

The role of the education quality assurance system in shaping relationships among university education quality, academic citizenship behaviour and academic performance

Summary

The thesis of Miss Mengyu Cao entitled “The role of the education quality assurance system in shaping relationships among university education quality, academic citizenship behaviour and academic performance” was prepared under the supervision of Prof. Rafal Haffer and co-supervision of Prof. Oivind Strand. The purpose of the thesis was to investigate how does the design of the educational quality assurance system and its implemented activities affect the variables university education quality (UEQ), student loyalty (SL), academic citizenship behaviour (ACB), and academic performance (AP), as well as the relationships among them in different cultural context.

This study employed a mixed-methods-case study approach, combining qualitative case study techniques with quantitative survey methodology. The research was conducted at two European universities: Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU) in Poland and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Norway. These institutions were selected due to their contrasting cultural profiles based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory. Besides, both universities have established mature QAS frameworks committed to enhancing educational quality and operate within the European Bologna Process system, providing a strong foundation for cross-cultural comparison while maintaining structural comparability.

The following case study research questions were posed. Six case study research questions are:

1. What measurements are implemented in the educational quality assurance system of this university?

2. What procedures for improving educational quality, student satisfaction, and the educational quality assurance system are used at this university?
3. To what extent does the educational quality assurance system contribute to improving educational quality and student satisfaction in this university?
4. How does this university handle educational quality assurance system?
5. How the student perceived the quality assurance system?
6. What are the similarities and differences between the QAS of the two universities?

Eleven hypotheses are:

H1: There is a positive relationship between University Education Quality and Academic Citizenship Behaviour.

H2: There is a positive relationship between University Education Quality and Student Loyalty.

H3: There is a positive relationship between Student Loyalty and Academic Citizenship Behaviour.

H4: Student Loyalty mediates the relationship between University Education Quality and Academic Citizenship Behaviour.

H5: There is a positive relationship between University Education Quality and Academic Performance.

H6: There is a positive relationship between Academic Citizenship Behaviour and Academic Performance.

H7: Academic Citizenship Behaviour mediates the relationship between University Education Quality and Academic performance.

H8: Power distance moderates the relationship between UEQ and SL.

H9: Masculinity vs. Femininity moderates the relationship between ACB and AP.

H10: Masculinity vs. Femininity moderates the relationship between UEQ and AP.

H11: Collectivism moderates the relationship between student loyalty (SL) and academic citizenship behaviour (ACB).

The quantitative component involved collecting survey data from 242 business students (165 from Poland and 77 from Norway) using validated scales for measuring

UEQ, SL, ACB, AP, and cultural dimensions. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with WarpPLS 8.0 software. The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews with 15 stakeholders (6 in NCU and 9 in NTNU) across both universities, including quality assurance chairs, faculty members, and students. Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis and cross-case synthesis to identify similarities and differences between the two quality assurance systems.

Chapter 1 established the theoretical foundation by exploring the multifaceted definition of quality in higher education, tracing the evolution from basic inspection methods to comprehensive quality management systems. It examined university education quality assessment frameworks, quality management system components, and the role of external accreditation in higher education quality assurance. Chapter 2 developed the theoretical framework and research hypotheses by systematically analyzing relationships between UEQ, SL, ACB, and AP as well as cultural dimension as moderators. Drawing on social exchange theory, cognitive consistency theory, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, the chapter also examined how cultural factors moderate these relationships and identified significant research gaps in cross-cultural higher education contexts. Chapter 3 outlined the comprehensive mixed-methods approach, detailing data collection procedures, sample characteristics, measurement instruments, and analytical methods. The chapter described both the quantitative survey methodology and qualitative case study protocols, ensuring methodological rigor through data triangulation. Chapter 4 presented integrated findings from both quantitative and qualitative components, including detailed questionnaire results, moderation analysis, case study findings from both universities, and a comprehensive comparative analysis highlighting institutional similarities and differences.

Supported Hypotheses: H1, H2, H3, and H4 were significant in both countries. H6 was significant only in Poland, while H5 was significant only in Norway. Cultural moderation was confirmed for H9 in Poland, H10 in Norway, and H11 in Poland.

Unsupported Hypotheses: H7 and H8 showed no significance in either country.

The qualitative analysis revealed that both universities implemented

comprehensive QAS frameworks following European Bologna Process requirements, but with distinct implementation approaches. NCU employed a more hierarchical, survey-based system with formal improvement processes, while NTNU utilized a dual approach combining surveys with participatory “reference groups” allowing real-time feedback throughout the semester. Both institutions faced common challenges with student engagement and communication transparency, though cultural contexts shaped their specific manifestations and solutions.

This research demonstrates that while standardized procedures provide a foundation, effective quality assurance depends primarily on institutional design, communication transparency, and authentic stakeholder engagement, with cultural factors serving as important moderating influences. While certain relationships operate consistently across cultures, performance pathways and cultural moderation effects create distinct operational environments. Universities should implement transparent feedback systems, work effectively with student representatives within the QAS structures, adopt timely feedback mechanisms, transform from documentation-focused to learning-centred approaches, and develop culturally aligned recognition systems. The study contributes to resolving the “quality paradox” by showing that QAS effectiveness depends on cultural intelligence, communication transparency, and authentic engagement with students’ dual roles as service recipients and active community members.