved student success. Moreover, the wave of violent student protests that hit the higher education sector calling for quality free higher education, the decolonisation of the curriculum and transformation augmented this nationalistic transformative agenda. The Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) was introduced as a sector-wide project in South African higher education in 2014 that aimed at addressing teaching and learning issues in order to improve student success and throughput at the undergraduate level. Systems, processes and strategies were put in place for a sector-wide roll-out of the implementation of the QEP as a short-term policy.

The CHE administered the QEP through its sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The HEQC was mandated by the Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997 to carry out quality promotion, institutional audit and programme accreditation within the framework of transforming the higher education system in South Africa. The HEQC commenced its first cycle of institutional audits in 2004 to 2011. The second cycle was the QEP. The QEP model, an externally driven process was comprised of a peer-reviewed system including peers from institutions and experts in the field of QA. The QEP was born out of concerns from both institutions and academics about weak and inefficient quality management systems and processes that failed to improve student success and lacked the capacity to enhance students' experiences (CHE, 2014b).

1.2   Statement of the problem

As already mentioned, the developments mentioned above led the CHE to embark on quality enhancement in South Africa in the form of a 'project' (QEP). The immediate objective of the QEP was to address teaching and learning challenges. In its initial phase (2014–2015), the QEP had four areas of focus:

- Focus area 1: Enhancing academics as teachers
- Focus area 2: Enhancing student support and development
- Focus area 3: Enhancing the learning environment
- Focus area 4: Enhancing course and programme enrolment management

The second phase was delayed owing to the nationwide student protests that swept across the higher education landscape in 2015 and 2016. Subsequently Phase 2, which looked at transforming the curriculum, was pushed forward by a year to 2017, as institutions had to consolidate what they had learnt in Phase 1 (CHE, 2018). This phase is beyond the scope of this study.

The QEP framework served as a guide within which the programme would be implemented across the sector including the key focus areas. Eventually, it was projected that in the long term, this new policy direction would contribute to:

- Addressing youth graduate unemployment, which remains a critical challenge regardless of government's policy of radical transformation of the higher education system.
- Addressing the lack of well-qualified academic staff which has a negative effect on the quality of output from the system. Recently, there have been calls to increase the percentage of PhD qualified staff in and the research output of the higher education sector. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 thus proposes an "increase from the current 34% to over 75% by 2030" (NPC 2011: 59).
- Addressing the root problem of quality in teaching and learning processes that results mainly from the absence of a customer and stakeholder focus oriented approach to QA (Saunders and Sin, 2015; Matsebatlela, 2015).
  - Creating a responsive higher education system that nurtures the exchange of information and sharing of best practice through the development of best practice guides across the system.
  - Increasing the number of graduates whose attributes are personally, professionally and socially valuable (CHE, 2014b).
  - Developing a transformed curriculum that meets industry and societal needs.

This study enters the discussion by exploring the implementation of the QEP in South Africa, particularly concerning how it has been understood and interpreted as a new policy by the higher education stakeholders (academics, QA managers, students, QA units, Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] officials, and the CHE). Scant empirical research has been conducted on the QEP project in the South African context, particularly concerning how it has been understood as a new concept, received and interpreted by higher education stakeholders to inform change processes. The body of literature available points to anecdotal evidence from workshops, presentations and conversations at a conceptual level (Sosibo, 2014). Therefore, the limited empirical research conducted, the lack of training of academics, and the lack of a monitoring mechanism might constrain processes to support the implementation of the QEP.

1.3   Study aims

The main aim of this study was to explore stakeholders' experiences and implementation strategies regarding the QEP in their institutions with a view to improving student retention, success and throughput. Accordingly, it firstly critically examined the way in which stakeholders were experiencing the policy transition from QA to QE, and then drew attention to their understanding of the purpose of the QEP, and how it supports internally driven (quality enhancement) processes of HEIs. The stakeholders include policy makers as well as representatives of four different public higher education institutions in South Africa. It was important to understand the views of the stakeholders regarding the implementation of the QEP to determine whether what the policy purports to achieve was in fact achieved given the persistent challenge of poor student success and throughput rates (CHE, 2014; DHET, 2014). At the same time, to understand how stakeholders addressed this challenge through the strategies they used at both the institutional and the programme level. Moreover, since the QEP represents a renewed vision and change strategy – expressed through notions of "reflective practice" and "doing things differently" (CHE, 2014a), this study explored the way stakeholders engaged with, negotiated and navigated their way through the renewed policy blueprint towards achieving set targets for student success and throughput. In addressing the research questions, the study aimed at interrogating the CHE QE policies, systems, procedures and processes, and how stakeholders understood, interpreted and applied them within their diverse contexts. In this way, I attempted to link stakeholder perspectives of the QEP as a mediating tool between policy formulation (theory) and policy implementation (practice) (Bowe et al., 1992).

1.4 Research questions

The overarching research question is the following:

**How do stakeholders understand, experience and implement the QEP
in four higher education institutions in South Africa?**

The sub-research questions are as follows:

- How do higher education stakeholders understand the policy shift from QA to QE?
- How do higher education stakeholders understand the purpose and meaning of the QEP?
- What strategies do institutions employ to implement the QEP?
- Which factors are enablers or barriers in the implementation of the QEP, and why?
- In what ways has the QEP been implemented as intended?

1.5 Research methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology through a multiple-case study research design, to provide an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' perspectives and experiences of the QEP and their strategies for implementing it in four South African universities. The cases were the universities (a traditional, a merged university, a university of technology and a comprehensive university[1]), the findings pertaining to which were compared for replication. The stakeholders consisted of university representatives including faculty staff, university senior management (DVCs: Teaching and Learning, executive directors); quality assurance units (QA managers) support staff, and Student Representative Council (SRC) leaders; CHE representatives (QA director and monitoring and evaluation director); and DHET representatives (university sector directors).

1.6 Theoretical framework

The study was informed by Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory on policy process, which helped me understand the processes of policy formulation, enactment and implementation in the South African higher education system. The theory was helpful in explaining policy formulation and

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[1] Traditional universities offer theoretically oriented university degree programmes. A merged university is the product of a merger between two or more institutions brought about by the restructuring of the higher education system. Universities of technology offer vocationally oriented diploma and degree programmes, while comprehensive universities offer a combination of traditional university qualifications and university of technology qualifications.

implementation processes and I applied it to the QEP by looking at the three policy contexts: namely, context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice.

1.7   Rationale, motivation and significance of the study

My interest in this area of research was motivated by concerns regarding low student success and retention, and the throughput rates evident in the high dropout rates of students, particularly in their first year of studies (CHE, 2014). As a practitioner working in the Division of Student Affairs and Extracurricular Development (SAED) at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), I was particularly interested in the quality of student services and the extent to which these services support students' academic development needs and ultimately improve student success. Since QE aims at improving student retention and throughput through enhanced teaching and learning strategies at the undergraduate level, I wanted to find out how and to what extent the stakeholders are experiencing the measures set in the QEP.

Moreover, studying QA and QE in South Africa will contribute to theory building and knowledge production and dissemination in the areas of QA and QE internationally. With globalisation, increased demands are being made for transparency and accountability and the effects of international standards are growing (Materu, 2007; Sursock, 2015). Following the global trends in internationalisation and competition there is a realisation that bolstering a local or regional mission with international outreach is necessary (Sursock, 2015: 29). This trend is backed by initiatives to harmonise study programmes, qualifications and the awards of HEIs, a process that has recently taken off in Africa, Southern Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. This was inspired by the Bologna Process in the European Union (Materu, 2007). It is evident that during the past decade the cross-border movement of students has increased, resulting in trans-national education and the mushrooming of a culture of externally driven QA systems and agencies requiring that quality be measured across national borders (Singh, 2010). This trend has led to the need for coordinated or synchronised QA practices to facilitate geo-regional and "cross-border academic mobility and recognition of qualifications within and across regions" (Singh, 2010: 190). This study will contribute to research into QE initiatives focused on enhancing educational standards through information sharing, sharing best practices and research on QE that will ultimately contribute to building global networks and support systems.

1.8   Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 has presented a broad outline of and orientation to the study. It introduced the concepts of quality, QA and QE and the history and trajectory of QE in South African higher education. The chapter also introduced the challenges associated with the phenomenon being studied and the rationale for the study, its aims, objectives and the methodology that it considered.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review and identifies the gap in the literature as a basis for this study. It provides definitions of the terms 'quality', 'QA' and 'QE' and the diverse conceptualisations of these concepts. In order to understand the trajectory of QE globally as a movement, the literature points to best practice models of QE and the mushrooming of QE internationally, as well as its influence in the developing world. It also shows how QE is institutionalised in developed countries and how the concept was born in South African higher education. The literature also delineates the concepts of QA and QE to better understand these terms and how they relate to the QEP. Of importance to note is the scant literature on QE in Africa, which thus presents the gap identified and which further justified the basis for this study.

Chapter 3 provides the theoretical framework that informed this study. The study drew on the Bowe, Ball and Gold's (1992) *theory of policy processes and the processes of policy* and the effects of policies in the education sector. This theory was relevant for the study because it examines the processes of policy and discusses policy practice by exploring the context of policy and the relationships and/or the power struggles between the role players and stakeholders that develop in the policy formulation and implementation processes. These elements were important for my study, as they helped me to answer questions around policy formulation (systems and processes), policy change and the way the stakeholders receive the QEP. It also addresses the question concerning what policy and policy implementation is. At the same time, the study drew on Braun, Maguire and Ball's (2010) policy enactments theory; and Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins' (2011) theory on policy actors to explain how teachers enact policies in schools and how policies are transferable to different contexts. However, the findings of this study conflicted with this view that policies could be transferred to different contexts, as it was found that the Scottish model could not be transferred as is to the South African context, as various issues were found regarding the different contexts of the two countries.

Chapter 4 provides the research methodology that the study employed. A qualitative multiple-case study research design was applied to provide an in-depth understanding of stakeholder perspectives on and experiences of the QEP and the strategies they applied in implementing

it in South African higher education. This approach was informed by a constructivist paradigm that acknowledges the richness of individual perspectives or expertise viewpoints, values and the subjective nature of the understandings of a phenomenon (Wahyuni, 2012) associated with the social constructs of meaning and discourse.

Considering the complex nature of the QA and QE phenomena and related challenges, and to answer the research questions, data collection methods included policy documents, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and reports. Data analysis involved content and thematic analysis.

Chapter 5 presents a cross-case analysis of data across the cases in the study. This analysis allowed for the identification of common or contrasting themes that emerged across these cases. The findings subsequently revealed diverse stakeholder understandings and experiences of the implementation of the QEP in the four participating institutions and stakeholder perspectives on its impact on student success and throughput reflecting both negative and positive views. Some felt that success had been achieved in certain areas, others were not convinced that the QEP had been successful and still others stressed that the QEP had been a failure. A key finding was the project mentality that emerged among the stakeholders, particularly at the faculty and staff levels, which arose from their lack of understanding of the QEP. This project mentality was manifested in the impression that was created that the QEP as a 'project' lacked the authority accorded to a policy. Consequently, stakeholders' adoption of negative attitudes and behaviours, as well as their lack of confidence and disinterestedness in the QEP, were the result of an environment that was not conducive to academics learning about and engaging with QE concepts to obtain a better understanding of its purpose, its meaning, and its intention. This situation threatened the sustainability of the QEP and consequently resulted in its failure to meet its intended objectives of enhancing teaching and learning to improve student success.

Chapter 6 explains policy formulation and reflects on the lessons learnt about policy implementation, through the lens of Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory on policy process and the process of policy. This chapter examined emergent trends and major themes in relation to the theoretical framework to explain the influence of the three contexts: context of influence, context of policy text production and context of practice, on policy implementation. The themes include the failure of traditional audits, unstable higher education climate, globalisation, and policy borrowing in the context of influence. Consultation, or lack of, between policy makers and policy implementers, various perspectives and interpretation of quality, QA and QE, top-down approaches to policy implementation, policy versus project, and lack of a theory of change in the context of policy text production. Collaboration, capacity building,

benchmarking, student support, different approaches to policy implementation, different understandings of the concepts quality, QA and QE, insufficient funding and resources, unstable higher education climate, project mentality and a compliance (tick-box) culture in the context of practice. The study found out whilst there were both positive and negative outcomes in the three contexts: the context of influence had a potential to influence change, the context of policy text production and the context of practice did not bring about the envisioned change (discussed in Chapter 6).

Chapter 7 is the last chapter of this study and concludes the findings of the study, makes recommendations, and suggests further research in critical areas that could not be covered by this study.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the existing literature on QA and QE as a background for this study. It is structured as follows: firstly, I present background information on QA and QE and their effects on educational quality in higher education. I interrogate the concepts of quality, QA and QE. This is followed by a discussion on QA and QE practices to understand the similarities and differences between them and their application in higher education. I then present global trends and QE models in eleven countries, Scotland, the United Kingdom (UK), Netherlands, Spain, Australia, the United States of America (USA), Canada, Finland, Ghana, Ethiopia and South Africa, to understand developments in QA and QE internationally and the factors that are influential in driving change in these environments. This discussion also seeks to gain insight into best practice models for benchmarking to improve practice in local contexts. This is followed by a discussion of the literature on stakeholders' experiences in the implementation of QE in higher education, as well as identify the gaps in the content knowledge.

2.1.1 Background

Mechanisms for quality assuring education provision are in place in many higher education institutions (HEIs) (Martin, 2018; Bollaert, 2014; Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018; Swanzy, Nudzor and Ansah, 2017). The aim is to reassure stakeholders (students, parents, employers, governments, academics and the society at large) that the provision of education meets threshold standards or to satisfy them about the quality of provision (Teshome, 2013). In the same vein, external factors such as internationalisation, globalisation, the massification of higher education, cross-border mobility of students and competitiveness are forces driving change in higher education and are influential in the policy direction of most HEIs. The need for HEIs to respond to these demands and the equally pressing need to enhance competiveness and effectiveness suggest the urgency for developing and implementing effective QA systems across functions and processes. Traditionally, the higher education QA system is accountability driven, a direction that shows a mésalliance with stakeholder (academics and faculties) realities regarding their experiences of policy implementation and the ramifications for teaching and learning. This mésalliance or mismatch between governments' or quality councils' and academics' conceptions of quality reflects different interests and the lack of trust displayed by government in academics. For instance, academics view QA as continuous improvement or transformative learning whilst government perceives it as accountability driven (Williams, 2016). Historically, in many parts of the world QA

practices are rooted in traditional roles that take on accreditation, external quality audits, voluntary accreditation or assessment standards (Shah, Cheng & Fitzgerald, 2016).

Stakeholders perceive the traditional QA as not taking cognisance of teaching and learning and as being compliance driven and merely a 'tick-box' approach that is not effective. Thus, they have become disgruntled with QA approaches (Harvey & Williams, 2010). Harvey and Williams (2010) argue that in the past 15 years, QA in higher education has been seen by academics as having no link between it and their academic work. Teshome (2013) holds that for effective and efficient quality assurance processes the quality model must emanate from stakeholder needs. He argues that any higher education department that does not follow this approach cannot meet the set standards and requirements of the industry and the community, resulting in failure to meet the ever-increasing demands of stakeholders. This suggests a stakeholder-oriented approach that takes into account stakeholder input and responsiveness to client and industry needs. In fact, Land and Gordon (2013) go beyond this policy standpoint, advocating for a culture based on consultative processes and stakeholder ownership and involvement, including student involvement as partners in QA and QE reviews.

O'Mahony and Garavan (2012) point to the centrality of stakeholder engagement and involvement in the QA implementation processes. These authors argue that an important dimension of quality management (QM) systems is the empowerment of staff; however, academics are frequently not consulted in the implementation process. According to (O'Mahony & Garavan, 2012: 182) "Research in wider change management reveals that about 70 to 75 per cent of major organisational change efforts fail because they fail to meet the expectations of key stakeholders". This, therefore has lessons for us to consider in the implementation of change policy. QA is of critical importance to any higher education system and the enforcement of effective QA tools, particularly internal QA processes that are in concurrence with external QA processes, is regarded as valuable by stakeholders. Based on the literature it can be argued that stakeholder involvement in policy processes is crucial given the major role stakeholders have to play, starting with their understanding of change processes, to enable them to implement the policy. In other words, stakeholders are the enablers of policy implementation; therefore, support should be within their reach for the effective QA and QE of teaching and learning. Having provided some background information on the concepts of QA and QE, and the relationship between these concepts, it is necessary to define quality to obtain a grounded understanding of what quality is and how stakeholders define quality and QA and QE, as well as their influence on educational quality.

2.2   Definition of quality

Quality of education in itself is a challenge and has undergone public scrutiny, resulting in the enforcement of QA schemes through the emergence of the New Public Management movement of the late 1970s to the 1990s across the Western world (Land & Gordon, 2013: 39). There is a need for a real understanding of quality and how it manifests in higher education. Although defining quality is crucial for a better understanding of stakeholder perceptions of quality, defining what constitutes it in higher education is difficult given the emergence of diverse stakeholder grouping interpretations over the past decade.

What emerges from the literature is the absence of a universally accepted principle or a single, authoritative definition of quality, and the approaches to QA are purpose related and specifically contextual (Martin & Stella, 2007; Ntshoe, Higgs, Wolhuter & Higgs, 2010; Prisacariu, 2015; Sharma, 2012; Shah et al., 2011).

Harvey (2007) holds that there is an epistemological conceptualisation of quality and its relationship to learning. He examines the various commonly adopted definitions of quality which accordingly are distinguished from standards and quality standards. In elaborating on these differing conceptualisations of quality, Harvey and Green (1993) group them according to five main categories: "quality as exceptional", "quality as perfection", "quality as fitness for purpose", "quality as value for money" and "quality as transformation". Harvey (2007) further distinguishes quality from standards, arguing that although these concepts are used interchangeably in higher education, they are distinctively different. It is imperative to clarify the difference between these concepts according to Harvey (2007). Quality is "essentially about process and standards refer to the level (grading) of the outcome" (Harvey, 2007:8). Table 2.1 that follows is adapted from Harvey (2007) and illustrates these differences in definitions, starting with the five commonly held definitions of quality.

Table 2.1: Definitions of quality and standards

Quality	Definition
Exceptional	A traditional concept linked to the idea of 'excellence', usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed.
Perfection or consistency	Focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality in this sense is summed up by the interrelated ideas of zero defects and getting things right first time.
Fitness for purpose	Judges quality in terms of the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose. The purpose may be customer-defined to meet requirements or (in education) institution-defined to reflect institutional mission (or course objectives).
Value for money	Assess quality in terms of return on investment or expenditure. At the heart of the value-for-money approach in education is the notion of accountability. Public services, including education, are expected to be accountable to the funders. Increasingly, students are also considering their own investment in higher education in value-for-money terms.
Transformation	Sees quality as a process of change, which in higher education adds value to students through their learning experience. Education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformative quality in education: enhancing the customer and empowering the customer.
Standards	
Academic standards	The demonstrated ability to meet specified level of academic attainment. For pedagogy, the ability of students to be able to do those things designated as appropriate at a given level of education. Usually, the measured competence of an individual in attaining specified (or implied) course aims and objectives, operationalised via performance on assessed pieces of work. For research, the ability to undertake effective scholarship or produce new knowledge, assessed via peer recognition.
Standards of competence	Demonstration that a specified level of ability on a range of competences has been achieved. Competencies may include general transferable skills required by employers; academic ('higher level') skills implicit or explicit in the attainment of degree status or in a post-graduation academic apprenticeship; particular abilities congruent with induction into a profession.
Service standards	Are measures devised to assess identified elements of the service provided against specified benchmarks? Elements assessed include the activities of service providers and facilities within which the service takes place. Benchmarks specified in 'contracts' such as student charters tend to be quantified and restricted to measurable items; post hoc measurement of customer opinions (satisfaction) is used as indicators of service provision. Thus, service standards in higher education parallel consumer standards.
Organisational standards	Attainment of formal recognitions of systems to ensure effective management of organisational processes and clear dissemination of organisational practices.

Source: Adapted from Harvey (2007)

Martin and Stella (2007) argue that the most appropriate definition of quality is "fitness for purpose" since this is an all-embracing concept. Fitness for purpose is potentially a definition of quality that embraces all five conceptualisations of quality by Harvey and Green (1993; Harvey, 2007).

However, this definition might be limiting, as Ndebele (2014) indicates that a "fitness-for-purpose" conceptualisation of quality is too simplistic in education, considering the complex nature of the educational field and environment, and how it is being received against service delivery, inputs or learning processes, and expected outcomes. Rather, a holistic yet varied definition of knowledge would provide a representative interpretation of quality in different contexts. In addition, quality is viewed from the diverse settings or environments in which it is applied. For instance, institutional settings and environmental dynamics are diverse in nature; therefore, one-size-fits-all approach might not be feasible in different contexts. Accordingly, owing to the diversity of practices and interpretations in higher education, definitions of quality vary.

According to Harvey and Knight (1996), Lomas (2004) and Cheng (2014), quality as transformation is considered the most appropriate definition of quality. In that light, Cheng (2014) argues that this definition appeals to all stakeholders in terms of addressing their concerns, especially in teaching and learning. This notion of quality is related to QE (Harvey & Knight, 1996) in that the general understanding of QE is continuous improvement leading to change. This suggests that the concept of change is central in QE. The commonly held assumption is that "QE is more transformative and requires a deliberate change process" to occur (Lomas, 2004: 158). Mkhize and Cassimjee (2013) and Elassy (2015) concur that the notion of quality as transformation acknowledges change processes in teaching and learning by affirming the practice of continuous improvement and the continued professional development (CPD) of lecturers. Therefore, one may agree that the notion of 'quality as transformation' is deeper than other notions of quality (discussed above) in higher education evident in the practice of transformative learning (Cheng, 2014; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Dongwe, 2013). This supports learning that changes the individual (student) as desirable because in this mode the student undergoes changes by learning to negotiate developmental transitions and become changed in the process (Cheng, 2014). This accordingly involves rational thought, reflection, emotion and social context, resulting in comprehension of themselves and their worlds (Cheng, 2014). Dongwe (2013) elaborates further on this notion of quality as "the ability to transform students on an on-going basis and add value to their knowledge and personal development". In support of this argument I concur that quality should add value to student learning experiences and knowledge systems by virtue of showing, for

instance, a change in attitude or the development of capabilities in students for personal enrichment. This would involve acquiring skills and processing information to make their own judgement about what motivates them in the learning process. This presumes the greater involvement of stakeholders in the processes and endeavours of quality.

As the debate around what defines quality ensues, institutions (governmental, academic, financial, industry) globally are grappling with how to keep up with accepted standards in a fast-paced changing world and some in developed countries are aspiring to implement absolute standards of 'excellence'. The higher education environment is a dynamic one with the change occurring demanding change management processes and the use of holistic or varied approaches in a competitive space. This leads us to a discussion of the approaches to QA, the quality culture and the gradual shift to QE both internationally and in the South Africa context.

2.3   Approaches to quality assurance

Having defined 'quality', it is worthwhile to offer a critical definition of QA and QE as the key drivers for maintaining standards and for the purposes of conceptualising this study, as well as for a better understanding of the two concepts. Hayward (2001) defines QA as a "planned and systematic review of process of an institution or programme to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced". This definition of QA is echoed by Kahsay (2012), who views QA as incorporating policies, procedures, systems, resources, strategies, values and attitudes in ensuring continued improvement in the quality of educational processes. This view is also shared by Woodhouse (2013), who states that QA is concerned with placing the policies, procedures, resources and strategies in place to ensure that quality is maintained and enhanced. On the other hand, QE is conceptualised and understood differently from QA. For instance, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the UK (QAA 2006: 11) defines QE as the "process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities". In other words, the "institutional mechanisms and processes of QE are conceptualised internally" (Nicholson, 2011: 6) with the purpose of capacitating institutions in improving teaching and learning.

QA in higher education involves the practice of maintaining and improving academic standards. The concept of QA is linked to 'accountability' for the use of public funding of universities (Shah et al., 2011); institutional reputation, students' choice of institutions to attend, and accountability in terms of value for money are all dependent on the quality of service provision in higher education. According to Harvey and Newton (2004), a QA approach

is a "pragmatic", logical process organised through political presumption steered by New Public Management ideology that compels the checking of higher education for accountability purposes. There are two main categories of QA: internal and external QA practices (Kristensen, 2010; Nicholson, 2011: 8; Harvey & Newton, 2004) embedded in diverse frameworks linked to the purposes of quality, institutional mission statements and objectives. External processes involve four major activities, namely, accreditation, audit, assessment and external examination (Harvey & Newton, 2004).

It is worth unpacking these four concepts for a better understanding of the external QA framework. Accreditation refers to a process whereby a decision warrants an institution or programme; audit explores internal processes; assessment passes a judgement about the quality of teaching and learning or research; and external examination checks standards (Ibid.). However, a common practice associated with external QA is accreditation while internal QA is usually linked to audit processes.

Shah et al. (2011) discuss the many approaches to quality assurance used in six countries: Sweden and the Netherlands, the UK, the USA, South Africa and New Zealand. These are summarised below (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Approaches to quality assurance

Approaches to quality assurance	
	Sweden and the Netherlands
	Traditional approach of accreditation. Focus is on assessing programmes and institutions with the possibility that programmes may be de-registered.
	United Kingdom
	Tradition of external quality audits and subject reviews with more focus on outcomes and standards.
	United States
	Approach is voluntary accreditation.
	Middle East
	The Commission of Higher Education uses 19 standards to assess institutional accreditation. Focus is on systems and processes to assure quality and also outcomes and standards.
	New Zealand
	Similar to the approach used in Australia. Focus is on developing systems and processes for quality assurance rather than monitoring standards and outcomes.
	South Africa
	Quality assurance uses both 'fitness for purpose' and a 'fitness of purpose' approach to quality. Fitness for purpose is in relation to the institutions' specific missions within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity. The fitness of purpose is defined as the quality-related intentions of an institution as adequate at the programme level (Harvey, 2004) to satisfy whether the qualifications, programmes, and learning experiences are responsive to the broad development needs of the students and to the knowledge, skills and service needs of South Africa.

Source: Shar et al. (2011)

Generally, these approaches reflect differentiation of practice, the QA arrangements existing in higher education tailor-made to meet specific national needs, and institution-specific environments. In the same vein, Chinomona and Moloi (2013) support the view that within a multipronged environment with varied definitions of quality, value is potentially added by adopting unique contextual models (taking into account the diversity of students and learning environments) to derive the relevant impact in enhancing student learning at the institutional level.

2.4 Conceptualising quality assurance and quality enhancement

QA is conceptualised has embedding a compliance culture of maintaining standards according to stipulated criteria or performance indicators. This view of QA has generated much debate recently, especially at a time when there is a mushrooming culture of internal quality enhancement. There has been much criticism of QA amongst scholars and academics that the conception of QA as a checking mechanism has resulted in a simple compliance (Ndebele, 2014) or a mere 'tick-box' phenomenon. This suggests an alternative, in the form of a quality

enhancement approach, based on internal (institutional) mechanisms of quality and/or supplementing QA approaches conceptualised internally with the purpose of capacitating institutions in improving teaching and learning. Quality enhancement arises from a culture of quality assurance within institutions that emphasises ownership of quality processes and collective responsibility for quality by stakeholders (institutions, academics, faculties, students). Subsequently, Ndebele (2014: 307) argues that QA is a practice in which the goal posts have been moved towards satisfying authorities instead of prioritising the improvement of learning. The underlying concern is that institutional practices and QA mechanisms will drive a compliance culture and accountability at the expense of teaching and learning for enhancement purposes. As a result, recent trends have shown increased QE practices and policies emerging in higher education and in some cases the blurring of the lines between QE and QA approaches.

However, considering that QE focuses on "deliberate, continuous, systematic and measurable improvement" (CHE, 2014: 11) suggests that attempts are made to foster a culture of quality improvement within institutions. It also suggests the promotion of ownership of quality processes and collective responsibility for quality by stakeholders (academics, faculties, students) (Nicholson, 2011).

The University of Miami has a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which it defines as

> … a carefully designated and focused course of action taken by colleges and universities that addresses a well-defined topic(s) or issue(s) relating to enhancing student learning as part of the accreditation process. The plan should complement the institution's ongoing academic planning and evaluation process. The QEP should be designed based on empirical data (http://www.miami,edu/index.php/ offic_of_accreditation_and_assessment_ooa/ums_).

2.5   Comparing quality assurance to quality enhancement

It is worthwhile to compare the QA and QE frameworks in order to represent their roles and their applicability in the quality arena by identifying their distinctive features and the overlaps between them. In that way, I provide a frame of reference for an account of how the policy processes evolved over time. In comparing them, I will therefore take into consideration the two areas of scope and applicability.

Newton (2013) discusses the distinctive differences between the two processes of QA and QE. He states that QA processes are deliberately aimed at checking, evaluating and making judgements about quality standards. This view is sustained by Gunn and Cheng (2015), who note that QA is about making judgements about whether standards are met and identifying areas for improvement or summative assessment. A contrasting picture emerges regarding QE processes, as these focus on the processes of teaching and learning, creating a culture of quality improvement and change from within institutions leading to improvement.

In terms of their comparability, there are areas of commonality as well as areas of marked difference between QA and QE. For instance, the common agenda is to ensure that the delivery of educational goods and services is of quality. However, despite the fact that the common goal is maintaining and enhancing quality of provision, and although QA encompasses aspects of teaching and learning, institutional capacity development through peer review and self-evaluation embedded in the QE framework, the QE scope goes beyond compliance targets. Newton's (2013) views of QE as a deliberate process of change suggests that QE leads to improvement beyond the accountability call. He further suggests that there is a correlation between improvement and the student learning experience and subsequently the enhancement outcome derived from mechanisms and activities aimed at enhancement (Ibid., 9). He also adds that QA may influence the direction that enhancement and improvement takes. In other words, this suggests overlaps between the two processes with some differences in their approaches to improving the quality of provision.

In that light, QA is viewed as accountability driven whilst enhancement is 'absolute' developmental. Nicholson (2011) differentiates between QA and QE, associating QA with accountability and external bodies such as the state, accrediting bodies and governmental agencies. In addition, whilst QA subscribes to a regulatory framework (compliance), QE is improvement-led. In other words, QA is outward looking, emphasising compliance measures in meeting stipulated criteria and QE is inward looking, focusing on internal institutional processes such as teaching and learning and research, and capacity building. QA emphasises meeting specified standards and maintaining them through policies, procedures, monitoring and evaluation (Nicholson, 2011; CHE, 2014b). By contrast, QE focuses on "deliberate,

continuous, systematic and measurable improvement" (ibid. 11). At the same time, QA processes are retrospective or backward looking, whilst QE is progressive or forward looking in that it considers *"comparing the quality of what is about to be produced with the quality of what has been produced in the past"* (Inglis, 2005: 2).

Another striking difference relates to the second area of applicability. For instance, since QA denotes the policies, procedures, values, attitudes, resources and actions in ensuring that standards are maintained and enhanced, practice translates to a mere 'tick-box' exercise and compliance measures. QE instils a culture of continuous improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, especially for staff in a university environment (Ndebele, 2014). This involves deliberate steps and initiatives aimed at motivating staff by giving them time, incentives and the means to actually improve quality (ibid.). Therefore, the context in which it is applied differs from the QA context. The environment applicable for a QA framework is systemic or managerial and is driven externally. It is operationalised from a top-down or a systemic and systematic policing approach to assuring quality. On the other hand, the QE environment is bottom-up, pragmatic or collegial and self-regulatory, shaped by emerging culture based on the values and principles of collegiality, inclusivity, ownership and enhancement (Saunders & Sin, 2015). What this implies therefore is that QE is contextualised to fit in the institutional situation and dynamics. These differences point to different practices within higher education. Interestingly, in the case of the South African higher education context, when it was found that QA had achieved little over the years, both external and internal QA were applied and a QE process infused in an iterative fashion (Materu, 2007; Hardman, 2005).

Therefore, it is against this backdrop that the renewed vision and strategy of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa is located to promote a culture of self-reflection and innovation in higher education. Since, the QEP of the CHE was earmarked for driving change within institutions, its applicability would therefore be consistent with focused attention on teaching and learning, as well as capacity development, at the institutional level to address the challenge of student success and throughput, which the QEP promotes. Moreover, considering the assumption that the QEP has the potential to pull together all the resources necessary for addressing student retention and throughput, it assumes a bottom-up approach in meeting disciplinary needs, moving away from institutional procedures towards actual teaching practice and ownership of internal processes.

2.6 Global trends and literature reviewed on quality assessment and quality enhancement models

Having presented a comparative analysis of QA and QE and their distinctive contexts and roles, this section of the chapter reviews the literature on global trends and factors driving change in these contexts. In other words, it is important to have an international perspective on the implementation of QE in diverse contexts in order to benchmark the South African QEP against international practice. In the South African context, QE would mean the enhancement of teaching and learning to meet student access, retention and throughput targets.

Studies conducted elsewhere seem to suggest the adoption of QE as fit for purpose for enhancing the student learning experience. For instance, common patterns emerging recently tend to suggest new policy decisions that embrace a QE culture in HEIs and frameworks that complement QA mechanisms with QA as a support structure for internal QA. Of particular interest for this study is the increasing emergence of QE globally and the meaning attached to it by stakeholders across higher education. To support this, an analysis of QE models in eleven countries was conducted to understand the shifting trends and patterns. The models presented below are evidence of change and the adoption of QE approaches in most higher education environments. This situation can be attributed to academic concerns about the 'weaknesses' of QA and the call for transformative practices in the form of academic 'ownership' of internal quality enhancement processes supported by academic autonomy. For instance, in these environments QE is viewed as an initiative to drive change and policy direction towards much desired transformative practices.

2.6.1 The Netherlands, Spain and England

Brouwer (2015) discusses the different approaches to QA in the Netherlands, Spain and England. According to the author, centralised, nationalist approaches are employed in England and the Netherlands whilst a decentralised, nationalist approach is being implemented in Spain. In the Netherlands and England, the process is done through national agencies responsible for QA. The Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO) was founded in order to ensure and promote the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders in 2004. This is an umbrella body primarily responsible for ensuring institutions maintain effective systems of QA in order to guarantee the quality of the programmes offered (ibid.). In Spain, a national QA Agency, the 'Agencia Nacional de Evaluacion de la Calidad y Accreditacion' (ANECA), was established in 2002 and the amendment to the Organic Law on Universities in 2007 gave it the status of a public state agency. ANECA provides external QA for the Spanish higher education system.

In 1997, the QA Agency for HE (QAA) was established in England, which replaced the former Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and the former separate quality assessment divisions. The creation of the QAA transferred the responsibility for the quality of funded HEIs from the funding councils to the QAA. As the new agency, the QAA also advises institutions on possible improvements. In England, the main focus of the agency shifted from accountability towards QA through institutional audits with evaluations of internal quality and management procedures (Bernard, 2012). The three country cases show commonalities regarding their underpinning philosophy on ensuring quality of provision. They prescribe to the notion of accreditation combined with institutional audits whereby institutions are responsible for the audit (improvement) functionality. In contrast, in the Netherlands, there is an acknowledgement of the critical role of stakeholders. The emphasis in the Netherlands is on the evaluation of the quality of the institution based on the judgement of students as well as the judgement of independent experts. The basis of this is that the results of the evaluation need to be publicly available (ibid.). Although enhancement is acknowledged in the case of both the Netherlands and England, the emphasis in England has been on QA through institutional audits.

2.6.2 Scotland

The Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) was developed in 2003 as part of a national initiative to create a unique, broad and distinctive Scottish policy culture. This policy initiative is implemented across the Scottish higher education sector, which comprises nineteen higher education institutions. Its operations are coordinated by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) with a view to providing an integrated approach, emphasising enhancement rather than assurance (Land & Gordon, 2013).

The Scottish model was intended to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Scottish higher education. It is viewed as a policy intervention that seeks to establish and promote a distinctive culture based on defining values and practices (Land & Gordon, 2013). Basically, the Scottish QEF is a departure from the traditional QA practices. It primarily promotes collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders and aims at creating a sense of ownership by stakeholders. This implies moving away from a top-down or managerialist approach towards a bottom-up, consultative, pragmatic and collegial approach. Another feature of the Scottish QEF is the emphasis placed on a national programme of 'Enhancement Themes' managed by the QAA Scotland. An improvement-led or enhancement-led, bottom-up, consultative and collaborative approach based on mutual trust of all stakeholder groupings is promoted through inclusive practices involving all key stakeholders especially students. Hence, in this model, the voices of stakeholders regarding the policy directions and goals would be critical and valuable. It would be meaningful to explore these voices (in their

contexts) and understand their experiences and the roles they played in shaping this model and the advances made towards meeting goals. This is discussed in section 2.7 of this chapter.

2.6.3 Finland

The Finnish case is a case in point, where institutional autonomy is integrated in the QA and QE systems. Accordingly, institutions themselves develop their own quality system based on their own needs and goals (Kallioinen, 2013). The Finnish audit model is informed by institutional reviews advanced by the core principle of the autonomy of HEIs. The latest trend in Finnish higher education is the increasing focus on quality enhancement. A stakeholder-oriented approach to QA is employed, with "stakeholders [continuing to develop] structures and study fields while at the same time maintaining trust in the long-term changes made earlier" (Kallioinen, 2013: 107). The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is responsible for the evaluation of HEIs through offering support to HEIs, their international competitiveness, quality work and disseminating good practice. Kallioinen (2013) examined the Laurea University of Applied Science QA system as a case study representative of the Finnish higher education sector, which is modelled on continuous development involving "everyone working and studying at Laurea, as well as the most important stakeholders" (ibid., 110). One strength of this model, according to the audit that was conducted by FINHEEC in 2010 in which Laurea was deemed as meeting the criterion of DEVELOPING, is the student-centric research and development (R&D) and the role of students as central actors taking responsibility for their studies (ibid., 113). This is important to note in the light of this study, as QE is used as a leverage for continuous development and students' empowerment. Centres of excellence were evident in the audit report, with Laurea seen as a "top" performing university of applied science in Finland. A major challenge experienced which could be experienced in another university context if not managed well relates to the comprehensive institution-wide implementation of the pedagogical model, taking into consideration the "competence and coping ability of teachers in the turmoil of change" (ibid., 113). So far, this model could be described as mirroring the Scottish model in as far as stakeholder perspectives are incorporated into the evaluation of QE mechanisms.

2.6.4 The United States of America and Canada

Traditionally, the United States of America (USA) implements a voluntary accreditation system. According to Eaton (2015 1), accreditation is "a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement". In this country, accreditation is a non-governmental enterprise. It is carried out by private, non-profit organisations designed for this specific purpose.

Both federal and state governments consider accreditation to be a reliable authority on academic quality. The federal government relies on accreditation to assure the quality of institutions and programmes for which the government provides federal funds as well as federal aid to students. However, Sorcinelli and Garner (2013: 95) explain that "QA and institutional effectiveness are sometimes considered interchangeable with QE", since they are all applied to student outcomes assessment, academic programme review, and the like. It should be noted that QE emerged from explicit attention being paid to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning through "faculty development" in the 1960s. At the same time, QE is stakeholder focused, involving many stakeholders beyond colleges and universities with the involvement of private, non-for-profit organisations, professional associations, institutionally located research programmes and non-governmental accreditation organisations (ibid.). The strength of this model is in the multiplicity of layers of involvement, with each entity mentioned above playing a recognisable role aimed at holistic improvement of the students' learning experience and competences.

Unlike most states which are national or federal (USA), the Canadian higher education system is a provincial responsibility. The improvement of student learning and the enhancement of educational quality is conceptualised through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) initiative. SoTL is a classroom-based post-secondary instrument used by practitioners to investigate teaching and learning processes. It aims at improving student learning and enhancing educational quality. What appears to be a challenge concerning this Canadian model or initiative is the lack of funding for SoTL. According to Poole and Simmons (2013), the provincial responsibility poses a challenge for funding and support from the federal government given that scholarship in SoTL is a provincial responsibility. In addition, the relationship between SoTL and institutional quality involves a complex and abstract pattern of factors (ibid., 119). In addition, there are associated difficulties surrounding its operationalisation in that SoTL takes different forms and is context based, shaped by diverse institutional types and practices. For instance, "each province features its own combination of institutional types" (ibid., 119). Thus, SoTL varies across Canadian higher education such that it makes it an 'oversimplification' to regard higher education in this country as homogeneous. The absence of a national framework or federal support for SoTL presents a potential limitation to its ability to influence policy, including enhancing efforts on a national front. However, the efforts by individual institutions that endeavour to benchmark practice should be acknowledged. In the province of Ontario, a national framework was developed following the provincial governments' policy stance to support initiatives.

2.6.5 Australia

In the Australian higher education system, national policy focuses more on QA and accountability than on enhancement, with institutions themselves bearing responsibility for QE (Krause, 2013). Krause (2013) argues that although some attempts have been made to steer policy in the direction of enhancement in teaching and learning through the AUQA ADRI framework, there has been relatively limited explicit reference to QE in the AUQA reviews. What emerges in the Australian scenario is the pressure from stakeholders and interest groups for some form of balance between QA and QE. Interestingly, tension between regulation and quality improvement has been observed, with student leaders calling for transformative action in government's reforms to embrace broader QE mechanisms (ibid.,135). Therefore, stakeholders advocate for articulated policy directions and government's institutional support, including funds and resources for institutions to manage this transformative approach from within institutions. What is imperative is creating this balance between accountability and improvement and, therefore, stakeholder views in this regard would be important to note.

2.6.6 Ghana

Ansah (2015) describes the education system in Ghana as having a strong tradition rooted in external QA. In his study, Ansah (2015) notes that Ghana does not have a strong internal QA system and thus he advocates for the development and implementation of an internal QA framework tailor-made for polytechnics in Ghana. The study focused on developing a QA framework as an evaluative tool "for embedding and aligning graduate employability competences in curriculum and assessment based on insight from past approaches and guided by a pragmatist perspective" (Ansah, 2015: 2). The rationale and purpose of the study was to capacitate degree-awarding polytechnics with weak internal QA systems.

The results of Ansah's study revealed financial concerns and the need to raise more funds to support QA implementation. Another concern was the issue of staff development. There is a need for continuous staff development and arrangements for staff training to upskill them and increase participation in conferences to "develop skills and build awareness of QA" (Ansah, 2015:15) to boost staff morality, motivation and commitment when staff see themselves as contributing towards and benefitting from being part of implementing change. This issue around staff training is a consistent thread in the literature on QE and policy change with advocacy for staff empowerment and ownership of QE processes and capacity building in HEIs. Another finding was the participants' concerns about stakeholder commitment and cooperation by staff in implementing the framework, thereby assisting them to understand their roles and benefits. This has been attributed to a quality culture that points to a lack of strategic direction on the part of senior leadership of the polytechnics to clarify the link between the implementation of the framework and the mandate of the polytechnics to avoid demotivating

staff. This refers to distributed responsibility or inclusive involvement of stakeholders, including students, to promote commitment and cooperation for the successful implementation of the QA framework. This approach is supported by Saunders and Sin (2015) (discussed in section 2.7) who point out that stakeholder involvement is of paramount importance for policy mediation and the cultivation of a conducive environment in which stakeholders are motivated, empowered and prepared and own the processes of QE or QA frameworks.

2.6.7 Ethiopia

In the Ethiopian context, QA follows a traditional route which is accountability driven through programme accreditation. However, there is also evidence of a recent shift towards internal QA mechanisms being used in the Ethiopian higher education system. Ethiopia's approach to QA leans firmly on the inclusivity of stakeholders be they students or academics. The emphasis is on participatory and inclusive practices of QA, which reflects a QE dimension.

The Ethiopian model promises to pull together resources, including stakeholders in an inclusive fashion. This approach is the hallmark of internal quality improvement as it advocates absolute participation by stakeholders, including academics and faculties, in the implementation of QA in a manner that promotes ownership or control of QE processes. Furthermore, this model views stakeholders as the key to the QE implementation process and thus this augurs inclusiveness.

2.6.8 South Africa

Traditionally, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) conceptualises quality based on the following aspects:

- **"Fitness for purpose** in relation to the specified mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity.
- **Value for money** judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper. Judgements about the effectiveness and efficiency of provision will include but not be confined to labour market responsiveness and cost recovery.
- **Transformation** in the sense of developing the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth" (CHE, 2001: 9 Founding Document)

In relation to teaching, learning, research and community service, the CHE views quality as the ability of the institution to provide qualifications, programmes and learning experiences that are responsive to the broad development needs of learners, thereby also addressing the knowledge, skills and service needs of the country at large. The criteria indicated above are located within a **fitness of purpose** framework based on national goals, priorities and targets

(CHE, 2001). What is noteworthy here is the CHE's conceptualisation of quality within a transformative framework which certainly supports the notion of 'quality as transformation'.

The CHE's QEP is modelled on the Scottish QEP which aims at inclusiveness and student involvement in QA processes in line with the standards and guidelines for QE in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This model was influenced by the ideology of the Bologna Process, which acknowledges HEIs as autonomous bodies with full responsibility for maintaining quality and to contribute to "a culture of continuous quality enhancement; and create a flexible and accessible higher education sector that is responsive to the needs of the students, the labour market and society" (Gvamaradze, 2008: 448). This approach is intended at focusing on student learning, learning experience and high quality learning (Gvamaradze, 2008).

The QEP of the CHE is intended to address poor student success, retention and throughput rates in the South African higher education sector by strengthening teaching and learning activities. The QEP defines student success as follows:

> Enhanced student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable (CHE, 2014b).

This definition of student success implies qualitative and not quantitative approaches whereby quantifiable mechanisms or tick-box methods are used to increase the number of graduates. Such practices would focus on "increasing graduates who have attributes that are valuable to themselves and to others in society" (CHE, 2015: 48). According to the CHE (2015: 48), "exactly what those attributes are must be determined by HEIs and other stakeholders, such as employers. However, there are some attributes that are widely recognised as essential for 21st century graduates to flourish, such as being capable of life-long learning and working as part of a team". This statement alludes to making decision-making powers solely the responsibility of HEIs and "other stakeholders" with regard to deciding on the character and attributes of graduates. This also means ownership by academics and stakeholders of the QEP implementation.

The QEP also aims at capacitating HEIs and building the capacity of lecturers as 'teachers' so that the student experience is optimised. Teaching and learning themes were identified following on the Scottish model which is structured along core teaching and learning themes. The main themes or focus areas include: *Enhancing academics as teachers; Enhancing student support and development; Enhancing the learning environment; and Enhancing course and programme enrolment management* (CHE, 2014a). Continuous professional

development is integrated into the capacity building plan for academics and institutions. In this process, the notion of self-reflection in teaching practice and *"doing things differently"* is key (CHE, 2014: 9).

Having outlined the models above, it would be useful to consider them in the context of my study. The common thread that runs through these models is that they are based on the argument that internal QA mechanisms to enhance teaching and learning should be acknowledged as central in improving educational quality. The Scottish, US, Finnish and Ethiopian models emphasise a stakeholder-focused approach to teaching and learning. These models ascribe to the notions of inclusiveness, transformation (change) and participation of stakeholders, particularly students as partners in the QA processes. It is in the context of exploring stakeholder' influences on the policy "implementation staircase" that these models become relevant. The Scottish and the USA models have a comprehensive dimension, and broader scope and applicability. The Scottish model is based on a nationally agreed QE framework informed by the Bologna Process. Similar to the US model it goes beyond the involvement of students and other stakeholders in the internal QA processes by instituting and affirming the principle of "partnership" and "ownership" of the decision-making in QA and QE processes of which students are part. The Ethiopian model, on the other hand, is relevant in the "developing" world context; however, it is limited in terms of its applicability. Its main focus is addressing a weakness in standards setting and monitoring instruments of the QA Agency, which looks at policy shift and the impact of this shift on change processes. However, this falls outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the Scottish and Ethiopian models have been cited as good practice models in Europe and Africa respectively.

For the purpose of this study, which focuses on stakeholder perspectives on the implementation of the QEP, I found the practice in Ethiopia also to be relevant, particularly considering context-specific issues, because it indicates an African-focused approach to QA. According to O'Mahony and Garavan (2012: 185), "much of the prescriptive quality management literature ignores issues of context, the nature of work processes, structural characteristics and the strategic objectives of the organisation". This model fits in a 'developing world' space shared with South Africa, as a developing country. When I consider context-specific issues, I argue that student dynamics and institutional cultures differ from context to context. This model is similar to the Scottish model in that it supports stakeholder involvement in quality enhancement and promotes inclusiveness and transparency in its implementation. Secondly, it is in line with the principle of 'quality as transformation' that seeks change underpinned by a culture of quality enhancement and inclusiveness to challenge the status quo represented in external QA practices. For instance, the (CHE-AfriQAN), 2012) mentions that the challenge being addressed through this model is the "weakness" of QA as a

standards-setting and monitoring instrument, given its localised context steered by the national QA agency, a practice perceived as not being inclusive. It is further argued that the transparent mobilisation of all stakeholders ensures wider acceptability in the implementation of the quality agenda.

Therefore, one can argue that since the QEP model in South Africa advocates for change, that is, as already mentioned "doing things differently" (CHE, 2014a: 9) and places weight on internal QA processes, it mirrors the Scottish and Ethiopian models which uphold renewed strategies and approaches to QA, particularly with regard to stakeholder involvement. Nevertheless, the purposes of all three models are moderately similar in that they promise change and improved outcomes with respect to the quality of educational provision, a claim worth investigating to determine if the QEP can deliver on its promise and the extent to which 'real' change has taken place within these contexts. However, the Ethiopian model of QA could have some potential in providing a theoretical lens to address context-specific issues around the implementation of standards setting and monitoring instruments, focusing on the external QA agency.

Having considered these models, I support the view that advocating for a 'change' model or a renewed approach to QA might potentially offer alternative strategies to address implementation challenges. This would be informed by benchmarking best practice. In other words, these models could inform my research by drawing on lessons learnt around the implementation of QE frameworks. For instance, in the Ethiopian model, stakeholder empowerment might be promoted through the "transparent and inclusive" (CHE-AfriQAN, 2012: 1) assessment practices it advocates. To achieve this, a shift from a "localised intervention involving only the national QA agency especially in standards setting and monitoring", which it views as not being inclusive (CHE-AfriQAN, 2012: 1), is called for towards mobilising all stakeholders in this process to promote wider acceptability through transparency in the execution of the quality agenda (ibid.). Accordingly, through this model, which addresses this challenge of lack of transparency and inclusivity, Ethiopia is able to leverage the acceptability of the new model within and across the entire university system and communities. This trajectory is particularly important for academics and policy implementers, who view the traditional route of QA as not addressing 'real' teaching and learning issues and internal QA processes, rather it is accountability driven. This view is consistent with the QE movement globally in acknowledging the transition towards enhancement-led approaches. However, a limitation of the Ethiopian model of QE can be linked to limited empirical research conducted to assess the impact of the QE mechanisms across the Ethiopian higher education sector, therefore difficulties might be experienced in replicating the model. Another concern is its focus and scope. Although there are some articles and certain research has been conducted, these

focus mainly on accreditation and external QA processes. In other words, very little documented evidence of the impact of the QE exists apart from government publications.

In South Africa, the CHE leans towards the Scottish QEF model which it views as the epitome of change. The assumption is that the Scottish QEF model has demonstrated some potential in bringing about change and has a long-standing history in QA underpinned by the European Bologna Process. It is simply viewed as best practice for most countries aspiring to effective strategies for enhanced educational quality. It is of critical importance to note here the tendency of the South African policy environment to borrow policy with very little empirical evidence to support it (De Wet & Wolhuter, 2007; Van der Westhuizen and Fourie (2002; Jansen, 1998; Jansen, 1999; Schmidt, 2017). It could be argued that South Africa has leaned towards policy borrowing practices and the imposition of these policies in environments without proper research being conducted or training offered to the implementers of the policy (Maluleke, 2013; Schmidt, 2017). Proper training of personnel in any policy change environment is crucial as a lack of sufficient training results in unprepared policy implementers (Ansah, 2015; Saunders & Sin, 2015). In the CHE's case, although a team of people from certain HEIs visited Scotland during the QEP conceptualisation phase, there was little research conducted to augment the policy direction in a developing context. Van der Westhuizen and Fourie (2002:30) argue that the lack of expertise has resulted in the culture and practice of "importing QA techniques and recipes from other contexts that are not appropriate for the South African situation". The CHE itself acknowledges this shortcoming through the proposed QEP aimed at the capacity development of academics, implying that academics themselves might be ill equipped when it comes to implementing the policy. Moreover, one has to consider differing learning environments. The Scottish context may differ from the South African context even in terms of student dynamics, learning environments and socioeconomic status, which may influence QE internally. However, the Scottish model is considered for benchmarking purposes. It is selected based on three fundamental reasons:

1. It was identified as best practice by the CHE in South Africa and the QEP is premised on the Scottish model.
2. It will be useful in providing a better understanding of stakeholders' roles (QA managers, students) as mediators in the implementation of the QEP, given its lead in the QE revolution in Europe.
3. It presents a theoretical lens to which this study attempts to contribute by addressing a fundamental gap I identified in the literature, that is, a lack of literature on QE in South African higher education.

In fact, scant literature could be found on the implementation of the QE, particularly with regard to stakeholder experiences and the strategies used to meet QEP objectives.

2.7   Stakeholder experiences in the implementation of quality enhancement in higher education

According to Tang and Hussin (2011), it is crucial for HEIs to pay attention to stakeholder views for quality process improvement in higher education. Tang and Hussin (2011) acknowledge the importance of stakeholders' views regarding their experiences in policy implementation to ensure sustainably and enhanced quality assurance processes. For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the experiences of stakeholders as mediators of policy implementation processes. This is supported by Leisyte and Westerheijden (2014) and Westerheijden, Epping, Faber and De Weert (2013: 3) in their description of "stake" as "those that may influence the university's behaviour, direction, process or outcome". They define "stake" as the "ability of a particular actor/group to influence the university's definition of quality of teaching and learning and internal quality assurance processes" (Westerheijden et al., p.3). Freeman (1984: 46) defines stakeholders as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of any organisation's objectives". Stakeholders in higher education include academics, students, parents, administrators, managers, alumni, employers, media and community representatives (Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the stakeholder groupings considered are students, QA managers, QE coordinators, and CHE and DHET QA directors. Defining stakeholders can be helpful in establishing the link between stakeholder experiences and the implementation of QA and QE policies, particularly in the light of understanding their perceptions of the shift from QA to QE.

Cheng (2011) places emphasis on the shift towards QE, noting that in order to assure and to improve teaching and learning in England, there was a shift from the definition of quality as "fitness for purpose" during the 1990s, to "one now focused on student 'transformation'" which reflects increased concern about students. This perspective is shared by Tang and Hussin (2011), who acknowledge the contribution of stakeholders in conceptualising quality and QA mechanisms in higher education. Included in Tang and Hussin's (2011) definition of stakeholders are students. Tang and Hussin (2011) argue that students as valuable stakeholders have a role to play and their views on the quality of educational provision should be acknowledged. In other words, students are increasingly being acknowledged as the primary stakeholders and as valuable with respect to internal QA (Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014; Tang & Hussin, 2011). Therefore, students' criteria for quality in higher education should be elucidated to make informed choices on comparatively high standards based on evidence (Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014: 126). Moreover, they are the recipients of educational goods

and investors in their education. Therefore, the quality of educational services and goods is of the outmost importance to them. With regard to teaching and learning, the students' learning experience matters and should be supported by effective enhancement-led approaches and mechanisms for successful outputs. Therefore, their understandings of the QEP and its purpose are crucial. Besides, QA is by its nature accountability driven and institutions are held accountable to governments, students and/or parents who expect a return on their investment in education. However, QA is not an end in itself, as assumed by QA proponents, because it does not take continuous improvement into account and that is where QE kicks in to facilitate improved student experience.

Notwithstanding the above, Rosa and Teixeira (2014) note the developments in higher education as a result of the recent market approach to governance driven by New Public Management and quasi-markets. This is related to the increasing influence of external stakeholders inclined to neoliberalism and a market ideology in institutional governance matters, including decision-making processes and the implementation of internal QA systems within institutions. For instance, the incorporation of external stakeholders' views in QA activities is gaining momentum evidenced in the incorporation of employers' views in study cycles (Rosa & Teixeira, 2014). This trajectory is important to note in the light of surfacing tensions between internal and external stakeholders' viewpoints on QA-related matters, with the former viewing the latter's presence with scepticism. This scenario interweaves contrasting trajectories of policy analysis discourse and interpretations that portray not only competing interests among diverse stakeholder groupings but also different definitions of quality within institutions. For instance, Cheng (2011: 5) observes:

> First, the quality process is dominated by belief and ideology. Second, stakeholders in higher education have different experiences and perspectives, so it is difficult for them to have a shared understanding of quality. There is a need for more empirical evidence of different stakeholder perspectives in this respect. Third, although attention has increasingly been given worldwide to the quality of teaching (Biggs, 2003), the concept of quality needs to be developed by more closely linking it to conceptions of teaching and learning.

These developments have had a major influence on QA and perhaps the shift patterns towards QE. The notion of institutions as corporations has had a tremendous influence on how institutions operate and is aligned to the idea of promoting institutional efficiency and effectiveness. This idea is warranted as a governance mechanism to "streamline and centralise the decision-making process, the internal setting of priorities and the missions of institutions" (ibid., 220). In the same vein, the involvement of external stakeholders in the

governance and quality assurance processes of higher education across the globe and particularly in Europe (ibid) is seen as furthering the idea of bringing employers on board and calls for higher education responsiveness to labour market needs and youth unemployment to bridge the gap between the labour market and HEIs. Accordingly, external stakeholders are seen to play a vital role in strengthening institutional governance structures, including quality assessment systems. For instance, the use of expertise with specialist knowledge is being promoted in "both the external assessment commissions (during the self-evaluation and external evaluation phases) and as representatives of the external community's opinions regarding the study programme under accreditation" (ibid., 223). In other words, the presence of external stakeholders in the implementation of internal QA systems within HEIs is regarded as crucial, particularly the inclusion of a role for students and other stakeholders (ESG, 2015).

However, in the case of the four institutions analysed by Rosa and Teixeira (2014) in the Portuguese higher education, stakeholders' views regarding external stakeholders' real presence revealed various layers of activism and presence. For instance, there were the external stakeholders who themselves felt their presence and intervention was active and their contribution positive or relevant for institutional development (ibid., 228). Others felt that their intervention was not significant whilst others such as students were not aware of their presence. The effectiveness of the intervention of the latter two groups was not visible even in cases where the intervention was seen as slightly positive, as real change was not noticed in the core areas of "defining graduate profiles, study cycle curriculums, graduate competences or even in terms of internal processes of quality assurance" (ibid., 228). Instead, change happened in the organisational culture and governance of the institution. In the Portuguese case, real change occurred in "the introduction of a more formal evaluative culture" (ibid., 228) which was accountability driven. Only the business sector role was viewed by stakeholders as making a positive contribution towards annual plans, annual reports of activities, the budget, and the strategic plan. Internal stakeholders felt that external stakeholders might have limited knowledge about the specificities of a HEI. However, the general feeling of the internal stakeholders was that the external stakeholders could bring an external view and positively influence the strategic development of the HEIs and the enhancement of quality. It was also noted that viewpoints differed between the polytechnics and the universities with the former stakeholders voicing a positive opinion and the latter a seemingly negative stance about the external stakeholders' real representation in decision-making bodies and their contribution in the institutions' life*" (ibid., 228).

A project that Saunders and Sin (2015) allude to in their article, "Middle managers' experience of policy implementation and mediation in the context of the Scottish quality enhancement framework" focused on the Heads of Departments (HoDs) who they consider as "middle

managers". This group consisted of academics with a middle management function such as heads of department, heads of schools, heads of division, directors of teaching and learning, and programme course leaders (ibid., 240). The aim of the project was to evaluate the middle managers' experience of policy and the strategies they use. It is important to note here that the following three areas were addressed in the context of soliciting stakeholder perspectives: i) the extent to which statements reflected participants' experience; ii) how they viewed their own role as a manager; and iii) factors which helped or hindered their ability to fulfil their role as they saw it. Focus groups interviews were conducted with this group in nine Scottish HEIs in 2008. The participants were selected randomly using names and contact details available on the institutions' websites. In total, 20 focus groups were conducted with up to six participants each.

The researchers used the "implementation staircase" metaphor to position the middle managers within the Scottish higher education system. The implementation staircase metaphor locates the middle managers strategically and situates their experience as mediators of policy on the staircase. These researchers argue that, as the metaphor suggests, it is important to construct the experience of policy from the points of view of the main stakeholders within a policy environment (Saunders & Sin, 2015: 139). Noteworthy here is the significantly different viewpoints, leaving the task of analysis upon stakeholders' constructs of meaning (ibid., 139). For instance, experiences were found to be contextually situated in the unique experiences of the individual stakeholders. Cheng (2011: 5) explains that "stakeholders in higher education have different experiences and perspectives, so it is difficult for them to have a shared understanding of quality". He suggests further that there is a need for more empirical evidence of different stakeholder perspectives in this respect (ibid., 5). Saunders and Sin (2015) point out that each group has a dual role as both receiver and agent of policy messages, which undergo adaptation and will be understood differently according to the situated experience of each stakeholder group (ibid., 139). Although they confined their investigation to middle managers in Scotland, their findings based on their study, "Middle managers' experience of policy implementation and mediation in the context of the Scottish quality enhancement framework" could be replicated in other environments especially the South African context given the policy direction that the CHE has decided on through the implementation of the QEP.

A central element of the QEP is ownership and collegiality. Discussions and analysis focused on participants' responses with regard to how their experiences were aligned with the culture of enhancement and the purpose of the QEP, which reflects a change or shift from QA to QE and whether such a shift did materialise. Nevertheless, the existence of very little literature on stakeholder experiences of QE, particularly in the South African higher education context,

constrains the development of mechanisms and strategies informed by research for the implementation of QE (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013) and the cultivation of a culture of ownership and collegiality. Although studies on QA and QE are increasing, the focus is on QA and scant literature exists on QE, especially stakeholder views of QE implementation. For instance, the gap seen in the limited empirical research conducted on the QEP has the adverse effect of limiting available evidenced-based information and places constraints on contributions aimed at the development of new theories to inform practice in the field of QA and QE. Research would provide the benefit of grounding well-researched practice of QE in teaching and learning and capacity building in institutions of higher education. In addition, as institutions familiarise themselves with QE processes and navigate their way, they would establish comfortable patterns of ownership of the QEP. Consequently, this gap may lead to ill-informed practices based on trial-and-error techniques, a lack of construing real change as a consequence of policy shift dynamics, as well as ambivalent reflective or self-critical practices in the policy mediation processes. Therefore, an exploration of the experiences of participants' enactment of the QEP in the South African context would provide insight into techniques and strategies for handling challenges based on stakeholders' experiences and recommend relevant alternatives, drawing on best practice replicated from other environments that are tailor-made to specific contexts. Some of the gaps can be viewed in the light of the challenges reflected in the literature on stakeholders' perceptions of the implementation of QE processes. Immediately below is a discussion of the literature based on the findings of the study by Saunders and Sin (2015), which relates to some of the challenges experienced by stakeholders in implementing QE and associated practices within institutions, despite the promise of cultivating a culture of collegiality, ownership and improved internal quality processes.

The findings of the study conducted by Saunders and Sin (2015) revealed a multiplicity of challenges, including an academic versus management divide and leadership versus management practice, as well as empowerment and preparedness, the lack of a leadership culture, lack of voice and the constraints placed on middle managers by university policies and procedures in terms of giving input into strategic review plans, lack of financial control, and lack of training provided, unequal treatment, and middle managers' decision-making being constrained, amongst others. The academic versus management divide reflects elements of the hierarchical structures prevailing in traditional QA systems and the corporate world driven by managerialism and accountability. According to Saunders and Sin (2015), accounts of middle managers' experiences of senior managers' behaviour show remoteness from academics and the day-to-day business carried out by those on the shop floor. This indicates practice that conforms to new managerialism tendencies and hierarchies in the Scottish higher

education system. Therefore, I concur with Saunders and Sin's (2015) argument that this way of behaviour and thinking lends itself to "rhetoric" on the part of senior managers because they have violated the mutually agreed values of the QEP. Similarly, the core principles and values of the QEP were violated, resulting in diminishing trust and tensions in the professional relationships among the parties that were involved in the policy implementation process. A pattern that emerges conflicts with the culture of ownership and collegiality shared by academics. Moreover, this depicts a clash between managerialism and the academic values of autonomy and academic freedom, a theme that recurs in the discourse on QA in higher education. As the state assumes increased responsibility for quality, academic freedom is compromised. Saunders and Sin (2015: 137–138) observe that:

> Reliance on independent institutions or individual professionals to ensure their own quality and standards has been replaced by national standardisation … These commentaries argue that academic freedom has become conditional and negotiated with government agencies through the funding councils and research bodies.

They further point out:

> As government policies change, they use these agencies to assess how far higher education institutions are implementing them. They provide a framework by which academics measure legitimate action and decide on priorities. The QEF, however, as a policy text appears to be relatively disconnected from such approaches. It aims to relocate the locus of responsibility for teaching and learning quality from external state agencies back to institutions themselves, as indicated by the policy framework emphasis on collegiality, sector ownership and quality enhancement, rather than quality assurance (Saunders & Sin, 2015: 138).

According to Saunders and Sin (2015: 142), the middle managers were critical of the managerial culture, which was at the expense of collegial relationships. They viewed policy and procedures as constraints and not enablers of collegiality and ownership, the core values that were mutually agreed to by all stakeholders. This means that the QEP was expected to embody a culture of collegiality, empowerment and ownership at all levels: senior management, middle management and academics. On the contrary, middle managers experienced the lack of a culture of collegiality, empowerment and ownership that the QEP aspired to embody.

The middle managers in this setting began to see themselves as "gatekeepers" and protectors of their colleagues from the bureaucracy and formalisation generated by top management decisions (Saunders & Sin, 2015: 143). The middle managers' strategies can be described as

coping strategies and tolerating or conforming to the regulations rather than acting independently. Such accounts reflect a dearth of 'trust' among and between the middle managers and senior management in the institutions, especially when one considers the middle managers who have assumed a collegial protective role, 'protecting' colleagues from bureaucratic practices. This implies mistrust between these structures in the institution. This weakness is echoed by Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015) in the African (Ghanaian) context, which suggests that these patterns of bureaucracy and hierarchy in traditional QA settings are not unique to Scotland, as they also exist in African environments.

Therefore, based on the picture presented here, one may ask whether the QEP and its architects have the potential to bring about the desired changes in the South African context. One considers the contrasting picture presented by Saunders and Sin (2015: 148), who observe that "middle managers' experience appears, therefore, to problematise the values of the QEF, as a policy built on 'consensual development', collegiality and ownership within the sector". They further observe that "in practice, this straightforward rhetoric, promulgated by policy-makers and institutional leaders, is enacted through situated 'mediation' and 'translation' nearer the 'ground', which involves a more fractured experience of power and decision-making" (ibid., 148). This is echoed by Cheng (2011), who observes that in higher education stakeholders have different experiences and perspectives; therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all approach and strategy for mediating policy, which suggests difficulty in reaching a shared understanding of quality. For instance, students' conceptualisation of 'quality' emanates from their situated position and experiences of learning in a classroom environment. Their understanding and interpretation of 'quality' would be passing the examinations as a priority for them or the knowledge and experience of lecturers (ibid.). Students would define quality as "benefitting from a knowledgeable tutor delivering a good teaching session" (ibid., 11). Which implies that from a quality point of view, students would interpret quality in instrumental terms and not transformative learning. On the other hand, academics would define quality as "making students actively engaged with the learning process to fully understand the relationship between knowledge and its practical application, rather than knowledge transfer" (ibid., 11).

This reflects a situated experience of quality manifested through direct interactions and enactments of policy on the ground by diverse stakeholders. In other words, policy enactment might be experienced differently subject to the environment and culture of institutions (Braun et al., 2010). Therefore, embracing diverse cultures and promoting teaching and learning strategies unique to learning environments might be beneficial for institutions in enacting policies rather than imposing a managerial notion of QA or QE. What is needed in this regard is effective turnaround strategies underpinned by theories and practices that take into account

the complexities in QA environments and the vulnerabilities characterised by dysfunctional policy environments to enhance educational quality, including the monitoring and evaluation of QA and QE systems. The theory on policy processes and the process of policy by Bowe et al. (1992) provides a very useful theoretical framework for understanding the complex nature of the policy processes found in institutional environments. Similarly, a common thread running through policy implementation frameworks that presents further complications is the disjuncture between policy generation (formulation) and policy implementation and the continued perception that these processes are divorced from each other with the former being privileged (Bowe et al., 1992). Consequently, policy process "serves the powerful ideological purpose of reinforcing a linear conception of policy in which theory and practice are separate and the former is privileged" (Bowe, et al. (1992: 10). Another common trend is the silencing of the stakeholders' voices (heads, senior managers, classroom teachers, students) and the exclusion or marginalisation of faculties to the policy process (ibid., 7); as well as the lack of inclusive practices and the lack of ownership by academics of the policy processes. An attempt is made to discuss these challenges in chapter 3, drawing on Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory to explain the policy process and its effects on change within the educational environment. For instance, Bowe et al. (1992) refer to the inter-relationality of policy processes which they categorise into three distinct phases: the context of influence, the context of policy text production, and the context of practice. The interrelatedness is not uniform but represents a complex weave of conflicting ideologies and political contestations that enter the policy realm and involve all parties (policymakers and policy implementers).

The other major challenge experienced is the absence of a culture of QE in institutions to support QE initiatives, particularly involving all stakeholders. In other words, there is a lack of a community of practice or a student-centric approach to internal quality improvement processes and a lack of collectiveness or collaborative approaches due to an element of mistrust from both sides – government and academics – and the enforced accountability-driven approach to QA and QE (Saunders & Sin, 2015; Rosa & Teixeira, 2014; Seniwoliba & Yakubu, 2015). For instance, Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015: 2337) point out that in the Ghanaian case there was "weak linkage between academic departments that run the programmes on the one hand and Unit Coordinators and Staff on the other". Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015: 2337) also observed that the respondents in their study expressed concerns over the

> … absence of quality culture in the university as a major challenge that has made some members of staff to misconstrue the concept of quality assurance as such, it is viewed as a fault finding unit mischievous with the intention of implicating staff and so some staff view activities of the Directorate of Academic Quality Assurance with suspicion.

Interestingly, Al Hasani and Al Omiri (2017: 5) indicate a correlation between the lack of effectiveness of change and development in the organisation and the weakness of readiness to change at all levels. They cite "[e]mployees' resistance to change" as a critical challenge to HEIs' readiness to change. They explain that HEIs are "rarely concerned with measuring the readiness for change in general and the readiness for implementation of the quality system in particular".

In addition, several other challenges that were identified by participants in the interviews that were conducted by Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015) on the implementation of QA and QE policies, include the lack of commitment from leadership to support the functioning of QA units to carry out their mandates, institutional leadership's weak adoption of the system, as well as inadequate resources (Seniwoliba & Yakubu, 2015; Al Hasani & Al Orimi, 2017). Al Hasani and Al Orimi (2017:5) also mention lack of relevant policies and laws, increased workload, poor employee experiences in the field of quality, lack of appropriate institutional environment, and overlapping of roles both inside and outside the institution.

Very important issues that also need to be addressed for effective QA or QE implementation in institutions are summarised in the table below (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Challenges experienced in the implementation of QA frameworks and implications

Challenge/Limitation	Implications
Lack of adequate staff and offices	Lack of dedicated staff to drive the QE agenda.
Lack of staff training	Staff lack the training required to equip them with the skills that would allow them to function adequately. Lack of development of behaviour, attitudes, values, skills and competences for advancing the QA agenda.
Presence of a dominant culture presiding over the quality culture	A dominant culture hampers the instilling of a quality culture. Such a culture coupled with the inevitability of change leads to resistance (Seniwoliba & Yakubu, 2015: 2337)
Budget constraints	Lack of budget poses a huge challenge to the discharge of the functions of the units in charge of QA.
Inadequate resources (human resources and expertise, financial resources, equipment and technology)	This lack inhibits the directorates and units in charge of QA in carrying out their mandates.
Lack of infrastructure (science laboratories, libraries, workshops, adequate students' hostels, electricity, books and textbooks, etc.)	Affects the implementation of the quality system. Infrastructure should be available and should meet minimum standards stipulated by regulatory bodies.
Overcrowded lecture theatres	Affects the lecturer–student ratio and student–lecturer interaction.
Absence of a strategic plan (the strategic plan should outline how QA should be enhanced in the institution).	The strategic plan sets out the strengths, weaknesses, goals, resource requirements and future prospects of an HEI. Lack of a strategic plan inhibits the building of a strong and effective HEI for the enhancement of performance and quality.

2.8   Conclusion

This chapter explored the phenomenon of QE in the context of the changing policy environment in higher education and the shift in policy from QA to QE. Much research in the field has focused on QA (Cheng, 2011; Mkhize & Cassimjee 2013; Harvey & Williams 2010) with very few studies on QE, particularly stakeholders' experiences of QE policies, "which necessitates further exploration of the concept of QE" (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013: 1266). Saunders and Sin's (2015) case study is an exception, but they focus on middle managers in

the Scottish context. In fact, little has been written on the theme of QE in Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa or South Africa. In South Africa, as already mentioned, this is a relatively new area and most research and researchers rely on government documents such as policy, framework and guideline documents.

This gap in the literature is what prompted me to conduct an explorative study using qualitative research methods and focusing on stakeholders' understandings and experiences of the QEP, as well as the implementation strategies they have applied in the South African context. I concur with Mkhize and Cassimjee's (2013) assertion that the concept of QE should be analysed further and clarified. Firstly, it is subjected to different understandings and interpretations of quality; as Cheng (2011) notes, there are different stakeholder experiences and perspectives of quality which makes it difficult to reach a shared stakeholder understanding of quality. Therefore, Cheng (2011: 5) argues that "there is a need for more empirical evidence of different stakeholder perspectives". Cheng's (2011) position suggests paying attention to the area of different stakeholder experiences, which supports and is consistent with the theory on policy enactment and the contextualised nature of policy implementation and enactment. In other words, stakeholders are inclined to mediate policy enactment based on their experiences which are contextually based. Seen in that light, policy enactment is situated within institutions and is taken up in a tailored fashion to address specific institutional problems and strategic priorities. This study will attempt at addressing this gap by exploring stakeholder experiences and perspectives of quality, QA and QE, drawing on the literature and the theoretical framework as a base to

i) understand how institutions take up policy within their contexts
ii) understand how stakeholders are experiencing the policy shift, and anticipating change and unintended consequences drawing on the literature, to understand the impact the shifts in policy have on their practice and to find out whether their practices translate to the principles of collegiality, empowerment and ownership as espoused by the QEP in the South African context
iii) understand, based on stakeholders' experiences, how they navigate the policy implementation process and what strategies inform their practice
iv) assist in understanding what challenges are imminent in implementing policies in HEIs
v) analyse the strategies used in addressing the challenges faced and identify the enabling or inhibiting factors in implementing the strategies
vi) consider the different experiences and perspectives of stakeholders with a view to contributing to global theories on stakeholder experiences of QA and QE, and

vii)   analyse 'real' change and to determine gains made from the QEP in meeting the national imperative of improving student retention and throughput in South African higher education.

This would contribute towards the advancement of building a shared QE culture by acknowledging the diversity, relevancy and situated practices of QA and QE. By looking at the silences in the literature and the scant research conducted on the QEP, this study will contribute to developing "more empirical evidence of different stakeholder perspectives" Cheng (2011: 5) and experiences of QE in higher education and improving practice in the area of the QEP by drawing on best practice and research. In South African higher education, there is a need for more research to be conducted on the QEP, given the silences of stakeholders' experiences of the QEP as a new policy and the inadequate training on the QEP which may result in difficulties in implementing it. Another gap in terms of the different approaches, contexts and institutional and student dynamics, is the need to implement tailored strategies based on the nuances of policy discourse on the ground in institutions. This would assist in benchmarking practices and identifying similar or dissimilar patterns with a view to replicating best practice or improving tailored practice in the South African higher education context. These issues tie in with Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory on policy processes and the process of policy and the theory of policy enactment by Braun et al. (2010) which will be discussed in chapter 3.

Chapter 3
Theoretical Framework

3.1   Introduction

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for understanding the implementation of the QEP. It draws on some theories of policy implementation, which include Bowe et al.'s (1992), *theory on the policy process and the processes of policy*; Braun et al.'s (2010), *policy enactments theory*; and Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins' (2011) *theory on re-contextualising policy enactment*.

Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory is relevant for my study as it contributes towards explaining policy formulation (how policy is formulated) and policy enactment or implementation and the inter-relational processes. It redefines policy processes by questioning the centrality of the state authority and the linear positioning of policy processes. It argues that the policy process is complex, interrelated and contested. Thus, it reveals underlying political, structural and power struggles amongst role-players (management versus academics, middle management, and students), and the tension between policy and practice, and the 'concealed' policy dynamics. Braun et al.'s (2010) *policy enactment theory* describes education policy implementation contexts by examining how institutions take up policy, drawing on aspects of their culture or ethos, their situated necessities and embedding some aspects of national policy-making into their own contexts. Situated necessities refer to context-related issues underpinned by realities or "real settings with real people" (Avelar, 2016: 7). Situated contexts are representations of context-specific dynamics shaped by histories and experience of policy actors in distinct environments and the kind of students recruited or student dynamics that shape and are shaped by the environment in which they operate. These contexts are nested within a framework of interrelated and interdependent policy technologies (Singh, Heimans & Glasswell, 2014) to explain the complexity of policy enactment (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). The theory on re-contextualising policy attempts to provide a 'heuristic' model of enactment by considering context specific complex issues surrounding educational policy environments. These theories respond to my research question as they problematise the relationship between policy and practice and redefine the roles of those involved in the process.

3.2   Definitions of policy

In order for us to reach a deeper understanding of the policy process and the processes of policy, we first need to define policy. Policies are conceived differently within and across contexts resulting in different definitions of policy. Policy according to Rizvi and Lingard

(2010:4), "is a highly contested notion". This view is shared by Bowe et al. (1992: 13) who define policy as "the operational statements of values, statements of 'prescriptive intent'" that at the same time are "contested in and between the arenas of formulation and 'implementation'". Policies are also seen as an act of government or a field of activity within an organisation or institution. This could be either a piece of legislation, "specific proposals, decisions of government, formal authorisation, a programme, output (actual deliverables of the policy) or outcomes (broader effects of policy goals)" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 5). Another definition of policy in the realm of public policy is "an intentional course of action followed by a government institution or official for resolving an issue of public concern" (Cochran, Mayer, Carr, Cayer & McKenzie, 2015: 2). This view is shared by Rizvi and Lingard (2010), who argue that policy is about bringing about change through governments' intentions to reform educational systems:

> Policy is…a field of activity (e.g. educational policy), a specific proposal, government legislation, a general programme or 'desired state of affairs', and what governments achieve. Public policy, then, refers to the actions and positions taken by the state, which constitutes of a range of institutions that share the essential characteristics of authority and collectivity (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010:4).

In that way, institutions are given recognition and acknowledgement of their roles as they form part of the policy formulation and implementation processes at the institutional level. This is important to note as institutions are governed by their own statutes. The *Policy on the Generation and Approval of Policies*, provides an example of different concept of policy. It defines policy as "the concise, formal and mandatory statement of principle that provides a framework for decision-making and a means by which the University reduces institutional risk" (Tshwane University of Technology, 2013: 2). This definition provides for a contextualised or tailor-made policy adapted by a University to fit its environment taking into account contextual issues and the institution's strategic direction.

Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 4) argue that, "policies are often assumed to exist in texts, a written document of some kind" but policies are also process "involved in the production of an actual text, once the policy issue has been put on the political agenda" (Ibid., 5). Policy is thus both process and product. In such a conceptualisation, policy involves "the production of the text, the text itself, ongoing modifications to the text and processes of implementation into practice" (ibid.). Enacting policy also involves implementation processes, which are never straightforward, and sometimes also to the evaluation of policy" (ibid. 4–5).

Braun et al. (2010:549) concur, arguing that policy is not mere government apparatus but a two-way process, therefore the meaning of policy should reflect diverse interests and contexts. According to them,

> … the meaning of policy is sometimes taken for granted by seeing it unproblematically as an attempt to 'solve a problem' and expecting it to take the form of legislative policy texts or other nationally driven interventions which are then put into practice.

They point out that policy should be understood as "a process that is diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subject to 'interpretations' as it is enacted in original and creative ways within institutions and classrooms" (ibid. 549). In the same vein, Braun et al. (2010) argue that policy in the education context denotes texts that frame, constitute and change practice within institutions.

From the definition of policy given above one may deduce that policy is multifaceted and embraces 'texts' – in the form of legislation, 'discourse' – in the form of pronouncements, interpretations of text and negotiation, and 'enactment' – in the form of policy implementation.

3.3   Theory on the policy process and the processes of policy

What should be considered too is the meaning that stakeholders give to policies based on their situated contexts, their roles and outlook on policy implementation. Common threads can be found in the literature defining stakeholders' experiences of policy implementation as a concept that is characterised by practices that seem to suggest policy processes as "linear" and policy as something that is "simply done to people" (Bowe et al., 1992: 15) with "implementers following a fixed policy text and 'putting the Act into practice'" (ibid., 10). The UK state models depict policy as 'linear' in form characterised by two distinctive and separate processes of policy generation (formulation) and implementation. This polarity of policy process is viewed by Bowe et al. (1992: 7) as reinforcing the 'managerial perspective' on the policy process and characterised by division and the breakdown of corporatism of the 'social democratic' consensus. For instance, a fragmented policy process portrays the state agencies, academics and students as being separated from each other. In such scenarios, academics' and students' voices are silenced or marginalised, with students being placed at the lower spectrum of the policy process. In other words, policy makers and professionals are increasingly 'disconnected' from the policy receivers (ibid., 7) who are tasked with the responsibility of conforming to policy regulations and implementation.

This gap between the policy makers and policy receivers and implementers is what Bowe et al. (1992) address in their theory on the policy process and the processes of policy to provide insight into sound policy processes. They provide an alternative theoretical stance to policy process to inform effective policy formulation and implementation practices, as they feel that the above approach is limited especially in the context of re-contextualising policy. They view the state control model as not 'potentially' capable of addressing complex policy environments as it portrays policy as a linear, remote and detached presentation of the relationship between policy formulation and policy implementation. According to Bowe et al. (1992), the state control model is a government apparatus and a top-down policy approach aimed at serving the "powerful ideological purpose of reinforcing a linear conception of policy in which theory and practice are separate and the former is privileged" (ibid., 10). This suggests an unequal relationship between the state and institutions with the state exerting more power and influence over the policy processes. The state control model oversimplifies the policy process and in the process downplays the reality of complexities of political manoeuvring involving the state and continual political struggles between the state and policy actors for control over access to the policy process (ibid.). They advocate for an inclusive, interconnected model and approach to policy process that acknowledges different stakeholders' roles in the policy process as they negotiate or manoeuvre their way through it.

Bowe et al. (1992) argue that "education policy is a dialectical process; policy outcomes are reliant upon the cooperation of the state, and an array of non-state organisations and individuals" (ibid., 15). Dialectical process is defined as "a discourse between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject but wishing to establish the truth through reasoned arguments (ibid, 15)". This suggests an interwoven, interconnected and negotiated process involving concepts of knowledge, practices and discourse that are not overtly simplistic, top-down or linear as the state model presumes.

These policy processes are undoubtedly not mutually exclusive of each other. For instance, policy theory informs policy practice and vice-versa. In that light, Bowe et al. (1992) view the policy process as continuous. To support this view they (ibid., 14) explain that "[p]olicy formulation and implementation processes are continuous features of the policy process with generation still taking place after legislation has been effected".

What is being implied here is the iterative nature of policy evident in the array of criss-crossing of meanings and interpretations of text put into circulation. Thus, policy process is subject to the interpretation of texts by those involved and these textual meanings can influence or constrain implementers' practices, which are informed by their concerns and contextual constraints, thus generating other meanings and interpretations (ibid., 12). Working within this

framework Bowe et al. (1992) draw attention to the issues of language, interpretation, power struggles and context as the fundamental principles of policy process.

According to Bowe et al (1992: 10):

> Who becomes involved in the policy process, and how they become involved, is a product of a combination of administratively based procedures, historical precedence and political manoeuvring, implicating the State, the State bureaucracy and continual political struggle over access to the policy process. It is not simply a matter of implementers following a fixed policy text and 'putting the Act into practice.

Therefore, they conceive policy as "essentially contested in and between the arenas of formation and implementation" (ibid., 13). It should be pointed out that the process of policy change analysis should be carried out simultaneously with policy implementation, given that these processes inform and influence each other. In this instance, it is important to understand the linkages between the concepts and their meanings and interpretation. For successful implementation of policy, key factors or conditions such as political, economic and social contexts are taken into account. Cerna (2013) concurs and further argues that general solutions to address the issue in the absence of acknowledging the particular context can lead to incoherent implementation efforts.

It can be seen from the above analysis that contextual issues and relevance are particularly important in the policy process. For instance, HEIs will consider contextual issues when developing and implementing policy. This would entail, for example, policies that embody a university's mission, values and strategic objectives and comply with national regulations. The context could also include the student dynamics and the university environment as well as the culture and practices.

Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory explores the contextual dimensions of the policy process looking at three policy contexts: *context of influence*, *context of policy text production* and the *context of practice*. Figure 3.1 is a representation of the contexts of policy making discussed (below) drawn from Bowe et al. (1992).
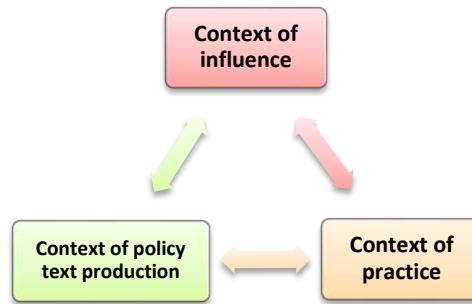
Figure 3.1: Contexts of policymaking

Source: Bowe et al. (1992)

Bowe et al. (1992) describe the *context of influence* as that space where the initial consultations, negotiations and manoeuvring that lead to the conceptualisation and formulation of the policy itself. This step is described by Allen (2004: iii) as involving multiple actors and spheres including the "social, economic, political and educational factors driving the policy; the influences of pressure groups and broader social movements; and the historical background to the policy, including previous developments and initiatives". The *context of influence* is representative of the broader picture where various policy actors interact, including the stakeholders, policy makers, the institution, the students and other constituencies in the policy process. It is within this context that contested ideologies or policy borrowing influences the policy process.

In the university environment, the context of influence would be manifested through stakeholder consultations. This involves stakeholder comments and reviews of policy after the drafting and prior to the final development of the policy phase. It should be noted that stakeholder consultation is a requirement prior to approval of the policy by either the chairperson of the Council for Council policies or the Executive Management Committee (EMC) for operational policies. It is important to note that in a university environment, key stakeholders would include "those directly affected by a policy, including those responsible for implementation and compliance monitoring, who must be consulted during the development or revision of the policy and its associated procedures. Therefore, key stakeholders may include students or members of the external community as well as University staff" (Tshwane University of Technology, 2013: 2). The policy owner (department or environment responsible for the development, oversight and review of the policy) consults with relevant stakeholders for input and feedback about the policy. It is crucial to include committees/ forums/ departments/ individuals who actually implement the policy. For instance, the university bargaining forum is one important stakeholder that is involved in the negotiating and manoeuvring during the policy conceptualisation phase. Wider consultations would involve generally all units, faculty, staff and students, individuals and/or units to whom the policy will

apply and who will be affected. It is worth noting that these stakeholders are considered due to their ability to influence the university's strategic direction (Leisyte et al., 2014).

The *context of policy text production* involves the processes of document analysis and interpretation with the involvement of stakeholders. This arena involves policy actors and stakeholders. The context of policy text production is a complex one, involving wide consultations by soliciting stakeholder inputs and the publication of policy texts which are interpreted and, subsequently, meaning constructed and reconstructed in preparation for the implementation phase. According to Ball (1993: 11), policies as texts are equivocal and double-edged due to their being "representations which are coded in complex ways … and encoded in complex ways". When policies are encoded they are representations of complex worldviews emanating from contestations, struggles, compromises, interpretations and reinterpretations causing plurality and differences in meanings by stakeholders in the policy formulation process. In other words, texts are interpreted differently by different stakeholders who view the world differently based on their histories, personal and professional experiences, skills, resources and context (Braun et al., 2010). As policy texts are often not clear this reflects a muddled terrain of contestations, confusion and uncertainty resulting from inherent arguments, "ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity" (Ibid.) in the policy formulation process. These trajectories have an impact on the political and environmental climate, and how these influence practice. Texts which are read, are interpreted linked to subjective meaning which informs context-based implementation practices. In addition, there are tensions emanating from competing agendas and interests that serve different purposes and reflect opposing worldviews of the policy makers and policy implementers. Furthermore, the policy environment is dynamic seen in the shifts and changes in policies, in meaning, interpreters and actors (ibid.). This change has an impact on how policy is enacted within institutions and schools. There are constant and ongoing policy reforms and reviews to keep up with the changing policy environments and the internal and external shifts in educational settings.

The third context, the *context of practice,* is where the policy is eventually interrogated and implemented by the implementers and stakeholders. In this state, policies are not simply rules to be received and adhered to by policy implementers and institutions (Singh, Thomas & Harris, 2013) rather they are multidimensional and value-laden. According to Bowe et al. (1992), they are subject to interpretation. In the context of practice, policy is received and responded to through the interpretation of policy texts in "a range of different context of practices" (Singh et al., 2013: 466). They further explain that even with a centralised mandate, education policy is "interpreted, translated, adjusted and worked differently by diverse sets of policy actors, in processes of enactment in specific contexts" Singh et al. (2013: 466). These

processes are the decoding and recoding of policy texts. Decoding is the substantive reading and recoding is the "iterative process of making tests and putting those texts into action" (Ball et al., 2011: 620). It is important to note that interpretation refers to the initial reading (decoding) of texts and making sense of policy texts, whilst translation refers to the rereading of policy or recoding policy. During this process policy is being actioned through activities and tactics such as talk, meetings, school plans, events, classroom lessons, school websites, producing artefacts, commercial materials and the like (Singh et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2013). Similar to the *context of policy text production*, there is contestation, as interpretation is a struggle and different interpretations emerge because of different interests (Bowe et al., 1992). Therefore, this terrain is not smooth because it is subject to different interpretations and what Bowe et al., (1992: 23) call "interpretations of interpretations" of practitioners in response to texts.

Considering contextual differences and less attention paid to contextual difference in the light of policy enactment, there might be the need to explore re-contextualisation of policy. According to Braun et al. (2010), policy enactment is a re-contextualisation process. What this implies is that policies are not simply imposed on institutions by authoritative sanction. The policy process should be understood as a two-way process and policy enactment within institutions is shaped and influenced by institutions' histories, capacity, individual capability (agency), values and cultures in enacting policy. In the South African university context, policy discourse is imbued with social justice issues which are a part of the history. This is what Ball et al. (2011: 586) refer to as the contextual dimensions. For instance, they explain, "What happens inside a school in terms of how policies are interpreted and enacted will be mediated by institutionally determined factors – the contextual dimensions". In their exploration of the concept of policy contextualisation, Ball et al. (2011) explain that:

> Policies also enter different resource environments; schools have particular histories, building and infrastructures, staffing profiles, leadership experiences, budgetary situations and teaching and learning challenges.

The perspective presented by Braun et al. (2010) contributes to an understanding that institutions' enactment of national policies is shaped by their unique circumstances and would consequently offer contextualised policy responses in policy uptake. In other words, context shapes policy enactments. It is imperative to conceptualise policy implementation within a contextual framework, considering that institutions "enact policies in material conditions, with varying resources, in relation to particular problems (Ball et al., 2011: 588), which can be solved in context in a multifaceted, iterative process (ibid.). What this means according to Ball et al. (2011) is that the analysis of policy enactment should reflect objective conditions that

are set against subjective 'interpretational' dynamics due to the different institutional contexts, non-linear and complex nature of policy enactment. Thus, in my case study, teachers and other educational workers at school level and academics, faculty workers, heads of departments at an HEI level are viewed as key actors in the policy process, reflecting the tension in the agent and a subject of policy enactment roles. In addition, the policy enactment process should affirm policy analysis at the institutional level that embraces material, structural and relational elements to make sense of policy enactment (ibid.). In other words, the policy enactment process should embrace the entire iterative processing of key stakeholders' interpretation and adaptation of policy texts within their environments based on their experiences and understandings. Therefore, the relevancy of the policies in relation to context plays an important role as they mediate policy and adapt it to the institutional/departmental environments.

As already, mentioned earlier, institutional uptake of policy differs in institutions of higher learning due to the diverse institutional cultures, values, histories and student dynamics. In the South African higher education system, QE is seen against the backdrop of the national imperatives of restructuring and transforming the system in keeping with a new social order premised on social justice and economic development goals (Naidoo & Singh, 2005). In accordance with the National Plan for Higher Education (2001), the system is driven by three steering instruments; funding, planning and quality assurance for the government subsidies allocated to public HEIs. The Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education following on the recommendation of the National Commission on Higher Education (1995) identified quality as one of the "fundamental principles that should guide the process of transformation" (NCHE, 1996: 4), as such called for the need to maintain and enhance the quality of educational goods and services. QA became the principle to drive the transformation agenda linked to increased student access, retention and throughput rates. It is important to note against this backdrop that the framework for QA in South Africa higher education is conceptualised at a national and institutional level with the primary responsibility for ensuring enhanced quality of teaching and learning lying with the HEIs. What should be noted here is the system used by institutions for their quality arrangements informed by an evidence-based, self-evaluation approach. It is within this framework that institutions are expected to incorporate appropriate mechanisms for enhancing quality of teaching and learning premised on the principles of institutional autonomy, ownership and capacity building. The literature reviewed and the theories show that there are aspired commonality of frameworks within QA spaces; however, feasibility and the realities confronting institutions and stakeholders' practice are underscored by context-specific needs and a diversity of experiences and expectations by stakeholders. Hence, it is imperative that contextual

dimensions are taken into consideration in advancing the QE movement. The rationale for a contextually based framework is therefore informed by localised and contextual needs that shape institutional uptake on policy. This would assist in understanding the relationship between policy formulation and policy implementation, with the latter being shaped by contextual issues. At the same time, exploring how the contextual dimensions illustrated in Figure 3.2 influence policy enactment and potentially influence the cases in this study.

These institutions are characterised by diverse institutional structures and cultures and are therefore prone to respond differently to policy directives (Ball et al., 2011). Higher Education South Africa (HESA) in its *Strategic Plan for the 2010 to 2014* supported the DHET's idea of a "progressive self-differentiation based on varied institutional visions, missions, policies and practices that enable institutions to meaningfully progress on a distinct development path" (DHET, 2014:4). Differentiation and diversity are seen as "meaning different things to different interest groups" (ibid. 5). Differentiation here is described in terms of mission differentiation, performance-based differentiation, self-differentiation, and programme differentiation (ibid.). This implies that institutions will be able to progress along different developmental trajectories guided by the principles of differentiation and diversity with institutions being guided by their distinct visions and missions. Self-differentiation is described as "process based on varied institutional visions, missions, policies and practices that enable institutions evolving within and across various categories in complex and dynamic ways" (ibid. 6).

On the other hand, diversity refers to a "variety of entities within a system". External diversity implies diverse entities focused at the national level whilst internal diversity focuses on the institutional level (of teaching and research) (DHET, 2014a). I would like to consider the contextual dimensions; drawing on Braun et al.'s (2010) model to argue that policy making is contextualised and re-contextualised at the transnational level.

However, Braun et al.'s (2010) theory does not sufficiently explain the localised contexts of developing countries particularly South Africa. Braun et al. (2010) were more interested in the settings but not in delving deeper into the specifics of contexts and their relevance. Therefore, there is the need to employ a theoretical base for practice grounded in localised contexts to reflect distinct realities. For instance, the issue of relevance is important to consider when analysing these theoretical foundations for practice. This implies an expansion of the conceptualisation of policy enactment to address elements of relevance which assume a nationalistic character to address the gaps in Braun et al.'s (2010) model with respect to the realities of the non-Western countries. An attempt at addressing this limitation in Braun et al.'s (2010) theory is addressed through the profiling of institutions to show the differing, localised contexts within which policy actors are operating to implement the QEP. As already argued, a

tailored model would assist in deepening understandings that are rooted in realities on the ground. It should be noted here that re-contextualisation rules call for the acknowledgement of relevance, particularly when considering a theoretical lens for moving policy theories to other contexts and practicalities within local teaching and learning environments. This relationship ties in with the notion of diversity and difference in different contexts at various levels from a global perspective – national down to the individual levels.

A predominant thinking in the literature that policy processes, particularly at institutional level, are influenced by neoliberal ideologies and policies argues that the private sector has a major role to play in the formulation and implementation of policies (Bolton & Keevey, 2011). This suggests the emergence of a line of thinking associated with new managerialism and increased stakeholder involvement in decision-making that shapes the practice of policy implementation. This trend acknowledges shifts that result from individual (stakeholders') agency, locality of contexts, and realities within distinct contexts. Therefore, in order to address country-specific contexts, there is a need to acknowledge diversity and other factors. A relevant policy framework should consider extending the contextual elements (situated, professional, material and external) to include content, actors and processes (Jie, 2016).

3.4   Conclusion

In conclusion, this study utilised the framework of Bowe et al., (1992) three contexts to contextualise stakeholders' mediation role and space within the QEP implementation process. This enabled the explanation of how policy actors (policy makers and policy implementers) navigate the policy environment. Moreover, the interrogation of stakeholders' mediation role within the QEP process would provide insights into how the stakeholders understood the shift and the meaning of the QEP based on their experiences, their histories, values and purposes, and stakes, as well as the impact of the implementation on policy. Therefore, these perspectives, shaped by experiences, histories, values and purposes, and different interests, would be analysed (consistently with the research questions and research findings) to identify gaps or shortfalls, and to make some recommendations on designing innovative implementation strategies or further research (where applicable). In addition, at the policy implementation level, South Africa has many policy implementation challenges (Jansen, 2002). Consequently, it would be useful to understand how the QEP is being implemented through the eyes of the stakeholders, and whether the intended twin objectives of improving student retention and throughput and promoting a culture of quality enhancement have been achieved. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used to explain the Bowe et al., (1992) three contexts.

Chapter 4
Research Methodology

4.1   Introduction

This chapter presents my journey of engagement with documents and in-depth and focus-group interviews with participants in the field. I personally conducted interviews, transcribed and analysed the data to gain the insider/emic perspectives through participants' own words based on their daily experiences, as well as document analysis. This data was gathered in an attempt to answer the research question: "How do stakeholders understand, experience and implement the QEP in four higher education institutions in South Africa?" This chapter includes the following sections: i) my choice of the research approach, the research design and the research methods employed; iii) the participants and the sampling methods; iv) data analysis techniques; v) role of the researcher; vi) validity and reliability; vii) limitations of the study; viii) delimitations of the study; and ix) ethical considerations.

4.2   The research approach and methods

The study employed a qualitative research approach through a multiple-case study research design to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences of stakeholders of the QEP as a new policy in South African higher education. Qualitative research has been defined in varied ways by scholars (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). For the purpose of this study, I drew on Yilmaz's (2013: 312) definition of qualitative research as "an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world". A qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study considering the depth and complexities surrounding the QEP. Moreover, this approach has the potential to tackle an "ambiguous phenomenon" and to generate rich evidence from the lived experiences focusing on context (Birchall, 2014). This allowed me to explore meaning, interpretations and individual (insider) perspectives based on stakeholders' experiences of the QEP in a natural setting (context). In addition, this approach assisted in generating rich evidence and information about the successes, challenges and risks, and the critical areas in developing and implementing new policies.

The qualitative approach is informed by a constructivist approach which supports an "ontological position that views social phenomenon and categories as socially constructed" (Bryman & Bell, 2015:17). In other words, meanings are constructed from the worldviews and

interpretations of stakeholders from first-hand experiences of phenomena in their contexts. Furthermore, a constructivist approach acknowledges the richness of individuals' perspectives or expertise, viewpoints and experiences, values, and the subjective nature of understandings of phenomena (Wahyuni, 2012) associated with social constructs of meaning and discourse. The intention is to gain rich emic (insider) perspectives from experienced participants who have expert knowledge about the phenomenon being investigated through open-ended questions which generate subjective meanings that are negotiated socially, historically and culturally (Creswell, 2009).

4.3   Research design

For the purposes of this study, it is important to define case studies, in particular the difference between a single-case study and multiple-case studies. Case studies are classified as explanatory or causal, descriptive, exploratory and their application is subject to the purpose of the study and the nature of inquiry (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014) answering a "how" and "why" research question requires the use of a case study method. Yin (2014) provided a twofold definition of a case study. A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when
- Boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.

According to Creswell (2018: 96), "the case study method 'explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information e.g., observation, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. The unit in the case study might be multiple cases (a multisite study) or a single case (a within-site study)". A single-case study can be defined as "an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalise over several units" (Gustafsson, 2017). Creswell (2018: 97) described a single-case study as "an individual, a community, a decision process, or an event". A multiple-case study involves "more than one single-case study" (Gustafsson, 2017) or multiple cases purposefully selected "to show different perspectives on the issue" (Creswell, 2018: 97). Baxter and Jack (2008) described a multiple-case study as a case study type that assists in comparing and contrasting cases. These authors explained that multiple-case studies "enable the researcher to explore similarities and differences within and between cases" (Baxter and Jack, 2008: 548). The strengths of a multiple-case study is its ability to generate contrasting and similar results to clarity the value of the results (Gustafsson, 2017; Yin, 2003). Comparing across the cases for

similarities and differences has an advantage of generating evidence that is strong and reliable (Gustafsson, 2017; Yin, 2003) through triangulation and generating themes that can be replicated. To support this, Flick (2013: 14) argued, "case studies that use both within and cross-case analysis have been found to be more effective at generating theoretical frameworks and formal propositions than studies only employing within case or only cross-case analysis". This implies that using both approaches are beneficial in uncovering the richness of the participants' stories. However, multiple-case study approaches' are limited in terms of resources such as time and finances as they can be expensive and time consuming (Creswell, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017). Creswell (2018) suggested that if a number of cases are studied this can dilute the rigour and depth of the study. While a single-case study has an advantage of providing rich insight as the researcher can delve deeper into the case, be more focused on salient aspects or few key issues that allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017), it is difficult for "one case to offer anything beyond the particular" (Willis, 2014: 12).

My study was a multiple-case study comprising four different case studies of higher education institutions. The institutions differ in type, backgrounds, histories and cultures. This allowed me to understand how policy is implemented in different contexts and the resultant implications. The cases were sampled to represent the higher education context in South Africa which was categorised into three institutional types following the mergers of universities from 2002 to 2006 (DHET, 2002):

- Universities of Technology which "offer mainly vocational or career-focused undergraduate diplomas, and BTech which serves as a capping qualification for diploma graduates. They also offer a limited number of masters and doctoral programmes".
- Traditional universities which "offer basic formative degrees such as BA & BSc, and professional undergraduate degrees such as BSc Eng and MBCHB, honours degrees and a range of masters and doctoral degrees".
- Comprehensive universities which "offer programmes typical of university as well as programme typical of university of technology". (Bunting & Cloete, 2010: 2)

I purposely sampled four HEIs: one university of technology (Institution A), one traditional institution (Institution B), one comprehensive university (Institution C), and one traditional merged HEI (Institution D). The participating institutions were located in two provinces in South Africa, in close proximity which was convenient in terms of travel costs, time and resources available. Therefore, only one of the institutions in each category was considered as a fair

representation of the cases to cover multiple-cases in a manageable fashion and to answer the research questions. The institutions selected have participated in the QEP in keeping with the project plan of the CHE and the time frames. The policy makers constituted another case as the custodians of QA and the QEP in South Africa and the institutions constituted separate cases as units of analysis in the implementation of the QEP. The selected institutions implemented the QEP processes and generated information that was shared in their environments. The policy makers involved in the study were the DHET and the CHE. The DHET derives its mandate from section 29 of the supreme law of the Republic, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. The University Education division under the ambit of the DHET provides strategic direction in the development of an effective higher education system and managing the government's responsibilities for the regulation of this system. It is within the context of providing support to the CHE to enable effective management of projects that the University division at DHET collaborated with the CHE on the QEP. With respect to the DHET and issues regarding quality assurance in universities, two specific directorates were involved in the QEP: the Directorate (teaching and learning in universities) and the Directorate: (Academic Planning, monitoring and evaluation). These assisted the CHE in rolling out the QEP through the university grant.

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) recommended the establishment of a 'higher education council' with a higher education quality committee' (HEQC) as the umbrella body for QA in higher education (Bailey, 2014). The CHE was established in 1997 as an independent statutory body by the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) which mandated it to advise the Minister on higher education matters, QA and monitoring functions. It is also responsible for quality promotion and standards setting through the HEQC. The CHE was formed as an expert-based council (not stakeholder-based) to take over national interests over particular constituency interests. At the same time, not only was the CHE independent, it had powers through the "council of ministerial appointees and stronger state steering" (ibid. 2014: 11). Therefore, the members of the CHE were expected to possess "deep knowledge of higher education and research" (ibid., 13). The operations of the CHE are carried out by a Secretariat made up of the Chief Executive Officer and four divisions: Corporate Services, Monitoring and Evaluation, Quality Assurance, and Standards Development. The QA function resides within the Directorate of QA and Promotion Coordination while the QEP was undertaken by the Director: Institutional Audits and its staff.

Institution A is a by-product of a merger process conducted in 2004, involving three former technikons in South Africa of different historical contexts, size, shape, student and staff profiles, and organisational cultures. This suggested a potentially different uptake of national policies (Braun et al., 2010) based on their unique characteristics and, hence, it is necessary

to understand the unique circumstances of the QEP implementation within the institution. In terms of its programme offering, the institution offers technological, career-focused programmes with an entrepreneurial edge.

Institution B is a traditional, dual-medium, multi-campus institution comprising six campuses and two distant campuses. The institution has nine faculties. Unlike Institution A, Institution B was not affected by the merger process and offers academic and professional programmes. The institution is one of South Africa's research-intensive universities. It has earned a reputation of being one of the top universities in terms of research outputs.

Institution C came about as a result of a merger between three institutions in 2004. It is a comprehensive distance education and the largest open distance learning (ODL) institution in South Africa, as well as one of the world's top 30 mega-institutions. It is focused on quality, development, research and community engagement – nationally, continentally and globally. The institution's offerings combine both types of training offered by technical and traditional universities.

Institution D was established in 2004 from a merger between three campuses spread across two provinces of South Africa. This institution is a traditional merged university with campuses relatively distant geographically that have significantly different student populations, programme profiles and campus cultures. The institution has "15 campus-based faculties, each located on one campus only, which resulted in some duplication of faculties as they functioned largely autonomously of each other" (CHE, 2017a: 5). Similar to Institution B, the institution offers academic and professional programmes.

The diversity aspect of the institutions was important in that it presented information-rich cases through maximum variation sampling, which has "an advantage of collection and analysis of data that produces detailed and high-quality descriptions of each of the cases in the sample" (Matsebatlela, 2015: 80). Thus, a multiple-case study was appropriate because it allowed me to address the research questions based on the participants' experiences of the QEP in their 'natural' settings. It allowed multiple-case analysis to determine similar or contrasting stakeholder perspectives or views about the QEP as the phenomenon under study, and thereby triangulate and replicate findings among the cases.

4.4   Participants and sampling methods

This study used purposive sampling (Anderson, 2010) which allowed me to select "individuals or sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2018: 158). Etikan, Musa, Alkassim

(2016) define purposive sampling as a "non-random technique" that involves the identification and selection of participants based on their knowledge and experience of the phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling involving careful selection of individuals with expertise or extensive involvement in QA and/or QE who were considered for in-depth interviews at the participating institutions. Considering the novelty surrounding the QEP, a small, strategic sample consisted of only senior managers or the people directly involved in QA processes (DVC: Teaching and Learning, Executive Directors, Directors/QA managers and QE coordinators) provided expert knowledge on the phenomenon of QA and QE and policy transition within the institutions. Some of these participants were identified by the CHE as the key role players in the QEP (Grayson, 2014). The sampled participants varied between cases because of the differences in roles they were assigned to with respect to the QEP in their respective institutions. The DVC: Academic or Teaching and Learning and the participants from 'Institution A' were selected because they were senior staff members who participated in the conceptualisation and implementation of the QEP's four focus areas. They belonged to the core working teams/groups that drove the QEP at a strategic level and faculty level. The Deputy Director: Directorate of Quality Promotion and the Acting Senior Director: Strategic Support were selected because of their roles in QA in the university. It should be noted here that academics and Deans were not selected because of time limitations and lack of capacity (financial and human) to conduct the research at a deeper level. The Director of Quality Assurance from Institution B was selected because of her role in QA and the Director of Department of Education Innovation was the key person as the project coordinator within the institution. Participants from Institution C were selected because they were managers of QA and were knowledgeable about QA. They were not directly involved in the QEP but the information they provided was useful for the study. I had no access to the actual people who were directly involved in the QEP implementation due to gatekeeping. I had to address this gap through tapping into institutional documents and reports from the CHE. The participants from Institution D were senior managers who were purposefully selected by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning to participate in the interviews because of their involvement and role in coordinating the project at the institutional and faculty level.

Furthermore, the purposive selection of student leaders was considered based on their involvement in policy matters arising from engagements with institutional management and their leadership roles within the universities and the student structures they represent. As they are clearly exposed to policy processes based on their standing as student leaders, they assisted in contributing a student perspective on quality issues. These student leaders were participants at the QEP workshops which were organised by the CHE in phase 1 and phase

2 of the project. Therefore, they were considered relevant based on the exposure they had received from participating in these workshops.

At the policy maker level, only directors or managers of QA directorates at the CHE and DHET were selected as relevant people to provide in-depth information of policy formulation processes. I selected the Directors of Monitoring and Evaluation, and Institutional Audits at the Quality Councils because of their lead roles in managing and driving the QEP nationally. They were key to inform the study as drivers of the entire project. The Chief Director of Teaching and Learning in Universities was selected by the Department of Higher Education and Training because of his role in the QEP through the DHET's University Teaching Development Grants which were very instrumental in the roll out of the QEP. He was instrumental in the provision of the finances that institutions needed to implement the QEP. Although the Director of the National Qualifications Framework at DHET was not directly involved in the QEP, the DHET officials involved her because of her extensive knowledge and understanding of the South African NQF, QA and higher education policy, system and processes.

Altogether, I interviewed 25 participants consisting of one DVC: Teaching and Learning, two Executive Directors, one Senior Director (Acting), ten Directors, two Quality Assurance Managers, one Deputy Director and eight SRC leaders from three institutions. Table 4.1 below presents the schedule of interviews and focus group interviews that were conducted.

Table 4.1: Sampled participants for In-depth interviews

Code	Date	Participant	Participating institution
1	7 August 2017	Director: Monitoring & Evaluation	Quality Council (Policy maker)
2	7 August 2017	Director: Institutional Audits	Quality Council (Policy maker)
3	6 September 2017	Director: Teaching and Learning in Universities	Dept. of Higher Education (Policy maker)
4	22 September 2017	Director: National Qualifications Framework	Dept. of Higher Education (Policy maker)
5	6 October 2017	Deputy Director: Directorate of Quality Promotion	A - University of Technology
6	16 November 2017	Director: Student Development and Support	A – University of Technology
7	20 November 2017	Director: Quality Assurance	B – Traditional university

8	21 November 2017	Director: Human Resources & Transformation	A – University of Technology
9	21 November 2017	Director: Teaching and Learning with Technology	A – University of Technology
10	23 November 2017	Manager: Quality Assurance	C – Comprehensive university
11	23 November 2017	Manager: Quality Assurance	C – Comprehensive university
12	29 November 2017	Executive Director: Student Life	D – Merged university
13	30 November 2017	Director: Teaching and Learning	D – Merged university
14	30 November 2017	Executive Director: Theology	D – Merged university
15	4 December 2017	Director: Department of Education Innovation	B – Traditional university
16	7 December 2017	DVC: Teaching and Learning	A - University of Technology
17	2 February 2018	Acting Senior Director: Strategic Support	A - University of Technology
18	27 November 2017	2 SRC student leaders	B – Traditional university
19	26 April 2018	2 SRC student leaders	A – University of Technology
20	17 May 2018	4 SRC student leaders	D – Merged university

4.4.1   Access to the institutions

The individual institutions assisted with arrangements and identified relevant participants who were directly involvement in the QEP focus group task teams. These were deemed eligible candidates for informing the study considering their high degree of involvement in QA and their knowledge regarding the QEP, which they spearheaded in the institutions. I applied for permission to conduct research and to interview staff via the office of the DVC: Teaching and Learning, which was responsible for the project in the institutions. In the case of the CHE and DHET, letters seeking approval to conduct research were sent via email to the office of the Chief Executive Officer, which assisted with the identification of the relevant people to participate in the study. I contacted the participants using their email addresses and sent them letters of invitation to participate in the interviews together (see Appendix A) with consent letters (see Appendix B) and the interview protocol (see Appendix C).

However, in some cases it was difficult for me to gain access to interview participants. Although the Research Ethics Committee permitted me to conduct research within a particular institution, I still had to submit another application requesting permission to interview staff and students. This process was conducted in a similar way to the first application (ethical clearance), which took approximately three weeks to be approved. I was then provided with the contact details of the senior managers responsible for the Teaching, Learning, Community Engagement and Student Support, and Institutional Development and Transformation portfolios, as well as the Dean of Students. I contacted these senior managers from Institution C (comprehensive university) requesting permission to interview the staff in these portfolios. No response was received from any of them until I escalated the matter within the institution, whereupon I was given permission to interview four QA staff members for an hour. However, I was only able to conduct two of these interviews. In addition, I was unable to interview staff members who were directly involved in the QEP or SRC leaders because I received no response from the Vice Principal: Teaching, Learning, Community Engagement and Student Support or the Dean of Students despite several attempts to follow up on my requests for permission to interview staff and students.

4.5   Data collection

Data collection techniques in the study involved in-depth interviews and focus-group interviews, as well as document analysis. This allowed for data saturation and triangulation.

4.5.1   In-depth interviews

For the purpose of this study, face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with participants using open-ended and semi-structured questions to address the research questions and to elicit participants' views and opinions. During the interviews, attempts were made to establish good rapport with the participants to allow them to share their experiences and to reflect on events and practices. The interviews allowed me "control over the line of questioning" (Creswell, 2009: 179). I designed an interview protocol for each group of stakeholders (see Appendix C) which was carefully drafted and reviewed by my supervisor to ensure that there were no leading questions and to avoid bias. The interview questions (see Appendices C, D and E) allowed participants to engage and to reflect on the QEP activities. They also allowed me to probe deeply to obtain more information and clarity where mixed messages emerged. The questions were reviewed after a few interviews had taken place and been transcribed. Minor modifications were made to the interview protocol to ensure there was no deviation from the research questions to avoid leading participants' perceptions (Yin, 2014).

The interviews were conducted in the participants' offices at the institutions. Upon agreeing to participate in the interviews, times and places for the interviews were chosen and confirmed

by the participants based on their availability and preferences, which varied depending on their work schedules. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour and 30 minutes. For instance, the DVC: Teaching and Learning and the Acting Senior Director were only available for approximately 30 minutes due to their busy schedules. A digital voice recorder and a smart phone were used to capture the responses of the participants for transcription purposes and to ensure that no important points were missed. Interviews were recorded with permission from the participants. I also took field notes and observed the participants as they described their experiences. The field notes together with the recorded data from the digital voice recorder were transcribed and coded. It is worth noting that I transcribed all the interviews myself in order to gain first-hand knowledge and a thorough understanding of the rich details of the participants' experiences. By single-handedly transcribing the interviews, I understood the concepts and was able to identify the key words, concepts and patterns that were repeated and to link the emerging themes.

Finally, after the interviews were conducted a thank you letter (see Appendix F) was sent via email to the Registrars and the DVC: Teaching and Learning of the participating institutions and similar letters were sent to participants who had contributed to the study. Interview transcripts were sent to the participants for validity and verification purposes (discussed in the section on member checking).

4.5.2 Focus-group interviews

Focus group interviews formed part of the data collection techniques in this study to allow for a purposive focused conversation with SRC leaders to elicit their views and opinions about the QEP and the impact it has had on their learning experience. The use of focus group interviews was supported by the assumption that they would "'focus' on a single topic of concern, offer group strength and support and generate rich descriptions and accounts" (Lederman, 1990: 119) of participants' lived experiences. Another benefit was the potential to gather more data in a relatively shorter time than could be collected in individual interviews. The focus group setting allowed for "conversations that encourage elaborations, agreements, and disagreements among participants that reveal the range of responses to a specific issue" (Ryan, Gandha, Culbertson & Carlson, 2014: 335).

I approached the office of Student Affairs to obtain permission to interview SRC leaders. Letters seeking approval were sent to the Directors: Student Affairs; or the Director: Student Governance and Leadership Development; or to the Executive Director: Student Life in the institutions (see Appendix E). I managed to obtain permission to interview these leaders; it was difficult to get a sizeable group of relevant SRC leaders who had participated in the QEP together, owing to the fact that SRC structures change each year and considering that the QEP ended in 2017. Initially, I intended to conduct four focus-group interviews with between

16 and 24 SRC leaders, that is, four to six per institution to provide a representative sample of the student leaders across the four institutions. At least three (minimum) SRC leaders including the President/Deputy President, Secretary and Treasurer of the participating institutions would have been fair representation of those involved in policy processes from across cases. In the end, I managed to interview eight SRC leaders who had participated in the QEP from three of the four participating institutions (refer to Table 4.2). Student leaders from one of the institutions were inaccessible due to gate-keeping challenges. The richness of the information they provided proved useful in addressing the research questions. The focus group interviews lasted an hour and were held at the offices of Student Affairs in the institutions.

The interviews were conducted at institutional management level, which excluded participants at faculty and departmental levels. In hindsight, this was a limitation which reflects the difference between a single case study and multiple case study whereby the former provides depth and the latter provided breadth. For instance, although permission was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of all four participating institutions, it was difficult to interview staff in the Department of Teaching and Learning, and to conduct focus group interviews with SRC leaders at one particular institution. I sent letters seeking permission for this to the Vice Principal: Teaching and Learning as well as several follow-up letters; however, no response was received which rendered the interviews impossible. In addition, no response was received from the office of the Dean of Students at the same institution and as a result, the focus group interviews could not go ahead. In addition to not gaining access to the staff and student leaders, the interviews with the two QA managers interviewed were limited to 30 minutes. Nevertheless, sufficient data were gathered in the interviews to reach saturation point.

4.5.3 Documents

Other sources used to collect data were institutional documents related to the QEP. Institutions were required to develop documents that complied with the institutional audit and the accreditation policies of the CHE. The specific documents that were made available and which I was able to access were the QMS strategy, QA policies, institutional audit reports, institutional QEP submissions to the CHE, QEP framework and strategies for implementing the QEP, and quality improvement plans (Improvement Action Plan). The purpose of reviewing these documents was to corroborate and augment information or evidence from the in-depth interviews with participants from the institutions. The documents assisted in terms of comparing stakeholder perceptions with how the QEP was described in the documents and to corroborate the themes that emerged. The selection criteria for the documents were QEP specific to enable a focused attention to the phenomenon being investigated. Table 4.2 outlines the documents that were selected for analysis.

Table 4.2: Documents included and relevant to the study

Document title	Role of document
Quality Management System Strategy	The strategy document was sourced from the institutions' websites. It aided in informing the researcher on the approach that institutions used.
Quality Assurance policies	These were the CHE's policy documents related to QA. These guided the study in terms of understanding the transition from QA to QE.
Framework for Institutional Quality Enhancement in the Second Period of Quality Assurance	The framework document spelt out the guiding principles on which the QEP was to be conceptualised and implemented across the higher education sector.
Institutional QEP submissions to the CHE (Institutional reports)	These documents contained information on how the institutions were operationalising the QEP in line with responding to the need to improve student success and throughput.
CHE feedback reports to institutions	These provided outcomes of review of institutional submissions including commendations and recommendations on improvement.

These documents were available online and on the CHE website and I did not need to ask for permission to access them. In the main, these documents were submitted to the CHE by the individual institutions which assisted me in terms of maximising evidence. This also allowed for triangulation, as already mentioned, and the use of various data collection techniques in line with the principles of qualitative research approaches. The data collection technique based on providing a wide range of information in different formats accompanied by the participants' descriptive events and stories in detail enhanced the rigour and credibility of the study. For instance, the major themes that emerged from the document analysis are training of academics, reward for excellent teaching or supervision, national and international benchmarking, collaboration, e-learning, LMSs, identification of at-risk students, student support, inadequate funding and resources, socio-economic conditions of students and poverty, Wi-Fi, and technology enabled tools. These were consistent with the participants' stories during the interviews. During the interviews, other documents such as reports were made available at my request. For instance, I was given a report containing the theory of change as the underpinning theory that was cited as having been omitted during the

conceptualisation phase of the QEP. The CHE QEP project leader described this as a serious oversight. This is discussed in the next chapter on analysis of the data (Chapter 5).

4.6   Data analysis

In qualitative research, the researcher is concerned with understanding a phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 1994). The aim is to "interpret the data and the resulting themes, to facilitate understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Sargeant, 2012: 1) and to "describe a phenomenon in some or greater detail" (Flick, 2013: 5). In the analysis, meaning is constructed from the beliefs and worldviews of individuals shaped by their experiences of objects and events. Data analysis in this qualitative research study involved preparing the data, organising them for analysis, coding the data and naming the themes, and representing or reporting the results in figures, tables, a story line, a model, or discussion (Baškaranda, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). What was critical for this study is employing appropriate data analysis techniques to represent the data and compare the cases (the experiences of stakeholders) and to develop a theory of the phenomenon being studied. In order to achieve this, the study employed content and thematic analysis. It analysed what participants reported about their experiences of implementing the QEP within their environments and compared the contents of their reports with statements that were made by other participants (Flick, 2013). The audio recordings were replayed and listened to repeatedly to ensure that the actual wording of the participants was captured correctly including the pauses between statements. All the transcripts were read thoroughly to extract meaning.

4.6.1   The coding process

The coding process I followed involved reading through each transcript and assigning codes or codifying. As I read, reread and worked through each transcript, I assigned codes to most phrases or sentences. Saldaña (2013) describes a code as a "word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2009: 3). I used mostly "open" coding and in vivo to capture the lived experiences of participants by using their exact words and expressions. As an example of the technique that I used, an extract from one of the transcripts of the interviews using open coding to synthesise the data into categories and themes is provided in Appendix E. For instance, some codes were also used to illustrate the feelings and emotions of the participants P18 and P19 (Institution D). The codes 'futile exercise' and 'agitated' reflected the participants' attitude and emotions. The codes 'implementation ideas not resolving problem' and 'paying lip service' were also used as value codes to indicate these participants' attitudes and the value they attached to policy processes, as suggested when they said they were never consulted during policy formulation. These codes are linked to the

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theme of *Implementation Challenges* which reflected conflicting views among the participants with some holding the view that there is a lack of effective implementation of the QEP, whilst others viewed it as being effectively implemented. A second cycle of coding was conducted to reorganise the first cycle codes and synthesise them into categories. The codes were re-coded by examining the similarities of the codes during the second cycle of coding. The first cycle codes were then matched according to meanings and emerging patterns, which reduced the codes from 66 to 45 in number, and subsequently they were organised into ten groups of categories. The coding process is illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: The coding process

Source: Saldanha, 2013

The coding was conducted manually without the use of software such as ATLAS.ti or NVivo because the software was not accessible at the time of the study. In retrospect, this lack of software resulted in a prolonged process of organising, coding and analysing the data which was very time consuming considering I was working with large data sets which took me approximately six weeks to code in their entirety. The process was also prolonged by my single-handed transcribing of all interviews as well as coding and analysing the data. However, this resulted in excellent familiarisation with the data.

4.6.2   Categorising data

Pattern coding was used to recode the data into categories after the initial coding and to develop major themes from the data. In terms of the analysis, I counted the number of times the codes were mentioned by the participants to create categories. For example, "policy implementation barriers" were mentioned by all 25 participants, followed by "non-involvement of students in policy processes" (15 participants), 12 participants mentioned "QE strategies", "capacity building" (12 participants), "QEP is valuable and important" (12 participants), "challenge of different contexts" (9 participants), "community of practice" (9 participants), globalisation (8 participants), "resistance to change" (8 participants), "QEP is not impactful" (8 participants), "no change from QEP" (7 participants), "need to harmonise QA and QE" (7 participants), "QEP is aligned with institutions' strategic plans" (7 participants), "non-involvement of QA units" (6 participants), and the remainder were smaller numbers which were grouped according to similarities to form themes. It should be noted that although this is not a quantitative study, this technique was useful in generating themes as it helped to identify the patterns based on frequency of mention by the participants. Below is an example of how the theme 'QEP implementation challenges and strategies to overcome barriers' was built from

codes. It has been extracted from a transcript of an interview with Participant 2A (Policy maker).

Actual words	Code	Category	Theme
"…to ensure that you got enough information from institutions … how do you ensure that they are not just giving you a wonderful story?"	'Lack of credible data'	Barriers to implementation	Implementation challenges
"It [QEP] was the same with the audits more or less; although they had to provide much more documentary evidence … Can you actually take this on trust with the institutions?"	'Trust issues'		
"I think another challenge was how … institutions approach it, okay … in the quality enhancement I think there were some institutions that took those four areas and really went with them deep into the institution and got the people who actually working in those areas as well as management to look at"	'Different approaches'		
"I think some of the other challenges, eh, how do you? (Pause). Some of the critique that I have heard in the system is something about theory and an initial critique…"	'Lack of underpinning theory/ appropriate theory'		
"you are not taking account of different contexts in the way that you are doing this because you are dealing with all at once …"	'Relevancy of QEP in different contexts'		
"I think it's also difficult to find enough peers in the system with a very deep understanding of what goes on in higher education to ensure that all your panellists were of sufficient depth and experience"	'Lack of expertise with subject knowledge'		
"…and quality of reports sometimes you pull your hair out just the same with audits"	'Poor reports'		

The categories or themes were built from the bottom-up "by organising the data into increasingly more abstract units of information" (Creswell, 2014: 234). In that way an inductive process was formed by working back and forth between the themes until a comprehensive set of themes was established (Creswell, 2014). The emergent major themes and sub-themes are illustrated in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Emergent major themes and categories

THEME 1: STAKEHOLDER UNDERSTANDINGS OF QUALITY, QA AND THE SHIFT FROM QA TO QE

CATEGORY 1: Stakeholder perspectives and interpretation of quality, QA and QE
CATEGORY 2: Stakeholder perceptions of the shift from QA to QE
CATEGORY 3: Stakeholder perceptions regarding the purpose and meaning of the QEP

THEME 2: INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT THE QEP

CATEGORY 1: Institutional approaches
CATEGORY 2: Capacity building
CATEGORY 3: Collaboration
CATEGORY 4: Benchmarking
CATEGORY 5: Student support

THEME 3: QEP IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

CATEGORY 1: Inadequate funding and resources
CATEGORY 2: Resistance to change
CATEGORY 3: Competitive higher education landscape 3
CATEGORY 4: Unstable political climate
CATEGORY 5: Changes in the policy environment
CATEGORY 6: Policy borrowing and contextual differences
CATEGORY 7: Students' non-involvement in QEP processes
CATEGORY 8: Lack of broad inclusivity and transparency
CATEGORY 9: Lack of monitoring and evaluation instrument
CATEGORY 10: Lack of an underpinning theory of change 8
CATEGORY 11: Weak capacity building initiatives
CATEGORY 12: Inaccessibility to technology
CATEGORY 13: Socio-economic conditions of students
CATEGORY 14: Context-based challenges
CATEGORY 15: The QEP as a short-term project

THEME 4: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF THE QEP

CATEGORY 1: Perceptions regarding the impact of the QEP on change and transformation

4.7 Trustworthiness and credibility

Validity in qualitative research is not easy, as it does not involve standard operating procedures or techniques as in quantitative research (Thomas, 2010). The strategies I used involved: i) member checking, ii) triangulation, iii) reflexivity, iv), audit trail, v) thick description in order to achieve credibility and transferability, which contribute to validity of a qualitative study.

4.7.1 Member checking

Credibility in qualitative content analysis is critical and is aimed at ensuring research findings are credible and trustworthy in addressing the research questions (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Credibility refers to how confident the researcher is concerning the "extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy" (Thomas, 2010: 319). The most effective way of ensuring credibility is through member checking (Thomas, 2010; Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016). I employed member checking in which interview transcripts or results are returned to participants for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). This was done through a process of transcribing the interviews and sending back individual transcripts via email to the participants from the CHE and institutions. The purpose was to request verification of the information contained in the transcripts as accurate and valid account of their narratives. I set up email notifications as confirmation that all the emails were dispatched to the recipients of the email. However, only one participant responded and attached her version of an edited transcript which I used in my analysis of the data.

4.7.2 Triangulation

In order to validate the data analysis, I triangulated different methods, that is, document analysis and interviews and different sources. I obtained information from sets of documents on the QEP in the form of feedback reports and institutional reports, that is, baseline reports which I sourced from the CHE website. Other sources of information were the individual interviews with participants from different institutions and perspectives as well as focus-group interviews with SRC leaders from three different institutions.

4.7.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a self-critical or introspection process of awareness about the role subjectivity plays in the research process (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, Visitacion & Caricativo, 2017) and the researcher's acknowledgement that "the world is mediated by the self" (Hesse-Bibber & Piatelli, 2014: 6). Researchers reflect on how their values, theoretical assumptions and biographies shape the research, as well as how "the structural, political, and cultural environments of the researcher and participants and the nature of the study affect the research process and product" (Ibid., 34).

My positioning as a researcher in this study was influenced by my values, belief system and biography (education, career, professionalism, etc.). By the same token, socioeconomic and political status, agency and theoretical (constructivism) position shaped the way I conducted the research in which I saw myself as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. My insider status was by virtue of being a professional in one of the institutions that participated in the study and also having previously worked at the CHE. As an outsider, I saw myself as the researcher conducting the study. Additionally, my ideology, as rooted in partially Marxist and liberalist perspectives, and my theoretical stance, which I alluded to as social constructivist worldview, accounted for the character of my reflexivity during that process. I entered that space with the subjective view that participants interpret and construct meanings based on their lived experiences, at the same time I observed that I was not detached from their world. For instance, there were moments when I identified with some participants' experiences owing to my previous practitioner experience of QA at the CHE. In my reflexivity, I interrogated my practice of bringing my previous experience into their space and allowing my practice to interfere with my perceptions of their narratives. At some point, there were interviewee–interviewer power dynamics at play, especially with the SRC leaders who positioned themselves as 'uncompromisingly' candid about their plight and frustrations regarding policy, decision-making, institutional governance, academic arrogance, leadership, and lecturer professionalism, amongst others. I found myself empathising with the SRC leaders thus affecting my responses which were emotional and they, in turn, in their expectations of moral support from me willingly provided more information than most participants in the interviews did. They constantly referred to "them" being "children" in a "parent-child" relationship, a scenario that was played out in the interviews I had with them, as they implicitly recommended that this research intervene in their situation. I had to strive to harmonise my subjectivity and my role as a researcher to combat bias and ensure the rigour and credibility of the research. To combat bias, my recourse was to resort to self-reflection and the realisation that my subjectivity would interfere with the research and compromise the purpose of the study, which was to explore the participants' experiences of the phenomenon in their natural settings. I used a research diary to reflect on my positionality.

4.7.4   Audit trail

An audit trail involves the practice of keeping records and "documenting the course of development of the completed analysis" (Carcary, 2009). This includes documenting all activities undertaken in the research to confirm the, research findings. According to Carcary (2009), in order for a researcher to be able to develop a detailed audit trail of the research he/she ought to document a "log of all research activities, develop memos, maintain research

journals" (ibid., 15), and suchlike throughout the research process. I kept a research diary in which I captured daily occurrences, personal reflections, insights and challenges throughout the data collection process.

4.7.5   Thick description

Thick description is a technique in which the researcher uses 'thick' accounts of the research settings and the participants to allow for transferability of the findings to other contexts, times, situations, and population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description was used in this study through describing each institution's context and the participants in detail. This allows readers to assess the applicability of the findings to the context.

4.8   Delimitations and limitation of the study

Simon and Goes (2013) defined delimitations as "those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries" of a study. This multiple-case study was conducted for a PhD degree between 2016 and 2017; some processes were finalised only in 2018 and thus went beyond the initial scope of the study. Moreover, in terms of the scope of this study, data collection and analysis were confined to the four institutions and student leaders within these institutions and heads of directorates of QA at the CHE and DHET. Although the QEP covers a nationwide programme involving all HEIs (both public and private) aimed at addressing student retention and throughput, only the four institutions mentioned above were included. The rest are excluded owing to cost and time constraints. It should also be noted that sampling was informed by the current institutional types: traditional university, comprehensive university, university of technology and a traditional merged university in line with the higher education transformation agenda. Accordingly, there was a need to include the perspective of a historically disadvantaged institution (HDI) in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the QEP implementation, thus taking into account the differentiated and diversified South African higher education landscape. However, owing to limitations in terms of time, resources and space, the study could not be extended to include such an institution.

Another delimitation of the study relates to the units of analysis which were limited due to the arrangements that were made between the CHE and the institutions themselves where, in some cases, the faculties were not directly involved in the QEP. The scope of the study was therefore limited to only task team members who had undergone a selection process managed by the office of the DVC: Teaching and Learning. Therefore, although the QEP is an all-encompassing concept and inclusive in nature, some units such as the faculties and the Quality Assurance unit played a lesser role. In some institutions, the Quality Assurance unit

played the role of coordinator while in others they had no role to play. Therefore, in terms of scope of this study, a limitation was not involving the faculties and academics in the study due to lack of resources (human and financial) and time limitations as well as having very small focus-groups. These limitations should be noted to inform further studies on policy change and implementation in the South African higher education context.

4.9   Ethical considerations

Obtaining ethical clearance was an important requirement in this study for the purposes of protecting participants and information. As required, ethical clearance was sought from the University of Pretoria's Research Ethics Committee and the Research Ethics Committees of the participating institutions prior to conducting the study.

The purpose was to ensure compliance with the ethical requirements of the participating institutions and government departments. This was crucial as research involves the sourcing of data, which in this case concerned the institutions and the CHE and DHET databases. I experienced some difficulties in obtaining ethical clearance or permission to conduct research from certain institutions. Having reviewed my application for ethical clearance or permission to conduct research, some institutions approved my request to interview staff and SRC leaders without delay. At one institution, my application for ethical clearance was approved within two weeks. However, delays of up to four months were experienced at another institution where I was required to submit a complete ethical clearance application form including my curriculum vitae and that of my supervisor. The application was returned with a request for more information about the method and software or application I would use to ensure that information from participants would ultimately be completely erased from my computer. On receiving the required explanations, the Research Ethics Committee of that institution did ultimately grant approval to conduct research at the institution.

Considering the study aimed to investigate the experiences and views of stakeholders about the QEP at the institutions, as mentioned earlier, the ethics procedures and protocols of the institutions were observed including those of the CHE and DHET. This required that I obtain consent (Hinds, Vogel & Clarke-Steffen, 1997) from the institutions concerned to use their databases. This also involved seeking consent from participants to participate in the study, as well as respecting their right to withdraw from the study in the event they decided not to participate. Participants were assured of their confidentiality by keeping their identities anonymous as well as the identities of the institutions concerned. I used pseudonyms and not participants' names to comply with the rules and confidentiality principles of research ethics. I assigned codes using an Excel spreadsheet which accommodated large amounts of data.

Therefore, codes were utilised to protect the identity of participants, and participating institutions and departments. The cases were labelled Policy Maker and Institution A, B, C, and D (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2) and the participants were called Participant 1 (P1) to Participant (P25) to avoid using their real names. Where student leaders were concerned, interviews were conducted with SRC student leaders in the age bracket 18 to 24 and letters were sent seeking their consent to participate in the research. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and they were informed that the information they gave me would be kept confidential and would not be disclosed until the finalisation and dissemination of the research findings to the higher education community.

4.10   Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research design and the methodology of this study. It described the whole research process in line with the purpose of the study. The sampling methods were described. It explained the rationale for choosing purposive sampling, explaining how this method would answer the research question and meet the objectives of the study. It explained trustworthiness and credibility, the issues around ethical considerations, delimitations and limitations of the study. It covers all aspects of the data collection and analysis processes, and the techniques used in data collection and analysis.

In terms of data collection and analysis, the tools or instruments used to collect the primary data through in-depth interviews and focus-group interviews, and documents were described. This use of open-ended and semi-structured questions in the interviews were explained with a view to probing further to gain insights into the participants' experiences of the phenomenon studied. It also explained how ethical issues were complied with research ethics protocols. The unfolding of the whole interview process was discussed and the data analysis process involving coding and development of themes. The data analysis is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5
Data Analysis: Comparative Analysis

5.1   Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of stakeholder experiences of the implementation of the QEP at the four participating institutions and at the CHE and DHET which formed the units of analysis in this study (Cruzes, Dybå, Runeson & Höst, 2015). This process entailed a comparative analysis of the cases to identify cross-cutting patterns and trends in order to replicate findings across cases and, ultimately, to determine whether the objectives of the QEP were achieved. This chapter follows the framework that was constructed based on the analysis of the themes as described in Chapter 4. It discusses four major themes and sub-themes: i) stakeholder understandings of quality, QA and the shift from QA to QE, ii) institutional strategies to implement the QEP, iii) QEP implementation challenges, and iv) stakeholder perceptions of the impact of the QEP, in relation to the research questions.

5.2   Stakeholder understandings of quality, QA and the shift from QA to QE

5.2.1   Stakeholder perspectives and interpretation of quality, QA and QE

In order to create a culture of QE in higher education it is necessary to agree on the concept of quality. Quality drives the core business of higher education which is teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Therefore, an understanding of how stakeholders perceived the QEP and whether consensus was reached on the definition of quality is necessary. This chapter explores how participants through interviews defined the concepts of quality, QA and QE to explore how they understood the shift from QA to QE and how this ultimately impacted on the implementation of the QEP.

The data analysis across cases revealed differences in the definitions of the concepts of quality, QA and QE within and between participant institutions, the CHE and DHET. For instance, the CHE defined quality in terms of fitness of purpose, value for money, transformation, meeting threshold standards (accountability) and graduateness. Importantly, quality in higher education has to do with the value to the student's life beyond university:

> *So there is the idea of quality that it is actually transforming the learner from the position where they came into to the institution to something else when they come out…Not only is it meeting minimum standards.* (Participant 1A)

This picture presents a value-add dimension and reflects the recent increasing attention given to transformation and student-centredness. It links to the QEP which purports to uphold the values of transformation and value-add to enrich students' learning experiences so that they can succeed in life beyond the university.

The DHET participants meanwhile defined quality broadly in relation to National Qualifications Framework (NQF) instruments, including life-long learning, responsive citizenry, quality of student graduateness, compliance with national regulations and requirements, maximum student learning experiences, amongst others. The following participant viewed quality through the lens of human capital, focusing on higher education's contribution to the economy and the labour market.

> *Obviously, there's also quality in a way the whole student system is administered, the experiences of students of quality, the whole quality vision of a university… The university's approach to what it should be delivering in terms of its qualifications … How that gets taught, how it is learned, what modes, models, methods, what underpins, the classroom experience of a learner … For me quality is also part of how the university relates to industry, how it relates to organised business in labour, … how it relates to labour market intelligence to inform the curriculum… So, for me that part of quality is very much within the bigger circle of a national qualifications framework.* (Participant 4B)

The institutions defined quality in terms of producing "responsive citizenry" and "quality graduates". One participant defined quality as follows:

> *…you will be proud in terms of the type of quality of education you have provided to produce responsible citizens.* (Participant 7A)

There were shared definitions of quality as "fitness of purpose" and "fitness for purpose", "value for money" and "transformation" between the institutions and the policy makers. The following participant from the traditional university explored how these definitions held by the CHE were 'unpacked' and institutionalised in the university.

> *For example, the CHE would define quality … [as] … "fitness of purpose" and "fitness for purpose", "value for money" and "transformation". So that's how we sort of define and then perhaps unpack what does transformation mean, what does value for money mean and all that.* (Participant 13B)

Another participant from the university of technology (Institution A) also presented a contextualised definition of quality that embraces the fitness of and for purpose elements.

You know what quality is everybody's business. Whatever you do it must be of the required quality. And I tend to go as back as some few years … they used to talk in terms of the 'fitness of and for purpose'. So, that really helped a great deal. (Participant 7A)

This implied that quality was associated with 'fitness of and for purpose' in operations and individual roles to fulfil institutional missions. This is seen in how the participant explained that "*whatever you do it must be of the required quality"* meaning that this understanding of quality was infused in daily routines and undertakings. Therefore, although there were similarities between the institutions' and policy makers' definition of quality, for institutions, dimensions of 'fitness of purpose' and 'fitness for purpose' were directly linked to their missions and operations.

The data also indicates variations in the understanding of quality assurance. Some participants from the CHE defined it as "*an umbrella term … for things that you do to ensure that your higher education is of good quality".*

QA to me is the overarching system with the associated processes that enable you to see to what extent [what] you are doing is leading to quality as we have defined it. (Participant 2A)

Participants from DHET defined QA as *"processes and mechanisms"*:

Quality assurance I think it's a process. So if we understand what quality is and what are the parameters for seeing quality or viewing quality then quality assurance is a mechanism for understanding if those parameters are being met. (Participant 3B)

This definition implies that QA is a measure of quality and the emphasis is placed on meeting standards through systems, procedures, criteria and processes. In other words, QA is the yardstick for measuring educational quality.

Institutions tend to define QA as an accountability-driven exercise. Participants from the institutions expressed that they were accountable to government and to students for the quality of provision offered and for monies invested in education. Therefore, QA meant to them conducting reviews, evaluations and assessments timeously to ensure standards are maintained.

That is as an assurance structure to make sure that assessments are done according to the policy, assessments are done as per schedule, the question papers with the quality standards, the questions comply with the teaching and learning standards. That is assurance. (Participant 9A)

QA was also seen in terms of economic returns to education based on the money governments and society spend on education. Thus, there was a value-for-money dimension to quality within institutions.

> *We need also to ensure that the lecturers or teachers that we have are of the required quality to deliver the tuition that the institution and/or the students are hoping to receive in class or online.* (Participant 7A)

This perspective indicated that institutions considered that the primary responsibility for QA lies with institutions. Hence, inputs (teaching and learning processes and quality of teaching/lecturers) and standards ought to be the defining principle that underpins delivery of provision. Participants from the institutions in this study presented an institutionalised perspective of QA based on institutional cultures and practices while policy makers' perspectives were based on understandings of QA as processes to be formulated for uptake within institutions. While policy makers defined QA in terms of systems and processes, they viewed quality enhancement (QE) in terms of uplifting the entire system:

> *So, now if you want to get to the actual quality not just the mechanisms that institutions use to ensure … That's where you go and do some capacity building or you might do some enhancement-led process … or you might actually have some kind of structural approach or you have a team of people coming to help for a period of time to get an institution out of a quality hold.* (Participant 1A)

This implied capacity building initiatives are aimed at developing institutions or assisting institutions in terms of maintaining their accreditation status. This view is supported by the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP),[2] which considers capacity development in institutions as a cohesive process that includes student development, staff development and curriculum development:

> … an integrated approach to capacity development at universities, and is intended to enable universities to work across the boundaries that separate student development, staff development and programme/curriculum development. (DHET, 2017)

Thus, QE was described as a deep-seated process where one digs deeper into institutional processes, identifying structural issues and weaknesses in relation to quality, and then

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[2] The UCDP is a Ministry of Higher Education and Training programme aimed at capacitating higher education institutions in South Africa. It focuses on three key development areas: student development, staff development, and management and programme/curriculum development (DHET, 2018).

implements interventions to address problem areas. QE was also perceived as being collegial, and a process to cultivate a sense of ownership and institutional autonomy.

> *Ja, the idea of actually to pitch it at that level as well where colleagues from different institutions could collegially work together and identify challenges and all that.* (Participant 13B)

> *… it's more on trying to find ways of finding one another in the making of this to go forward because we need to understand if we were to enhance what are we enhancing? At what level? And there are different role players in it up until support service division hence it must be more on different role players in the university coming together.* (Participant 13B)

This suggests instilling a sense of ownership of processes from within institutions and acknowledgement that responsibility for quality and QE rests with institutions themselves. The institutions defined QE in terms of continuous improvement of teaching and learning. To them QE meant going beyond the accountability call to dig deeper into QA processes and enhance quality. While QA was viewed in terms of meeting minimum standards, QE was emphasised as the "next generation quality assurance" to ensure continuous improvement of quality.

> *… how we can bring in the quality enhancement into our approaches as [Institution]. And that kind of document we called it "The Next Generation Quality Assurance".* (Participant 9A)

> *… now you come with the enhancement, you know! You have done that part [quality assurance], now you need to do certain parts to ensure that the quality remains … but now if you look at this [quality enhancement] approach, it's different. It's how do you ensure that your quality, you know, still stands!* (Participant 5A)

Another observation from a participant at the merged university was QE as a catalyst for transformation/change whereby it drives social justice imperatives in higher education.

> *If you read all these things here prior to, then you see that the whole quality enhancement is also towards establishing a type of just society, you know and so forth.* (Participant 17D)

Therefore at all three levels (the CHE, DHET and the participant institutions), there were varied understandings of quality, QA and QE which reflects the diverse characteristics of higher education in South Africa. DHET had a broad definition of quality reflecting policy imperatives at the national level whilst CHE defined quality as fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation emphasising the traditional definition and a value-add

dimension in the South African context. This reflects the deconstruction of meaning from quality concepts with a view to addressing quality issues at policy making and implementation levels. The CHE participants viewed QA as an overarching system linked to quality. The DHET understood QA as putting in place quality control measures (mechanisms) to enforce standards within institutions. Institutions understood QA as accountability to government and students for investments in education. Policy makers understood QE as an instrument for reforming the sector and institutions understood QE as internally driven to promote collegiality, ownership and institutional autonomy. Hence, some embraced QE as a panacea for the ills of an overregulated system. In summary, QE was perceived as improvement-led processes for teaching and learning or enhanced learning experiences to bring about change in students' attributes, knowledge, and skills. In addition, QE within an institution was synonymous with uplifting the quality of provision beyond meeting minimum standards. The next section will explore how participants understand the shift from QA to QE.

5.2.2 *Stakeholder perceptions of the shift from QA to QE*

Participants' understandings of the shift from QA to QE varied slightly across cases. The different perspectives regarding the shift from QA to QE that emergent showed that some perceived the shift as real while others argued that there wasn't a real shift. A participant explained that it was not a "real" shift *"because enhancement is embedded in QA processes"*.

> *So in a way I wouldn't say it's a real shift because enhancement is embedded. Perhaps is more on, if you like drilling deeper into an element of enhancement as it were where we literally want to understand the enhancement thereof, where are we enhancing? What informs that enhancement and all that? So, it will be more really at sort of drilling and mining that concept of enhancement in higher education as such.* (Participant 13B)

Other participants viewed it as a real shift, enabling the institutions to rethink the way they are doing things:

> *The shift from QA to QE, I understand it as almost just creating a different system … where then the institutions would have to see how they create efficiencies in the sphere of teaching and learning by looking at those four focal points [Enhancing academics as teachers; Enhancing student support and development; Enhancing the learning environment; and Enhancing course and programme enrolment management] which is different from … evaluation that was done through the institutional audits which were part of the QA regime supported by other systems such as programme accreditation. (Participant 15D)*

Another participant who saw a potential in the shift viewed it as a mechanism to address pertinent issues within such as the challenges of student dropout and poor retention rates:

There's also the issue of dropout, you know! Lack of retention where people start and they never complete the programme … they don't actually come out with anything. So … without even going to the other factors, there was a need to think and come up with a project or system of enhancing the learning processes. (Participant 12C)

Others viewed the shift from QA to QE as a form of control over the policy process by the CHE that resulted in resistance to change (discussed later). For instance, it was observed that while policy makers wanted to introduce newness into the system to address the failure of traditional audits, policy implementers viewed this as continued dominance of compliance-driven frameworks that influence policy uptake and implementation strategies. This is the result of fear within institutions of the consequences of not complying with regulatory requirements.

I guess we are doing some of these things to comply with the system and sometimes we are doing them because they fall within the realm of the work that we normally would be doing. (Participant 15D)

This response highlights the compliance-oriented approaches and methods this institution used which were regarded as the norm. Consequently, some institutions displayed lack of innovation and creativity when addressing challenges. In other words, while the failure of the traditional audits through its influence introduced change, it did not change effectively the culture of compliance, the shift was abandoned in the long term, as some still preferred the traditional audits to continued enhancement or improvement.

The policy makers explained that the rationale or the primary goal of the shift at a national level was to ensure efficiency in the system and to address the failures of the traditional audit system.

But where the shift happened is that we had the institutional audits. Now the audits is that kind of approach where you go in and check the systems and processes that the institution has to ensure its own quality, okay. That we shifted for a while and that programme to the QE. … So, now you got the systems and processes in place but where is the improvement coming from? How are we actually affecting the real quality? And that was the shift for a while, okay. So, it's almost like the shift from checking systems to getting your hands dirty with institutions to help improve the quality. (Participant 1A)

The CHE's QEP: Phase 2 report on higher education institution submissions echoes this concern highlighting the importance of the shift from traditional audits towards focused attention on QE to improve teaching and learning.

At the end of the [first] audit cycle, discussion took place between the CHE and the HEI sector about the focus, scope and direction of a second cycle. An external evaluation of the CHE in 2009 noted the benefits of the institutional audit process, but also the cost in time and human resources. It suggested that the next cycle should focus on quality promotion and, in discussion with HEIs, the need to improve teaching and learning emerged as a central theme. By the end of 2013, the focus of the second quality assurance cycle would be on improving student success, both at individual institutions and across the higher education sector as a whole. This resulted in a Quality Enhancement Project, which aims to 'help institutions to advance to increasing levels of quality' (CHE, 2018:5).

One participant from institution A mentioned the technicist or 'tick-a-box' approach (discussed later) to quality of the audit system, which she compared to the improvement-led approach of enhancement.

> *… the institutional audits … check list or tick-a-box and following that first cycle of audits did not add value in terms of improving the quality of teaching and learning … and so in the second cycle … CHE considered perhaps now focusing on the enhancement which is more developmental than assurance.*

This statement suggests weaknesses in the existing system of audits and the need to adopt new methods, strategies or 'doing things differently' in order to influence the desired change in teaching and learning. In that light, the QEP was seen as a change agent for improved student retention, success and throughput that the audits had failed to achieve.

The policy makers regarded the traditional audits as lengthy and challenging, and explained that by the time one audit had been completed, the CHE had forgotten about what was happening in the first institution audited:

> *... the audits were done sequentially, one institution after another … they started in about 2005 when they did the UCT one and carried on till 2011-12. So, before you got through the whole sector it's basically, … that was quite a long time, it's about a decade, alright. So by the time you would have seen the first one in 2005 and you still busy with the last one in 2014, a lot has happened in that first institution that you do not know about.* (Participant 1A)

> *That process, the process of conducting audits across the sector took very much longer than was anticipated. It was originally envisioned as being a process that would last for 5 years. It began in 2004 however even now we still have one audit that is not closed. So, this is 13 years later.* (Participant 2A)

These prolonged processes of audits stemmed from inadequacies of the past education system and its legacy which further complicated the audits.

> *Now some of the reasons have to do with complexities in our higher education system and some of the complexities are the result of the policies of the former government.... So that complicated the audit process because you couldn't really continue with the audit process whilst some institutions were under administration. And that is one of the factors that has contributed to the audits taking very much longer than was expected.* (Participant 2A)

One participant from the CHE explained that importing the QEP was a deliberate attempt at doing things differently to steer policy direction.

> *The idea to do the enhancement came before and then we said, okay so who's doing this well? Let's go and see what they are doing and what we can learn from them. So it wasn't like let's go and look for a model and let's go and import it here. Not at all. Um, and also remember the kinds of models we choose as a country also depends on why you are doing this. Okay, if you look at some of the European models, the context is very different.* (Participant 1A)

The policy makers maintained that external influences weighed heavily on the shift from QA to QE and the conceptualisation, adoption and uptake of the QEP.

> *Okay, there were two main influences on the design of the QEP. The one was, we drew quite heavily on the QE framework of Scotland. So, Scotland made a shift from QA to QE in 2003. So they have quite a long experience. So there were elements of their QE framework that we drew on in designing the QEP. The other major influence was an initiative in the U.S. called "Achieving the Dream".* (Participant 2A)

This participant explained that *'Achieving the Dream' was an idea premised on a "network of community colleges in the U.S. and the dream is student success".* The lessons learnt from this experience were focused particularly on *"success for students who are 1st generation and from low-income households"* which mirrored the socio-economic conditions of *"the majority of our students of course in S.A"* (Participant 2A). Again, this suggests learning from developed countries and sharing "new" information and resources locally for improvement purposes.

> *So, there were several features of what 'Achieving the Dream' does that had an important influence on the design of the QEP. One of them was the idea that we should be sharing what we learning and the challenges. One of them was that we should be much better about collecting data and using evidence to guide decisions and one of them was a very intentional focus on student success.* (Participant 2A)

So, and then from Scotland the role played by DVCs and the importance of them being colleagues in the project was one of the most important things we learnt. But also the taking what is being learnt and collating it so that you create resources for the sector was an important idea that we took from Scotland. So those were the two main influences on the design of the QEP. (Participant 2A)

The views of some of the participants who embraced the notion of policy borrowing in the institutions echoed the views of the policy makers. They saw this as conceptualising new ways of doings things – a move away from the traditional audits methodology.

You'll remember as universities initially what we were used to is what we call 'audits' where an independent body like the CHE, Professional Boards would come and see what we doing here and actually certify that they are happy, we can proceed. But I think the CHE came with a very progressive proposal to say, 'Let's look into what other countries are doing particularly the Australians, the Scottish and then they came up with a proposal of what we call now the Quality Enhancement Project. (Participant 10A)

It is worth noting that managers from the merged institution shared this view and welcomed the shift as a positive move away from the externally controlled QA system to self-directed internal processes, thus suggesting that traditional audits had failed. This perspective was linked to the institution's history and the trajectory of the merger; hence, this move was interpreted as providing an opportunity for the QEP to provide direction and guidance in moving the institution forward. Subsequently, management of the merged institution took an open approach to the shift as they viewed it as a *"smooth and enjoyable"* transition from QA to QE, an opportunity for personal and professional development. Individuals would be able to take advantage of the opportunity for self-upliftment:

Within [Institution D], I think the shift from QA to QE I could say has been a smooth one for various reasons. We welcome the focus that was given to teaching and learning issues. (Participant 15D)

So despite the fact that there were deadlines, etc., at the same time, it was a kind of an opportunity … See what you can improve and what you gain from this opportunity and so on. And it depends on the individual to say that this is an opportunity, let me run with it, let me make the best out of it, and see what I get out of it. That's how I saw it. (Participant 16D)

It seems that at this institution, the shift from QA to QE was perceived as a means for self-empowerment. Hence, institutional managers embraced the proposed shift as an opportunity

to step back and reflect on their policies, systems, procedures and processes in order to support ongoing initiatives aimed at fast-tracking transformative processes.

This view of QE as self-empowerment is consistent with the views of Inglis (2005) about QE as being progressive, implying that QE is improvement-led and inward looking, focusing on internal institutional processes, such as teaching and learning and research, and capacity building. This is in opposition to QA, which is perceived as outward looking, externally controlled regulatory driven and focusing on accountability for government funding to universities.

> *Assurance is very much accountability based whereas enhancement is about continuous development and improvement.* (Participant 5A)

Some participants at the university of technology (Institution A) supported the move away from external audits to focused attention on internal processes.

> *I understand the shift as indicating that we need to now focus on continuous quality improvement because if you look at the first cycle it was focused on ensuring that we have quality controls in place, we have strong assurance mechanisms in place but we slightly neglected the continuous, the quality improvement part and basically if you look at the quality loop, you need to close off the loop by improving quality, continuous quality improvement. So enhancement is now shifting us, to say, 'focus on quality improvement and not only the assurance part'.* (Participant 9A)

The emphasis here on the internal conceptualisation of QE mechanisms and processes implies a shift from external control or audits to a place where institutions themselves drive and own these processes (Nicholson, 2011).

Furthermore, participants at the university of technology (Institution A), viewed this transition as part of a global move towards improved standards and enhancing the quality of provision. The following participant viewed the QEP as the "quality leg of the CHE" which helps the institution.

> *… with regard [to] the shift my perspective to [the] QEP [of the] CHE or the quality leg of the CHE normally used to conduct the quality assurance to ensure that what really the institution is offering is of required quality or expected quality. But now since that particular guideline or policy [QEP] has been entrenched the CHE or the quality leg then tried by all means to now to enhance quality. To elevate it from where it was to a certain aspect so that it can eh, accelerate the issues of student success and access to information and also improve the throughput rate.* (Participant 7A)

Participants at the university of technology seemed to welcome the shift as a means to align the QEP initiatives with the institution's mission. This was aimed at contributing to human development in the country through technology, innovation and the scholarship of teaching and learning, as well as being relevant and competitive nationally, regionally and internationally through focused attention on vocational orientated programmes. This would entail reconstructing their academic programmes and aligning them to industry needs so that the students produced and their skills are relevant to industry. This view was confirmed by a student leader from the university of technology (Institution A), who observed that:

> *We [students] are what is expected by the market, as I've said. What used to be [in the past], sometimes you would find out that when one finished doing a course it was no longer relevant to the market. So, what I think they [management] were trying to do is to achieve what the market wants with their students.* (Participant 21A)

Similarly, a participant from the comprehensive university (Institution C) acknowledged that the shift reflected the institution's mission and vision which underpin the ODL contextualised model of delivery considering the institution's diverse student needs and large footprint. This supports reaching out to the African continent in terms of knowledge production, knowledge dissemination and scholarship through lifelong learning, knowledge creation, student centredness and provision of cutting-edge ICT applications and platforms (Makoe, 2016).

> *If we're saying we are an African university and we have students outside of the country then it even makes it more challenging to say how do you begin to address their needs so that when you do your quality enhancement, they are also then part of that.* (Participant 11C)

Other participants from the university of technology (Institution A) supported the shift from QA to QE as moving beyond the call for accountability to creating a conducive learning environment and capacitating academics so that they acquire the skills and knowledge required to teach diverse student populations, and to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning. In this way, they would acquaint themselves with ways to teach 21st century students who are technologically inclined to be on par with their counterparts around the globe:

> *The university of today is very different from the university of 20 years ago. It's a different space, there are different requirements, business and industry we are moving as people say into the 4th industrial revolution, artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnologies, can our universities cope with that? And I think part of that was what I thought of it underpinning the quality enhancement project, realising we are in a different space, what is required of a young graduate coming out is different, how the*

university responds, how they engage with teaching, learning, the innovation and all of that. (Participant 4B)

This supported the line of thinking at the university of technology (Institution A) that holds QE as an agent for bridging the generational divide and creating opportunities for the younger generation.

So, people from areas where they support students were the ones that were actually involved with [Enhancing Student Support and Development (Group 2)] and then we went to enhancing the learning environment. As you know, the learning environment is our classrooms and the university is offering a lot because we also have another environment where they look into … technology. You know our kids of today are not the same as us. They embrace technology a lot. (Participant 5A)

Participants from the traditional university saw the shift from QA to QE as promoting inclusivity. A participant regarded the shift as bringing on board voices that were previously marginalised and uniting people across the sector, especially key role players in the policy processes who were not involved in QA:

So, we in a way we missed the role of other people within institutions and those of academics. And the shift I think was aimed at bringing the voices that were left out a bit closer in terms of understanding. (Participant 13B)

This participant looked inward and backwards to the past in explaining the rationale behind the shift; observing that the shift was intended to redress past imbalances in the higher education system; promote unity across the sector; and empower especially those who were previously marginalised. This embodies a worldview rooted in social justice and values that the institution holds and aspires to promote, given the legacy of the past unequal apartheid education system. This is consistent with the principles of inclusivity, collegiality and ownership espoused by the QEP. In the South African higher education system, this is an important trajectory in terms of redressing past imbalances in higher education. One participant reflected on the persistent lack of epistemological access and epistemic inequalities which are still firmly entrenched in the education system. She pointed out the need to shift in order to eradicate inequalities and to address the persistent gap in performance between white and black students.

Teaching and learning issues and throughput and all that were already big issues … we used to generate teaching and learning data to look at how students were faring in terms of their performance. And you could see there was a huge gap between black

students and white students. And so that issue has always been there. (Participant 13B)

Therefore, the above participant was comfortable with the shift which promoted a culture of inclusivity. This view was shared by management at the merged university who understood the shift as having to do with promoting inclusivity within the university and as a means for uniting the different segments and people within and across the university and campuses.

> *It was really something we wanted to work on and we embraced it because we could involve support staff, academic staff and the students as well, everyone. One can say the whole university from all the fields and spheres were actually directly involved in this. I mean from the Counselling groups, from the medical groups, the people who work with bursaries and so on all were actually involved in the projects in phase 1.* (Participant 16D)

Most participants, including student leaders at the university of technology (Institution A), touched on this inclusiveness to emphasise the collective approach.

> *And I can also describe this project as a project that does not only include researchers in the upper level or the executive level … There is student leadership that is involved in the process, there are also groups or structures of the university that also participate in this thing.* (Participant 20A)

This is indicative of the need for the institution to embrace QE in support of inclusivity based on broader stakeholder representation in institutional processes which they believed could be achieved through the shift from QA to QE.

Contrary to the participants who understood the shift as a means to instil a culture of collaborative practice, participants from the comprehensive university (Institution C) understood the shift as an exclusionary practice. They were concerned that instead of unifying units within the institution, the shift had created a division among the QA processes in the institution because the QEP was housed in the Vice-Principal: Teaching and Learning portfolio yet the QA unit, as the custodians of QA within the institution was not involved in its processes.

> *I joined this department in 2014 and when I joined, the shift into quality enhancement was already on the table. I believe and I think for me the first thing that came through was that eh, the quality enhancement project would be lying with the VP: Teaching and Learning, and we [QA unit] on the other side would still remain with the traditional quality assurance.* (Participant 11C)

Nevertheless, the participant further noted that although they were *"not very much involved with"* the QEP, they were *"aware of the kind of projects that have been introduced to try and address the quality enhancement project"* (Participant 11C).

Although the picture above seems to suggest support for the shift from QA to QE by some, many were opposed to the idea of the shift. For instance, some participants at the traditional university (Institution B) felt that the shift from QA to QE was not desirable, as it did not bring anything new to the institution. They were apprehensive about introducing enhancement which they viewed as not been adequately grasped by the higher education community. A participant highlighted the challenges involved in adopting and implementing a new concept that the higher education sector was not sufficiently prepared for. She argued that aspects of traditional audits ought to be fully developed first.

> *I personally thought we could have gone through the second cycle of audits perhaps being more specific to teaching and learning and not on enhancement but more on audits still.* (Participant 13B)

She regarded audits as representing a tradition, which they were accustomed to and which provided clear direction as well as stipulating *"minimum standards"* for teaching and learning.

> *So we understand the auditing element in terms of why are you doing this? How are you doing it? What we are expecting you do. These are the minimum standards that are expected in terms of teaching and learning.* (Participant 13B)

In fact, some participants at Institution B preferred audits to enhancement. One participant described QA as being *"far more structured, far more focused on the entire university system"* and more comprehensive than QE. In other words, their systems were advanced and the QEP did not match their standards, considering their already advanced status in QE and as one of the top ranking institutions in South Africa.

Furthermore, some institutions maintained that the CHE was not mandated to drive the shift from QA to QE. As such, some participants who wanted to go back to traditional audits argued that institutional audits enforced accountability for quality of provision and ensured institutional effectiveness.

> *But what is most important is that the shift [from QA to QE] as it were in a way contradicts what should be the main mandate of the CHE if you like. The mandate of the CHE is to monitor institutions in terms of quality assurance or their own provision as it were. So, the enhancement aspect does not necessarily replace the auditing and monitoring of performance of the university.* (Participant 13B)

They argued that the CHE did not have the mandate to interfere and to introduce QE, as their mandate was to oversee QA in terms of the Act that regulates QA in the South African higher education.

> *I feel it's [institutional audits] the right way to go because that is the mandate given by Parliament through the Act that gave birth to the CHE. And looking at what is happening in higher education now, you can tell that in some instances some problems universities face because they relax a lot on their quality management systems. So, the assurance approach or framework that the CHE is going back to helps to put institutions accountable. Whereas the QEP did not put institutions into accounting for the tax payers money they were using but quality assurance does.* (Participant 6A)

This situation reflected the power struggles over who controlled the QEP processes. These are evident in the way the policy makers' attempts at initiating change were undermined or resisted in institutions, and how students were vying for recognition as 'equal partners' in policy processes. These contradictory viewpoints suggest a tension between and among policy makers' and policy implementers' understanding of the rationale behind the shift. The underlying philosophy of collegiality seems to have been undermined or threatened, as evidenced in the way some experienced the shift as breaking down traditional structures rather than tapping into vast experience and expert knowledge of QA units, as well as disempowering them.

These differences reflect the worldviews embodied in the different histories and cultures of the institutions. In that regard, the university of technology's (Institution A) worldview can be associated with a past that evolved from the technically oriented provision of education to vocationally orientated qualifications in that it associates newness or developments with entrepreneurial (technologically inclined) advancement. Whereas the traditional university's (Institution B) trajectory as a traditional institution roots its history and values in its pursuit for academic and research excellence and would assert itself firmly as a research intensive university which always pursues quality and resist change. The comprehensive university's (Institution C) history denotes an inclusionary ideology seen in its commitment to increase access into higher education to people from all walks of life, hence its concern with exclusionary practices. Meanwhile, the merged university's (Institution D) concerns have to do with inclusivity and transformation (realignment) of campuses, programmes and activities as embodied in its history, vision, values and mission as a merged University. As a newly created institution, it embraced new ideas to bring about inclusivity across the institution. A participant explained that the shift came at the right time when the institution was in the processes of realigning their programmes across the faculties.

We saw this as an opportunity to say, 'whilst we are in the process of restructuring this is now the right time to put a lot into this and to look at all focus areas and to make a success of it. (Participant 16D)

What is quite interesting is it actually went hand-in-hand with the restructuring of our university. (Participant 16D)

In conclusion, the picture above presents polarised worldviews and understandings of the concepts of quality, QA and QE as well as the understanding of the shift from QA to QE: policy makers versus policy implementers. The policy makers' views were influenced by their ideologies and motives to drive national policy imperatives and change in line with transformation. The policy implementers' views reflected institutionalised processes or autonomous, inward-looking approaches to policy implementation. The mixed reactions and differences at the micro-level policy implementation reflect diversity in the sector. It reflects the diverse ways in which institutions defined quality, QA and QE, and interpreted the shift from QA to QE based on their contextualised experiences that shaped their implementation of policy aligned to institutional missions. This suggested an understanding of the shift as a means to support their specific issues internally. Interestingly, some policy implementers' perspectives regarding the shift, reflected how they yearned for a return to accountability, preferring an externally controlled process to QE. These worldviews were in opposition with one group of participants welcoming the shift from QA to QE as a progressive move while the other opposed it. The tension between state control (policy makers) at macro-level and autonomy (policy implementers) at micro-level point to the power struggles and complexities in the South African higher education policy environment.

5.2.3 Stakeholder perceptions regarding the purpose and meaning of the QEP
The data analysis revealed diverse perspectives, which reflected a lack of a common understanding of the purpose and the meaning of the QEP. However, there were also commonalities as described in the following section.

5.2.3.1. Improvement of teaching and learning
An overarching thread consistent across all five cases is an understanding of the main purpose of the QEP as being to "improve" the quality of teaching and learning at the undergraduate level as key to addressing low student success, retention and throughput rates (all ongoing issues).

It also became clear that the area in which there was the greatest need was teaching and learning and so a decision was made, I think it was in 2010 by the HEQC that whatever process that was followed in this second cycle needed to focus on improving

teaching and learning across the entire sector not one institution at a time. (Participant 2A)

This rationale is confirmed in the CHE (2018) report which purports that the QEP's mandate was to accelerate transformation and to improve student success rates and throughput.

> The reconfiguration and resultant transformation of higher education in South Africa since 2004 provided another rationale for the QEP … Despite the significant transformation of the HE landscape in 2004, the effects of apartheid policies and practices still linger and are most acutely felt by the historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) (CHE, 2018: 8).

> …an external evaluation of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and discussions with the higher education sector led to a decision to focus on improving teaching and learning in the second period of quality assurance. The need for this was highlighted in the National Development Plan (NDP) and statistics that showed that only about half of entering students were completing their qualifications. After an extended period of consultation, the CHE formulated the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) as a five-year project to work with all HEIs simultaneously to improve student success (CHE, 2018: 14).

Accordingly, it was framed around four focus areas: enhancing academics as teachers, enhancing student support and development, enhancing the learning environment, enhancing course and programme enrolment management and capacity building. Capacity building was referred to holistically to include capacitating the institutions in terms of resources, standards of provision, professional development of academics as well as students.

> *Then if we are going to improve the quality of university teaching, we need to make sure that academics know something about teaching. Okay, so the first step is for new academics to then go through some kind of induction process where they learn the basics of university teaching, okay. So part of the first phase of the QEP, 'enhancing academics as teachers' focus area, one of the things we looked at is "do institutions have any kind of induction into teaching for new academics?"* (Participant 2A)

This was consistent with the CHE (2015: 5) Report on Phase 1 of the QEP:

> These four-focus areas deal with institution-level issues. The enhancement of academics as teachers requires institutions to provide professional development opportunities. But for academics to pay attention to improving their teaching, institutions need to include teaching quality in performance appraisal and rewards systems.

The development of students was to be conceptualised through the focus area on enhancing student support and development, which was linked to appropriate teaching methodologies and/or pedagogy or andragogic principles expressed in the QEP.

> Student support and development need to be offered through appropriate structures by qualified people at different levels of an institution (CHE, 2015: 5).

> *And there is too much of that going on whereas you really want to develop learners who are self-regulated, take responsibility, and take initiative then you need to go through professional development so you understand something about how people learn. Um, and you learn about teaching approaches that promote student engagement.* (Participant 2A)

Policy implementers and student leaders agreed and described the purpose of the QEP as contributing to improved student graduateness.

> *… the CHE normally used to conduct the quality assurance to ensure that what really the institution is offering is of required quality or expected quality. But now since that particular guideline or policy has been entrenched the CHE or the quality leg then tried by all means to now to enhance quality. To elevate it from where it was to a certain aspect so that it can eh, accelerate the issues of student success and access to information and also improve the throughput rate.* (Participant 7C)

> *… and also, the main focus of this [QEP] project is to make sure that it increases the number of graduates in universities.* (Participant 20A)

This strategy was both important and instrumental, since gaps in teaching and learning such as poor teacher competences and unconducive learning environments may mask or disguise deficiencies in the system. Hence, the CHE flagged the urgency to respond to the pressing need to redress the imbalances of the past education system with regard to teaching and learning, in order to reposition higher education. This will contribute to the political, socioeconomic and transformative goals related to human resources development and economic growth in the country. The broad national vision the CHE revisited is in keeping with the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education.

5.2.3.2. Collaboration
Another common theme among stakeholders was collaboration and forging communities of practice. In that light, policy makers understood the QEP as a two-phased process that is inductive and iterative to promote collaboration.

So, it was intended that we were going to have two phases and in each phase, there would be selected focus areas we would ask institutions to give us a baseline submission about what they were doing in each focus area. (Participant 2A)

Inductive meant that information and insights emergent from each part of the QEP process would inform the next steps of the process and iterative meant that in each phase there would be engagement with "selected focus areas through baseline submissions, collaboration with other institutions and reports on enhancements" (CHE, 2015: 3). They hoped that this would be achieved through a systematic application of interactive activities or spin-off activities pulled off by the sector as a collective to build communities of practice. Accordingly, the purpose was to forge networks and collegial practices through sharing systems and best practice:

So, can they learn from each other? If one institution has a wonderful system going of teaching portfolios, why must the others go and reinvent? There are good things happening in various places that they can learn from each other and part of what was happening there was getting all the DVCs: Academic coming together to learn from each other [okay]. So almost to create a community of practice. (Participant 1A)

A participant, also from the CHE, shared this view and emphasised the need to share expertise and resources in the sector. This entailed collective approaches to address common challenges that are systemic and institutional as a means to achieve the identified objective of uplifting the sector:

So, let's see how we can capitalise on the knowledge and experience of the whole sector so that different institutions can learn from one another and can share things that they are doing that are effective and also work together put their heads together to address challenges that are common so that we raise the whole sector up as quickly as we can. (Participant 2A)

Workshops were organised with the purpose of ensuring that there is collaboration between and among institutions.

So from identifying the focus areas, the institutional baseline submissions, the analysis of those, the next step was then to promote collaboration among institutions and we did that by having workshops in 2015. (Participant 2A)

According to policy makers, collaboration would be informed by a particular theoretical lens that appeals to the principle of openness and transparency. For instance, they drew on *"Appreciative Inquiry"* (AI) (Participant 2A) in cultivating a culture in which change could be amicably embraced. In that light, the QEP was viewed as advocating for the promotion of an

open, collegial culture in which institutions could open up, share information and resources in a relaxed non-judgemental atmosphere linked to peer review and feedback.

> *[We use] appreciative inquiry … it is in a spirit of mutual help to actually get to a better level … the intention was to give peer feedback on how they have improved … it's not like you are going to get minus three (-3).* (Participant 1A)

> The broad frame for the visit is appreciative inquiry (AI), originally developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). AI is a strengths-based approach to change management that uses the "positive core" of an organisation as the starting point for growth and improvement (CHE, 2017: 3).

The CHE, 2017 report describes appreciative inquiry as a 'strengths-based approach to change management' implying that focusing on the positive and on what works within an institution or organisation and with collective efforts bestowed on initiatives ensures success (Fynn, 2013). The basic tenet of this philosophy or underlying principle is inclusivity, co-operative and co-evolutionary process begot by a practice of searching for the best in people, their organisations and their world (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). Thus, the policy makers' understanding of the QEP was linked to AI, which they saw as a positive influence and having a potential to foster a sense of appreciative collectiveness between institutions and themselves. Therefore, the policy makers' underpinning philosophy of AI was to promote transparency for introducing the QEP in the institutions. This was in line with the CHE's position, as the administrators of the project, in terms of setting up parameters for implementation. The use of this negotiated approach would leverage institutions' potential and openness to change.

At the same time, the CHE participants described the QEP as a repository for information to be accessed, shared and made available sector-wide between and among institutions and individuals.

> *That was one of the ideas - that the QEP would make information widely available and resources widely available for the sector so that the sector as a whole could be improving and institutions could use the resources to improve at institutional level.* (Participant 2A)

Accordingly, as the drivers of the QEP, this notion informed the role they played in deliberately facilitating the dissemination of information or knowledge processes in institutions.

> *We would ask institutions to give us a baseline submission about what they were doing in each focus area, what was working and how did they know, what was not working and why did they think that it was not working, and what were the challenges. We then*

did an analysis … so that analysis was published and it became a resource for the entire sector. (Participant 2A)

In this way, ideas would be exchanged and applied proactively to influence decisions and/or ground-breaking innovations. In other words, promoting a culture of enhancement underpinned by the principles and values of the QEP.

The [institutional submissions] were published and they became a resource for the entire sector. (Participant 2A)

The policy makers' assumptions were that sharing best practice would translate to peer reviews of codes of good practice at all levels of the system.

So, constantly in the QEP we were looking at enhancement at institutional level and enhancement of the system as a whole. And one of our goals was to get to the point where we have codes of good practice so that there are certain things that every institution agrees need to be done. (Participant 2A)

This approach of the policy makers with regard to resourcing the sector was in opposition to the bottom-up approach of policy implementers. Policy implementers' inclination was to tap into institutions' knowledge reservoirs, share knowledge, and own these processes in line with their institutional autonomy.

Again, at institutional level, there were variances of opinion about the purpose of the QEP which reflected diverse experiences. The notion of shared responsibility was common among three institutions: a university of technology (Institution A), a traditional university (Institution B) and the merged university (Institution D).

Collective approach. I think for me it was that because if you look at the way it was brought to us you will realise that there were also people from HR … then you also have other people from somewhere even though the majority of them were from the academic world … But they tried to have everybody in there … That collective approach is the best where you have everybody who is supposed to be there. So, there was more involvement from relevant units. (Participant 5A)

Participants from the traditional university (Institution B) perceived the QEP as promoting collaboration, which allowed the university to break the silo culture and collaborate on projects.

… in my quality unit, we had a student quality enhancement project that we were running in collaboration with student affairs and in that space we also roped in people who were responsible for data, HEMIS and that we would look at when we say 'students-at-risk' what do we mean? How can we identify a system that will assist?

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Who is doing what? Where? Which institution can we invite so that we can talk about that? So, it was more about working together towards a common goal of assisting a student. (Participant 14B)

At the merged university (institution D), there were opposing management versus faculty views regarding the purpose of the QEP. At management level, the predominant view was consistent with the view of the traditional university (Institution B) that the QEP should inculcate a practice/culture of working together (togetherness). The faculty views about the purpose of the QEP reflected a lack of understanding about the QEP and their roles. The participants I interviewed at management level believed that the QEP was about finding common ground, sharing experiences and forging partnerships through benchmarking nationally and internationally, as well as exposure to QE best practice models and growth as professionals and practitioners.

But also it gives opportunity to look at best practices from other higher education institutions and also look at areas where you can either collaborate or adapt systems that could make your processes better. Therefore, in a nutshell, it has been a beneficial shift for quality. (Participant 15D)

In this way, institutions could learn from more experienced institutions, particularly international institutions, in order to model their QE practices.

I think there has been a series of workshops to share experiences and also to benchmark against international institutions that have gone through QEP specifically those that were based in that country that's called Scotland. (Participant 15D)

This culture of bringing institutions together, flagged by management at the merged university (Institution D), reflected hopes that an open, shared and collaborative approach would allow opportunities for increased efficiency in the system as well as collective engagement to redress past imbalances of the education system. This indicates a worldview for change shared between them and the policy makers in line with the transformative agenda. At the time of this study, this institution was trying to realign programme offerings across the campuses and faculties. At the same time, it continued to integrate the different cultures and languages resulting from a range of practices and approaches to teaching and learning.

The QEP came at a very best time in the history of the university because actually it helped towards actually finalising some of the things that were outstanding [in the merger processes] that were not clear. So, now at least there is clear direction though we are still working on a number of other things, as you know. (Participant 16D)

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Management at the merged university (Institution D) understood the QEP to be the tool to help in their journey towards finalising the restructuring of the university and realignment of offerings across faculties to streamline processes so that a centralised and integrated entity could emerge – a move from the decentralised past. In fact, student leaders who participated in the focus group interviews also expressed the view that teaching and learning practice *"differs from faculty to faculty"* (Participant 23D), which echoed the dissonance and discrepancies in practice that further perpetuate inequalities among faculties.

> *And now they are pushing the academic excellence as well and I think from our university we still struggle a lot with that because now they have aligned all the three campuses and our academics is not on the standard that it is supposed to be yet because they sort of trying to fit in and align everyone.* (Participant 22D)

> *Sure, [the QEP] will definitely assist because in the first place when we looked at the whole issue of, for instance, student success rates within different campuses it was kind of federal although the same degree was offered but each and every campus had its own way of doing things … So there wasn't that kind of quality equity or whatsoever for various reasons. And now with this, everyone focuses on the same thing as one executive dean who runs every faculty across campus irrespective of the distance or the site of delivery.* (Participant 16D)

Thus, the QEP was synonymous with the institution's post-merger transformation agenda to bring about alignment across geographically distanced campuses and different student populations, programmes and campus cultures. However, faculty views reflected a lack of understanding of the meaning and purpose of the QEP which resulted in disinterestedness. These divisions may be understood in the context of the legacy of the merger processes.

Furthermore, collaboration denotes inclusivity within the institutions in that key stakeholders engage one another. For example, participants at the university of technology (Institution A) perceived the QEP as forging healthy student–lecturer–management partnerships with students being regarded as equal partners.

> *And then um, you know, the role of students in the various structures in universities especially in faculties I think that could have even been enhanced in terms of how student-lecturer relations should be in terms of regulatory frameworks [the audits framework] in these faculties. So I think it [QEP] has enhanced those kinds of formal relations with staff and student relations.* (Participant 9A)

This perspective emphasises instilling a culture of inclusivity. In a similar vein, the comments by the above participant on how student roles and structures in universities should be

modelled on regulatory frameworks, suggests inconsistencies between student-lecturer relations and the culture of compliance with regulation. Therefore, the QEP was viewed as instrumental in enhancing relationships between staff and students. The tone of the response suggests appreciation of the role of the QEP in strengthening these relationships in the institution.

Contrary to the views above, the participants from the comprehensive university (Institution C) perceived the QEP as exclusionary whereas in other institutions it was seen as inclusive. They argued that the QEP was not conceptualised to fit into an ODL context.

> *So many of the things conceptualised in the CHE really don't have a means of even an understanding within a distance education.* (Participant 12C)

This is an indication that the QEP was seen as conceptually limited to conventional universities and consequently QE was compromised in distance learning. This links to the issue of competitiveness of higher education which was a challenge in the implementation of the QEP (discussed later).

5.2.3.3 Student-centredness

Another common theme that emerged among the policy makers and two of the institutions – the university of technology (Institution A) and the traditional university (Institution B) – was student-centredness. This theme was common among these role players because they consistently claimed that student-centredness, that is, to engage students and to ensure that their learning experiences are enriched, was at the heart of the institutions' and the CHE's policy direction.

> *Student-centredness for me is every design of this university's activities and services should revolve around producing a [Institution A] graduate with [Institution A] graduate attributes as well as other competences that can make them competitive out there. For me that should be everybody's you know, duty of care of why they are here. If you were asked "why are you at [institution A]? What are you doing here at [institution A]?" You should be able to align what you're doing to that student in the centre. Not something else on the periphery to that very student … value add to the student.* (Participant 6A)

This was consistent with the university of technology's (Institution A) mission and vision of a student-centred system. To support this, participants from the two universities and the CHE stated that the purpose and meaning of the QEP was to develop student-centred approaches to teaching and learning. Participants from the CHE observed that currently the university

system is not designed to centre on students and their needs, which they admitted was a major weakness.

> *Well, the very big one and I alluded to it earlier is that our universities were never designed to centre on the needs of the students that we have. So the whole way in which our universities are structured is not what is most needed by most of our students. I mean for the most part universities' structures are historical and they are structured around what worked for staff. So if we are very serious about radically improving student success, we need to take three steps back and look at the whole way in which our universities are structured and operate and say how might we do it differently if the success of the students is really our primary goal. And not just students but these particular students that we have.* (Participant 2A)

Another participant from the traditional university (Institution B) echoed this concern and advocated for integrated systems and practices in which students and their needs are central.

> *But it's more on trying to find ways of finding one another in the making of this to go forward, because we needed to understand if we were to enhance what are we enhancing? At what level? And there are different role players in it up until support service division. Hence it must be more on different role players in the university coming together to support this particular centre, which is a student-centred approach if you like.* (Participant 13B)

For university QE processes to be robust there is a need to devise student-centred approaches and to engage students in QA matters at all levels (Crawford, Horsley & Parkin, 2018; Gvaramadze, 2011). This is essential in ensuring that the student experience is enriched as a means of enhancing student success. Therefore, the systems were to align with student-centredness and high educational quality. These techniques build on and are shaped by deeper institutional processes linked to QE.

Having noted this, the QEP was commonly projected as a process that involves drilling deeper because it is 'deep seated' as opposed to QA, which involves surface-level processes. The reason for this, according to the policy makers, was to uplift the entire university system. Seen in this light, there was a need to 'drill deeper' into the university and, using self-reflection, identify areas of weaknesses or strengths. To support this, one participant from the traditional university (Institution B) described the QEP as *"drilling deeper into an element of enhancement to understand the concept thereof"*, as well as where and what informs it. This suggested an element of engaging with deep underlying issues that hamper student success at universities.

5.2.3.4. Policy versus project

Also discussed was whether the QEP could be regarded as policy or a project. The trend that emerged points to a lack of common understanding of policy. Some participants described it as a project basing their argument on the conceptually interventionist aspects of the QEP, its predisposition to time (periodisation) and its cyclical nature. For instance, the policy makers described the QEP as a five-year project aimed at uplifting the entire sector:

> *Eventually after long discussions there came the idea that lets do something in the entire sector at one go instead of sequentially but then if we doing that you have to make it time bound – so it has to be a project. Okay, so this is what informed the QEP. It is going to be a five-year project, let's say.* (Participant 1A)

A student perspective emanating from the university of technology (Institution A) clearly shows that the QEP was conceived of as a project:

> *I'll start by describing the quality enhancement policy as a project. It is a project that exists nationally and institutionally. In terms of institutionally, it is a project that … captures the understanding … of teaching and learning … in the very same institution.* (Participant 20A)

Policy implementers also viewed the purpose of the QEP as a short-term intervention in teaching and learning:

> *Then with time and changes in terms of leadership within the CHE, those that were in power felt that it was important to have short intervention on … maybe within a two-year period that could look at certain aspects within the broader spectrum of issues that were looking at QA specifically within institutional audits.* (Participant 15D)

This shared view highlighted the temporal features of the programme contrary to the continuity elements embodied by quality enhancement. It should be noted that participants' view of the QEP as a mere project contradicts the very principle of continued improvement. Such improvement is built on ongoing processes and not on short-lived approaches to tackling the conundrum of student success and throughput in South African higher education. However, some participants referred to the QEP as a new policy aimed at bringing about change in teaching and learning.

> *Ja, I would say that this policy [QEP] it has an impact on how teaching and learning should occur and as I said eh, in my focus group area which was technology enabled tools and resources.* (Participant 7A)

Some argued that the QEP did not qualify as policy due to not having undergone the traditional, formal procedure and process of policy formulation to which they were accustomed. The QEP was conceived as a project by the policy makers which resulted in a policy implementers' project mentality. Participants' conceptualisation of policy in a traditional sense as a formal document led to their limited understanding and renunciation of the QEP as policy. Policy denotes an act of government or *"an intentional course of action followed by a government institution or official for resolving an issue of public concern"* (Cochran, Mayer, Carr, Cayer & McKenzie, 2015: 2). This manifests itself in the form of bringing about social change. One can argue that the QEP could be seen as an act of government to bring about change in the purview of education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). To support this, as alluded earlier, a participant from the CHE acknowledged that the QEP was a deliberate action to reform the education system.

> *So, let's see if we can do a little bit differently and so that's where they impetus came from … So, it depends, it depends on your political context, it depends on what you are trying to do with the system. So again, that comes back to us. What we are trying to do with our QA system! It was always informed, from day one, by the idea that actually what is it that we are trying to do very different thing from other places. We are trying to bring about transformation … we are trying to reduce all the imbalances that we had … So a different impulse behind it.* (Participant 1A)

While the policy makers framed the QEP as imperative for redress and equity issues, transformation, and social justice, they did not define it as policy which contradicted the very essence of their action and intent – as a tool for social change or transforming the higher education system. The policy implementers' narrow definition of policy, which was limited to official written texts or documents to enforce authority and accountability in institutions, was far removed from the intention of transformation. At the project level, few people were involved in supporting the implementation strategy due to a lack of common understanding of what policy is. At the same time, it is clear that without guidelines, the policy was open to different interpretations and experiences that influenced its implementation at institutional level:

> *What I do know is that obviously [the QEP] it's experienced differently across the sector … I think there were a lot of DVCs that really got a lot out of it as DVCs, learnt a lot and participated and others just said, 'oh, ja, well I already know all'. You have that. So I think it is experienced differently depending on the institution.* (Participant 1A)

This is a clear indication of a lack of common understanding and confusion about the intention of the QEP among the key role players and stakeholders. The goal of the QEP as a new policy was to drive a transformative agenda. Therefore, there was a need for a common

understanding of transformation. However, there was a lack of understanding of transformation at the level of faculties. This was evident when participants at the merged university (Institution D) observed that a major challenge was academics' limited understanding of transformation. A participant argued that students should be seen as equal partners in transformation especially in curriculum transformation.

> *… where it is becoming more complicated is when you deal with transforming a society, transforming students for a transformed society or for transforming society rather because the society is yet not fully transformed ... but you cannot be in a transforming society and the students are remaining here. They are not keeping at least in line and it is this thing. I am not sure if I am going to ask now many of these people, 'tell me what is your conception of a transforming society and what do you think we should do to prepare our students for that?' I'll get answers but weird answers and of all sorts.* (Participant 17D)

They regarded this lack of understanding on the part of academics as translating into poor teaching practices which could be linked to poor capacity building initiatives which impacted on teaching and learning. Ultimately, the policy versus project mentality curtailed the success of the QEP as a change agent due to the lack of a long-term plan and commitment resulting from the project mentality and perpetuation of compliance culture.

5.2.3.5. Reforming the curriculum

Other participants viewed the QEP as reforming the curriculum. For example, participants from the three universities (university of technology, traditional and merged) advocated for curriculum reforms in line with institutional strategic objectives, student needs in terms of career growth, and empowerment within institutions. A participant from the university of technology (Institution A) framed the QEP in terms of decolonising the curriculum, aligned to the entrepreneurial angle of the institution, relevant to the market. It should be noted that this area was addressed in the second phase of the QEP.

> *Why don't we try to make a curriculum talk to the local situation? That's where now the issue of try to decolonise this curriculum which was designed by somebody else, somewhere else and that we do not even know ... And a very good example is if you look around before 1990 you wouldn't see a person sitting in the street selling food but today you go to every city it's a common thread. Moreover, there are challenges there and I say now, 'as an academic what would you do in the curriculum to make sure that your students are properly trained that when they go to work then they can address these things'. Starting from the engineering students who must come with the design*

to say 'how do we locate these people from the pavement of the cities to a better place where they can sell food?' (Participant 10A)

A participant from the traditional university (Institution B) explained that curriculum transformation ought to be seen in the light of changing the language policy of the institution so that the English language becomes the main medium of instruction. This speaks to decolonising the curriculum to address the issue of language policy to ensure inclusivity, equality, social cohesion, redress of imbalances in order to guard against marginalisation of other languages.

> *For example, here in our institution one of the things that we are talking more about in terms of curriculum transformation is to say: 'The language policy is a problem. We need to be teaching in English not so much in Afrikaans but how many of our lecturers can teach in English?' Have we looked at that? No, we haven't.* (Participant 13B)

Therefore, participants from the traditional university (Institution B) not only drew attention to language policy issues to be reviewed but also called for the bottom-up co-designing of curriculum by lecturers and students. It was reiterated that for there to be change, emphasis should be placed on bottom-up initiatives to revitalise the curriculum, in a collaborative fashion with students and lecturers sharing a platform in teaching and learning. A bottom-up approach implied that key stakeholders should play an equal part in providing input to the sub-objectives of the QEP, that is, curriculum redesign and programme reviews. In this way, the QEP was viewed as having a potential for change if stakeholders would take collective responsibility and students would be treated as equals.

> *I would say the philosophy that underpins the project really it's more about bottom up approach … And so it's more of the curriculum aspect should be, you know, co-designed by both students and the lecturer. So the philosophy behind that would be more on improvement orientated, development orientated as opposed to … top-down approach, you know, 'I am the lecturer'.* (Participant 13B)

For this participant, the QEP created opportunities for students and their inputs to be acknowledged. She understood the effective implementation of the QEP as being informed by 'developmental' and institutionalised processes. Therefore, the QEP process was conceptualised as non-prescriptive, as institutions had the option to follow whatever course they preferred or suited their cause of action given their autonomous status. This was also acknowledged by the CHE who maintained that:

> *At institutions, we didn't specify because it isn't our [CHE] role to specify how an institution would run the project. The only thing we did is we said at the very beginning,*

we requested the Vice Chancellors to appoint whoever was the Chief Academic Office of the institution as the liaison person with us for the QEP. (Participant 2A)

A participant from the merged university (Institution D) raised contextual issues related to the curriculum. He observed that the way the curriculum is designed in this institution promotes the dominance of Afrikaans over English thereby alienating a certain section of the student population who are in the majority are not first language Afrikaans-speaking students. This creates a language barrier for some students and inevitably leads to irrelevancy of curricula.

From a curriculum perspective … here in this Campus A they designed a learner guide. Then they distribute it to Campus B … So when you open it then you see the examples inside comes from the world of reference of Afrikaans speaking people. Even sometimes, when they quote from text it was in Afrikaans. It was an English text with an Afrikaans paragraph. (Participant 17D)

Therefore, institutions were at liberty to approach the QEP in whatever manner that suited them. The university of technology (Institution A) and the traditional university (Institution B) approaches to curriculum reform were influenced by their outlook based on their situated realities. The university of technology (Institution A) vision of transforming the curriculum was aligned to meeting industry needs while the traditional university (Institution B) vision for transforming the curriculum was in the context of championing the cause for social justice and cohesion by drawing attention to equality issues.

5.2.3.6 Reach-out programmes

Participants at the comprehensive university (Institution C) viewed the QEP as a tool to strengthen the reach-out programmes considering the institution's large footprint in Africa. In the same vein, it was understood as a mechanism to drive the ODL strategy of improving student retention and throughput given the institution's challenges of high dropout rates.

As a [Institution C] employee my expectation would be that we would see gains in terms of student success rate. That more students would be able to finish in appropriate times because people would always say [Institution C] is an institution that is pregnant. There are so many of [students]) that are in the system but so few of us [students] are getting out of the system. (Participant 11C)

Therefore, in light of their concerns over increased numbers of students accessing higher education and the types of students recruited, they perceived the QEP as a way to address and improve student success rates. Many students at this university are not conventional in the sense that they are generally adults or students who did not do well in their final school

exams and thus were unable to gain entrance to other universities. Many battle with the concept of distance education.

> *I think for me for the fact that [Institution C] has some very low throughput rates and some success rates which are really terrible … So the shift was to ensure that the access then that we give is aligned with student success. So that was the importance of the shift for [Institution C] as an institution in particular.* (Participant 11C)

The potential of the QEP to initiate change, enhancement and tackling the twin challenges of low student success rates and high dropout rates, should be understood against the backdrop of the institution's mandate and role to increase input (student enrolments) in the higher education system, ensuring that there is a balance between increased student enrolments and the costs to education.

In conclusion, the purpose and meaning of the QEP was understood differently across cases. The policy makers had a top-down perspective. Therefore, their approach was to formulate, facilitate and administer this change from the top to achieve the goals set for the QEP in accordance with national imperatives. However, the policy implementers' perspectives regarding the purpose of the QEP reflected attempts to address their specific needs. For example, responses of the participants at the university of technology (Institution A) highlighted their personal values, beliefs and attitudes, thus reflecting a subjective understanding of the QEP based on their experiences and personalised philosophies on collectivism, student-centredness, transparency, inclusivity, continuous improvement, and student-led education, which framed their understanding of the purpose and meaning of the QEP. In this regard, the university of technology (Institution A) emphasis on internal processes was drawn from its mission to remain relevant by "offering a portfolio of relevant, recognised and career-focused programmes" (Prospectus 2018, Institution A). The traditional university (Institution B) challenged the notion of QE. As a traditional institution, it was opposed to change initiated by the concept of the QEP and wanted to maintain its status quo as a research intensive institution. The comprehensive university (Institution C) understood the QEP as a means to strengthen their outreach programmes in line with their mission of an ODL institution. The merged institution (Institution D) regarded the QEP as fitting within their vision of a newly established institution, to realise the change needed in the institution.

5.3   Institutional strategies to implement the QEP

The institutions' strategies show the way by which institutions organised themselves for the implementation phase as well as their approaches to the requirement of the QEP such as collaboration, capacity building, benchmarking, and student support. In the same vein, it is

important to note that the strategies were organised around the QEP four-focus areas which policy makers presented as the enabling factors. The traditional university (Institution B) emphasised QEP focus areas 3 and 4, namely "Enhancing the Learning Environment" and "Enhancing Course Enrolment Management". This was evident in the attention they gave to underperforming modules and ensuring a conducive student-centred learning environment. The university of technology (Institution A) and the merged university (Institution D) prioritised focus area 1, that is, "Enhancing Academics as Teachers", while the comprehensive university (Institution C) prioritised focus area 3: "Enhancing the Learning Environment" in line with their ODL model. QEP focus area 2: "Enhancing Student Development and Support" and QEP focus area 3: "Enhancing the Learning Environment" were prioritised by all institutions. Focus area 2 was a common theme across cases, as it was linked to student support which emerged as fundamental in addressing student needs (including social and academic issues).

5.3.1 Institutional approaches to policy implementation

The institutions' models reflected common strategies which were used in conducting QEP awareness-raising workshops, as well as institution-wide seminars organised in line with the four focus areas and training workshops to conceptualise planning, activities and allocation of tasks.

> *Therefore, to a large extent things were done through a number of training workshops just to explain the focus and the way in which we have to work.* (Participant 15D)

In addition, common activities included iterative processes involving self-reflective practice, collaboration, data collection, institutional submissions, teams of people from relevant divisions, and report writing. The institutions received feedback from the CHE on the institutional baseline reports and improvement plans. At the same time, there were some differences in approaches used. There were two levels in the university of technology (Institution A) approach: the institutional (strategic) and the programme (operational) organised around task teams. At the strategic level, strategic direction involved an oversight role for executive management as well as accountability for the QEP.

> *… the CHE will approach the DVC: Teaching and Learning who will be the project manager for the entire process … then internally he had to look for the coordinators and also the focus group managers … members of the Executive Management they oversaw [accountability] for each and every focus group assigned to them.* (Participant 7A)

At the operational level, directorates were involved in project coordination through the Directorate of Quality Promotion. This process involved organising task teams, briefing

meetings or workshops on the nature of the QEP, its aims and objectives, its roll-out plan involving data collection, progress reports, institutional submissions, meeting schedules/itinerary, and/or other means of communication, and organising task teams.

It seems that this approach by the university of technology (Institution A) was a top-down process reflected in the bureaucratic or hierarchical angle the institution undertook to implement the process. For instance, this approach of purposefully selected people with managerial experience was seen to be relevant. In addition, the model suggests that at the strategic level decisions were being made and cascaded down to operational levels which implicitly suggests the concentration of power and/or influence at the top and lack of stakeholder engagement on the QEP implementation processes. The top-down approach limits input or compromises valuable input and creativity at grassroots level, as there is limited ownership of strategy due to bureaucratic management style.

The traditional university's (Institution B) strategy was all-inclusive, involving both staff and students in report writing in an attempt to include the student voice in the QEP implementation and to engage students on quality matters. The approach was multipronged and included organising task teams, report writing, internal meetings, workshops and participating in QEP-related projects. It was maintained that organising teams of people from relevant divisions was a strategy that assisted in soliciting valuable information from the various departments and units within the institution. Four task teams were set up to undertake tasks aligned to the four focus areas of the QEP. Overall accountability for the project lay with the Vice-Principal: Academic, who was the contact person for the CHE at the university, the deputy deans were responsible for the operations of all focus areas of the QEP, and the project was coordinated and managed from the office of the Director: Department for Education Innovation.

> *… what I did, there were four things. I got to give four sets of people: stakeholders in that particular area plus students. And every area, every focus area was led by a deputy dean. So they had a meeting. We captured it, describe, captured it [referring to reports]. I panel beat it [report] into a sort of a draft, then another meeting, some panel beating then circulated it electronically. And I sent it to the executive and they sent it to the CHE, okay.* (Participant 14B)

> From the start of the QEP process, the principle at [Institution B] was to use an inclusive approach to the development of the self-evaluation reports, led by the teaching and learning portfolio and supported by the Quality Assurance unit … In total, 84 individuals were involved, 21 of them students. (QEP Institutional Report for Institution B, Phase 1a, December 2015)

This suggests that although the process was similar to the university of technology (Institution A) in terms of teamwork, the approach was slightly different in that it was all-inclusive with key stakeholders giving input then being involved in reviewing, drafting and submission of the institution's report to the CHE. This suggested a collective approach by the traditional university in involving expertise aligned to the key principles of inclusivity, collegiality and ownership espoused by the QEP evident in involvement of stakeholders and students in writing and producing reports. This approach is elaborated in the 2017 CHE Institutional Feedback Report, which clearly describes the team effort and institutional buy-in "through setting up a project team under the leadership of the Vice Principal: Academic, a project manager and coordinator at University level" (CHE QEP Institutional Feedback Report, Phase 1, July 2017a: 6). The report further noted that collegiality and buy-in were achieved through a team process which included students.

> The reflection and preparation of the comprehensive first report appear to have been strongly driven by this team effort, with the report compiled from notes arising from the team discussions, followed by an iterative process for comments and additions to the report, which was then circulated among the teams. The student voice was provided by the Student Representative Council (SRC) Academic Officer and President as well as nominees from Faculty Houses, undergraduates and postgraduates. (CHE QEP Institutional Feedback Report, Phase 1a, July 2017a: 6)

However, efforts at involving students in the actual implementation processes were thwarted by internal student dynamics such as changes in student structures and their busy schedules (discussed later).

The comprehensive university's (Institution C) strategies involved forging partnerships with other institutions and government departments, the use of e-tutoring technology tailored to students' learning needs in an ODL environment, professional development of lecturers, and a rewards and recognition system for lecturers. Institution C's 2015 QEP Institutional Phase 1 Report (Progress Report) details the strategies that were used when implementing the four-focus areas at the inception of the project in February 2014.

Accordingly, the institution took a contextualised approach, taking into consideration its ODL environment by starting with seminars. Figure 5.1 illustrates the Student Success Framework that informed the holistic strategic framework guiding the implementation of the QEP.

Figure 5.1: Conceptual model of student success at Institution C
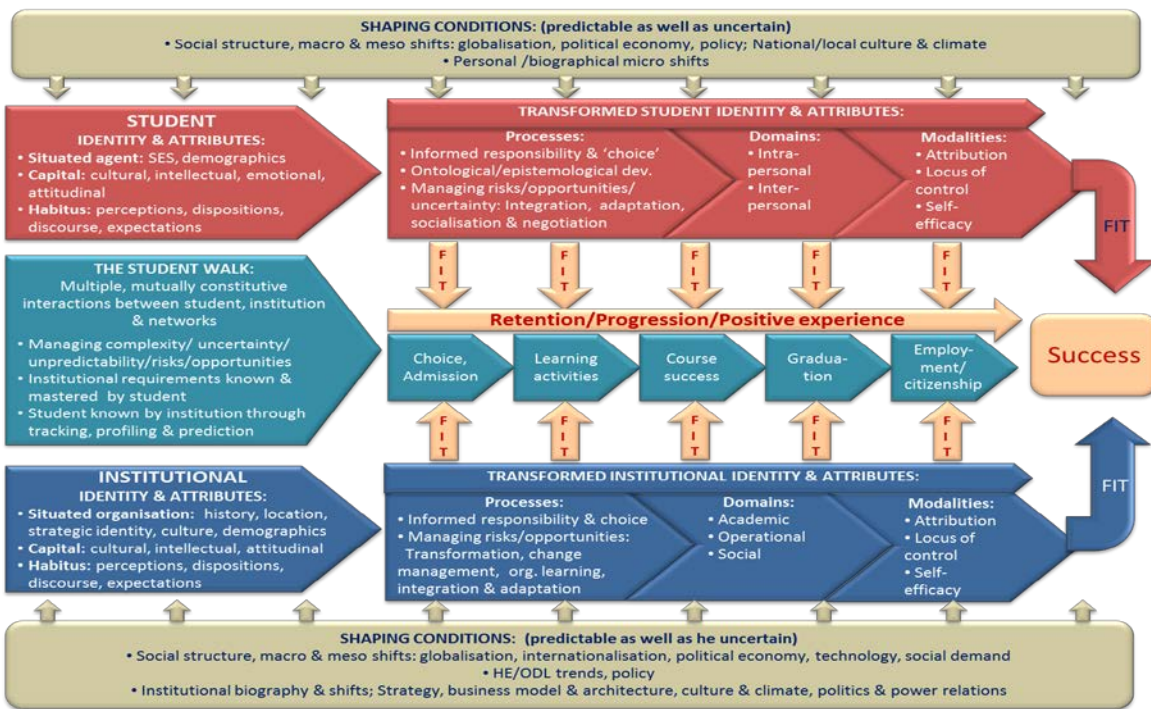
Source: QEP Institutional Report, Phase 1, 2015

It is important to note here that this framework highlights "factors that impact on student success and throughput" (QEP Institutional Report, 2015: 5) and consists of strategies built on organisational elements, including policies, systems, processes, resources, practices, structures, methods and approaches for ensuring the effective implementation of student success (Prinsloo & Subotzky, 2011) at Institution C. These factors informed the reports that were submitted to the CHE on the QEP. This model was presented as the strategy that informed the implementation of the QEP at the comprehensive university (Institution C). Prinsloo and Subotzky's (2011) conceptual model explains that student success can be understood through the sociological perspectives of activities, behaviours, attitudes, and responsibilities of students and institutions as situated agents. Institutions and students as situated agents enjoy relative freedom to develop their attributes within parameters "shaped by the structural conditions of their historical, geographical, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds and circumstances" (ibid. 184). According to Prinsloo and Subotzky (2011), there are three levelled factors that influence student success characterised by external and internal environmental factors. The first level is the individual (student attributes and identity) including SES (socio-economic status), capital and habitus. At this level, the individual student's academic, attitudes, behaviour and circumstances are considered. The second level is institutionally (identity and attributes) situated, and considers the history, location, strategic identity, culture, and demographics; capital: cultural, intellectual, attitudinal; habitus:

perceptions, dispositions, discourse, expectations. The third level considers the macro level whereby external factors to the institution are influential factors such as socio-political and socio-economic factors. The institution refers to a student journey or 'walk' starting from the student's application for acceptance, registration, examinations, graduation, and employment. It manifests as the nexus of interactions between the individual student, the institution and networks. The student walk is the entire academic journey and learning experience of the student which is shaped by a multiplicity of factors that are complex, uncertain, unpredictable, with risks and opportunities. Therefore, this model mapped the external environmental (social, political and economic) and contextual factors and attributes (institutional – quality of academic offerings, research, administration and support services) as conditions that shape student success. Thus, application of this model was seen as aligning to the objectives of the QEP which is improving student success and throughput.

The merged university (Institution D) approach was ensuring coordination and streamlining of operations and processes across faculties. Initiatives and interventions at the institutional and faculty level suggest that efforts were made to ensure a coordinated approach as well as to address any gaps in the implementation of the QEP. This also assisted in strengthening the institution's operations, considering the decentralisation of activities and programme structuring and offerings.

> *When we looked at for instance, student success rates within different campuses it was kind of federal although the same degree was offered but each and every campus had its own way of doing things. Not everything was aligned … but now with the whole transformation … it is also now much easier whilst previously you would find that the same qualification would have an accreditation at one campus and at another campus there is not.* (Participant 16D)

This explanation shows the benefits of the QEP in terms of streamlining programmes. Another benefit was the assistance it provided in aligning faculty operations at the different campuses. This is important to note in the light of the different institutional dispositions, histories, and the institution's attempt to transform and realign the institution following the merger.

5.3.2 Capacity building
Some common features of the strategies across cases related to capacity building. The university of technology (Institution A) incorporated lecturer training and development as a means to upskill and motivate lecturers. Of importance was the professional development of university teachers, using Teaching Development Grants (TDG), as well as developing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoLT) built into the Institutional Strategic Plan (2014 – 2019), the Workplace Skills Plan, and rewards and promotion incentives (CHE, 2015). This

was to ensure that academics were motivated and aspired to excel in their respective disciplines, as well as to promote the "relevancy of professional development interventions" (ibid.: 9). Therefore, the university of technology's (Institution A) remuneration strategy (applicable to academic staff) would be aligned to a performance management development system (PMDS). At the same time, partnerships that were entered into with three Finnish universities aimed at exploring ways in which the professionalisation of teachers could be enhanced. The motive for this was to expose staff to international best practices and global developments.

Furthermore, lecturer training was acknowledged as essential for self-upskilling. The use of learner analytics software to assess student performance required academics to be technology literate. Therefore, institutions were expected to put in place appropriate mechanisms to fast-track institutional capacity building initiatives that address the challenge of unskilled or unqualified lecturers. To support this, the CHE's (2015) point of view that lecturers lacked proper teaching qualifications, competences and relevant skills to teach a 21st century student or diverse students was evident in the way the university of technology (Institution A) took lecturer training seriously and considered it a priority among the measures they took in enhancing quality.

> *I realised indeed our lecturers must be developed … So I decided to go to [Finland] and say to them, 'just tell me, what is the trick of you guys having such a success in education?' The success was every person who teaches in this university for instance, would be required to have what we call pedagogical methods to be trained as a university teacher … Then I have to come back here and say to the staff member, there is an opportunity guys to be trained as university teachers and the incentives are that now, you work after finishing this thing, 60 credits which is a year programme then you will be a better person, a better teacher. And you can see from the results of the students.* (Participant 10A)

This indicates a practice intended for capacitating the young, up-and-coming academics who need training as lecturers. The statement suggests how they perceived training as important as some lecturers are not qualified to teach especially 21st century students with diverse needs. Capacity building of these lecturers is critical, especially as some are oblivious to change coming with the Fourth Industrial Revolution – there need to be opportunities to be trained as university lecturers and to acquire the relevant skills. As a university of technology, it is critical for it to capacitate its lecturers with a view to fulfil its mandate as an institution driving entrepreneurial or technological career oriented programmes. The merged university (Institution D) meanwhile developed a teaching and learning strategy and a teaching and

learning plan, both of which were aligned to the institution's strategic plan. At the faculty level, the QEP informed the teaching and learning strategy developed in terms of preparing for institutional submissions to the CHE.

> *We developed a fully-fledged teaching and learning strategy for the university … and in the reporting we also used that information to indicate to them in answering some of the questions that this is how we accommodate or give effect to it or whatever, 'see our teaching and learning strategy'.* (Participant 17D)

> *The new DVC and I sat together, we talked about another thing, and that is that every faculty must now before the middle of next year come up with a design of a teaching and learning plan … embedded in the teaching and learning strategy. So, we took things out of that strategy and see there are four basic big pillars that it deals with. It deals with the teaching and learning environment, it deals with the students, it deals with the staff and it deals with the curriculum.* (Participant 17D)

The teaching and learning plan together with the strategy were aimed at capacity building in the area of teaching and learning involving all four-focus areas of the QEP. This suggested a holistic approach to teaching and learning including student support (discussed later in section 5.3.5) which was part of the strategy.

Similarly, the traditional university's (Institution B) approach to capacity building was through strengthening teaching and learning and the curriculum. The tenet of their strategy entailed the use of experts in the field of QE and curriculum reviews to identify underperforming programmes and interventions and, thus, to address academic issues. To achieve this they used the idea of a "basket of projects" (sub-projects), for example the Siyaphumelela project that mirrored the objectives of the QEP. What this implies is that they instituted sub-projects which they used to drive the main project. The Siyaphumelela project, as mentioned earlier, a US initiative which focused on 'Achieving the Dream', was one sub-project. The project was founded by the Kresge Foundation in the US which aims to achieve student success through capacity building of institutions using data analytics. 'Achieving the Dream' is a network of community colleges in the United States and the 'dream' is student success. In the institution, this project involved evaluating underperforming modules throughout the institution and included quality units and appointing reviewers who are experienced, knowledgeable subject experts to sit with the lecturers and review the entire programme and/or module, identifying problem areas and putting in place interventions to improve the modules.

> *For example, we have what we call Siyaphumelela project [okay] which was introduced. Siyaphumelela as a project focuses on modules that are underperforming … we were roped in as a quality unit to assist in terms of developing terms of reference*

for this Siyaphumela project, helping lecturers identify reviewers for the programme, approaching those reviewers and all that. (Participant 13B)

This is an indication of the project's potential in addressing issues of teaching and learning at the programme level. The institution received some funding for this project through the CHE to ensure that the project was well managed. At the same time, there were workshop sessions on pedagogical competences aligned to capacity building initiatives that were organised periodically.

So we had what I thought that was an interesting thing on pedagogical competences with somebody from Sweden or somewhere. (Participant 14B)

And then sometime in the middle of the year as I said it was that pedagogy thing ... I think the one in Durban on the Pedagogy was about in September and then in December we had to submit something to show what happened during that year. (Participant 14B)

The policy makers' approach to the implementation of the QEP was through ensuring planning is in place and securing funding to roll out the programme sector-wide. As drivers of the QEP, they were concerned with funding, logistics and planning at the national level. Partnerships were forged between the DHET and the CHE to secure the necessary funds for the QEP prior to it being implemented at the institutional level.

…the timing of the DHET's Teaching Development Grants call and the launch of the QEP was very good … I had conversations with the DHET in about October of 2013 which was about a month or so before they released their call for the Teaching Development Grant and because of our conversations when they released the call they actually explicitly made reference to the QEP and said that you know institutions could apply for funds for QEP related projects if they fit into the brief of the TDG. (Participant 2A)

In addition, the CHE encouraged a practice built on an iterative process, which involved activities that interfaced with the four QEP focus areas such as workshops, self-reflection, collaboration, identification of strengths and weaknesses, institutional baseline submissions and analysis, and feedback. Spin-off activities took place simultaneously but lacked the concrete measures to assess the impact of the theory in these processes (discussed later in section 5.5.1).

5.3.3 Collaboration

A higher order enabler that cut across three cases (university of technology, traditional university and the merged university) was identified as collaborative practice, which was

fundamental for sharing open platforms and raising awareness of the QEP. This was considered important across cases because it was seen as an effective strategy to conceptualise, administer and implement a brand new policy that was little understood in the South African higher education environment. One participant from the traditional university (Institution B) elaborated on how different people with expertise from different institutions came together to share best practice models.

> *I would say for example when we talk about the Siyaphumelela programme, obviously the experts who came to our institution were from different institutions and they were sharing. For example, if the issue was around physics, eh the lecturer in physics would say 'well in our institution this is how we do it, this is how we do it, this is how we do it, have you tried it this way?'* (Participant 13B)

However, there were slight differences in the way the stakeholders perceived collaborative practices, with policy makers considering their potential in creating opportunities for responsiveness, while participants at the traditional university (Institution B) noted that collaborative processes enabled a culture of working together thus discarding the silo culture. Participants at the university of technology (Institution A) observed that collaborative practices enabled working together to resolve common issues in planning to undertake the QEP, while participants at the merged university (Institution D) felt that collaboration and team work created an enabling environment in which best practice could be shared and they could learn from each other. A common denominator was the creation of a sense of community, a community of practice. This sense of creating a community of practice was deemed necessary and important, given the sector's history of inequality and the legacy of the apartheid segregationist education system, which rejected social cohesion and the need to establish a culture of QE which embodies collegiality, collectiveness and inclusivity.

5.3.4 *Benchmarking*

A common trend identified regarding the policy makers, the university of technology (Institutions A) and the merged university (Institution D) was benchmarking both nationally and internationally. For instance, in the focus area of "Enhancing Academics as Teachers", the university of technology (Institution A) benchmarked internationally against Finnish universities to gain more exposure to QE. They prioritised this area as they regarded it as key to ensuring student success. The CHE used the US concept of "Achieving the Dream" and the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework on which to model the South African QEP. These benchmarking exercises were important because they allowed the QEP to be conceptualised on tried-and-tested models, which gave them insights into the nature and character of QE in preparation for implementation in South Africa.

Inter-university benchmarking was also deemed important for facilitating inter-university partnerships and was used as a tool by role players to promote best practice sharing and common issues and to exchange ideas among policy implementers. Benchmarking with various institutions opened up avenues for soliciting and adapting best practices to improve teaching and learning within their environments. Participants from the traditional university (Institution B), the university of technology (Institution A) and the merged university (Institution D) confirmed the benefits of benchmarking against other institutions.

International benchmarking was, to a large extent, influenced by emerging trends globally and shifts towards QE. Accordingly, the QEP was a by-product of the impact of this global movement on educational quality and the internal processes of institutions (Land & Gordon, 2013). For policy makers, this meant keeping up with international best practice and/or standards. National benchmarking, on the other hand, was intended to strengthen internal systems, collegiality, the promotion of QE cultures, and the establishment of communities of practice within and across institutions.

5.3.5 Student support

The QEP as a policy driver for change within and across the higher education sector necessitates implementation strategies to realise its goals. As already indicated, the QEP's immediate goals as envisioned by the CHE was to improve the undergraduate provision at tertiary institutions in order to tackle the challenge of poor quality of graduates (CHE, 2014). Therefore, student success was envisaged in the context of improved 'graduateness' through an enabling environment and increased student experiences.

> *What we said specifically was that student success for the context of this project meant enhanced student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable so that is in the QEP framework. So that was the goal. And then we envisioned that there would be a number of outcomes which are in the framework document.* (Participant 2B)

Considering these aims and objectives, the CHE envisioned turning around the quality of output of higher education through strengthened support systems and structures. For instance, the QEP acknowledges the benefits of supporting student learning through utilising Learning Management Systems (LMSs), such as enabling students to access course-related information and online assessments, making teaching and learning material easily accessible, and providing online chat platforms where students can share discipline-related information in their peer groups, among others.

A trend that emerged across all four participant institutions was student support as it was considered key to the achievement of the QEP goals of addressing students' learning needs in order to improve student success. The strategies, mechanisms and techniques that institutions used to support students were tailor-made to specific contexts of institutions while some were common across the institutions. For instance, identification of at-risk students and implementing interventions to support them academically and the use of LMS was a common practice across cases whilst the use of e-tutoring featured at the comprehensive university (Institution C) was in accordance with their ODL architecture.

Student support systems were specifically in line with individual institutions' needs and strategic goals and at the same time, they played a common role of supporting students and their needs. Some institutions also featured infused elements of technology-enabled tools to support students' academic work. These were integrated initiatives aimed at strengthening student support. For instance, in the case of the university of technology (Institution A), these included a student support structure underpinned by blended learning using technology through a LMS, identification of at-risk students, and techniques to address students' various learning styles, which were focused on students' needs in ensuring that they received effective academic support.

> *Then again, it focuses on the students themselves. What type of students do they enrol and all that and how does the enrolment takes place? And also it focused on the student support. Shouldn't just put them in there. We need to support them as expected and also the integration of technology in teaching and learning to enhance the learning spaces.* (Participant 7A)

Another participant described how technology is being embedded in the university's strategic plan. The QEP subscribes to a philosophical strategy that embodies institutions' visions and missions as reflected in their strategic plans.

> *As the University of Technology what stands out in the strategic plan that we need to drive teaching and learning from the technology thrust … And we took all both [2009 and 2012] strategic plans [institutional] and … what has been suggested as a framework for quality where [the QEP] fits within the broader framework of the strategy of the institution.* (Participant 7A)

At the university of technology (Institution A), technology-aided learning was provided by a Learning Management System (LMS) which leveraged teaching methods aimed at enriching student-learning experiences.

So the LMS will be compatible to the ITS [Information Technology and Support]. It will also be compatible to the systems of data driven which is the HEDA [Higher Education Data Analyzer] and also to the finance systems … So [Technology] has brought lot of changes and it made teaching and learning sort of a fun activity which students enjoy very much. (Participant 7A)

A similar trend of utilising blended learning, that is technology-aided learning through an LMS and the identification and support of at-risk students, was also evident at the traditional university (Institution B).

We always say once a student enters your space they don't belong to basic education, hayi, they are yours now. They are yours. So need to make sure that at least you beef up your early warning system because it says here enhancement. You need to find a way of supporting them. So find a way to quickly see if a student is suffering and see how you can assist them. (Participant 13B)

These were linked to support systems for at-risk students. The benefits of the LMS were noted as follows:

Well, we've got a Learning Management System which makes it easy for online learning because it records click stream data. It also records, you know, how long students spent online, how they spent it. (Participant 14B)

At the comprehensive university (Institution C), students could access LMS using their mobile devices or smartphones. In this instance, the LMS was also accessed in a similar manner through a Library App.

If you're a student, it would be good to have your own laptop or your own tablet or your own smartphone because you're then able to access the university. Like for example right now the library has developed a library app so that means if you have a smartphone or a tablet or a device then the library is in your hands. We have a Learning Management System. It will also be in your hands (Participant 11C).

Another common trend among three institutions (the university of technology (Institution A), traditional university (Institution B) and merged university (Institution D) was a tracking and monitoring system to identify at-risk students and offer interventions. The Directorate of Student Development and Support (SDS) at the university of technology (Institution A) operationalises student development and support through facilitating academic success and personal development of students at a faculty level. Interventions include early identification of students at risk and the referral of high-risk students.

Okay, there's a number of ways we do that. We do it with student profiling process in terms of the sub factors. So there we look at the language skills, learning and study strategies, awareness in career orientation and then we identify students at-risk, provide the interventions in terms of student development and support. In terms of their marks after the first year, we use the student tracking system. We identify students at-risk based on them failing the first year, communicate with them about the services offered by student development and support and let them come and know what is available. (Participant 8A)

The QEP explicitly refers to the importance of a tracking and monitoring system to identify at-risk students and break the cycle. This is particularly in the first year of study when many students drop out (CHE 2015). This is consistent with the explanation presented by a participant and similarities can be drawn to the QEP Framework.[3]

Universities need systems to monitor student performance. Such a system requires that students are assessed early on in the term, that the marks are loaded onto an IT system that can compile the marks for all registered courses per student, that suitable interventions are available and that people are in place who are responsible for referring students to the interventions they need. (CHE 2015: 26)

So when the universities organised the Quality Conference they spoke about the first year experience at the university. That is another daunting task because if you do not prepare for those students they take a long period before they actualise or get used to the university. By then it will be too late. That's why you find out that the high drop-out rate of students in the first year sometimes because they would say, "sheewas I thought, you know, university is like high school ". (Participant 7A)

Participant 14B described the student system at the traditional university (Institution B), detailing the built-in steps and processes, starting with the early warning system during the registration period.

So, we start with the early warning system here. In the first week when they register we do … Student Academic Readiness Survey and it identifies at-risk students … they get referred to the faculty student advisors as well as the tutor system and they get mentors. Um, and then in the media we do a cluster analysis. So beside the fact that we are monitoring them during the semester online, we do a cluster analysis at the end of term with the end of semester results. (Participant 14B)

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[3] Content Analysis of the Baseline Institutional Submissions for Phase 1 of the Quality Enhancement Project, Institutional Audits Directorate, Council on Higher Education, 2015.

At the merged university (Institution D), student support included student recruitment, placement, registration models, identification of at-risk students and providing interventions to help them succeed. The trend here suggests similar approaches that make use of mediating tools and systems, including blended learning to strengthen learner support. This strategy of monitoring student progress is in line with the QEP in that it acknowledges the need to identify at-risk students and put in place the interventions required to help students succeed. At-risk students are identified early in their academic journey and they are referred to counsellors and faculty advisors who, as professionals or practitioners, are able to assist and provide the support they need.

At the comprehensive university (Institution C), student support featured the use of techniques designed to address students' varied learning styles. Accordingly, the student support service had been tailored to the specific environment and included e-tutoring technology. This was used to facilitate student-lecturer interaction aimed at bridging the transactional distance between the two. To enable this, one participant explained that there is a need for interventions that will address identified gaps, such as access to technology-enabled tools and resources, to enable access to technology.

Technology-enabled tools and resources tailor-made for an open-distance learning (ODL) environment in the form of smartphones, tablets and laptops were deemed essential for tackling one of the major challenges facing students, especially those from rural areas. As already mentioned, the institution's library has developed a library app to enable access to technology. Using this app, students are able to access the internet and university websites and systems. However, owing to the high student numbers, learning spaces are very limited and efforts to provide learning spaces for tutorials facilitated by tutors or lecturers are rendered futile. Participants indicated that partnerships had been formed with other institutions and government departments as a strategy to address this issue. This was confirmed in the CHE QEP Feedback Report to the institution:

> The University has agreements to share spaces and facilities with other public institutions, including municipally owned halls and libraries. In the Eastern Cape, a collaborative grant from DHET is enabling [Institution C] to work with Walter Sisulu University and Fort Hare University to build a library in East London. An interesting collaboration, which is being explored, is the sharing of facilities with FET Colleges. (CHE QEP Institutional Feedback Report, Phase 1, March 2017: 18)

Participants alluded to strategies aligned to an understanding of students and their needs. They argued that given the diversity of the students enrolled and the institution's large footprint which included students in countries outside South Africa, reaching out to them was a

challenge. For instance, the needs and dynamics of students residing in other countries in Africa or internationally, differ from those of local students.

> *I'll say in particular for any enhancement project to work well you need to be able to understand your students first and foremost and if you look at the diverse students that this institution has then it becomes problematic.* (Participant 11C)

It is clear from the above statement that understanding diversity and student dynamics was key for the comprehensive university (Institution C) in implementing the QEP, given its modus operandi of distance learning. It was pointed out that over the years the type of students enrolled has changed from the adult learner to matriculated students *"who have not made it into the mainstream higher education environment"*. Similarly, these students are not well prepared for higher education through online learning. Strategies have therefore been adapted to suit that environment through, for instance, the introduction of e-tutors.

> *… those e-tutors are for specific subjects and they are then linked to students. So then, what happens is that, there is a platform where students have an opportunity to ask questions and the e-Tutor would respond to them.* (Participant 11C)

This statement supports the point made earlier that as an ODL institution, the strategies used would be contextualised to address the issues encountered in an ODL environment. This indicates efforts and initiatives involving e-tutoring technology to facilitate student-lecturer interaction allowing students to ask their tutors questions. Participants described this process as interactive; in other words, a platform on which students can access tutors and thus bridge the transactional distance between students and lecturers.

At the same time, student support featured technology-aided tools that allow students to access material in a cost effective way. A participant's narrative described the effective use of technology-aided learning, whereby technology is infused in teaching and learning, as aligned to the focus areas of the QEP. This is consistent with the QEP, which alludes to students accessing learning materials in a cost-effective way, as well as the university considering the expensive route of computer laboratories and computers for each student. For instance, the 21st century learner is generally familiar with technologies such as the internet, apps, Wi-Fi, smartphones, social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, which they use as social platforms and are able to access using cellular phones or smartphones. These were mentioned during the interviews as already existing structures and systems to support student success. While these were not directly related to the QEP, they were nevertheless acknowledged as having facilitated QEP processes. When asked whether the QEP had an influence on student learning development, one participant explained that making resources

available enhanced the learning environment through enabled instruction that addressed the various learning styles.

> *Ja, and I would say that the resources that we would avail … they take care of various learning styles of students because … others [students] are more auditory, others are visual … and others [students] prefer to listen to the lecturer and all that, others [students] are more exploratory. So all these tools and resources they [students] use them to explore and personalise their learning.* (Participant 7A)

This narrative confirms the strategies that the participant had used in implementing the QEP grounded in his environment. This is evident in the following affirmation:

> *Yes, talking from my own environment which was the technology enabled tools and resources. As the University of Technology, what stands out in the strategic plan is that we need to drive teaching and learning from the technology thrust.* (Participant 7A)

Other strategies involved student recruitment models, training or staff development. At the university of technology (Institution A), in terms of enhancing course and programme enrolment management, the participants mentioned the student recruitment strategy or model. One participant explained that the calibre or quality of students entering the programmes is crucial for success because enrolling students who are underprepared for tertiary education is not cost-effective.

> *Again the last one. What type of students are we enrolling? What measures have you put in place to ensure that really if we enrol the students that we envisaging. These are the students that we are certain from the enrolment and admission enrolment to say that 'really this will go through until the end'. Because what happens you can have about say may be 10 students starting from enrolment but throughput rate you might find that really you end up with may be four or three students. Others have just fallen along the way.* (Participant 7A)

The CHE (2015: 36) notes that in terms of student selection the "timeous selection and provision of feedback is crucial to attract and retain quality students in the university". This suggests that quality students should be recruited to avoid wastage of resources and to ensure that opportunities are given to academically deserving and well-prepared students.

Learner support at the merged university (Institution D) transcended recruitment, teaching, and learning support to include training, mentoring and retention strategies. A participant reflected on how they provide extracurricular activities to students including mentorship programmes and absorbing them into academia.

And also that's part of our strategy but also (pause)… I will not call it staff development but we've got a process within the university of 'growing our own timber' which we nurture young academics and yes, I think one of the themes which was the second theme was about enhancing academics as teachers. (Participant 15D)

It [growing-our-own-timber] is almost like an internal staff development thing where you identify promising students at honours level … Encourage them to do their master's degree. Then when they get a master's degree you appoint them on a permanent basis as lecturers within the university … It was based on the organisation that you need to have your students who are promising to encourage them to join the ranks of academia. Then largely I think the focus was on women and students who are South African nationals. (Participant 15D)

This suggests empowerment of young, black and female graduates to be absorbed in academia using affirmative action aligned to the institution's transformative goals as a merged university. It also suggested an enabling and conducive environment for personal and professional development and equalities of opportunities provided for marginalised groups of the population.

Then now they [graduates and staff] are senior lecturers with PhDs and they will be professors pretty fast because the environment is conducive and they are nurtured. (Participant 15D)

It should be noted that the students' views regarding student support contrasted with the views of the interviewed participants from the institutions' as they described student support in line with the QEP. Students' views were not directly related to academics rather much needed social and psychological support. For instance, they argued that the services provided to students were not accommodative of their individualised situations and preferences including their emotional, mental and physical, and their realities and experiences as students. This they argued is evident in inadequate human resources, unhealthy student-lecturer relationships, and lack of trust between medical professionals entrusted with the responsibilities of providing health and welfare services to students.

So, and it goes back again to student support. If there were enough student support in our campuses, maybe the situation wouldn't have been this bad because, there is a doctor on campus. The doctor is here three times a week. There is one psychologist per faculty on campus. That is not enough because students have certain preferences like you get this psychologist is white. A black student does not want to speak to a white psychologist and it needs to be accommodating to students because you can't

feel free discussing your mental state to somebody then you can't even go there. So there's not even support for that individual. (Participant 19B)

The picture presented here reflects how student leaders experience student support pointing to issues of bias and power struggles between management and student leaders.

… but even this year the whole thing about student support there has been a crisis all over the universities. There's a lot of students that have been committing suicide. There's been even other like your mental illness … Even in terms of the teaching and learning and what you call the relationship between lecturers and students, we've been dealing with so many cases where lecturers actually victimise students ... and others I don't know, end up failing them [students] because of the bias or stereotype that they have against students. (Participant 18B)

According to the institution, student support provided illustrates the journey the students undertake starting from the time they are accepted at the university and the kinds of mechanisms that are put in place to ensure that their learning is an enrichening experience. Student support was intended to address students' needs; however, there is no evidence of its achievement in addressing the QEP objectives of improving student success and throughput. It remains a contested area as stakeholders were divided on its effectiveness to address students' needs as participants from the institutions indicated its successes while student leaders challenged this claim. However, the social issues such poverty and the student violent protests that disrupted the implementation of the 2nd phase of the QEP was a clear indication that student support remains a challenge in the realisation of set targets of improved student success and throughput in the South African higher education system. Therefore, institutional strategies aimed at improving teaching and learning should be centred on effective student support structures and mechanisms.

In conclusion, there were commonalities and differences in the stakeholders' implementation strategies. The data revealed commonalities in how institutions conducted capacity building initiatives, collaboration and benchmarking. Capacity building was commonly viewed in the light of enhancing teaching methods, knowledge and skills, training and upskilling of lecturers, the Siyaphumelela project aimed at capacitating institutions, professional development of lecturers, development of teaching and learning plans, and rewards, recognition and promotion policies for lecturers. At the same time, they mentioned collaboration as a strategy that influenced sharing ideas, expertise, resources and best practice, as well as forging partnerships. Benchmarking was a common tool that institutions found useful for designing best practice models and strengthening internal weaknesses. Student support was also a common practice among the institutions. For instance, most institutions emphasised blended

learning techniques involving technology-aided learning through LMS and the identification of at-risk students and putting in place interventions to support them academically, and incorporating techniques to meet various learning styles of students. Others support systems were contextualised to address specific challenges and institutional dynamics. For instance, the comprehensive university (Institution C) support systems involved e-tutoring and development of a library app to bridge the transactional distance between the student and lecturer in an ODL environment.

Participant institutions' approaches differed, which embodied distinct institutionalised contexts in line with their "visions, missions, policies and practices that enable institutions to meaningfully progress on a distinct development path" (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014a: 4). Overall, the strategies used suggest that institutions approached the QEP according to their realities, experiences and challenges. The comprehensive university (Institution C) used a contextualised approach relevant to an ODL environment. The policy makers approach was to organise funding, logistics and resources. The university of technology (Institution A) approach was top-down with influence concentrated at the strategic level. The traditional university (Institution B) used an inclusive approach based on stakeholder-focus oriented processes. Finally, the merged university (Institution D) approach involved staff-engagement at the institutional level with 'cracks' evident at the programme level.

5.4   QEP implementation challenges

This section explores the factors that were regarded by participants as the main challenges to the implementation of the QEP. It seems that more barriers than enablers to the implementation of the QEP were identified across cases. These include inadequate resources and funding, resistance to change, competitive higher education landscape, unstable political climate due to student protests, policy borrowing and contextual differences, social issues, and poverty amongst others.

5.4.1 Inadequate funding and resources

A major barrier identified in all the cases was inadequate funding and resources, which are essential when implementing a comprehensive project such as the QEP. Indeed, the CHE acknowledged the limited funds and resources (CHE, 2018), seeking some financial assistance from the DHET to ensure sector funding for the project as indicated by the CHE participant:

> *We did it from the side of pushing and then the TDG (Teaching and Development Grants) from the DHET gave them the financial ability to make actually a lot of*

improvements ... they [institutions] did [need resources] to take the whole project off the ground … we are too small a sector our resources as a sector are too limited for institutions to just go it alone. (Participant 2A)

In fact, the participants from both the CHE and DHET acknowledged the impact of lack of funds on the implementation and realisation of the QEP objectives. One participant expressed her frustration over the limited resources that the sector has *"for institutions to just go it alone"* (Participant 2A).

There's not enough money, now you still wanting to do quality enhancement. What does it mean? How much is it going to cost? So the system is grossly underfunded and we have to look at, where are all the pockets of money? … Now you've taken money away and then you put your quality enhancement project. So it almost works against each other. So, we do need money, resources, finances, to drive it. (Participant 4B)

Participants across all four institutions indicated that their institutions did not have sufficient funds to acquire the necessary tools, resources, infrastructure and facilities, including internet accessibility and logistics to organise, conduct and/or facilitate workshops, inter-institutional visits and collaboration, etc. required to implement the QEP. A participant from the traditional university (Institution B) indicated that initially her unit wanted to adopt the QEP on a long-term basis but on realising they had limited funds in the budget, the QA unit backtracked on this decision. Another participant lamented the lack of funds to address the challenge of student support in the country, which she viewed as a huge problem.

You need tutors. You need reading laboratories. You need things like Maths centres, writing centres and then it will all cost money and the system just doesn't have that funding available. And it's not money that will come from the CHE. Obviously, it's a DHET thing. (Participant 14B)

At the university of technology (Institution A), lack of access to the internet which was linked to lack of funds, resulted in difficulties connecting with their partners in Finland to train lecturers.

Another challenge is we use our friends from Finland to train these people … You need to be connected online to talk to other students who are sitting in Finland when you are being trained here because this thing is interactive … I had go to this hotel near [Institution A] because I was getting frustrated … Two days down the line there is no internet. (Participant 10A)

Similarly, at the merged institution (Institution D), lack of physical and financial resources were mentioned as some of the challenges to the implementation of the QEP amongst others. If the institution was to redesign the curriculum, the necessary resources had to be made available.

> *When you are going to work on [improving the curriculum] then you need the necessary funds. And you understand it's not only from the academic side – it's from the side of IT where you have to put Wi-Fi everywhere.* (Participant 16D)

These challenges may be attributed to the dwindling funds allocated to the South African higher education sector as a whole.

> *The other big problem that we have is that student numbers at our universities have doubled but the money given to the universities has not increased anything like as much. So universities are under incredibly tight financial constraints which impacts on everything they do.* (Participant 2A)

In sum, the mismatch between the decreased funds allocated to higher education and the ever-increasing student enrolments constrains any efforts to drive quality imperatives. The other critical challenge was inadequate human resources. The CHE's Quality Audit unit was incapable of administering the QEP due to insufficient staff, while in some institutions QA units were not given a role to play in the implementation of the QEP. The negative consequences of this was the underutilisation of vast knowledge and experience in the sector, marginalising and disempowering some units instead of investing in these units to address the challenge of lack of expertise in the field of QE. One policy maker explained that

> *… it's also difficult to find enough peers in the system with a very deep understanding of what goes on in higher education to ensure that all your panels were of sufficient depth and experience.* (Participant 1A)

Thus, for the QEP to be successful, sufficient funds and human resources, and support structures such as tutors, proper student support, laboratories and centres that are interdependent, are required including availability of free access to Wi-Fi hotspots.

5.4.2 Resistance to change

Policy makers tend to explain challenges as institutional resistance to change and their perception of a lack of institutional buy-in, trust and the historical role of the CHE as an evaluator.

> *Well, there were a lot of challenges. One of the big challenges is that institutions have a lot of inertia. They are not easy places to change. So look in the beginning it took time to convince institutions that this was something worth doing … Also, institutions*

were nervous of us because the CHE in a sense was viewed as something of a watchdog and so it took a while for institutions to relax with us and realise that this was not going to be an audit, we weren't coming in as inspectors. (Participant 2A)

Also at institutional level, lack of buy-in was considered one of the main challenges:

But there were those difficulties, you see...So, you can only push up to so much but if the leadership doesn't buy into the project then don't expect anything. (Participant 9A)

Another participant confirmed this concern mentioning that change was difficult due to resistance within the institution at both management and staff levels.

To be honest …. you know change is being approached as a difficult process and sometimes people are reluctant to change because we sit in our comfort zones and not knowing very well that really if we look at things with a different eye, those particular things that we look at they will change for the better or maybe we will somehow be motivated to achieve certain or aspired results. And, the very same change itself it was not an easy one because you need to drive the process from the managerial aspect where you working with the team how best your team will respond to the outcomes which are set in front of them. So it was really, really challenging one. (Participant 7A)

It seems that faculty and support staff or QA units across the four institutions were increasingly resisting the change that was being introduced by the QEP. For instance, at the merged university (Institution D), regardless of management enthusiastically embracing the QEP, faculties argued that the QEP impacted negatively on student success. To support this, a discrepancy between management and faculty views on the question of inclusivity was evident, with management viewing the process as all-inclusive and faculties citing disinterestedness and lack of faculty buy-in as the source of poor levels of participation and uptake of the QEP. As one participant from the faculties pointed out, academics' lack of understanding and disinterest in the QEP contributed to its failure.

I am happy in the sense that I see where is the direction they want to go. I am not happy with what is happening here on the fringes, here on the side, you know, with how faculties, I feel that faculties did not as yet buy properly into the process. The faculties do not understand what is going on in the world out there ... And I think it is because they don't know that world or on a very limited scale … but I am very uneasy about the participation level and the quality thereof from the grassroots level. (Participant 17D)

An element of resisting change was also evident at the comprehensive institution. Conversations I had with the participants at the comprehensive university (Institution C) showed feelings of frustration about the approach that the CHE used which they viewed as undermining local ideas. They argued that the QEP did not promote localised ideas nor did it consider the local context but rather borrowed ideas originating from developed countries. They also argued that the new approach served powerful ideologies and marginalised non-conventional (ODL) universities.

> *I mean in a way obviously like everything in the CHE, it [QEP] was meant for the conventional universities. You see the people don't have in mind distance because there's only one distance educational institution here and that's [institution C].* (Participant 12C)

This lack of buy-in at faculty level and lack of commitment to the QEP hindered implementation. This tendency may be partly linked to the laissez-faire approach institutions expected in terms of lesser government control in institutional processes and their regard for the QEP – as not serving their interests. A laissez-faire approach would have cemented institutional autonomy whereby institutions would have greater control and ownership of the QE processes according to their specific needs. This perspective supports Al Hasani and Al Omiri's (2017) argument that institutions are rarely ready for change. This weakness is associated with an equal reluctance to change on the part of the individuals within the institutions themselves. One participant from the CHE reflected on the fear of losing authority and confidence within the sector, which she attributed to some institutions' perceptions and *"fear that [the] QEP is too weak"* (Participant 1A). This reflected in her observation:

> *Okay, a quality body should come with some authority and say you not doing this right, you ought to do that better and hold them to account. Okay, so there is that understanding in the system, and if you are just coming along for enhancement you might be a bit wishy-washy. So where are your teeth? There is very much that fear around. That's hard. It exists all over, that's one of the challenges.* (Participant 1A)

Resistance to change is in fact an indication of deep-seated issues, as already discussed around social cohesion, and the fear that change may result in the loss of employment or authority (Mapesela & Hay, 2006). This had an effect of stifling creativity and innovation to initiate change and at the same time, it disallowed the creation of space for building trust among stakeholders and perpetuated power struggles between policy makers and policy implementers.

5.4.3 Competitive higher education landscape

The culture of bringing institutions together was necessary to break down the walls of competition and individualism. Competition among institutions was seen as a major contributor to persisting systemic inequalities which constrained progress during the QEP implementation and did not contribute to improving educational quality.

> *But one of the things that we tried to say in the QEP is we really shouldn't be competing with each other in terms of helping students succeed because this is a problem for all of us and we really need to put our heads together to address this problem. So, if you want to compete in terms of your ranking or in terms of your research status then that's up to you but when it comes to student success, we really need to collaborate and not to compete.* (Participant 2A)

The following policy maker maintained that the competitive nature of HEIs and the tension in the relationship between policy makers and the institutions hindered the imperative for collaboration and sharing of information.

> *And at the very beginning, institutions were nervous about the idea of talking to other institutions because the higher education is a competitive environment in South Africa.* (Participant 2A)

Student leaders similarly argued that competition among institutions entrenches and perpetuates institutional inequalities and division:

> *There is so much competition amongst the universities.* (Participant 18B)

> *… there's a lot more that needs to go into the QEP. I think an element of something I would love to see is 'unifying the higher education system' because universities have become so autonomous that there is no unity amongst our higher education institutions.* (Participant 19B)

The competition relates to the apartheid past of South Africa as well as the current call for horizontal articulation of programmes in the higher education sector.

> *… there are real examples where people would have done a degree, for example at a historically disadvantaged institution and then want to go and study an honours or a master's degree. I've got a case right now that I'm dealing with where the person wants to go and do a master's degree at one of the traditional white universities but the degree they got it at Fort Hare. Now this university is saying no, no, no, we do not trust the quality of what you did there. And, if you want to come in here you have to redo a whole lot of work to be able to gain access, which I think is they could rather do an*

RPL assessment and rather say 'put together a portfolio, let's have a look at your work and then you get access'. (Participant 4B)

It seems that the competition among higher education institutions resulted in trust issues and conflicts as well as perpetuated the existing inequalities in the system. This observation by this participant points to a situation where competition inhibits the articulation and portability of credits and qualifications among institutions since it does not *"enable learners to transfer their credits or qualifications from one learning institution and/or employer to another"* (SAQA, 2000: 6). This was perceived as a challenge as it was tantamount to rescinding the objectives of the QEP to address the challenge of student success and throughput.

The competition restricted the urge to cultivate a culture of shared practice. Instead, on the one hand, there was evidence of lack of trust between the policy makers and policy implementers, and on the other hand, lack of trust among institutions themselves. Thus, a conducive environment and the inculcation of a practice/culture of working together (togetherness) was a necessary condition to forge cooperation and harmony among institutions. However, this condition was non-existent which was contrary to the very fundamental principles of collegiality and ownership of the QEP which extends to building communities of practice.

5.4.4 Unstable political climate

Across the sector, there was a sense of frustration over the unstable political climate that was manifested in the wave of student protests that disrupted universities' activities. This had ramifications for the implementation of the QEP. Over the past few years, the South African higher education system has been hit by a wave of #FeesMustFall student protests over tuition and fee increases at public universities (Jansen, 2017) and students demanded free higher education as well as quality higher education. This situation has complicated the higher education environment and politicised student structures and leadership, which regarded the QEP less significant in comparison to their financial situation and the consequential fee increases. This had a negative impact on the QEP, as it was difficult to continue with the projects and activities as intended. For instance, the participants from the CHE voiced frustration over the adverse effects of the student protests on the implementation of the QEP as it was intended.

And then the next idea was to go into phase 2 which is to focus on curriculum. But many of the institutions said that, 'you know what? We had such a bad year last year with the student protests and all of that please can we just postpone this a little while'. (Participant 1A)

And then of course we are in a very politically unstable time and that spills over into the university as well and particularly in student leadership … (Participant 2A)

The university of technology (Institution A) had experienced violent student protests during the period that coincided with the rollout of the QEP.

So you cannot just change ... It's a process and it needs funding. But again the national issue of #Fees Must Fall, it's another challenging factor because some of the students if they are off campus, there are those who also still need to learn. So, the provision should come from the technology side. How do we cater for those who still wanted to learn while others are on strike? (Participant 7A)

The negative impact was seen in the intensity and disruption of the QEP processes caused by the protests, which resulted in renegotiations between policy makers and institutions during the second phase of implementation.

So that's the end of one phase and we have completed phase one. Our intention was to do a second phase the same way but we are not going to be able to do it (pause). So the one thing that happened as I indicated earlier was that we could not start phase two last year because the student protest had been very disruptive and the DVCs said we don't think we can start the phase now and they said we really want to consolidate what we have learnt from phase one. (Participant 2A)

It seems that lack of institutional capacity resulted in failed attempts at implementing the QEP as intended, evidenced by the failure to mitigate the student protests risk which threatened the mandate for driving a national policy agenda.

5.4.5   Changes in the policy environment

Changes in the policy environment had implications for the QEP delivery. For instance, the CHE *"had change of leadership"* (Participant 4B). During that time, the CHE *"also had quite a change of staff"* and *"they also had cuts in their budgets"* (Participant 4B). These changes had implications for the QEP delivery considering inadequate staff and funds to pull off a "project" of such a huge magnitude as the QEP. Another observation related to the changes in the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) roles and functions as a Quality Council.

The role and function of the higher education quality Council (HEQC) which is almost like the quality assurance of the CHE is also changing and making sure that they understanding how quality enhancement is monitored and evaluated. So we are moving into that space. (Participant 4B)

This implied a changing QA environment which had to take into cognisance roles and functions in keeping with changes in higher education. It also suggests that as the CHE evolves, it has to take on new responsibilities such as monitoring and evaluation of policies in the sector; however, the CHE did not share the understanding that their role was to monitor and evaluate the system at the level of QA or QE.

> *So we produce statistics every year and DHET monitors each institution's throughput rates. But we don't do that monitoring.* (Participant 2A)

Lack of understanding of clear roles and responsibilities had a negative impact on the QEP. Evaluating and monitoring tools required to assess the impact of the QEP on teaching and learning were lacking. This again revealed systemic issues and power struggles amongst regulatory bodies and role players which curtailed the forging of effective partnerships.

5.4.6   *Policy borrowing and contextual differences*

The fact that the QEP was borrowed from a foreign country constituted a challenge for implementation. Some participants including the policy makers embraced the practice of borrowing concepts from developed countries with best practice QE models and mature systems in place, other participants felt that policies borrowed from developed countries would not be adapted effectively locally due to contextual differences between the home country and the receiving country, for example the different goals of student leaders:

> *So we were talking earlier about the Scottish system where students are partners and they see themselves as having a role to play in improving student learning experience where in SA our students leaders are mostly there to be involved in politics. This makes our context very complicated.* (Participant 2A)

Participants at the traditional institution (Institution B) argued that in implementing the QEP, different historical, political, economic, social and cultural dispositions, local conditions, topography, institutional and student dynamics, and the people's own revolution in response to these, should be considered because localised aspects such as culture, history, language and student dynamics cannot be assimilated into the Scottish model. For example, one participant argued that South Africa is faced with persistent institutional inequalities resulting from the legacy of the apartheid education system, a situation that has not been experienced in Scotland.

> *… the disparities between higher education institutions they're still there … We still have historical black universities that are challenged when you talk about teaching and learning … And so I think the enhancement came in as a Scottish kind of a thinking*

which perhaps made sense in Scotland but we were not ready for that in South Africa.
(Participant 13B)

Furthermore, this participant advocated for identification of priorities and policy direction towards addressing systemic imperatives and agency.

Then we see how well are we doing and then the enhancement element from my personal view would have come much later. (Participant 13B)

According to her, there were urgent and pressing issues that needed attention internally such as addressing institutional inequalities and transformation. This participant argued that adopting a foreign idea was too premature and irrelevant in the South African context considering the differing values, student dynamics and education system between Scotland and South Africa. She advocated for a local solution to local problems which she felt had to be prioritised. The QEP had a negative effect of not contributing to improving student success and throughput as it was seen as not adding value and/or benefitting the South African student.

This is South Africa … be real. Where do your students come from? What kind of education do they get? How many times do they have to repeat first year? Twice, three times before they get it. Why? Education system is different from that of the Scottish to what we offer. So while, you know, some of the things are nice to have but there are challenges in terms of implementation. (Participant 13B).

This statement suggests that a foreign concept may not be suitable to tackle poor student performances in South African where students face poverty and other social issues.

A participant from the comprehensive institution (Institution C) also indicated that the QEP as a borrowed concept was irrelevant in the South African context. This participant observed that borrowing from developed countries was tantamount to undermining local ideas and localised ideologies, consultative processes and promoting cultural imperialistic tendencies through the dominance of foreign cultures over local ones.

I think … that they [CHE] seem to be kind of experimenting with one thing after the other and they don't seem to have developed something home grown. They [the CHE] seem to get concepts and ideas from the more developed countries… (Participant 12C)

Another participant from the traditional university (Institution B) gave an example of the Scottish concept of socio-learning space was irrelevant in the South African context due to different environmental conditions. The "open space" concept was borrowed from Scotland

and relates to creating socio-learning or indoor learning spaces where students can sit in *"big lobbies and buildings"* (Participant 14B) equipped with *"some Wi-Fi, some computers against the walls"* (Participant 14B). According to Participant 14B, this idea was conceived to address the challenge of student absenteeism resulting from students not coming back to class in the afternoon due to the cold weather in Scotland. Thus, this concept was relevant for Scotland but not for South Africa, where the weather is generally fine.

> *It was good I think for the Vice-Principals to get together. They had quite a useful visit … [to] Scotland because the QEP is based on a project in Scotland. … And my Vice-Principal went. He was quite interested in the socio-learning space. We were working here on socio-learning spaces. And so he was quite interested in what he saw there. But it wasn't a new idea to us. In addition, I think the entire country here [South Africa] has the wrong idea about what they have done in Scotland. Here we have sunshine. Students can go and sit under a tree.* (Participant 14B)

The view that the CHE was engaged in practices that involved experimentation with global policy and not policies related to the developing world rooted in solving problems at 'home' suggested a tension between globalised views and nationalistic sentiments. A participant from the merged institution (Institution D) reiterated the same issue:

> *And more often than not examples were taken from literature that they get from all over the world. It's not South African circumstances. So, it will be a challenge for people also to go, sit, and say, 'If I talk here about community development issues, for argument sake, then I must look at South African communities'. It doesn't help to tell me how it is doing in the Bronx or wherever in the world.* (Participant 17D)

Subsequently the participant called for re-contextualising the curriculum in such a way that it fits the local context as well as student needs and is not merely applied as is from a foreign source:

> *It's good to learn there may be methodologies and you might find that may be there's something useful there. So I won't discard those things. But you must see what the student learns – because where is he going to work? He is not going to work necessarily out there. But it's not that you cut those totally out but you must not disregard what you have here.* (Participant 17D)

Student leaders echoed this concern regarding contextual differences that fail to take into account their realities. Hence, during the focus-group interviews student leaders argued that the QEP had a negative influence because the Scottish facilitator was uninformed about the

South African situation and as a result did not understand their realities and issues. Accordingly, this translated into the inconsideration of their localised experiences:

> *So I think … she's [facilitator] from Scotland … She's also in a university in Scotland. … she should have first come to South Africa and observed the situation around the institutions then compared that research with your situation in Scotland and then come to a conclusion to say, 'okay this is what I think could help you'. Not just to come from Scotland and just give us your model that you use in Scotland … it's not gonna work … because the situation is like this so anything that you have given us was already a failure before it could be implemented because it wasn't fitting within the South African context.* (Participant 19B)

The student leaders argued that the Scottish model was appropriate for developed countries and did not fit underdeveloped or developing countries' contexts; thus, they advocated models that are representative of African realities and address the realities of the African student. This again shows the complex nature of policy implementation, as some participants (particularly senior managers) embraced the idea of international best practice models while others at faculty, staff and student levels viewed this practice with cynicism or scepticism because it was either not well understood or it was not "a fit" with their local context.

The different views reflected contradictory world views and understandings among the participants regarding policy borrowing. While policy makers and some participants viewed policy borrowing as a necessary condition for improved practices and realisation of change, others argued that the QEP as a borrowed policy does not fit the South African context.

5.4.7 Students' non-involvement in the QEP processes

Another major challenge was how to make the QEP processes inclusive through broader participation of the university communities including academics and students. Lack of engagement of key stakeholders, particularly students, was experienced as a challenge in that input concerning how they expected the policy to impact on their learning was not obtained. During the focus group interviews, student leaders from the traditional university (Institution B) and the university of technology (Institution A) pointed out that students were excluded from all policy and decision-making processes.

> *I think most of the time especially in such cases like this we are not really consulted. We are informed kind of to say, 'this is the move'. Like you say 'this is the move that the higher education will be taking eh, prepare yourself'. It's that kind of situation. It's not like a situation where such policies are done and we are involved.* (Participant 21A)

A student leader from the traditional university (Institution B) strongly felt that there was a deliberate move to exclude students system-wide.

> *I don't think any student representatives across the country were involved in the planning, the research, and the proposals of the policy … Ja. And research conducting. They conducted the research themselves. I don't think students were participants in the process.* (Participant 19B)

This pattern was observed across cases where student leaders expressed similar concerns about not being consulted during the conceptualisation and implementation of the QEP and that their non-involvement in policy processes was detrimental to their learning experiences. This view was echoed by the policy makers as a critical oversight of the system, which ought to be addressed if a student-centred higher education system is to be developed.

> *…no, that is a big problem. It is a weakness in our system … and one of the things that came out very clearly during that visit was the important role that students play as partners in Scottish universities and also in quality in assuring quality. And we heard from a number of student leaders who said to us "our role is to help ensure the best possible learning experience for students". Isn't that amazing? So different from here. And so the DVCs were very impressed and we all came back realising that we have a long, long way to go. And it is certainly one of the things that we plan to pick up in the next QA cycle: how do we involve students more and how do we become more student-centric as institutions in what we do and how we do it?* (Participant 2A).

In fact, the CHE's reiteration of the lack of student-centric approach mirrors the literature reviewed, which points to a lack of a QE culture that promotes student-centred approaches and collectiveness in institutions. The emphasis is on the need to engage students in quality matters to improve upon the educational provision which they invest. According to Gvaramadze (2011:19), student engagement is necessary to underpin the *"validity and reliability of external review processes".* Gvaramadze (2011) also considered the Scottish quality enhancement processes wherein students were engaged and their inputs validated.

In addition, student non-involvement in policy implementation and decision-making is consistent with Land and Gordon (2013) who advocated for inclusive policy practices and processes that acknowledge students as partners in QA and QE reviews. In fact, an overwhelming majority of the participants, including the student leaders themselves, voiced strong opinions about institutional governance and decision-making, as well as empowering students to engage in such processes. They felt that there was a need for a policy redirection so that students' views and inputs could be considered and actioned. One participant, a student leader from the merged university (Institution D), called for turnaround strategies to

be implemented with regard to buy-in from students and the inclusion of the student voice in policy-making and decision-making processes.

> *I think that universities and institutions like ours we need the students' buy-in with policies because how are you gonna still have students coming and signing up and joining the university and sort of choosing your institution if so many, but it's because some universities have a buy-in from the students.* (Participant 23D)

However, reaching equality status with students wouldn't be feasible given that universities are still top-down institutions. Thus, reaching shared understandings of policy changes specifically in relation to quality enhancement with students would require changing mind-sets of people within universities themselves.

5.4.8 *Lack of broad inclusivity and transparency*

Quality Assurance is perceived as a function that traditionally resides in the QA unit that therefore would take on full responsibility for the QEP as well. However, some institutions assigned the responsibility for the QEP to senior management whose portfolio is teaching and learning. Participants from the traditional university, the comprehensive university, and the merged university (Institutions B, C and D) voiced concerns regarding the exclusion of the QA units. These institutions had used the office of the DVC: Teaching and Learning units to implement the QEP and had not involved the QA divisions. This trend differed from the university of technology's (Institution A) approach in terms of which the QEP was coordinated from the QA unit.

The issue concerning lack of broad participation by staff, which specifically relates to the non-involvement of academics and QA staff in the QE processes, was a common theme across cases. In fact, the CHE acknowledged this shortcoming, which saw the QA unit having being marginalised, as there was no clear indication of the role of the QA manager in the QEP processes at some institutions.

> *… Which is either a DVC: Teaching and Learning or a DVC: Academic. It's called different things at different places – okay. … so what we from our side said was that would be the person that we communicate with at the institutions. Now this is a bit different from what happened in the audits because in the audits a lot of the communication was with the QA manager (okay). So, that was one of the challenges at the beginning. That the QA managers said but what is our role? So we said, well that is up to your DVC to determine.* (Participant 2A)

The issue of lack of involvement of key role players in QE processes was viewed as stifling creativity and underutilising expertise. For instance, structural changes, seen in the

introduction of the QEP as a new structure headed by Heads of Centres of Teaching and Learning, instead of the QA unit which is the custodian of quality matters, served to disempower the traditional audits and/or quality units. It should be noted that QE was borne out of QA and therefore, separation of these processes was a challenge as the two complement each other.

> *… the audits forced most universities to get a quality assurance office. So, there was variety of Quality Assurance expertise built in the system. In many universities, the work for [the] QEP was handed to the Heads of Centres of Teaching and Learning. So what did the office of Quality Assurance do? They didn't have a role in it. In many of the universities maybe not in all of them. So, in some ways it disempowered those units.* (Participant 14B)

This statement suggests non-inclusive practices and the marginalisation of other sections of the university. This is contrary to the principles of inclusivity espoused by the QEP. This view was supported by another participant who voiced her frustration about the QA unit not playing a role in the QEP.

> *And perhaps maybe the last point because the QA units in general have been neglected … You know, it's like somebody is doing you a favour when they say, ahaa, 'QA you must come, come sit here' … And this I would say, most of us managers in institutions who are tasked with QA, that's what we talk about when we are together to say, somehow it feels like our work is undermined, you know, because our expertise is not tapped into.* (Participant 13B)

The picture presented here depicts a sense of frustration, loss and alienation from their work. Perhaps it also suggests that the expertise and experiences of the QA units were not sufficiently utilised by the QEP. This situation presented here points to lack of trust and/or collaboration at institutional level which consequently influenced their uptake and enactment practices.

Another participant expressed concerns over the non-involvement of academics in the QEP, which rendered the QEP implementation not effective as input on teaching, and learning from academics themselves was lacking, yet the QEP focus area 1 was on enhancing academics.

> *But perhaps unconsciously so many academics were left out in that exercise. They were not incorporated. Therefore, it was more on high level thinking in terms of policy development, in terms of missing policies, in terms of high-level strategic thinking, in terms of where we are going as institutions of higher learning. So we in a way missed the role of other people within institutions and those of academics.* (Participant 13B)

This is a result of the mistrust between the government and academics and the enforced accountability-driven approach to QA and QE (Saunders & Sin, 2015; Seniwoliba & Yakubu, 2015; Rosa & Teixeira, 2014). According to Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015), mistrust and the lack of a QE culture in institutions contributed to academics' defensive behaviours, lack of enthusiasm and suspicions about QA in Ghanaian higher education.

5.4.9   Lack of monitoring and evaluation instrument

Policy implementation studies point to necessities of implementing monitoring and evaluation, as well as periodic reviews of policies in order for policy makers to make informed decisions, identify strengths and weakness for continued improvement purposes (Mtshali, 2015). During QEP implementation, there were no monitoring indicators nor guidelines explaining how the programme or policy should work during implementation. This lack was particularly evident at the level of producing a framework for reporting, monitoring, and evaluating progress in relation to meeting objectives set in the QEP.

> *It's an area [monitoring and evaluation] that needs to be improved and I think most institutions have realised through their participation in the QEP that they were not very good at answering the question 'How do you know that something has been successful?' So, that's one of the questions we asked. If you say it [QEP] is successful, how do you know? What evidence do you have? Then institutions have realised that in many instances they have little or no evidence.* (Participant 2A)

Lack of monitoring and evaluation, ineffective systems and feedback loops were other challenges cited by participants from the university of technology, the traditional university and the merged university (Institutions A, B and D).

> *For me the other challenge is that there isn't a lot of discussion regarding this QEP. What have we submitted? How far are we? So there was no monitoring and reporting after submission of reports to the CHE which is something that was lacking with regard to the QEP.* (Participant 8A)

This view was shared by student leaders from the traditional university (Institution B) who reiterated that the lack of monitoring and evaluation signified implementation challenges.

> *Hence the biggest thing is policies implementation … 'the policies are great' ... How do you then check up on all of these institutions to see that they actually implementing and then you can also enforce the fact that are you complying with these standards* (Participant 18B)

These students were concerned that the monitoring and evaluation systems of institutions and government were ineffective, were not comprehensive and were not student-friendly, as they tended to ignore their needs.

> *And the monitoring system of government in universities … You'll find that in terms of how they collect data there are barriers. Now those people who come from the department to come and monitor and all those things they do not get sufficient information in the process.* (Participant 21A)

> *I remember that we raised a concern at the workshop and we like 'how are you gonna make sure that this is actually done?' And the representative from the CHE was like 'no we have guidelines quality of good conduct' or something like that. And we asked her, 'how handy are these guidelines? How are you gonna enforce them? What's gonna happen if there is contravention of the guidelines? What do you do?' And she couldn't give us an answer. So I think having the workshop in itself was premature because you couldn't respond to all of our problems that we had raised.* (Participant 19B)

The statements above indicate the shortfalls in the monitoring and evaluation system which was a concern considering that the QEP was a new policy in South Africa. Therefore, lack of proper monitoring and evaluation, ineffective systems and feedback were of great concern.

5.4.10 Lack of an underpinning theory of change

As already noted, the CHE's vision of unity and/or building communities of practice in enhancement was to drive change in the sector. This, they aimed to achieve through Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (discussed earlier in section 5.2.3.2) to galvanise the institutions to support QEP initiatives. However, it should be noted that AI did not filter down to all layers of the four QEP focus areas, being applied to site visits only and not broadly, as reflected in the CHE's QEP Institutional Feedback Report, 2017.[4] This suggests that peer reviewers, CHE personnel and institutional management were the only ones who were exposed to the theory during institutional site visits. In fact, there was no alignment of this theory to pragmatic processes, as it was not meant to 'fix' or address existing challenges.

> In contrast to problem-solving – trying to fix what is – it employs a generative method to envision what does not yet exist. While it is impossible for peer reviewers to engage in a full-blown AI process, the institutional visit is intended to focus on the positives as a springboard for thinking about what to enhance and how. (CHE, 2017: 3)

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[4] Quality Enhancement Project, Institutional Feedback Report, CHE, 2017

It was evident that although the CHE had identified the data to be collected and the reporting to be done, there was not a clear theory to inform practice. For instance, one participant criticised the programme for failing to provide an explicit underpinning theory:

> *But there is always going to be a challenge no matter what system ... I think … some of the critique that I have heard in the system is something about theory.* (Participant 1A)

A DHET participant viewed the absence of an underpinning theory as a clear sign of implementation constraints. She argued that there was a need for a pragmatic theory of change, as an appropriate theory, to be applied to guide the intervention. She referred to Rogers' (2014) report on *UNICEF Methodological Briefs Impact Evaluation No. 2: Theory of Change*, which is currently being promoted by various government agencies, NGOs, and funding agencies across the world and in South Africa to direct, and support change:

> *So I think part of that was [need for] an underpinning knowledge and understanding that the world has changed.* (Participant 4B)

Rogers (2014: 3) described a theory of change as "a building block for impact evaluations". Rogers (2014) noted that it is also useful in strategic planning or policy planning and it can be used to support an intervention in these processes. Accordingly, a good theory of change takes into account explicit explanations of how an intervention or programme works (ibid.) by following a results chain sequence starting from inputs and moving towards the impact.

Figure 5.2: Rogers' theory of change presented in results chain
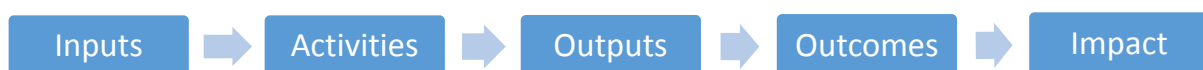
Therefore, in the case of the QEP, a roadmap of envisioned change would have taken into consideration a thorough explanation of how the QEP worked and "how it was expected to achieve its intended results" (ibid.: 6), starting from the inputs and moving towards the impact. The inputs in this case would be the students recruited for the programme, funds, resources, planning and activities for improving teaching and learning, capacity building, support systems, and monitoring and evaluation (activities), which would lead to conducive teaching and learning environment (outputs), leading to increased knowledge and better understanding (outcomes), which would eventually result in increased student success (impact). The lack of such theory was perceived as a factor that impeded the implementation of the QEP.

5.4.11 Weak capacity building initiatives

Professional development of lecturers was identified as a key strategy and essential in implementing the QEP to address teaching and learning issues to realise the QEP objectives. A number of interviewees maintained that the academics' lack of knowledge and expertise in teaching 21st century students, and/or lack of teaching qualifications, had a negative influence on teaching and learning. Consequently, this became a barrier in the implementation of the QEP. Hence, a participant advocated that to transform the learner, academics should be educated and empowered with a better understanding and knowledge of the concept of transformation in relation to epistemology and student learning.

> *Which knowledge are you talking about? Whose knowledge? And how are you going to give this knowledge to students? What is the ways in which we are doing it? And this necessitates very in-depth knowledge of curriculum theory and practices related to this whole construct of transformation. So, the people say, 'ja we must transform' but they do a structural transformation. They say, 'okay, let us revise our programmes and then we re-register on the HEQSF' and then they think they have transformed the thing. And they have but it is on a very thin level, on the form level but not the substance.* (Participant 17D)

In other words, the world of learning is complex and requires people who possess not only subject knowledge but also the skills and deeper pedagogical understandings to prepare and impart knowledge to 21st century students.

> *The success was every person who teaches in this university for instance, would be required to have what we call pedagogical methods to be trained as a university teacher. (*Participant 10A)

> *You know they tried at stages within university context to design a programme and tell lecturers do it … So, Tinto[5] was saying to us here the other day … In the Netherlands and in Sweden and in Germany and he mentioned a few other nations where they said, 'forget you will not be a lecturer if you have not done certain things within the sector that is education related you know'.* (Participant 17D)

Student leaders at the merged university (Institution D) voiced strong opinions on lecturers' lack of competency, supporting the previous participant.

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[5] Professor Vincent Tinto is an award-winning Distinguished University Professor at Syracuse University. He is the former Chair of the Higher Education Programme at Syracuse University and a senior Scholar at the Pell Institute. He has written extensively on higher education and undertaken research on the issues surrounding student retention, attrition and throughput in the USA.

> *I just tell them, 'if you take someone or appoint someone who is a lecturer make sure that they have practical experience … Help them to get extra experience so that they can then teach the students … Not just appoint someone that's literarily come out of their honours or masters now.* (Participant 23D)

Policy makers acknowledged this concern and challenge involving programme design and pedagogy/andragogy. One participant from the DHET also expressed concerns about the readiness of university lecturers to teach diverse student populations and provide them with the support that they need.

> *The challenges are around how programmes are structured. The challenges are around how ready university teachers are to teach in ways that are responsive to diverse learning populations or learner populations or diverse students. The challenges relate to the kind of support that the students are getting.* (Participant 3B)

Kahu (2013) maintained that lecturer incompetency and/or lack of relevant skills to teach students with diverse learning styles could alienate students and had a bearing on their performance or engagement. The participants felt that unprepared lecturers could lead to students' feeling of alienation from their learning. A participant refers to students' sense of feeling detached from the curriculum or lack of a sense of belonging to the university milieu:

> *What approach does this institution take to identify instances of bias and alienation related to the curriculum? ... Alienation is a concept that is very heavily sort of explored and dealt with within critical theory and so forth. And it is an issue within the universities eh, this one particularly. Also, there was a programme in Law where the accusations were made by students that they do not feel at home.* (Participant 17D)

This is a clear indication of longstanding issues around the lack of relevant skills and underqualified lecturers. It is acknowledged that some university lecturers do not have a teaching qualification or have not undergone proper teacher training. Additionally, teaching diverse students requires a particular skill. For instance, students with special needs, students who are differently abled, students from rural areas, students who are English second language speakers, students from different regions and countries, all have different needs. With a lack of relevant skills by academics to teach diverse student groups, it was difficult to address teaching and learning issues and to enrich the learning experience of students as espoused by the QEP.

5.4.12 Inaccessibility to technology
Inaccessibility to technology was another challenge in some institutions. Although participants from the university of technology (Institution A) and the comprehensive university (Institution

C) mentioned the issue of inaccessibility to technology as a barrier to QEP implementation, they experienced this challenge differently. The university of technology (Institution A) attributed it to inability to access the internet, which among other problems hindered benchmarking with 'colleagues' in Finland for the purpose of training academic staff, while the comprehensive university (Institution C) linked it to their own ODL context (online learning). Accordingly, they cited challenges related to students' lack of access to technology as resulting from high data costs and/or lack of technology uptake or student technology illiteracy.

> *I think for me the fact that we are an online institution one of the key challenges is the access to technologies by our students … most of our students unfortunately are from rural areas, they don't have access to those devices and as a result they still rather go to the regional offices where they would then get supported.* (Participant 11C)

This suggested that the internet has not yet penetrated the rural areas where these students come from; hence, they lack exposure to the world of technology. This is a critical challenge considering technology advancements in line with the fourth industrial revolution trajectory.

> *So, I think for me then the other key issue is the uptake of technology. It's a challenge on its own … Students are still inclined to use the hard copy kind of material … If they can still want to drop [assignments] in the assignment box but they were in the computer lab that means using that facility as a learning, as a classroom has not yet sunk in.* (Participant 11C)

> *And then the issue of data and its cost in this country is a huge challenge because indeed some students when we do the quality reviews we send emails to students to respond. There are those indeed who will tell you that eh 'I didn't, I don't have data to do this survey'.* (Participant 11C)

Lack of access to technology and the additional challenge of data costs are detrimental to student performance, especially in an ODL environment. Students in such an environment should be able to access technology, should be technologically literate, and should have data to do and submit assignments, navigate the internet, interact with peers on social media platforms, conduct research-related projects, among other things, according to their course requirements.

Therefore, the lack of access to technology would constrain efforts of the QEP in addressing poor student success and throughput rates at the comprehensive university (Institution C). At the university of technology (Institution A), lack of access to technology restricted access to material and information about enhancement and constrained the training of lecturers.

Consequently, this had a negative effect on capacitating institutions and academics as envisioned through the QEP.

5.4.13 Socio-economic conditions of students

In addition to academic matters, higher education institutions in South Africa have to deal with students' social issues and poverty and provide financial support to struggling students , what Jansen (2017) referred to as the 'welfare university'. According to Jansen (2017: 172), the *"growing welfarisation of the South African university"* is a cultural change within institutions in which university leaders endured most of *"demands for services related to students' material, social, and financial well-being"*. Failure to meet these demands resulted in the violent 2015-2016 student protests as a means to address social issues and poverty faced by welfare students, some who are first generation students. These social problems and politics of protest for financial support overburden institutions' capabilities and resources and hinder progress in the implementation of policies and the achievement of the QEP goals.

> *It is a huge challenge aligned with the poverty are many, many social problems. So, our universities are faced with social problems … So we don't have to just offer good academic programmes, we also have to offer all kinds of support to students some of which really ought to be done by government agencies and not by universities.* (Participant 2A)

This challenge is acknowledged in the CHE (2018) report on the QEP Phase 1, higher education institutions' submissions:

> The 2014 and 2015 QEP institutional submissions and reports commented on how different institutions deal with the numerous socio-economic factors which affect student performance, retention and completion of studies, from poverty alleviation projects to low fee structures (CHE, 2018).

A participant who presented an institutional perspective regarding social issues that students experience on a daily basis due to their poverty-stricken backgrounds pointed out that this had a negative effect on student performances.

> *And even the former head of StatsSA [Statistics South Africa] at some point did make a remark on throughput and dropout, high dropout rates and in particular black students that the context are challenging where they are coming from. You can pay… in terms of being in class but on an empty stomach when you don't even know where you gonna sleep, under the bridge? And it is not that the university is not aware or is not willing there are limitations as well for example some universities do know that*

students who are on Res [Residence] they perform better but they cannot provide accommodation for every student. It's impossible to do that. (Participant 13B)

The student leaders at the merged university (Institution D) raised quite a number of issues including inadequate student support and challenges associated with intergenerational gap between academics and students.

The lecturers if you go to them they probably would, maybe some of them would help you but there is no real support for someone who struggles … and it's not supposed to be like that. (Participant 23D)

In South Africa, poverty is a real issue which has depleted universities' capacity and resources and has impacted negatively on the quality of educational provision. It has also impacted negatively on the QEP, as funds were required for the project and for student support.

5.4.14 Context based challenges

Each institution had its own challenges based on their context. For the policy makers, the challenge is lack of expertise to exercise oversight and provide leadership in QA evaluations. This challenge spilt over into the QEP.

I think it's also difficult to find enough peers in the system with a very deep understanding of what goes on in higher education to ensure that all your panels were of sufficient depth and experience. It is always a challenge whether you have it in audits or QEP. (Participant 1A)

Participants from the comprehensive university (Institution C) mentioned challenges related to the e-tutoring system and the lack of well-qualified tutors to mentor students. These issues reflect participants' realities and experiences in an ODL environment. The merged university (Institution D), on the other hand, mentioned distance between campuses and duplication of activities in the four-focus areas as challenges.

… it is issues of distance because the three campuses in a multi-campus structure for having meetings was also a challenge. Then you could do video conferencing, which helped. But then when you do these things you need to see that everybody supports. (Participant 15D)

The above-mentioned challenges suggested that the management's vision of bridging the gaps between campuses and faculties was difficult to realise at the merged university.

The traditional university (Institution B) mentioned increased workloads as a challenge created by the introduction of the QEP which increased their responsibilities.

All it [the QEP] did was add to my workload. I felt quite resentful because I thought it was a quality assurance office function to do anything related to the CHE and then suddenly I was told it was my job on top of everything else I am doing. So it actually added to my workload significantly. (Participant 14B)

This was consistent with the literature reviewed, which points to increased workload on the part of academics and the consequential alienation of QA units from their work (Al Hasani & Al Orimi, 2017).

A major concern for the policy makers was the issue of institutional resistance to change. This trend is an indication of the emergent culture of resistance to top-down approaches in universities. Institutions indicated that they were opposed to top-down approaches as they do not consider the interactions, negotiations and reactions of those who are at the bottom of the ladder and who are responsible for policy implementation (Pont & Viennet, 2017).

5.4.15 The QEP as a short-term project
The perception of the QEP as a short-term project by some institutions contributed to implementation challenges. For instance, some implementers developed lackadaisical attitudes, as there was no long-term commitment. The QEP was defined as a short-term project and most importantly, a mere intervention in the system:

… so it was never intended as a project that had to be in place in the system for a long time. It was an intervention that was deemed necessary at a specific point in time. (Participant 3B)

This implied that it did not have long-term goals, as 'it was never intended' to be continued in the system. It also suggests a reactive response to the issue of student success and throughput implicit in the camouflaged tick-box culture. There was an apparent understanding of implementing quality enhancement, however; people's mind-sets had not shifted to accommodate the implementation of a short-term project. The challenge was how to shift people's mind-sets to view the QEP beyond a mere project to invest in it and to commit to its implementation over a long-term period in line with its continuous improvement principles. The other challenge associated with this was the insufficient allocation of resources because it was never intended to be *"in the system for a long time"* (Participant 3B). This situation was a barrier to the effective implementation of QEP because there were insufficient funds to continue with the project as intended. At the same time, the perception of the QEP as a short-term project led to the project mentality (discussed in Chapter 6) and consequently to a compliance culture. This was evident in the way in which some institutions simply complied to meet set requirements.

In conclusion, major challenges, including insufficient resources and funds, point to the need to boost the higher education system financially to support policy implementation initiatives if change has to be realised. These and the other numerous challenges elaborated above are an indication of the complex nature of policy implementation. This suggests the perpetuation or persistence of challenges in the implementation of policy across the higher education system. Conflicting views on the methodology used to implement the policy indicated insufficient preparation of the sector in the form of preliminary research and piloting of the project, timing and consultation, as well as situational, contextual and risk analysis (if necessary) to realistically adapt the QEP, considering its relevancy in South African higher education. In addition, sustainability of the QEP as a new policy was threatened by the absence of a clear theory of change, funding issues that overwhelmingly affected the institutions' performance in terms of sustaining QE in the South African higher education system. Issues around borrowed policies and contextualisation or re-contextualisation and relevancy of foreign policies created resistance and feelings that cultural imperialism was reinforced and perpetuated in the South African higher education. Some viewed this as contrary to the principles of transformation (change). All these contextual factors had a negative effect on sustainability of the QEP across cases.

5.5 Stakeholder perceptions of the impact of the QEP

5.5.1 Perceptions regarding the impact of the QEP on change and transformation

While participants acknowledged the envisaged values of the QEP and the challenges of implementing it, it was important for the purpose of this study to discuss the successes and failures of the QEP as experienced by the stakeholders, including its value-add and contribution to teaching and learning, achievements, collegiality, ownership, inclusivity and collaboration.

An overwhelming majority of participants across cases considered the ideal that the QEP represented to be a valuable, important and necessity-driven process for improving student success and throughput in South African higher education.

> *Well … like us saying that the enhancement project is important. We need to enhance our offering in terms of teaching and learning. We don't have a choice.* (Participant 13B)

However, the participants were divided when discussing the intended and unintended consequences of the QEP. Some policy makers were satisfied that as a result of the QEP the four focus areas were embedded in the institutional strategic plans and processes:

One of the consequences is the extent to which the attention to the focus areas of the QEP has become embedded in many institutions in their normal activities and in their policies. (Participant 2A)

Another participant argued that the QEP was too ambitious and expensive and not all universities had the resources to implement it. Subsequently, the QEP may entrench divisions between universities and work against the transformation agenda in the South African higher education.

I think that it was a very ambitious project but it does require resources and we have fewer resources. So again, one of the universities will be able to embrace it and cope better than the other universities that have never had and now they have a new system so then we almost be creating a gap again and creating the sort of distinctions and inequalities and that to me is a big worry. (Participant 4B)

At the institutional level, there were both positive and negative reactions to the QEP. While some institutions viewed the QEP as necessary and beneficial or important, others felt it was unnecessary and was neither a new concept nor the mandate of the CHE.

But what is most important is that the shift as it were in a way contradicts what should be the main mandate of the CHE if you like. The mandate of the CHE is to monitor institutions in terms of quality assurance or their own provision as it were. (Participant 13B)

This view was supported by participants at the comprehensive university (Institution C) who argued that the CHE ought to focus on its mandate, which is institutional audits.

Then I actually don't know who is in charge of it [QEP] … you see when it's quality assurance we know who to go to at CHE, we know who is who but when it comes to quality enhancement I don't. (Participant 12C)

This statement suggests that traditionally the CHE is mandated to oversee QA and not QE as their responsibilities are misplaced in QE and are not recognised by the institutions.

In this light, most participants indicated that they would prefer to return to a compliance (audits) culture, which they were more accustomed to than a collegial culture which fails to enforce accountability in institutions.

… we were supposed to have followed the same pattern as the audit pattern or approach where institutions are rather listed with particular dates and standards. Minimum standards are put on the table that 'this is where we expecting you to be pitching your teaching and learning profession at and if you are unable to do that we

will give you a chance to improve'. And, you need to give an improvement plan and all that… like I said more developmental approach and following the same pattern if there was a pattern at all, in terms of how the first audit was rolled out. (Participant 13B)

Seen in this light, they felt that the QEP was weak and failed to enforce accountability while in fact it was expected to bring about change, address institutional weaknesses and thus improve student throughput rates. To support this, participants at the traditional university (Institution B) argued that traditional audits had structure suggesting that this was more effective than enhancement, especially since the QEP had no monitoring and evaluation process:

If you moving to an audit you've got deadline dates and you get there and you have the audit then next people go away and then you have the improvement plan with dates and you meet them and so the whole thing has got structure and pace. So this [enhancement] didn't have it. (Participant 14B)

Some participants from the university of technology (Institution A) maintained that the QEP was not feasible because its collegial model was not well conceptualised and consequently failed to enforce accountability. They argued that the move away from a compliance culture as *"some universities didn't see it as compulsory"* (Participant 6A) would compromise standards and as an unintended consequence led to tick-box exercise.

…the conceptualisation of the project at implementation level was problematic that the value added it was supposed to do in the sector it had not done it because it was approached more on a collegial level … and they [some universities] didn't see its value and it was just one of those things we have to do. (Participant 6A)

This group of participants expected the QEP processes to be aligned to regulatory frameworks and imperatives in a manner that addresses the realities of a 21st century university such as social issues and student accommodation: as one of the largest residential HEI in southern Africa, the institution continues to battle with growing numbers of students. Hence, they felt that the collegial approach was not adding value in terms of mitigating risks associated with student success.

Equally important was the issue of the impact of the QEP on teaching and learning which reflected differences in stakeholder opinions across the participant institutions. Participants at the comprehensive university (Institution C) questioned the effectiveness of the e-tutoring system. They argued that it might not be as effective as face-to-face instruction. Another participant who was not confident in the e-tutoring system expressed concerns regarding its effectiveness in advancing the objectives of the QEP, stating that e-tutoring was not able to

facilitate interactive peer sessions among students or student-lecturer interaction in the same way as face-to-face methods.

> *… then the e-tutoring which is even, the other version of face-to-face. I'd rather have face-to-face because you ask many questions and you vent your anger and you meet other people and you kind of …, but when it's e-tutoring it's again back to your own desk and that is really helping you to get nowhere … but that's enhancement, why not?* (Participant 12C)

This criticism highlighted the need for feasible methods or techniques to meet the needs of 21st century students. The QEP supports the application of techniques to meet various learning styles of students through technology. However, I observed an element of sarcasm or cynicism when the participant described how she viewed the institution's attempts at enhancing teaching and learning. This suggests a negative view of the QEP approach used to address student success and throughput challenges.

> *So to me, but that's enhancement, why not? [Institution C] is enhancing and maybe someone else has an idea on how they are enhancing.* (Participant 12C)

Accordingly, the question arises as to what extent the QEP was successful in addressing teaching and learning issues within the institution.

> *This thing [QEP] was defeated before it even went anywhere in my view but you can see I know this diagram [QEP Framework] well [laughs] and you know it looks, I am sure when it's presented in PowerPoint, people come out with a feeling that [laughter] they've never realised. But you know I am no longer impressed in many of the things that are around.* (Participant 12C)

From the participants' views presented above, one gains a sense that the institution was faced with a myriad challenges in the implementation of the QEP which might have rendered some strategies ineffective. For instance, one complex issue identified is how the institution will be able to align the growing demand for higher education, the increasing number of students knocking at its doors and the quality of its provision.

A participant from the university of technology (Institution A) who described quality in terms of adding value in teaching and learning and student graduateness argued that the QEP did not achieve this in her view.

> *It [QE] did not add value in terms of improving the quality of teaching and learning and also bringing into context the issue of student-centredness and so on to improve the student output or graduations and quality of those graduates.* (Participant 6A)

In addition, one participant also doubted the value and benefits of the QEP owing to the persisting institutional inequalities in terms of advancement, disinterested staff and lack of commitment and absolute lack of clarity on how institutions would be brought onto an equal footing. This is an indication of the differences in understandings of the value of the QEP.

> *But then with that [new] way of thinking [about introducing QEP] we ended up … benefitting and sometimes questioning the value that we are getting from these processes because if you are at an advanced phase of your QA system, or the advanced stage of how your system works within a university, such as for example the registration system or maybe workload models and also all those things, then to be starting to teach others about how your system works, so something in terms of sharing expertise and that thing [was not supported].* (Participant 15D)

The participants who advocated for the QEP at the university of technology (Institution A) expressed concerns about student throughput rates that continue to challenge the institution.

A different view was expressed by one participant who maintained that the introduction of the QEP had brought about remarkable changes in student success rates, which were evident in the improved performance of the 2015 student cohort.

> *And you can see from the results of the students. Again we take it back. What does [the QEP] do now to the student success? And if you check all those people [2015 cohort] who went through this programme, you check their last year's [2016] success rates … you'll see there's a huge shift.* (Participant 10A)

The participant's analysis of the performance of the 2015 cohort indicated improvements, which he attributed to the QEP:

> *If you look into our registration process now, it's just spot on. We do the online registration. Our students are not even required to come to campus to register. These things were not there before [the QEP].* (Participant 10A)

It seems that the QEP increased the attention that this institution gives to managerialism and the culture of efficiency. However, the overwhelming perception was that the QEP did not impact substantively on the quality of teaching and learning.

At the merged university (Institution D), there were two opposing views, management versus faculty, regarding the QEP's implementation. Institutional management viewed it as a success story but faculty perceived it as having failed to achieve its intended objectives. Management welcomed and embraced the QEP however; this managerial outlook and these ideas did not filter down to faculty or the lower levels of the institution.

> *I haven't received any major change suggestions back so I assume that the problem is it could be that only the Dean or his Chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee read my report. I don't think it has become the property of every individual member to the lowest level there and this is one of the things that should have happened like the TL strategy, it must be owned and integrated within by every staff member. (*Participant 17D)

Faculty perspectives reflected unsatisfactory experiences of the shift from QA to QE. For instance, a participant argued that they experienced inclusivity on a superficial level because the QEP did not permeate all levels of the institution, including faculties.

> *If you see uptake as, 'now let us make it our business and integrate this and see what we can get out of it', then I would say, 'not very good, not very good'. It was dealt with in a surface way and so forth.* (Participant 17D)

At the same time, different theoretical or ideological differences emerged between the CHE and some institutions. Ideological inconsistences were evident in the case of the merged university (Institution D) which reflected, on the one hand, conflicting policy makers' and institutional ideological stances, and on the other hand, contradictory institutional management and academics' understandings of QE. Different understandings of theoretical orientations of transformation were evident in how at Institution D *"they see transformation as of a technicist nature"* (Participant 17D) which differed from the CHE's theoretical lens. This dimension was evident in the disjuncture in terms of the theoretical lens. At the level of the faculty in the merged university (Institution D), the QEP was seen to be advancing a particular ideology that differed from the CHE's theoretical stance. For instance, the CHE's theoretical underpinnings of the QEP drawn from critical theory deviated from the institution's philosophy.

> *I see some of the constructs, some of the terminology that they [CHE] use, and the people [theories] to whom they are referring. I am talking here about literature, then you can see that the tradition, the underpinning assumptions, the points of departure, the paradigmatic framework is basically critical theory … which might appeal to some people and might not to some others'. Because not all universities are sort of as universities inclined towards such an approach.* (Participant 17D)

These conflicting ideological stances validate the argument that there were differences in understandings and assumptions regarding the QEP among stakeholders. Differences in ideological stances suggest inconsistency and/or lack of common understanding of the concept of the QEP which would negatively impact on teaching and learning in terms of reaching transformation goals of the curriculum.

The policy makers' assumptions about transformation and redress of past imbalances in the system rooted in critical theory is suggested in their intention to *"raise up the entire sector in the area of teaching and learning"* (Participant 2A) through capacity building to improve student success. This accordingly informed the thinking within the CHE which was different from the "factual" and "technicist" (Participant 17D) world of academics considering that *"universities to a large extent are very factual driven"* (Participant 17D). Their dealings with curriculum transformation was at the pragmatic level whereas the CHE position was based on depth and unravelling deep insights.

> *You'll find in university contexts a variety of paradigmatic approaches in faculties and even across faculties and so forth...If you read the questions [from CHE] you can see this thing is basically linking to some of the theoretical … so called meta-theoretical underpinnings related to teaching and learning.* (Participant 17D)

Thus, these ideological differences culminated in renegotiation and power struggles evident in the juxtaposition of the critical theory lens and the positivist, post-modernist orientations of the policy makers and implementers which suggested difficulties in reaching common understanding of concepts of transformation imperative for redressing past imbalances.

Contrary to the pervading idea of the QEP as beneficial, the tension between what was perceived as the intent of the QEP and the reality expressed through dissatisfaction with the process at the grassroots level created a binary of perspectives within the institution. Capacity to conceive the rationale behind the QEP was lacking at the faculty level, which constrained its implementation as envisioned by the management of the institution. Consequently, divergent perspectives of the intent of the QEP were presented, divided along managerial versus faculty lines. This implies divided approaches informed by and shaping practice and the implementation of the QEP, thereby suggesting failure to achieve the unity they expected through the QEP moreover since it was short-lived. It also suggests that ownership of the QEP was compromised at lower levels and the Dean and his Chair of Teaching and Learning were the only people who had an input into the QEP. Therefore, there was no solidarity from within the institution to pull resources together and to find a common ground which was contradictory to the collective and collegial approach of the QEP.

A similar trend of exclusion was evident in the marginalisation of the QA units in other institutions. For instance, at the comprehensive university (Institution C), they argued that instead of promoting collegiality and inclusiveness, the QEP rather brought about divisions within the institution, culminating in the marginalisation of certain key role players such as the QA unit. This implies that the much desired QEP objective of pulling together resources to

develop good practice guidelines, ownership and collegiality were compromised, evident in the tension between collegiality and managerialism.

With respect to collaboration and building communities of practice, these were viewed as key in the QEP implementation. To advance this objective, the policy makers pointed to the benefits of peer review system which encouraged sharing information and resources, and benchmarking against each other as institutions.

> *I think some of them really, from what I hear enjoyed the interactions with peers … because they could talk openly about anything and share ideas not being worried about being marked on something. Are we going to pass this criterion or not? So, it was an opportunity to do that and I think many of them appreciated that.* (Participant 1A)

However, there were opposing views regarding how collaboration was facilitated and how the QEP was administered by the policy makers. One participant argued that the CHE did not coordinate or administer the QEP as intended and the intended purpose of sharing resources had failed. For instance, she stated that *"the CHE produced what I thought was a very poor summary of all the submissions from which all of the details of any university was deleted"* (Participant 14B), making it impossible for institutions to contact each other.

> *So, they then had a meeting based on that document and everybody was up in arms because they said 'How do we know who we should contact? How do we know whose good practices they were? So, it didn't serve the purpose of what I understood a little was the purpose of the thing.* (Participant 14B)

This participant argued that there were instances of missed opportunities for shared practice in that they did not make good use of it.

> *And then there were a number of activities that followed up and all the universities coming together but not necessarily getting the opportunity to share anything they were doing.* (Participant 14B)

A similar trend was evident at the merged university (Institution D) faculties that felt alienated from the QE processes. A participant observed that while some institutions valued team work and sharing ideas, others simply did not comprehend those values and thus resisted the change that the QEP would bring.

The implementation approaches showed more attention was given to the four focus areas whereas a holistic approach involving strategies to balance academics and social issues was necessary. The social issues and poverty facing students undermined collective efforts to drive the QEP as was intended, evident in how student protests disrupted phases of the QEP

implementation. Focused attention on the four focus areas yielded positive results such as capacitating institutions through training of lecturers, exposure to best practice in the field of QE, aligning the QEP to institutional strategic plans, improved student success rates in some institutions, lecturer incentives and rewards systems, introduction of performance management systems to reward lecturers and further develop them, amongst others. However, it could be argued that focusing attention on the four focus areas per se resulted in restricting enhancement initiatives to teaching and learning and neglecting equally competing priorities including research and support functions. In addition, this diverted attention from exploring other forms of creativity and innovation that lie outside of the parameters of the four-focus areas. In addition, the differing contexts, experiences and approaches to policy enactment and implementation had adverse effects on teaching and learning as this diversity was not uniformly embraced due to competition and failed attempts at collaboration.

In conclusion, it should be noted here that inconsistencies between the policy makers' and the implementers' approaches and philosophies constrained the implementation of the QEP. Various strategies or lines of thought, for example, "Appreciative Inquiry" theory were misunderstood and participants at the university of technology (Institution A) viewed the 'collegial' approach as weak. There was evidence of misalignment of philosophies, as the merged university (Institution D) did not see 'critical theory' as fitting the mission of the university, which ultimately culminated in a mismatch between policy and practice noted by a participant from the merged institution. These inconsistencies resulted in a lack of common understanding and a clashing of applications and implementation methodologies. At the same time, not all strategies were effective for the implementation of the QEP, as evidenced by the technology and Wi-Fi challenges experienced at the university of technology (Institution A) and the e-tutoring challenges experienced at the comprehensive institution (Institution D). These strategies would have been considered effective had the QEP reached "policy goals that are shared widely" (Pont & Viennet, 2017: 26). This therefore implies that QEP implementation was not effective nor were the project goals realised.

5.6   Conclusion

In conclusion, the cross-case analysis revealed very important lessons for the implementation of the QEP in the South African higher education system. One important lesson is that the QEP as a new policy necessitated innovation and creativity as well as long-term strategy; however; these were constrained by the project mentality adopted by some institutions. Therefore, one could argue that the QEP was not implemented as intended because it was viewed as a project and lacked long-term plans and policy directives. Being short-lived suggests that it could not achieve its intended objectives of improvement in teaching and

learning to improve student success and throughput rates. In a developing country context, one important lesson is that effective policy uptake and implementation necessitates thorough planning, consultation, transparency and the commitment of funds and resources, and monitoring and evaluation tools. The emergent themes from the data point to the persistent challenge of policy implementation across higher education. Saunders and Sin (2015) noted critical issues on the "implementation staircase" that hindered the implementation of the QEF in Scotland. These included academic versus management divide and leadership versus management practice, lack of voice or exclusion from policy processes, lack of financial control, and lack of training, amongst others. These findings are consistent with the findings of this study. Another important lesson was a realisation of the factors, either internal or external, that might have influenced the implementation of the QEP. An internal factor relates to instilling a culture of enhancement in a proactive and responsive manner to prevent the reoccurrence of failure of existing systems such as traditional audits. External factors would include the effects of policy borrowing and adaptation or transfer of a policy to a new environment. This chapter has included an assessment of the risks that might be posed by the QEP approach and how to mitigate against such risks. The data analysis showed instances of a discrepancy between the Scottish QEF and the QEP that further suggested the misfit of the developed country model in a developing country context. Notwithstanding the financial unpreparedness of the institutions, prior to embarking on a large-scale project such as the QEP, the social issues need to be considered of students and poverty that resulted in the student protests over increased tuition fees. Of importance to note is that the QEP did not initiate a long-term cultural change in the institutions. In some cases, however it did initiate some structural change. The next chapter will return to exploring Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory of policy processes and the process of policy to assess the impact of each context of policy process on implementation of the QEP.

Chapter 6
Explanation of the change through the lens of theory
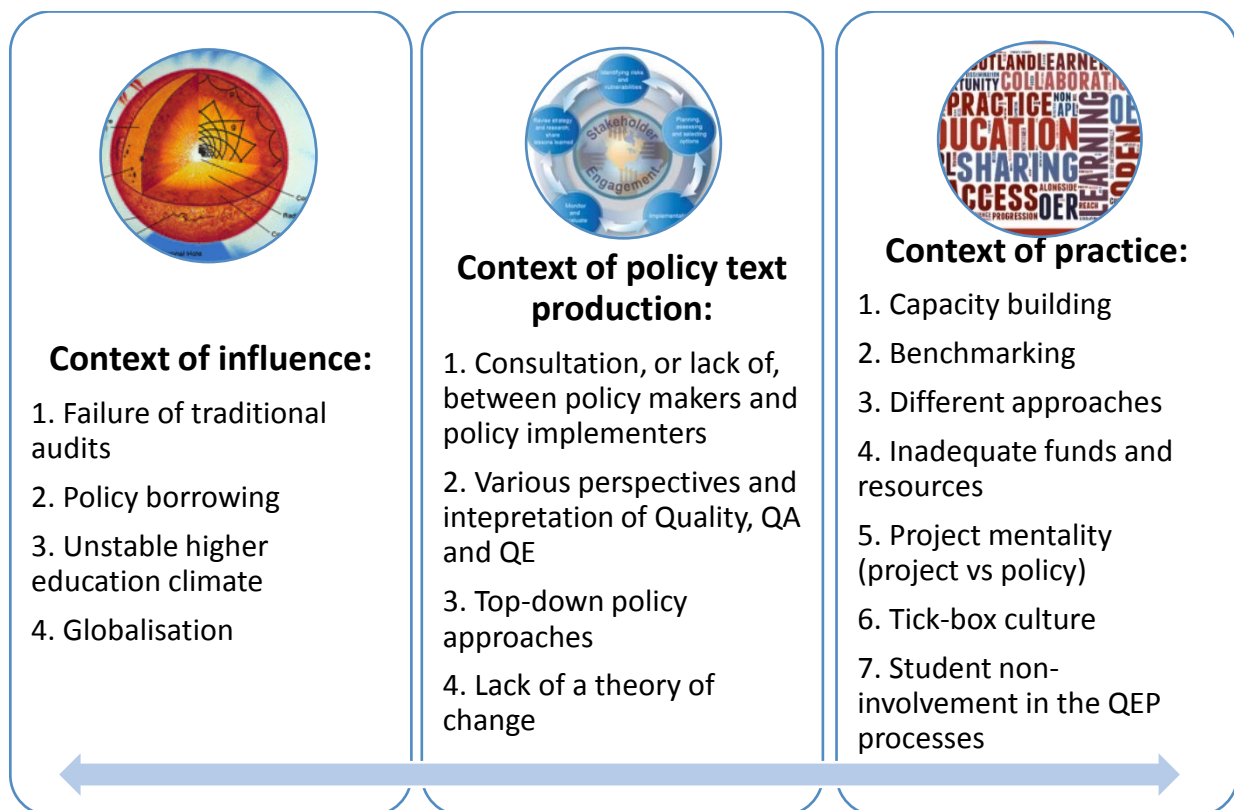
6.1   Introduction

This study draws on Bowe, Ball and Gold's (1992) *theory of policy processes and the processes of policy* as the overarching theoretical framework to elucidate policy formulation and the enactment or implementation process. This theory (discussed in Chapter 3) considers three policy contexts: the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice that frame policy processes.

This chapter analyses the perceived successes and failures of the QEP implementation through the lens of the three contexts. The findings indicate that the most salient factors influencing the QEP in the context of influence is the failure of the traditional audits and the unstable higher education climate which motivated the policy makers to suggest change. It also highlights the role of globalisation and the process of policy borrowing in the shift from QA to QE. Regarding the context of policy text production, the most salient factors affecting the QEP include consultation, or lack of, between policy makers and policy implementers, various perspectives and interpretations of quality, QA and QE, the top-down approaches to policy implementation and the policy versus project perceptions of the QEP. The lack of a theory of change to some extent was a contentious issue that emerged in the context of policy text production. In the context of practice, many factors emerged that either hindered or enabled the implementation of the QEP including the different approaches to policy implementation, capacity building, collaboration, student support, inadequate funds and resources, unstable higher education climate, the project mentality of the implementers, as well as a compliance (tick-box) culture.

6.2   Contextual factors impacting on the implementation of the QEP

Contextual factors such as those listed above have a huge impact on the implementation of the QEP. These are presented in Figure 6.1 that follows.

Figure 6.1: The implementation of the QEP – adapting Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory

Context of influence:

1. Failure of traditional audits
2. Policy borrowing
3. Unstable higher education climate
4. Globalisation

Context of policy text production:

1. Consultation, or lack of, between policy makers and policy implementers
2. Various perspectives and intepretation of Quality, QA and QE
3. Top-down policy approaches
4. Lack of a theory of change

Context of practice:

1. Capacity building
2. Benchmarking
3. Different approaches
4. Inadequate funds and resources
5. Project mentality (project vs policy)
6. Tick-box culture
7. Student non-involvement in the QEP processes

6.2.1. Context of influence

6.2.1.1 Failure of the traditional audits

The findings revealed that the shift occurred or was influenced by the need to address failed systems. The common understanding between the policy makers and implementers was the influence that the failure of the traditional audits had on the shift in the context of influence. The CHE, concerned with an ailing system of traditional audits which was "not adding value", not effective in driving change in the higher education system, coupled with the inadequacies of compliance-oriented approaches, turned to QE as a new vision for change. This is consistent with the Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory which holds that factors either internal or external to the policy environment might potentially influence the introduction of a new policy. In the case of the QEP, external factors had a major influence on its introduction in South Africa. For instance, in order to address the failure of the traditional audits, the policy makers looked elsewhere for new ideas. In that light, the impulse for policy borrowing was the desire to address *"inadequacy or failure of some aspects of educational provision"* (Phillips & Ochs, 2004:778). This could be linked to borrowing new ideas from elsewhere to address the failure of an existing system (traditional audits) in order to tackle the issue of student success and throughput.

6.2.1.2 Policy borrowing

Policy borrowing was another pivotal factor that impacted on the context of influence of the QEP, considering policy makers' adoption of foreign models built on best practice that had been tried and tested in their home countries. This finding is in line with Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory on the re-contextualisation of policies in different contexts; however, in South Africa, it was not adapted and it was viewed as an irrelevant concept that was borrowed. Subsequently conflict may ensue as a result of differences in opinions. For instance, it was found that the QEP could not be implemented as is in South African institutions, because of the differences between Scottish and South African contexts. In fact, Van der Westhuizen and Fourie (2002:30) argue that the lack of expertise has resulted in policy borrowing "from contexts that are not appropriate for the South African environment". In this space, issues of cultural imperialism, different histories, localised or indigenisation of experiences, language, climate and lack of knowledge about the local environment for transferability emerge.

6.2.1.3 Unstable higher education climate

According to Bowe et al. (1992), within the policy domain, varied interests and concerns held by various constituents lead to power struggles and ideological contestations. In the context of influence, this manifested itself in the representation of interests of and conflict among the various stakeholder groupings including students. Consequently, violent student activism which coincided with the introduction of the QEP in South African higher education influenced the QEP's vision of change. This was evidenced by the urgency to mitigate risky student behaviours and thereby address the culture of student violent protests if improved student success was to be realised. With escalating tension and contestation, advocacy groups, civil society, government, business, bargaining forums and the university sector endeavoured to find ways to meet the demands for a free higher education (Jansen, 2017). These developments greatly influenced policy and decision-makers' thinking, a process that would culminate in educational reforms and influence policy reviews and the introduction of the QEP aimed at meeting student needs to improve student success. Therefore, in terms of the context of influence, the QEP was an integral part of that change process and was intended to meet the demands for a transformed higher education system. Nevertheless, the violent student protests in 2016, a major influencer and the motive behind the need for change, were disruptive and negatively affected the QEP strategic plans and initiatives aimed at meeting student needs.

6.2.1.4 Globalisation

The findings revealed that globalisation has had a major influence on the shift from QA to QE. As was indicated in the literature review, QE is a movement that is increasingly sweeping across various higher education systems (Land and Gordon, 2013). In South Africa, the policy

makers looked for international best practice models to benchmark against in order to be competitive and to maintain standards. In devising the QEP as a new policy, the CHE drew on the Scottish and US QE frameworks (CHE, 2014b). This finding is consistent with Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory, which holds that in the context of influence, policy-making processes are influenced by global developments. The findings revealed that this context had a positive impact on forging new partnerships and global networks and collaborative practices, peer reviews and international benchmarking. It allowed global ideas to penetrate the South African education space where stakeholders were engaging with foreign concepts to improve their quality management systems and indeed partnerships were formed between South African institutions and overseas institutions, such as Finnish universities. For instance, DVCs: Teaching and Learning met at workshops and visited ten Scottish universities to learn about QE frameworks and best practice models for adoption by South African universities. The purpose of these visits was specifically to *"interact with their Scottish peers"* on i) *"how to co-lead QE nationally"*, ii) *"how to work together as a diverse higher education sector"*, iii) *"reflect on benefits and challenges of QE after 13 years"* and *"to see innovative teaching and learning spaces"* (Grayson, 2015: 9). Attempts at institutionalising QE models were evident in the university of technology's (Institution A) Teaching and Learning with Technology division, which initiated follow-up visits to Finnish universities to further expose its academics to QE models.

Although global learning positively influenced the presentation and exchange of new ideas between developed and developing countries, it was unsustainable due to internet inaccessibility and it did not penetrate to lower levels within institutions. It lacked plans on exposing academics to QE concepts and benchmarking best practice globally evident in instances where some deans and academics had little to no understanding of the QEP while some lacked interest in learning about it. Limited information about the QEP to the majority of staff in institutions compromised ideals of global learning.

In summary, with regard to the context of influence, the study found that the failure of traditional audits, policy borrowing, the unstable higher education climate, and globalisation had influenced the development of the QEP. However, it was found that the failure of traditional audits had a negative impact on the QEP. Moreover, the idea of moving away from traditional audits was not a viable option, as was evident in the way the majority had reverted to compliance-driven approaches. Although global learning was partially achieved, networks were created, collaboration took place and there was uptake at management level, the QEP sustainability was compromised at the faculty levels. Instability in higher education caused by the student protests disrupted the QEP processes and had a negative impact on them. In

addition, policy borrowing was deemed not to be feasible owing to the differences in contexts of Scotland and South Africa.

6.2.2   Context of policy text production
6.2.2.1 Consultations, or lack of, between policy makers and policy implementers

The context of policy text production follows the context of influence and involves policy document analysis and interpretation processes (Bowe et al., 1992). According to Bowe et al. (1992), initial consultations take place between the policy makers and the policy implementers within the context of policy text production and facilitate the processes of policy development, uptake and implementation. It was evident during the conversations with participants that initial consultations took place at policy maker level (the CHE) and at management level in the universities. Therefore, this trend would seem to be consistent with Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory concerning the consultations that take place. However, although there were consultations that took place, these processes did not permeate grassroots levels within institutions. This was a sign of discrepancies in the system as there was no real consultation between the parties. A limitation was the non-involvement or the lack of broader stakeholder involvement and the consequential lack of buy-in (discussed earlier) into the process. This didn't yield the desired outcomes as inclusive consultation processes were not enforced.

> *… I've been delving into issues of quality in South Africa and I just look and see okay somebody comes to this concept, writes a paper and then it starts to be implemented without even going to the ground and consulting the stakeholders, particularly the implementers.* (Participant 12C)

This picture presented above is consistent with Harvey and Williams' (2010) argument that for the past 15 years in higher education, academics, perceive QA and/or QE as having had no link with their work. This school of thought further argues that academics have become disgruntled with external QA or traditional audits due to the exclusionary practices whilst Teshome (2013) and O'Mahony and Garavan (2012) advocate for the centrality of stakeholder involvement and inclusive practices. Hence, in the case of the QEP, the absence of proper consultation was criticised as deviating from the norm of policy processes, which acknowledges policy implementers and the importance of consulting them for input into new policies (Bowe et al. 1992). This would consider the role played by QA units in policy implementation, especially since the QEP principles were founded on inclusivity in policy processes. The exclusionary practice led to the lack of common understanding of the QEP partly due to ideological differences between the policy makers and policy implementers. This is discussed in the section below.

6.2.2.2 Various perspectives and interpretations of quality, QA and QE

In the context of policy text production, there were different understandings of quality, QA and QE that reflected distinct institutional needs and contexts, and the CHE's agenda to drive change. This had an influence on the policy actors' conceptualisation of the QEP as a new policy. A common understanding was the need to improve educational quality or transformation. However, the varied interpretations of quality, QA and QE that emerged shaped by the different ideologies and philosophies the parties subscribed to suggested conflicting perspectives about change and/or policy directive. Accordingly, ideological contestations arise out of differences of perspectives among parties, which necessitate negotiations and recreations of policy processes (Bowe et al., 1992). This is consistent with the literature reviewed. For instance, Cheng (2011) explained that the different stakeholders' experiences in higher education institutions lead to diverse definitions and different interpretations of quality. Nevertheless, Chinomona et al. (2013) suggested that at the institutional level, it is potentially value-adding to promote diverse student learning styles to derive relevant impact in enhancing student learning.

6.2.2.3 Top-down approaches

Diverse approaches that emerged were partly influenced by what and how role players perceived their roles in the policy process. The CHE felt it had to facilitate and steer the QEP implementation thus imposing its views on institutions.

> The focus of the CHE'S QEP was on an evaluation of what individual institutions had achieved in order to enhance the quality of student learning … Each institution was required to provide a baseline submission to the CHE in 2014 of the current state of its quality assurance in respect of teaching and learning. (CHE, 2018: 8)

This top-down approach on the part of the policy makers reflected their position as the custodians of the quality regime and placed them in a dominant position with regard to the implementers who were the people responsible on the ground for steering the higher education system in a new direction. This accounted for the top-down approach and practices adopted by the policy makers in the QEP process:

> *I think the CHE would be the key driver because they are the Quality Council and the Quality Councils have very clear roles and functions, firstly set out in the NQF Act what they must do and secondly, set out in the Act that aligns to them like the Higher Education Act for the CHE … CHE is the more technical driver of the quality enhancement and what should happen and what is quality and what they expect the institution to do and deliver and show.* (Participant 4B)

Policy implementers saw their role as having to implement the QEP in order to realise its intended objective of improving student success and throughput. Their understanding of the process meant embedding the QEP in institutions' operations to achieve the policy goal set by the CHE. Thus, to them, it meant something they were obliged to do in order to comply with regulatory requirements:

> *In the institution, it is not a shift. It is not a shift in that sense because with both QEP 1, Quality Enhancement Project 1 and Project 2 it was a matter of complying with what CHE required in terms of the template they provided to universities and within the university the data was collected as such to comply with the template.* (Participant 6C)

Hence, some participants from the university of technology (Institution A) contested the imposition of the QEP which they viewed as just another top-down approach to policy implementation, in addition to being a tick-box exercise (discussed later in section 6.2.3.6) which lacked meaning in as far as change was concerned.

According to Bowe et al. (1992), conflicts arise in the context of policy text production. These conflicts emanate from the interplay of various policy actors that have a stake in the process and have different interests to those espoused by the policy being formulated (ibid.). This state of affairs influences the outcomes. It was evident that the consultative processes that influenced the shift from QA to QE did not filter down to the bottom levels of institutions. The CHE's use of a top-down approach in obtaining institutional buy-in to support this decision created unintended conflict resulting in policy directives and concentration of power at the top-levels of institutional echelons. Subsequently, the power dynamics that ensued saw stakeholders contesting ownership of policy processes (Bowe et al., 1992). For instance, the CHE's role of overseeing the national policy agenda and policy implementation in institutions reinforced its hierarchical position, thus wielding power over implementers' interests in safeguarding internal processes from external interference and control. This top-down approach resulted in resistance from certain key stakeholders at the bottom, which sounded the death knell for the principle of collegiality espoused by the QEP. This suggests that new policies ought not to be imposed from above without considering context and common understanding of the policy by all stakeholders.

6.2.2.4 Lack of a theory of change
The effective implementation of change within an organisation or institution requires a good theory of change (Roger, 2014). This informs the series of activities or interventions for the realisation of change intended (ibid.). Therefore, in the context of policy text production, a theory of change for the QEP implementation was necessary to influence the change envisioned. This implied the development of QEP framework(s) informed by a good theory of

change. However, the QEP's implementation was threatened by the lack of evidenced-based research on improvement apart from institutional reports (CHE, 2015), lack of monitoring of how institutions are progressing on improvement plans (Matsebatlela, 2015), and the lack of research on or evidence-based conceptualisation of the QEP. In fact, the literature review of this study indicates the lack of empirical research on the QEP project in the South African context. One could also argue that the lack of a theory of change that would have informed the QEP in a South African context disadvantaged it in terms of policy planning, evaluation and monitoring, and understanding of how the policy works.

In summary, in the context of policy text production, it was found that the top-down approaches used during consultations with policy implementers left them feeling disempowered; moreover exclusionary practices contributed to their alienation from the QEP. Furthermore, although different approaches denote diversification of the higher education landscape and situatedness of policy uptake, to a certain degree this influenced change negatively as the tension between practice and diversity to achieve the common good could not be reconciled. The intent was to build universal or standardised tools in the form of good practice guidelines which necessitated a common framework and approaches. The project mentality was found to be a factor that contributed to the resentment or resistance of some stakeholders towards the QEP, as there was a lack of a common understanding of the QEP; in instances where it was little understood, it was regarded as a mere project.

6.2.3 Context of practice

The context of practice is the context within which policies are being implemented. Policy texts, having been decoded and recoded, are put into action (Bowe et al., 1992). In this section, I highlight the factors that hindered or enabled the implementation of the QEP. The results show there were both positive and negative outcomes of the policy implementation process in the context of practice. Collaboration, capacity building, benchmarking and student support were cited as enablers of the QEP implementation strategy. However, these initiatives were undermined by the overwhelming challenges that institutions faced in the implementation of the QEP.

6.2.3.1 Capacity building

Second to the four focus areas that were cited as second-order enablers, capacity building was identified as an enabler by policy makers. Participants explained that capacity building was a necessary condition for strengthening institutional capacity in terms of capacitating institutions as well as academics. The impact was positive in that it allowed for opportunities for exposure, growth and professional development of academics through training, upskilling of lecturers and incentives. In the same vein, its successes could not be measured due to the

lack of monitoring and evaluation tools and the short-lived nature of the QEP itself. At the same time, although capacity building was regarded as instrumental and a necessity, its sustainability was constrained by insufficient training due to insufficient resources and in some instances, huge workloads. This finding was consistent with Ansah (2015) and Saunders & Sin's (2015) assertion that proper training of personnel in any policy change environment is crucial as a lack of sufficient training results in unprepared policy implementers. This suggests that to a certain extent capacity building did not ultimately effect change in teaching and learning. Its impact on teaching and learning and improvement of student success and throughput rates remains to be seen.

6.2.3.2 Benchmarking

The literature review points to the advantages of benchmarking best practice for the improvement of student success and throughput. Eleven models were explored in Chapter 2 that point to some success stories in the endeavours of some countries to implement enhancement. This practice represented in the literature is consistent with the findings of this study where both policy makers and policy implementers embraced benchmarking as a practice that would raise standards and improve institutions' internal systems and processes, as well as promote the idea of benchmarking best practice nationally and internationally. The positive impact of benchmarking was evident in the seamless way in which the policy makers adopted the QEP through benchmarking exercises and the way in which some institutions institutionalised that practice within and across the university sector. Largely, benchmarking had positive effects on bringing institutions together, sharing ideas and learning from each other. It created a conducive environment for enabling the implementation of the QEP ideals and fostering collegiality.

6.2.3.3 Different approaches

In the context of practice, multiple interpretations, recreations and differences in approaches are present. For instance, in the South African experience, policy implementers' mediation of the QEP was based on their different experiences, histories, values and purposes, and the vested interests (Bowe et al., 1992) that influenced the diverse approaches, practices, views and even the emergence of contestation impacting on the context of practice. The findings of this study were consistent with the theory of Bowe et al. (1992), which holds that subjective meanings attached to policy influence practice differently, based on context, individual experiences and exposure to policy. Different approaches suggest that one-size-fits-all approach to policy implementation cannot be applied as a universal principle. For example, the QEP affected the four HEIs differently; hence, it is argued that a one-size-fits-all approach to policy implementation is not feasible given the differentiated and diverse higher education landscape. This finding is consistent with the literature I reviewed which points to the lack of a

universally accepted principle or a single, authoritative definition of quality, and the approaches to QA are purpose related and specifically contextual (Martin & Stella, 2007; Ntshoe, Higgs, Wolhuter & Higgs, 2010; Prisacariu, 2015; Sharma, 2012; Shah et al., 2011). Therefore, any desired harmonisation of QA and QE processes in higher education should not rule out the possibility that institutions would consider distinctive approaches relevant to their unique missions, visions and cultures.

Participants at the comprehensive university (Institution C) confirmed that enhancement was open to different interpretations and therefore it was difficult to reach common understandings of the phenomenon.

> *So there were no guidelines … I mean that, it depends a lot on how I interpret what enhancement is. You know it is subject to multiple interpretations and multiple understandings of exactly what to do [mean] because when you come up with a project of this nature it requires a lot of consultation so that you know, people are kind of like, 'we have the basic minimums of what we are calling enhancement'.* (Participant 12C)

The different approaches in the implementation of the QEP were based on the subjective understandings and interpretations of quality, QA and QE by the different stakeholders. These are discussed immediately below to explain the impact practice of this trend.

6.2.3.4 Inadequate funds and resources

According to Bowe et al. (1992), in the context of practice, policy actors' experiences shape and affect, either positively or negatively, the implementation of the policy itself and its outcomes. While funding is a necessary condition for policy implementation (Ansah, 2015), it is evident that insufficient funds and resources hindered the implementation of the QEP as intended. The funding challenge is relational in that it spilt over to other areas such as planning. For example, in order to plan for and for a policy or project of the magnitude of the QEP to be effective, a committed budget is required, as without a budget the policy cannot be effectively implemented. It was emphasised that insufficient funds constrained the seamless rollout of activities as planned. The QEP experience again shows the cost implications when managing reforms.

A similar trend could be observed with insufficient human resources. The CHE's Quality Audit unit was incapable of administering the QEP due to insufficient staff, while in some institutions QA units were not given a role to play in the implementation of the QEP. The negative consequence of this was the underutilisation of vast knowledge and experience in the sector, marginalising and disempowering some units instead of investing in these units to address the challenge of lack of expertise in the field of QE. One policy maker explained that

… it's also difficult to find enough peers in the system with a very deep understanding of what goes on in higher education to ensure that all your panels were of sufficient depth and experience. (Participant 1A)

This challenge cuts across systems in the southern African region and the African continent at large (Okebukola, 2015). Therefore, there is an urgent need for solutions to address the challenge of insufficient resources in response to the demands of a globalised education system where African universities are competing with their developed counterparts in a global village.

6.2.3.5 Project mentality (policy vs project)

The findings of this study revealed that the manner in which stakeholders interpreted the QEP was largely influenced by their distinct cultures and traditions, as well as the belief that only written policies and documented texts have the authority to regulate institutions. This finding is consistent with the Braun et al. (2010) observation that policy enactment might be experienced differently subject to the environment and culture of institutions. The QEP was introduced in 2014 as a project aimed at addressing problematic higher education processes, which the traditional audits had failed to do. Therefore, the findings reveal that, in general, stakeholder interpretations of the QEP were framed/conceptualised as:

- a time-bound project
- having no long-term commitment to change
- a mere test-and-trial exercise
- having no authority to influence/drive change in institutions.

Thus, the conceptualisation of the QEP as a project rendered it open to various interpretations from the outset and it was perceived as merely a short intervention to "solve a problem". Hence, the majority of stakeholders failed to acknowledge it as a CHE mandate and challenged its legality based on the fact it had not been formally legislated as policy.

… from what I hear and what I know [the] CHE is going back to institutional audits. And that should happen within the next year or two. Therefore ... some of those institutions that I spoke about were adamant … I think that they still prefer that [audit] system and also they tried to be legalistic about it to actually say, 'legally the institutional audits were established to be institutional audits'. They were never established to be quality enhancement thing. Therefore, it means that the [CHE] they have moved away from their original mandate that they were given and they must continue doing their mandate. (Participant 15D)

The superficial conception of the QEP as a mere project led to a project mentality (Meki-Kombe & Herman, 2017; Israr, 2005; Adelman & Taylor, 2003;) being displayed by most

participants, which prevented the QEP from being implemented as intended. Israr (2005) defined a "project mentality" as the practices, behaviours, mind-sets and specific attitudes that different people possess that are negative towards any short-term initiative. This project mentality could be seen in the attitudes displayed by most participants, who regarded the QEP as simply another passing and transient project. One participant confirmed the presence of such a compliance attitude, stating that the QEP was a routine chore for project managers.

> *I think for me it was just one of my duties as a QA officer.* (Participant 6A)

Consequently, this created a culture of indifference, as some role players perceived the QEP as merely procedural rules they had to comply with and as not really going deeper into cultivating a QE culture.

> *But then, (pause) if you ask me, 'how prepared was I for that particular thing?' I think that to some extent it was just something that we needed to do in the process of all our things because it was required for us to do.* (Participant 15D)

As a result of its short-term life span, there was no sense of urgency, no long-term commitment and no ownership of the QEP. The concept of the QEP as a mere project negatively influenced stakeholders' thinking and attitudes towards deep engagement with the concept. Moreover, the QEP was little understood by the majority of stakeholders who resisted, ignored and resented it. Overwhelmingly, the QEP was resented because people were not fully informed and most stakeholders felt they had not been sufficiently consulted.

The effects of the project mentality were negative as some policy implementers were suspicious of the policy intention and considered it ineffective. For example, one participant from the comprehensive university (Institution C) reduced it to mere "decoration" and maintained that it was not to be taken seriously because it had no "authority" as QA did. These and other uncertainties regarding the achievements of the QEP contributed to the negative attitudes, which shifted attention away from concerted efforts to ensure the sustainability of the QEP. Hence, the intended purpose of the shift from QA to QE was lost. Policy implementers became demoralised and lost confidence in the QEP as a change agent, and felt it stifled creativity and innovation. Most policy implementers did not see the need to continue to explore innovative ideas in the face of the myriad challenges and the intention to discontinue it. Most importantly, abandoning policies before they materialise is a waste of resources and money. Conversely, there is a need for *"institutionalising system change"* to ensure the sustainability of innovative ideas and concepts (Adelman & Taylor, 2003), as well as to avoid tick-box exercises (discussed in the section below) when implementing policies.

6.2.3.6 Tick-box approach to policy implementation

The literature review revealed that when policy implementers regard audits as a tick-box exercise, this renders them inefficient and ineffective in ensuring the quality of education (Harvey & Williams, 2010). In my study, an interesting finding concerning this view was that while some institutions embraced the change to enhancement, the majority of participants in this study preferred the external audits and wanted to go back to QA. Ironically, all stakeholders, including the CHE, approached the QEP as a tick-box exercise. Several presented it as a temporary exercise they needed to get through. This suggests the perpetuation of the compliance-driven and accountability culture they believed to be ineffective in the first place. In other words, all parties were complying with this long-standing compliance tradition in higher education.

Participants at the comprehensive university (Institution C) explained that the QEP was reduced to a compliance driven exercise. For instance, they noted that because there was an element of not clearly understanding the QEP process, it was reduced to the status of compliance whereby an executive or manager would singlehandedly write the institutional reports for submission to the CHE, thus turning it into a tick-box exercise.

> *This diagram [QEP Framework] is [about selecting] a focus area, then institutions do submissions and then there's analysis, there's feedback, there's collaboration, there's analysis again and feedback and then you keep going round. You give the institution feedback but of course … I mean I can sit on my desk as in charge of this and actually give you the institution submissions because … very few people get involved in or even know what exactly is being done.* (Participant 12C)

While changes were evident in the embedding of the QEP in some institutional strategic plans, institutions that resisted change applied a tick-box approach to the implementation of the QEP. This begs the question, was the compliance driven culture a strength or limitation? At this juncture, I would like to argue that the envisioned vision for redressing a failing audit system was threatened by the perpetuation of a compliance-driven system. For instance, instead of a collective approach involving all parties together influencing change, only a fraction of policy implementers strived for change, while others were oblivious of the QEP or were simply disinterested, and the majority simply complied with CHE requirements, regarding them as the norm.

6.2.3.7 Students' non-involvement in the QEP processes

In the context of practice, it was also clear that the non-involvement of students in policy processes was an oversight; they needed to be engaged with as key stakeholders. Crawford, Horsley & Parkin (2018) emphasise the importance of student input into policy processes as

key stakeholders in higher education. Land and Gordon (2013) advocate for all-inclusive consultative processes with the student voice and students acknowledged as partners. The findings of this study revealed that students were not consulted nor called on to give active input to the policy process (discussed earlier). Where their inputs were solicited, their concerns were not taken seriously and their inputs were either not actioned or ignored. The exclusion of the student voice from policy processes and the QEP in particular was tantamount to silencing their voices and not obtaining meaningful input from key stakeholders, which consequently undermines efforts for a united front working towards a common goal. Moreover, it should be noted that inclusivity in terms of students' involvement was not sustained. It was later evident that students were only involved in the workshops organised by the CHE. This participation did not continue during implementation in the institution. This is consistent with Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory, which holds that the voices of those at the bottom are marginalised by state apparatus (policy makers). When stakeholders' voices (heads, senior managers, classroom teachers, students) are silenced and faculties in the policy process are excluded or marginalised, according to Bowe et al. (1992), policy processes reinforce ideologies of power and separation.

6.3   Summary

In summary, Bowe's theory on policy processes was helpful in analysing the factors that either enabled or hindered QEP implementation. It enabled me to understand how the three contexts (context of influence, policy text production and practice) influenced policy implementation in terms of the QEP. The findings of the study revealed both positive and negative outcomes in the three contexts, as there were successes and challenges in all three contexts. The context of influence had a potential to initiate change by facilitating the introduction of a new concept of quality enhancement in the South African higher education environment. The context of policy text production did not bring about change in terms of the approach towards consultations between policy makers and policy implementers, as well as the top-down approach to policy implementation of policy makers. The context of practice was problematic due to a myriad of challenges that constrained effective implementation of the QEP indicative of the persistent challenges of policy implementation in higher education.

Chapter 7
Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1   Introduction

This study has explored stakeholder experiences of the QEP in four public higher education institutions in South Africa. It looked at the implementation of the QEP at both macro-policy level (policy-making) and micro-policy level (policy implementation) in order to determine the gains made in improving student success and throughput. In the previous chapter, I discussed the QEP implementation based on the three contexts elucidated in the Bowe et al.'s (1992) *theory of policy processes and the processes of policy.* This chapter presents an overview of the findings of the study, conclusions drawn from the study and recommendations for further research. The chapter is divided into four sections: summary of findings, recommendations, implications for theory, policy and practice, and suggestions for further research. I conclude the chapter with reflections on my research journey and personal and professional development.

7.2   Summary of findings

The following research question was formulated for this study: How do stakeholders understand, experience and implement the QEP in four higher education institutions in South Africa? To answer the research questions, the study subsequently identified major findings discussed below.

The goal of the QEP was to enhance educational quality by addressing the challenge of poor student success and throughput rates in South African higher education. Participants across cases considered the QEP to be a valuable, important and necessity-driven process for achieving this goal. Both policy makers and institutions recognised the need to enhance the quality by focusing attention on teaching and learning in order to improve student success rates.

However, opposing worldviews between policy makers and policy implementers resulted in a lack of a common understanding of the QEP, as well as tensions and power struggles among the role players for control over the policy processes. This implies that stakeholders should have been made aware of their roles and what was expected of them to enable them to take ownership of the project and to ensure that intended goals were realised. There appear to be different understandings of the purpose and meaning of the QEP. Policy makers perceived the QEP as a driver for change across the sector. Policy implementers, on the other hand, perceived it as a short-term intervention in teaching and learning which led to a 'project

mentality'. The QEP was presented as a project and not a policy, creating a 'project mentality' that negatively influenced its implementation and sustainability. This study concludes that the QEP lacked a long-term strategy to avoid the project mentality that constrained its sustainability particularly in the light of the internal QA review project in the pipeline to be rolled out in 2020. The QEP formulation process should have been stakeholder-focused.

The findings also revealed that there were different stakeholder experiences of the QEP. The policy makers' perspective pointed to achievements of the QEP which according to them involved the way institutions embedded the QEP in their institutional strategic plans and processes, the benefits of peer review system, collaboration which encouraged sharing information and resources, and benchmarking against each other as institutions. Some participants experienced the QEP as a success while others experienced it as a failure. For instance, on the one hand, the policy makers' views were that the QEP had been successful in achieving its intended objectives, with some senior managers within the participating institutions concurring with the policy makers on this issue. On the other hand, faculties experienced the QEP as a failed project as it did not filter down to the faculty level.

Another finding relates to the challenges in the implementation of the QEP. Although the majority understood the failure of the traditional audits as the prime motive for the shift from QA to QE, the implementation resulted in the perpetuation of compliance-oriented practices. Moreover, it was found that the QEP process was not sufficiently well managed to:

- realise change envisioned in the traditional audit system;
- improve teaching and learning;
- capacitate lecturers and students and improve the learning environment;
- redress the past imbalances in the system; and
- uplift the sector as a whole as well as the student learning experience.

At the same time, the strategies used to implement the QEP varied from institution to institution, reflecting the distinct visions, missions, cultures, histories, institutional dynamics, and practices of the respective institutions. For example, an e-tutoring strategy was found to be instrumental in driving QE in the ODL environment of the comprehensive university (Institution C) while the merged university (Institution D) implemented inclusive practices to remedy complex historical and structural challenges to streamline processes in line with the realignment agenda of the institution following the merger.

Moreover, regardless of the claim that their process had been participatory, the policy makers' approach was perceived as top-down and hierarchical, which resulted in policy implementers adopting compliance-driven approaches. It is evident that this type of approach was preferred

and subsequently applied across the universities at the expense of continuous improvement. The policy makers' top-down approach to the QEP led to lack of buy-in of the QEP and created a culture of resistance to change. Accordingly, a balance should be maintained between top-down and bottom-up approaches, thus giving all stakeholders equal status in the policy process. Thus, the study reaffirmed that policy implementation is a problematic area. For instance, a multiplicity of barriers were observed, ranging from major barriers such as a lack of funding and resources, to the non-involvement of students in QEP processes. Other issues worth mentioning include institutional resistance to change, institutional competition, lack of buy-in and lack of a QE culture in institutions, lack of trust, lack of a common understanding and/or different interpretations of the QEP.

Other challenges were of a socio-economic-political nature. The impact of political and social contexts on policy was linked to social issues and poverty that resulted in the unstable political climate spilling over into higher education. Therefore, the implementation of the QEP was threatened by external factors such as the unstable higher education environment which had resulted from student protests. It was thus concluded that external factors could disrupt the implementation strategies of a policy, especially in an environment that lacks the capacity to tackle such challenges.

Another critical finding was policy borrowing mentality. The fact that the policy was borrowed from an entirely different system is typical of a 'policy borrowing mentality' and rendered the QEP irrelevant in the South African context. The study thus concludes that the discrepancies between developed and developing country contexts constrain the practicalities of adopting a foreign policy. The relocation of such policies to a different country should take into account the policy's relevancy in terms of institutional cultures, history, climate, student dynamics, and so forth.

The intention of the QEP was to develop best practice guidelines that subsequently would be made available to all the institutions. It is not however clear whether any guidelines were developed. Therefore, the study concludes that the development of such guidelines is imperative in order to provide the necessary guidance on institutionalising or instilling a culture of QE in South African higher education in future. In addition, the lack of monitoring and evaluation, ineffective systems and feedback loops, non-involvement of QA staff in the QE processes, inaccessibility to technology, challenges of the e-tutoring system and the associated lack of well-qualified e-tutors, distance between campuses and duplication of activities were also challenges that affected the institutional processes.

Considering the barriers to QEP implementation that outweighed or overshadowed the enablers, as well as the difficulties experienced in resolving these issues, accompanied by the

unsustainable implementation of the project, it may be argued that the QEP was relatively unsuccessful.

7.3   Recommendations in relation to the findings of the study

Findings of this study suggest four major themes: stakeholder understandings of quality, QA and the shift from QA to QE, institutional strategies to implement the QEP, QEP implementation challenges, and stakeholder perceptions of the impact of the QEP. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations and framework is proposed to address some of the issues found in those developing country environments aiming at instituting quality enhancement.

It is worth acknowledging some successes of the QEP. The findings of the study revealed that the QEP promoted a certain degree of collaboration, learning from each other among institutions and best practice sharing. Evidence from policy makers and some participants from the institutions revealed concerted efforts made to instil a culture of collaboration. However, for collaboration to be sustainable, it is recommended that a paradigm shift should be made to eliminate competition between institutions. Therefore, forging partnerships and global networks is essential. The literature review and the research findings point to the need to establish networks and partnerships at institutional levels based on trust among stakeholders.

Although the findings of the study revealed that participants across cases considered the QEP to be valuable and important for change, it was experienced as a top-down, and not all-inclusive approach affecting buy-in of the policy. Effective policy uptake and implementation requires wide consultation, transparent processes and inclusive practices involving all key stakeholders and that recognise and acknowledged academics, support staff and students as collaborators through continued engagement to eliminate exclusive practices leading to feelings of marginalisation, alienation and no commitment to the project. This situation could lead to confusion, negative attitudes, employee demotivation, lack of confidence and mind-sets that threaten the sustainability of the project. At the same time, the lack of institutional buy-in or leadership buy-in was another factor that was found to be a significant factor in explaining why policies are not adopted by institutions. A policy's success depends on buy-in and support on the part of management and other stakeholders. Therefore, an all-inclusive stakeholder buy-in strategy is recommended to promote the uptake of new policies.

The QEP was also understood and interpreted differently based on stakeholders' uniqueness of contexts and different practices. A current debate and major concern in higher education is how to measure and manage quality in a climate of diverse higher education systems,

practices and cultures. This said, the internationalisation of higher education, competition and the increased call for universality in QA processes as well as the adoption of standardised approaches might seem a far cry from reality given these vast differences. Therefore, initiatives aimed at the internationalisation or regionalisation of QA and QE processes might need to take into account the diverse nature of higher education evident in the lessons from the QEP implementation.

As already noted, the findings of this study revealed that a multiplicity of challenges constrained the implementation of the QEP as intended. In fact, this is consistent with the literature review which points to numerous challenges in the implementation of QE and QA in developed and underdeveloped countries (discussed in Chapter 6). To support this, Saunders and Sin (2015) point to numerous challenges that constrained the implementation of the QEF in Scotland and Ansah (2015) points to challenges in the Ghanaian experience of implementing QA. In the light of addressing the critical challenges that emerged from the findings, this study makes the following recommendations:

The study reaffirms Fullan and Miles' (1992) statement that *"change is resource-hungry"* (p.750) because it is associated with solving problems related to complex issues and to acquiring new skills and new insights. Fullan and Miles (1992) argued that change processes demand additional resources and committed budgets of institutions *"for training, for substitutes in projects, for new materials, for new space, and, above all, for time"* (p.750) to effect substantive and effective change. This can be linked to the QEP in that, as a change catalyst, it necessitated sufficient resources and funding to ensure that adequate training, learning about QE as a new concept, relevant content and support material were sourced, and space and time were budgeted for. Additionally, long-term planning for sustainability, sufficient funding and well-conceptualised proposals with feasible outcomes are necessary. However, in order for this to be achieved, the prevailing silo work culture needs to be broken down.

Furthermore, considering the relatedness of scarce resources and funding to socio-economic conditions of students, an integrated and collaborative strategy involving higher education, civil society and government institutions, business, labour and communities, should be continuously explored to curb student protests. This would contribute meaningfully by accessing resources to support students, especially first-generation students in order to bring stability to the South African higher education system. Institutions should position themselves strategically using research, resources, tools and information available to foster a culture of student engagement on issues that affect them.

In the light of poverty and past discrimination, student support systems should not be limited to academic support but should be extended to address social issues through programmes

such as food schemes, student accommodation, and health and wellness. Therefore, it is important to address the issue of competing priorities and balance academics and student life. In as much as the study supports focusing on teaching and learning in order to improve student success, prioritising teaching and learning over the learning environment and student life does not warrant student success in itself.

The study found that policy borrowing was impractical in South African due to different contexts between Scottish and South African higher education environments. Therefore, policy formulation and enactment should consider the incorporation of home-grown ideas in the development of new policies – in other words, relevant foreign ideas could be integrated into localised environments – based on evidence-based research and feasibility analyses. For example, the concept of 'growing your own timber' should be explored further in the context of student success. Moreover, the localisation of project concepts should consider geo-spaces, climate, realities of contexts, culture, language, systemic issues, student and institutional dynamics to reflect the realities of local contexts, social dynamics and individual agency (where applicable). The fact that South African students are affected by poverty, a situation that does not exist in developed countries, is a case in point.

The study also revealed that there was a lack of monitoring and evaluation tools; therefore, there is a need to develop monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the impact of a change policy and the impact of QEP implementation as a new policy. The lack of monitoring and evaluation tools points to the lack of student success indicators, ultimately leading to an inability to determine whether progress has been made in achieving the set objectives.

Other recommendations in relation to teaching and learning include curriculum transformation, lecturer competency and qualifications, and strategies to address the challenge of first-year student drop-out as a means to improve student success and throughput in higher education. The content of the curriculum should be relevant to meet student and industry needs for student employability. It should also promote innovation and creativity aimed at addressing local problems on the ground. It is also recommended that programmes or platforms should be created to sensitise academics and to encourage them to shift mind-sets and develop the skills required to teach the 21st century student for them to meet industry requirements. In addition, lecturers should be well qualified and possess subject knowledge and expertise, and be trained to teach (pedagogy) students and not merely possess qualifications. In addition, strategies aimed at addressing the challenge of students dropping out in their first-year and under-prepared learners entering tertiary institutions from high school should be strengthened.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that too many external policies overburden institutions, increase workloads and are accompanied by new responsibilities, while too much time spent on external audits affects the institutions' core business.

7.4   Implications for theory, practice and policy

Having presented and discussed the findings of the study, this section discusses the empirical findings to derive theoretical and practical implications for policy. In light of the findings of this study, it was evident that policy implementation and sustainability can be realised through focused attention on the theoretical and practical aspects of policy processes (Bowe et al., 1992), since theory has implications for the practice of policy by those directly involved in the implementation of that policy. The findings of this study confirms the basis on which Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory on policy process is grounded. Having said that, the following are theoretical considerations that should be considered to ensure the sustainability of new policies in higher education.

Policy processes should take into consideration concept design and project feasibility studies. For instance, during the policy conceptualisation phase, policies should be designed in a clear and understandable fashion to avoid confusion and make them easy for stakeholders to implement. At the same time, policy definitions should be revisited as they are subject to various interpretations, resulting in loss of meaning, inconsistency of theory and practice, and power struggles. A well-defined theory of change should be formulated in order for change to be effective. Such a theory should be explicit and should be shared with stakeholders. This should take into account preliminary research, feasibility studies and/or environmental scanning exercises as essential ingredients before undertaking a government initiative. Moreover, while learning from the developed countries can be a good idea, the policy has to be relevant in the borrowing country's context in order for it to be sustainable. Most importantly, funding is a crucial factor that should be explored prior to conceiving a policy. Resource management and availability are also crucial for effective implementation.

7.5   Implications for further research

Other issues of critical importance that I could not cover in this study owing to limited time or because they fell outside of the scope of this study are recommended here for further research. These include; faculty and departmental roles, silo mentality, student protests, research on QE concepts in Africa, and HDIs in South Africa.

Faculty and departmental roles
There is the need for further research to be conducted on the implementation of the QEP at faculty and departmental level considering that these areas were outside of the scope of this

study due to limitations of time and resources. This would allow for a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the QEP, especially since teaching and learning happens within faculties and departments.

Silo mentality

The silo mentality and the gap in the literature pointing to the lack of attention paid to extracurricular areas such as soft skills development, accommodation, food, language issues, social issues and poverty in relation to students. The QEP focused attention on teaching and learning and consequently failed to strike a balance between academic and student life (extracurricular activities). It was observed that academics and support units work in silos. Therefore, research could be conducted on integrated systems to avoid the duplication of certain activities and ensure coherence in university systems as well as to contribute to the development of rounded and grounded students (holistic development of students).

Student protests

More research is necessary on student protests in view of the negative impact they have had on the QEP implementation strategies. Therefore, future research should focus on ways to engage students in order to obtain their input giving them a voice and enabling feedback to be obtained on QA matters in South African higher education.

Research on QE concepts in Africa

Research should be carried out for a better understanding of the concept of QE in Africa. This is important in view of the fact that the continent is looking to shifting policy in the direction of QE. The findings of the study revealed that the concept of QE was not understood in South Africa evident in the contexts of the participants in the study. Moreover, the literature review points to a gap in studies on QE in African higher education.

Research on QE in HDIs in South Africa

There is a need for research on QE to be conducted in HDIs to gain insight into how the QEP was implemented there and to determine the gains made sector-wide. At the same time, this would ensure an even spread of research across the entire higher education system, aimed at placing HDIs on a par with their sister institutions. Such research would enable a comprehensive picture of research on QE in the South African higher education system to be formed.

7.6   Conclusion

In conclusion, although trends point to the increasing emergence of QE as a movement globally evident in higher education institutions endeavours in embracing QE culture into their spaces, the literature and findings of this study reveal the persistent complexities associated with policy implementation hindering the impact of QE. This is corroborated by Bowe et al.'s (1992) theory that policy implementation is a contested area imbued with power struggles over policy process amongst policy actors. This is reflected in the findings which revealed a complex weave of some successes but mostly challenges in the implementation of the QEP in South African higher education. The emergent themes as revealed by the findings and consistent across the cases included: stakeholder understandings of quality, QA and the shift from QA to QE; institutional strategies to implement the QEP; implementation challenges; and stakeholder perceptions of the impact of the QEP. The findings highlight both positive and negative outcomes in the three contexts of influence, policy text production, and practice. The study concludes that although the context of influence had a potential to influence change, the context of policy text production and the context of practice did not bring about the envisioned change. Lastly, it is evident from the findings of this study that the research questions have been addressed as evident in the participants' narratives across cases, the emergent themes and findings consistent with the existing literature on QE globally and strides to tackle student success and throughput nationally.

7.7   A reflection on my research journey

Research is one of my passions. I find so much joy and delight in conducting empirical research as well as other research-related projects. Long before embarking on this journey, I dreamt of achieving a doctoral degree. This experience has been invaluable to me. I am proud to have progressed so far with my studies. I express my gratitude to the Lord for granting me the health and the strength to push myself to the limits against all odds.

When I commenced with my studies I remember having a conversation with my supervisor on how I was going to balance work and study, as I was working full time. As we contemplated the pros and cons, my supervisor advised me to go and sleep on the matter. I had learnt about the difficulties experienced by people, especially women, when completing PhDs, partly due to the adverse effects on their family responsibilities. I subsequently resolved to muster the courage to undertake the PhD study and informed my supervisor accordingly. At first, the going was tough as I had to juggle work, personal life and study, which were equally competing priorities. I thank my supervisor for having been so supportive and for encouraging me to soldier on.

After thinking about a topic and deciding to research the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), which had recently been introduced into the South African higher education system, I thought that it was something that was doable over a period of three years. I subsequently decided on a qualitative approach and that my sampling would involve four institutions, the Department of Higher Education and Training, and the Council on Higher Education. However, when I started conducting the fieldwork (collecting data) I became overwhelmed with the task, because the project was far too large to fit the prescribed time frame and for a researcher to singlehandedly cover all aspects of the research including transcribing and coding the data. However, my love for research motivated me to persevere. At times, while attempting to uncover knowledge, I felt lost in the project. I can thus relate to the words of Wernher von Braun, the German Scientist: "Research is what I am doing when I don't know what I am doing". Nevertheless, this was okay because every day I learnt something new.

This experience has taught me many new things and exposed me to a great deal of scholarly work, particularly in the field of quality assurance. I learnt about academic work, the art of academic writing, as well as locating my study in the field and exploratory research. My interest in quality enhancement grew; I was eager to learn about this area since it was a new concept in South African higher education. I learnt about the competition between HEIs through first-hand experience when attempting to obtain permission to conduct research at some of the institutions in the study. Through this experience, I learnt how difficult it could be to get ethical clearance, which can be very frustrating. I waited for eight months to obtain permission to conduct research in one institution and even then, I was not granted access to interview certain key personnel for the study. However, this was a learning experience on its own, as I learnt how institutions protect their information, which in my view could be justified. It was also noted that gatekeeping forms an epistemological gap as gatekeepers hinder participants from assenting to participate in research projects, thereby frustrating prospective PhDs. This is all against the backdrop of the limited number of research outputs produced in this country.

My research skills improved as I 'walked the talk', moving forward each day. I learnt that consistency is the ultimate key to realising one's dreams. After completing the fieldwork, I applied for a sabbatical of four months to focus on my research. Once the leave was granted, I was able to work consistently on the chapters every day for the entire period. Every day that dawned, I would wake up, sit at the desk, and write up a chapter. I conclude by quoting Albert Szent-Gyorgyi: "Research is to see what everybody has seen and think what nobody else has thought". In a nutshell, this has been my research journey.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS
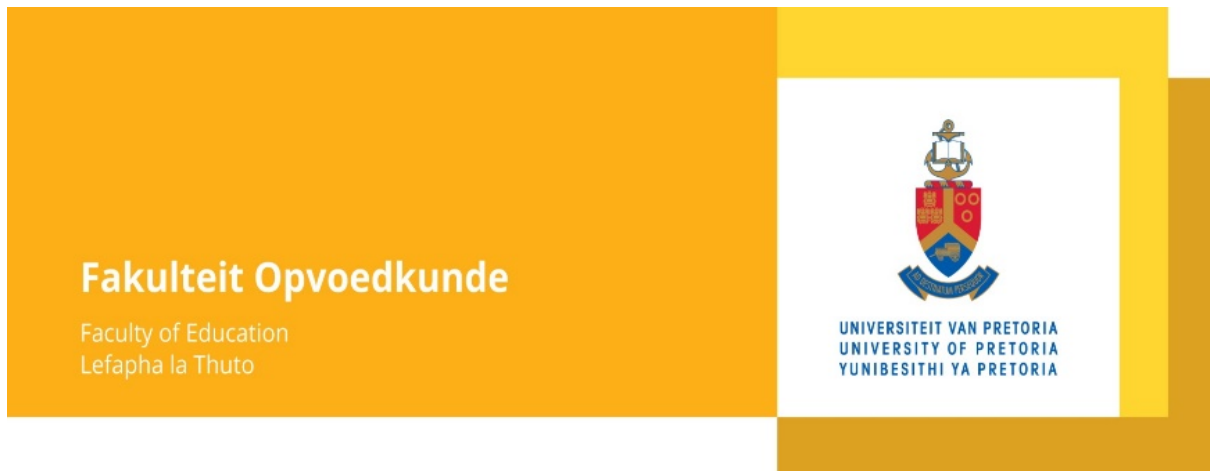
LETTER TO QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGERS

Dear Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms…………………………….

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

I am a PhD student at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is "A multiple-case study of stakeholder experiences of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) in selected South African universities".

The research examines the QEP implementation from a stakeholder (faculty, academics, students, QA managers) perspective, focusing on stakeholders' experience of the QEP in four South African universities (one traditional, one comprehensive, one university of technology, and one traditional merger). Having said that, using purposive sampling I will be selecting relevant people at these universities with whom to conduct in-depth interviews. Accordingly, I have identified QA managers, QEP coordinators and students as relevant people to interview for my study. As you are a QA manager at a traditional institution I consider your area of expertise to be relevant for this study.

I therefore seek your consent to participate in this study. The interview will take place at your office or at a mutually agreed venue and should last 45 minutes to an hour. Confidentiality

rules will be strictly adhered to in that your name and identity will not be revealed. Codes will be used in the report and presentations or publications of the work to further protect your identity. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and the tape and transcripts will subsequently be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office.

In terms of your role, you will be asked questions on your area of expertise, your knowledge and experience of the QEP as a new policy, your experience of the shift from QA to QE, and the strategies used to address any challenges or advances made thus far. The interview is a voluntary process and should you wish to withdraw your participation you will be at liberty to do so. Your participation and input will be invaluable in contributing to the aims and objectives of the study and adding value to policy implementation processes and the body of knowledge aimed at strengthening quality enhancement, as well as improving student retention and throughput strategies in South African higher education and around the globe.

You are welcome to ask any questions regarding the research. These may be directed to the researcher using the following contact details or to the supervisor, Prof. Chaya Herman, at Chaya.herman@up.ac.za or 012 420 5665.

Researcher: Mercy Sondlo   Supervisor: Prof. Chaya Herman

Signature: …………………………………   Signature: …………………………………

Date: ……………………………………….   Date: ……………………………………….

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

23 August 2016

LETTER TO QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT COORDINATORS

Dear Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

I am a PhD student at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is "A multiple-case study of stakeholder experiences of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) in selected South African universities.

The research examines the QEP implementation from a stakeholder (faculty, academics, students, QA managers) perspective focusing stakeholder' experience of the QEP in four South African universities (one traditional, one comprehensive, one university of technology, and one traditional merger). Having said that, using purposive sampling I will be selecting relevant people at these universities with whom to conduct in-depth interviews. Accordingly, I have identified QA managers, QEP coordinators and students as the relevant people for participation. As you are the QE coordinator at a university of technology, I consider your area of expertise to be relevant for this study.

I therefore seek your consent to participate in this study. The interview will take place at your office or at a mutually agreed upon place and should last 45 minutes to one hour. Confidentiality rules will be strictly adhered to in that your name and identity will not be revealed. Codes will be used in the report and presentations or publications of the work to further protect your identity. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and the tape and transcripts will subsequently be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office.

In terms of your role, you will be asked questions in your area of expertise; knowledge and experience of the QEP as a new policy, your experience of the shift from QA to QE, and the strategies used in addressing any challenges or advances made thus far. The interview is a voluntary process and should you wish to withdraw your participation, you will be at liberty to do so. Your participation and input will be invaluable in contributing to the aims and objectives of the study and adding value to policy implementation processes, the body of knowledge

aimed at strengthening quality enhancement, and improving student retention and throughput strategies in South African higher education and around the globe.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the research and these may be directed at the Researcher, Mercy Sondlo, University of Pretoria, 0605287674/0123825106 or to the supervisor, Prof. Chaya Herman, University of Pretoria, Chaya.herman@up.ac.za; 0124205665.

Researcher: Mercy Sondlo   Supervisor: Prof. Chaya Herman

Signature: ……………………………..   Signature: ……………………………

Date: …………………………………   Date: ……………………………

APPENDIX B: LETTERS OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Department of Educational Management,
Law & Policy Studies**

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT
FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH**

Title of the study:
'A multiple-case study of stakeholder experiences of the Quality Enhancement
Project (QEP) in selected South African universities'
Researcher:
Mercy Sondlo, University of Pretoria
Cellphone: 060 528 7674, Email: msondlo@gmail.com

_____

Owing to your experience and knowledge in the research area, you are cordially invited to participate in an academic research study, titled Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Prior to the start of the study, every participant will be given a document to read and sign.

- **Purpose of the study**: The purpose of the study is to understand stakeholders' (faculty, academics, students, QA managers) experiences of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) as a new policy, as well as its intentions and the impact the shift in policy has had on their implementation strategies. The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of our findings on request. No participants' names will be used in the final publication.
- **Duration of the study**: The study will be conducted over a period of three years and its projected date of completion is December 2017.
- **Research procedures**: The study is based on in-depth interviews, institutional reports on quality assessment (QA) and quality enhancement (QE), as well as any documents pertaining to QE such as policies, strategies, implementation plans, presentations, minutes of meetings (if necessary), statistical data, and the like. The in-depth interview will involve participants answering structured and open-ended research questions.

- **What is expected of you**: You will be asked questions pertaining to your area of expertise, your knowledge and experience of the QEP as a new policy, and the strategies you have employed in order to help me understand the shift from QA to QE and the advances made thus far in meeting the QEP objectives. During the interviews, field notes will be taken and a digital tape recorder will be used to ensure that all information is captured. The interview will take place at your office or at a mutually agreed place. The interview will last 45 minutes to an hour. The information you provide will be used solely for the purposes of this research.
- **Your rights**: Your participation in this study is very important. You may, however, choose not to participate or you may stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative consequences. You, as participant, may contact me at any time in order to clarify any issues pertaining to this research. You will be provided with a copy of the signed letter of consent which you should keep.
- **Confidentiality**: All information will be treated as confidential. Your identity will be kept anonymous both prior to and after the interviews and your real name will not be used. Names will be translated to codes such as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, etc., and all data collected will be labelled with the codes rather than your names. To maintain anonymity pseudonyms will be used for the participating institutions to avoid participants in the study being linked to them. The four institutions will be referred to as 'comprehensive university', 'traditional university', 'university of technology' and 'merged university' respectively. Codes will also be used when discussing the institutions in the report. My supervisor and I are the only people who will have access to the transcripts. The digital tape recorder and field notes will be kept in the researcher's office and the transcripts will be kept on the researcher's computer which is password protected. On no account will information be disclosed before the report is finalised for dissemination and release. The information will be kept in the researcher's office in a locked cabinet for five years whereupon it will be destroyed. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all relevant data will be destroyed.

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research.
I understand that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I also confirm that I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent: _____

Signature: _____

Researcher: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Contact number of the researcher: _____

VERBAL INFORMED CONSENT *(Only applicable if respondent cannot write)*

I, the researcher, have read and have explained fully to the respondent, named

_____ and his/her relatives, the letter of introduction. The respondent has indicated that he/she understands that he/she will be free to withdraw at any time.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL A - POLICY MAKERS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHE/DHET QA MANAGER

Title of research	A multiple-case study of stakeholders' experience of the Quality Enhancement Project in South African universities
Name of researcher	Mercy Sondlo
Institution	University of Pretoria
Department	Education Management, Law & Policy Studies
Supervisor	Professor Chaya Herman
Contact details	Telephone: 060 528 7674 E-mail: sondlmn@tut.ac.za or msondlo@gmail.com
Date of interview	
Particulars of interviewee	

1.   Introduction (interviewer and participant) and guidelines

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today for this interview. My name is Mercy Sondlo and I will be interviewing you on your experiences of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) as a new policy at the policy formulation level in the South African higher education landscape. The purpose is to find out how stakeholders (faculty, academics, students, and QA managers) are experiencing the QEP as a new policy and the impact the shift in policy has had on their implementation strategies. Therefore, policy makers will also be interviewed on the rationale behind the shift. Ultimately, the objective is to understand stakeholders' perspectives on the 'real' shift in policy and its influence on student retention and throughput at the institutional and programme level, as well as, in your case, at the national policy formulation level. In addition, the purpose is also to understand what gains have been made so far since the inception of the QEP.

I would like to reiterate that the interview is voluntary and that your identity will be protected for confidentiality purposes. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed until the finalisation of the research and its dissemination to the higher education community. You will be given an opportunity to comment on the final draft of the report to verify that I have captured and reported the data collected correctly, as well as to suggest any changes that you deem necessary before finalising the thesis. You may withdraw from the research at any stage, even at the point where the draft report has been submitted to you for comment.

With your permission, I will take field notes and I will record our discussion to ensure that I do not miss any information.

The interview will take the form of an open discussion and I will be following a line of inquiry that will enable us to cover the salient areas. However, you are free to talk about other aspects which I might have omitted.

2.   Purpose of the research (as explained to the participant)

The purpose of this study is to look at the experiences of universities and the QEP implementation strategies used to improve student retention and throughput in line with meeting the targets set in the QEP. The assumption is that quality enhancement as opposed to quality assurance can play a major role in increasing student success and improving student throughput. Nevertheless, the quality of output from the system remains below acceptable standards. Considering the lack of evidence on the impact of the QA on teaching and learning, the silence in the literature regarding the role of academic units in relation to QA (Houston & Paewai 2013: 267), as well as the paucity of evidence-based research conducted on QE, one may argue that assumptions should be based on evidence-based research and previous studies that have been conducted. For this reason, I would like to focus my research on the QEP implementation strategies to improve student throughput and success rates.

1. How would you define quality in higher education?
2. How would you define quality assurance in higher education?
3. Describe the shift from quality assurance to quality enhancement and how it is being managed.
4. When did the shift happen?
5. Why did the shift happen? In other words, what is the motive (rationale) for the shift?
6. What were your expectations of this change?
7. What challenges were experienced in the transition from QA to QE?
8. Please would you briefly explain the Quality Enhancement Project.
9. What does it aim to achieve?
10. What is your role in the project?
11. What policies or processes are in place to support the implementation of the QEP?
12. What has changed since the implementation of the QEP?
13. What challenges are experienced in the implementation of the QEP?
14. Are there any achievements? If so, please explain.
15. What is the role of other stakeholders?
16. Are students involved in this process? If so, what is their role?
17. What philosophy or approach informed the formulation of the QEP?

18. What principles informed the identification of the four focus areas of the QEP during its conceptualisation phase, namely, enhancing academics as teachers, enhancing student support and development, enhancing the learning environment, and enhancing course and programme enrolment management?

19. How do you prioritise the focus areas?

20. In what way is the QEP capacitating academics at universities?

21. If you look at the objectives of the QEP in terms of increasing student throughput and success rates, what are some of the unique challenges being faced?

22. What strategies are in place to address these challenges?

23. How has the QEP influenced students' learning development? Please explain.

24. How do you monitor student progress at universities?

25. What have been the unintended consequences of the QEP?

26. We have now covered the broad range of issues that may influence student throughput and success rates. Are there any other aspects that you think are important to consider?

Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL B - POLICY IMPLEMENTERS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTERS

Title of Research	A multiple-case study of stakeholders' experience of the Quality Enhancement Project in South African universities
Name of Researcher	Mercy Sondlo
Institution	University of Pretoria
Department	Education Management, Law & Policy Studies
Supervisor	Professor Chaya Herman
Contact details	Telephone: 060 528 7674 E-mail: sondlmn@tut.ac.za or msondlo@gmail.com
Date of Interview	
Particulars of interviewee	

1. Introduction (interviewer and participant) and guidelines

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today for this interview. My name is Mercy Sondlo and I will be interviewing you on your experiences of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) as a new policy in the South African higher education landscape. The purpose is to find out how stakeholders (faculty, academics, students, and QA managers) are experiencing the QEP as a new policy and the impact the shift in policy has had on their implementation strategies. Ultimately, the objective is to understand your perspectives on the "real" shift in policy and its influence on student retention and throughput at the institutional and programme level, as well as what gains have been made so far since the inception of the QEP.

I would like to reiterate that the interview is voluntary and that your identity will be protected for confidentiality purposes. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed until the finalisation of the research and its dissemination to the higher education community. You will be given an opportunity to comment on the final draft of the report to verify that I have captured and reported the data collected correctly and to suggest any changes that you deem necessary before finalising the thesis. You may withdraw from the research at any stage, even at the point where the draft report has been submitted to you for comment.

With your permission, I will take field notes and record our discussion to ensure that I do not miss any information.

The interview will take the form of an open discussion and I will be following a line of inquiry that will enable us to cover the salient areas. However, you are free to talk about other aspects which I might have omitted.

2. Purpose of the research (as explained to the participant)

The purpose of the study is to look at the experiences and implementation strategies of the QEP used by universities to improve student retention and throughput in line with meeting the targets set in the QEP. The assumption is that quality enhancement as opposed to quality assurance can play a major role in increasing student success and improving student throughput. Nevertheless, the quality of output from the system remains below acceptable standards. Considering the lack of evidence on the impact of the QA on teaching and learning, the silence in the literature regarding the role of academic units in relation to QA (Houston & Paewai, 2013:267), as well as the paucity of evidence-based research conducted on QE, one may argue that assumptions should be based on evidence-based research and previous studies that have been conducted. For this reason, I would like to focus my research on the QEP implementation strategies in order improve student throughput and success rates.

Questions

1. Describe the shift from quality assurance to quality enhancement.
2. When did the shift happen?
3. How do you understand the shift and the motive (rationale) for the shift?
4. What were your expectations of this change?
5. What has changed since the implementation of the QEP?
6. Can you describe the transition from QA to QE and the way it is being managed?
7. What is your role in the project?

8. Can you give me a broad overview of the project, that is, its introduction and adaptations and improvement strategies?

9. Looking at the focus area of the QEP, that is, enhancing student support and development, what are the achievements and specific challenges? How are these challenges being addressed?

10. In what way is the QEP capacitating you as an academic?

11. If you look at the objectives of the QEP in terms of increasing student throughput and success rates, what are some of the unique challenges that you face?

12. What strategies have you developed to address these challenges?

13. In your experience, how successful have these strategies been?

14. Does this policy have an influence on the development of student learning? Please explain.

15. What are the specific strategies that you would use to improve the throughput rate?

16. How do you monitor student progress?

17. How do you deal with 'at risk' students? That is, how do you identify and support them?

18. Based on your experience how would you describe student participation in the QEP implementation processes?

19. We have now covered the broad range of programme-specific issues that may influence student throughput and success rates. Are there any other aspects that you think are important to consider?

Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL C - STUDENT LEADERS

FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STUDENT LEADERS

Title of research	A multiple-case study of stakeholders' experience of the Quality Enhancement Project in South African universities
Name of researcher	Mercy Sondlo
Institution	University of Pretoria
Department	Education Management, Law & Policy Studies
Supervisor	Professor Chaya Herman
Contact details	Telephone: 060 528 7674 E-mail: sondlmn@tut.ac.za or msondlo@gmail.com
Date of interview	
Particulars of interviewee	

Introduction (interviewer and participant) and guidelines

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today for this interview. My name is Mercy Sondlo and I will be interviewing you on your experiences of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) as a new policy in the South African higher education landscape. The purpose of this interview is to find out your perspectives on policy implementation in the institution and the impact these have on you as a student.

The interview is voluntary and your identity will be protected for confidentiality purposes. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed until the finalisation and dissemination of the research to the higher education community. You may withdraw from the research at any stage, even at the point where the draft report has been submitted to you for comment. With your permission, I will take field notes and I will record our discussion to ensure that I do not miss any information.

The interview questions

1. What is your understanding of the QEP and how would you describe it?

2. Are you aware of the policy shift from QA to QE? Please elaborate

3. How are these policy changes affecting you?

4. How are student leaders involved in the policy review processes? What is your role in this process?

5. How is the QEP responding to your learning and support needs?

6. What significant changes have you observed since the implementation of the QEP in your institution?

7. In your opinion, what part do students play in the decision-making processes?

8. Based on your experience, how would you describe student participation in the QEP implementation processes?

9. What are your observations or concerns regarding the implementation of the QEP?

10. The QEP aims at addressing teaching and learning challenges with a view to improving student success and throughput. In your view, has there been any improvement and what are the challenges you have observed?

11. How are these challenges being addressed?

12. In your opinion, are lecturers sufficiently trained as professional teachers? Please elaborate.

13. Are lecturers teaching methods addressing students' learning and support needs to enhance student success?

14. What teaching and learning barriers have you identified and how can these be addressed to meet your learning needs?

15. What support services would you recommend as relevant and valuable for you?

We have come to the end of the focus group interview session and I wish to thank you for participating in the interview.

APPENDIX F: THANK YOU LETTERS

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

23 March 2018

Dear Mr/Ms/Dr/Prof

PARTICIPATION IN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS FOR PhD STUDY

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for participating in my study on the QEP, for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in the interviews and for sharing your insights, knowledge and experience in the area of quality assurance and quality enhancement with me. I gained invaluable knowledge and information that will contribute to practice on quality assurance and quality enhancement in the South African higher education system. International trends show a shift towards quality enhancement in teaching and learning, as well as student-centred approaches aimed at improving the student learning experience and success rates. Thus, this study is intended to shed light on how the QEP implementation set out to achieve these objectives in the South African higher education system. I hope that this research will add value and contribute to theory development in these areas.

I found our interaction a very insightful experience and I learnt a great deal about this topic. As I indicated prior to and during the interview, I will provide you with the interview transcript (attached to email) and the final draft of the report for your comments, as well as to verify that I have captured and reported the data collected correctly. At the same time, you may suggest any changes you deem necessary before the thesis is finalised.

Yours sincerely

Mercy Sondlo (Ms)
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APPENDIX G: An example of first cycle coding using in vivo, process and "open" coding

Item	Place	Note	Code	Category	Theme
Inter view	CHE	"Quality is in the eye of the beholder"	Fitness of purpose	Quality (Different definitions)	Theme 1: Variations in Stakeholder practices and approaches to policy implementation
		"So value for money is also an aspect of quality"	Value for money		
		"Transforming the learner"	Transformation		
		"Are their graduates actually able to be employed?"	Graduate employability		
		"Do their graduates go out and actually take up leadership positions in society?"	Graduate attributes		
		"Umbrella term for things that you do"	QA processes and systems	Quality assurance (Different definitions)	
		"It must have a system in place"	QA systems		
		Accountability	Accountability		
		"protection the public from unscrupulous providers"	Safeguarding quality		
		"they must have criteria for admissions"	QA requirements		
		Shift was in audits	processes to Improvement	Shift in approach	
		"the intention was to give peer feedback"	Peer reviews		
		Shift from sequential approach	Shift in approach		
		"the process that it actually just taken so long"	Time factor		
		"Try to do new things"	Innovation		
		"trying to stimulate institutions to develop their internal systems"	Motivation		
		"so we didn't want it to become a compliance process"	Self-reflective practice	QEP implementation strategies	
		"We want to go a bit deeper this time"	Deep insights		

Item	Place	Note	Code	Category	Theme
		"Learn from each other"	Exchanging ideas	Dev and capacity building	
		Transparency	Lack of transparency and trust		
		"So almost to create a community of practice"	Community of Practice		
		"to improve from where you were to where you were not"	Improvement		
		Some DVCs learnt a lot	Empowerment		
		Opportunity to interact and share ideas	Opportunities		
		"Doing some capacity building"	Enhancement		
		"I don't know if everybody bought into that"	No buy-in	Resistance	Theme 2: QEP implementation challenges and strategies to overcome barriers
		"Eh, and you will lose something if you do something different"	Fear of change		
		"because you will somehow lose some authority"	Fear of loss of authority		
		Fear that QEP is too weak	Lack of accountability		
		How to get enough information that is credible	lack of credible data	Barriers to implementation	
		can you actually take this on trust with the institutions	Trust issues		
		Different approaches and uptake	Different approaches		
		Policy uptake approach differences	Policy uptake issues		
		lack of underpinning theory/appropriate theory	No underpinning theory		
		Misconception of QEP in institution	Trust issues		
		lack of expertise with subject knowledge	Lack of expertise		

Item	Place	Note	Code	Category	Theme
		Lack of quality reports	Poor reports		
		International trends and models	International benchmarking	Globalisation	Theme 3: Forging partnerships and global networks
		We use the New Zealand model very much	QEP modelling		
		we have a set of criteria but it is a developmental approach	Developmental approach		
		I cannot say with any authority because the evaluation is still to happen	Uncertainty	Impact of the QEP	Theme 4: Stakeholder perceptions of the influence of the QEP on teaching and learning
		I don't know if we have enough data as I said to you to actually say that	No monitoring system		
		We are trying to bring about transformation	Transformatory agenda, social justice	Transformation	
		we are trying to reduce all the imbalances that we had	Redress and equity		