

# A 'Systems Thinking' Framework For Quality Assurance In Transnational Education – The Case of Kenya

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# Outline

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1. Background Information
  - Transnational Education (TNE)
  - Open and Distance Learning (ODL)
  - Systems Thinking
2. Quality Assurance (QA) in TNE
  - QA – The current Status
  - QA Challenges
  - Kenya's Case
3. Systems Approach for QA within TNE
4. Conclusion

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# Transnational Education (TNE) - Definition

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- “All types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, **or may operate independently of any national education system.**”

***UNESCO/Council of Europe's 'Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education', June 2001***

# Transnational Education (TNE) - Types

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- Franchises
- Branch-campus,
- Programme articulations/Twinning degrees
- International institutions
- Large corporations
- Off-shore institutions,
- Distance, and virtual universities

# TNE - The Facts

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- Why TNE?
  - Globalisation and/or Internationalisation
  - Demand, and market-driven supply
- Growing rapidly; growth to increase even further
  - E.g. Worldwide, close to two million students engage in transnational education
- Mostly from the Developed to Developing countries; the transfer of '**Northern designs to Southern realities**' challenge.
- Financial gains motivate majority of the players

# Open Learning and Distance Learning (ODL)

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- OL + DL = ODL
  - Opening up learning requires the introduction of some form of distance
  - Introducing distance education opens up learning
  - Therefore, these two complete each other
- ODL is currently implemented in form of: e-learning, on-line learning and virtual learning
- The openness, nature and remoteness (Distance) of participants in the implementation of TNE make it fit the definition of the ODL mode
- Quality Assurance in ODL is a complex issue because it is multi-dimensional; each of the stakeholders' (such as accreditors, state regulators, academic staff and students ) quality factors must be considered

# Systems Thinking

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- The *systems' approach* is primarily a philosophy of structure that coordinates, in an efficient and optimum manner, the activities and operations within a system and it enables analysis of complex problems and situations; This approach is about seeing things as a whole and has proven to be an effective way in solving problems in messy environments.
- ODL within the TNE system is better viewed as a system made up of several entities such as the student, the lecturers/tutors, HE institutions and regulatory bodies as well as the context and the content; each of these play an important role in completing the entire education system.



# Schools of Systems Thinking

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- **Senge's systems thinking**
  - System dynamics paradigm : Things are interconnected in complex patterns that can be captured into a model without loss of relevance
- **Checkland's systems thinking**
  - Soft systems paradigm: Multiple realities, multiple world views on a problem. Ambiguous goal systems. A problem is managed, not solved
- **Mitroff and Linstone's unbounded systems thinking**
  - Multiple perspectives paradigm : Ill-structured problems can only be understood from multiple perspectives.

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# QA – The Current Status

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- There is lack of consensus on QA for TNE, eg. In mid 1983, In a particular country within the developing world, the Ministry of Education had decided not to recognize the educational programmes provided by the overseas campuses of American Universities located in Europe.
- An idea for a general legal framework which could harmonise the different educational structures and values of transnational education institutions and qualifications has been floated by various scholars. This is unlikely to encompass the diversity and uniqueness of requirements and may also constrain necessary change and innovation.

# QA – The Current Status

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- Some of the existing standards:
  - The UNESCO/Council of Europe's Code of Good Practice in the Provision of TNE, 2001
  - UNESCO and OECD "Joint Guidelines", 2005
  - Principles of Good Practice for Educational Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals, shared among the regional institutional accrediting bodies of the U.S.A.
  - In the **UK**: Code of Practice for Overseas Collaborative Provision in Higher Education by the Higher Education Quality Council (1996); Quality Assurance Code of Practice: Collaborative Provisions by the Quality Assurance Agency.
  - In **Australia**: Code of Ethical Practice in the Offshore Provision of Education and Educational Services by Australian Higher Education Institutions by the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee. Australia has also developed a conceptual framework that is based on three strategic principles: complementary, Priority Countries and The role of a central International Office

# Current QA Standards - Limitations

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- The lack of a single model for QA implies that it is extremely complex to adapt and harmonise different systems working with different keys and different reference points
- Many international initiatives, without any monitoring of their implementation and use, remain a series of good intentions and exhortations with no indication as to their effectiveness
- They don't effectively address the issue of ODL and therefore of TNE
- They are inclined towards the foreign provider while totally ignoring the recipients of the education; hence magnifying '***the transfer of Northern designs to Southern realities***' challenge

# Current QA Standards - Challenges

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- Different usage of terminologies in different countries;
- QA is more of perception; often culturally and socially determined
- Inadequate national capacity and knowledge for quality assurance
- Tendency to focus on a relatively narrow range of subject areas which are 'cheap'

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# Background Information

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- At present, Kenya has 6 public Universities with an estimated student enrolment of 81,491 and 17 private Universities with a total student population of about 10,050
- The annual enrolment is < 10% of the high school graduates compared to the recommended enrolment rates of 40-50%
- Degree programmes especially in IT and Business Studies that are offered in the ODL mode within the TNE are attracting many Kenyan students:
  - Those who missed places in local universities and cannot afford to study abroad
  - Those interested in 'life-long learning'



# Transnational Education

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- Kenya has been receiving transnational education from UK, US and Australia, for over a decade. Others such as South Africa and Malaysia have joined
- Degree programmes under TNE (the focus of this paper) fall under Commission for Higher Education's jurisdiction; the following rule is used:
  - *No person or post secondary school institution shall, without the Commission's authority, enter into collaboration with another institution or university for the purpose of offering the programmes of the institution or university. Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 65 - Legislative Supplement No. 41 of October 15, 2004. Section 12 (page 266)*

# TNE Institutions

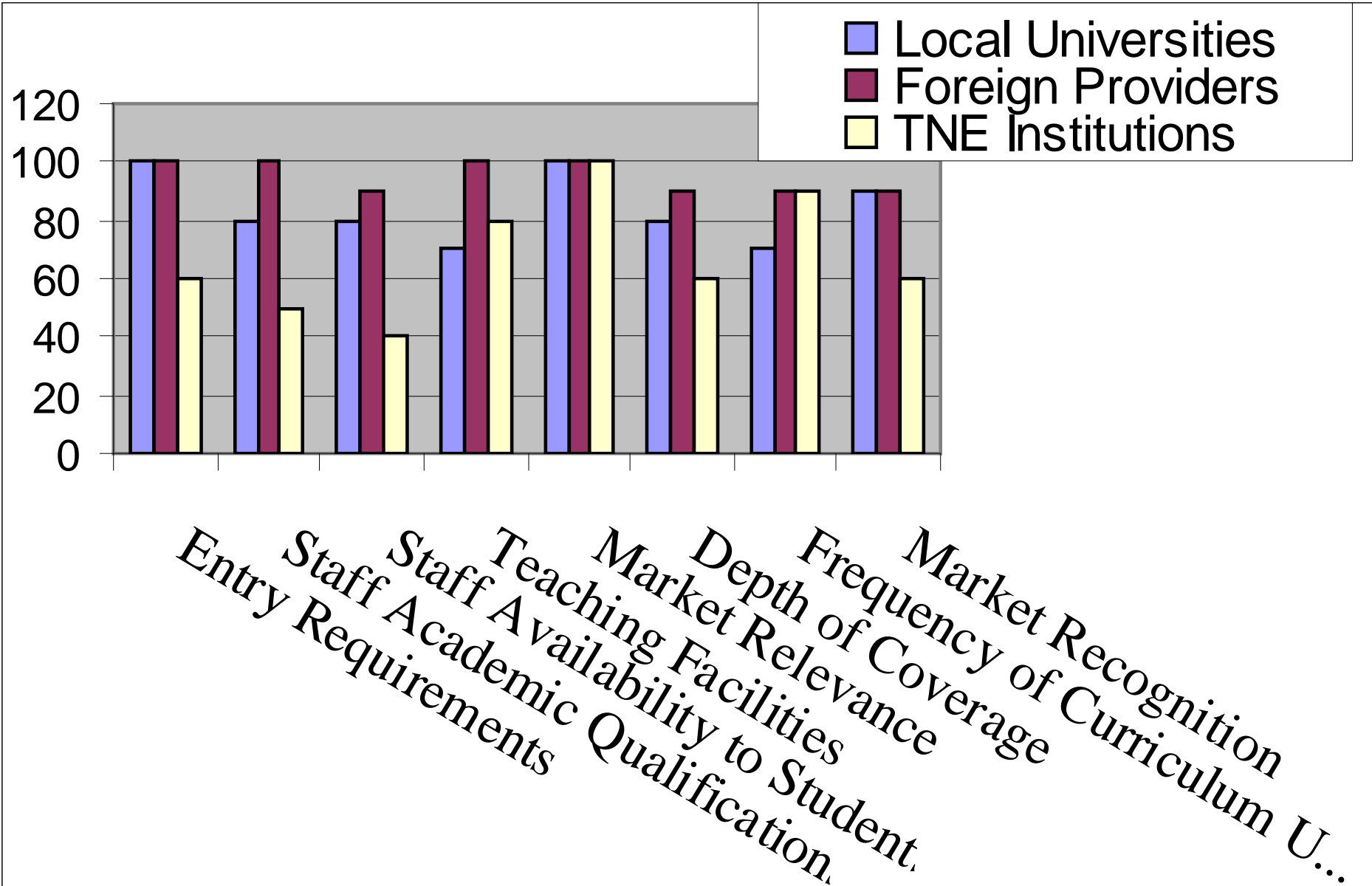
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- The main institutions providing TNE in Kenya are the public and private universities, commercial colleges, virtual universities and institutions attached to embassies and high commissions.; commercial institutions are the majority
- Mainly for financial gain and are mostly located in the capital city; Nairobi
- Majority lack clear policies on staff development and capacity building; none of the four interviewed had a single permanent lecturer;
- Quality assurance mechanism is therefore left to transnational providers and the product is not vetted by CHE (Mutahi 2004)
- Data regarding four institutions was analyzed. The following was considered: Entry Requirements, Staff Academic Qualifications, Staff Availability to Students, Teaching Facilities, Market Relevance, Depth of Coverage, Frequency of Curriculum Updates, and Market Recognition.

# TNE Institutions – Collaboration Examples

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- The University of Huddersfield, UK, and Institute of Advanced Technology (IAT);
- The University of Sunderland, UK, and Intel Computers Data Processing Ltd;
- The Instituted of Technology Australia (IOTA) and Dreamline College;
- Technikon Southern Africa University and the Kenya School of Professional Studies;
- ILM Australia and Eldoret based PERT International;
- Makerere University of Uganda and Kenya's Regional Institute of Business Management.
  - Note: focus here is on those offering degree programmes



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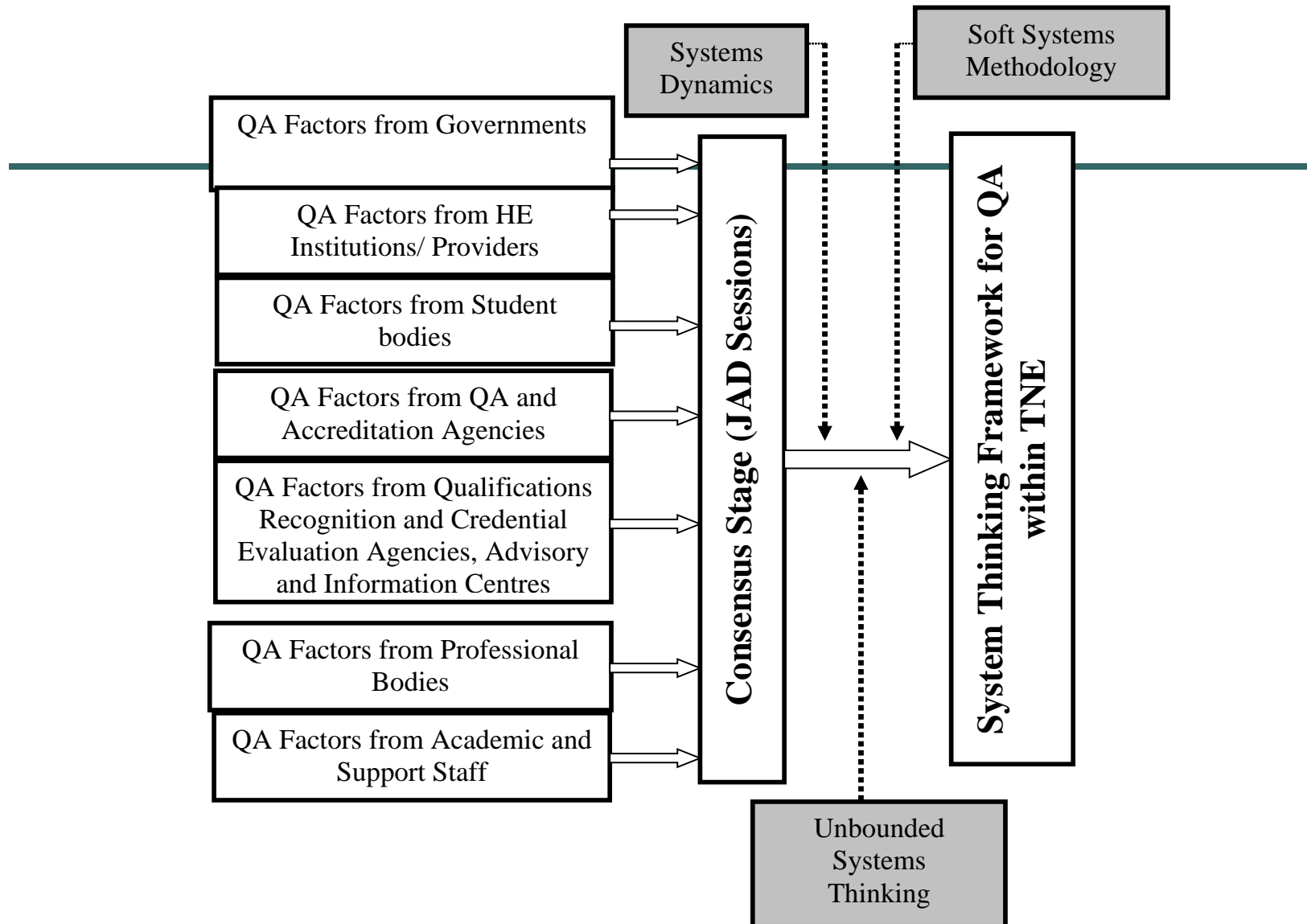
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# Systems Thinking for QA within TNE

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- In coming up with a QA framework to govern TNE, all the parts that make up this education system must be put into consideration.
- Use of Joint Application Development (JAD) sessions to bring together the diverse (which differently influence their views/perceptions) stake holders
- Systems approach was used to develop a framework for incorporating systems thinking into IS Education (Vo *et al* 2006)
- The guidelines for the various stakeholders in the framework have been borrowed from UNESCO/OECD '*Joint Guidelines*' (2005).
- Data from Kenya's case study has been used to validate usefulness of some of the inputs.

# Framework for Incorporating Systems Thinking/Approach into QA for TNE



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# Conclusion

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- Transnational Education is unstoppable tide; here to stay
- Appropriate QA within TNE is lacking; Systems Approach backed by JAD is one way of developing QA standards
- TNE in Kenya is taking shape but QA standards are in embryonic stages; all stakeholders need to be involved in developing the standards for Kenya
- Further work:
  - More analytical work needed to ascertain the actual status of TNE in Kenya; validate hypotheses, such as those related to relevance to the economy and the standard of teaching, for programmes currently offered under TNE in Kenya.
  - 'Framework Testing' with the aim of establishing the applicability of the solution proposed in this paper.



- Thank you
- Questions, comments...