Abstract: International Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) are currently in a state of crisis regarding assurance of quality education within a socially responsible paradigm. As noted in the international media, IHEIs are increasing their efforts to enhance the quality of education, and yet, except for some IHEIs, there is inadequate evidence that quality education agendas are aligned to social responsibility actions to improve the quality of life of local (global and local) communities. This paper focuses on the apparent dichotomy, tensions, dilemmas, challenges and opportunities to reframe quality education and social responsibility agendas within a UNESCO 2030 Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) framework. Recommendations are made to embrace a socially responsible quality education strategy aligned to the UNESCO 2030 SDGs and contribute to the common good. A critical review of the emerging literature highlights the absence of a social responsibility strategy among IHEIs. The author asserts that there are several opportunities for international higher education to commit to a Higher Education Social Responsibility Strategy thereby ensuring that the UNESCO 2030 SDGs are collectively achieved through partnership, collaboration and commitment to enhancing the quality of life of glocal communities.

Keywords: International Higher Education Institutions, Glocal communities, Quality education, Social responsibility, UNESCO 2030 Sustainability Development Goals

1. Introduction

International Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) are directing and redirecting their energies, funds and priorities to provide “world class education”, enhance “quality of education”, develop a citizenry that would be skillful to boost the economy and at the same time ensure that those who pass through their doors can contribute to the society’s wellbeing. “Postsecondary institutions educate students and develop citizens” according to Weingarten et al. (Weingarten et al., 2018), among others who share similar perspectives. However, whether IHEIs should develop the good citizen versus the global citizen study model (Nicotra et al., 2017) remains a contested area. Society looks to IHEIs for inspiration and direction to uplift the quality of life of local and global communities within a socially responsible, just and sustainable paradigm to ensure quality education translates to quality life. Lambrechts et al. (Lambrechts et al., 2018) present a critical reflective perspective on the higher education for sustainable development discourse which has a number of different approaches. More importantly, the study poses the dilemma that as current practices in competence based higher education start from an instrumental approach, whether or not influenced by neoliberal market discourse (Lambrechts et al., 2018, p.1296). In the case as such, values and virtues are left out because they simply do not fit into the instrumental approach of operationalizing and...
assessing competences. The IHEI stakeholders thus need to critically think about the question on how to foster ways of orienting learning towards adaptability, initiative, values and virtues in such a context.

This paper raises similar critical questions about balancing quality education and social responsibility agendas. There is growing literature in this field that points to the reframing, reclaiming and rethinking of IHEIs as catalysts of social change (Patel, 2017c). Articles and research into quality education and assurance processes at different levels around the globe raise pertinent questions, for example, “what is the appropriate balance between accountability and autonomy? How can we best understand and assess higher education as a ‘public good’?” (Hazelkorn et al., 2018). The current practice in international higher education institutions is to exploit international students (Patel, 2019) from China, India and other vulnerable communities under guise of internationalization, for example, to boost their coffers suggest that international higher education is struggling to balance its commitment to assuring quality in education to enhance the quality of life of glocal communities within a socially responsible framework and to uphold the moral code and ethical education practice in quality education policy and processes. Among the tensions, dilemmas, challenges and opportunities, there emerges a need to recognise IHEIs as the public good (Locatelli, R., 2018), to be noted as “an inherent tension in the relationship between financial and academic sustainability” (Weingarten et al., 2018, p.5) and to observe the dichotomy between the former elitist university as research intensive models of intellectual debate and ethical commitment and the emerging polytechnic university trends that require technical proficiency across the curriculum so that university trained graduates become “skills-based” employees and cogs in the industrial wheel. The polytechnic university models are corporate partners with industry and governments focusing on student cohorts as employees in the new world economy. Their focus is on hands-on knowledge and skills as opposed to ethical and moral aptness to become good citizens of an ever fluid demography in a fast-shrinking geographic space. The current political economy of higher education is visible in the convergence of public and private education as corporations preoccupied with the intention of attracting the international market at a cost to the quality of English language proficiency and academic performance. Yet, if IHEIs revisit their missions, visions and value statements from a humane perspective, they will reap the benefits of quality education through multiple opportunities to build socially responsible, sustainable quality education. For example, the UNESCO 2030 Sustainability Development Goals and the author’s proposed Higher Education Social Responsibility strategy (Patel, 2017) are current and future oriented sustainable opportunities to collectively improve the quality of education.

The author asserts that IHEIs appear to subscribe to raising quality education as a precursor to its social responsibility to uphold truth and morality in education endeavors. However, visible tensions between both quality education and social responsibility agendas suggest that IHEIs are struggling to strike a balance. Examples of such a struggle and the resulting imbalance in quality education include the tensions and challenges in the aforementioned paragraph along with the increasing corporate identities of IHEIs which compete for international students from China, India, Pakistan and Nepal (Bolten, 2019); corporate deals to entice new enrolments based on business deals with technology corporations in the USA (Frolund et al., 2017); and the increasing infringements of academic integrity in IHEIs that condemn international students for the rise of the academic misconduct in industry (Unconventional Economist, 2019) on the assumption that academic misconduct issues were not prevalent in earlier decades when the international student cohorts were either absent or
present in smaller numbers and when new information communication technology (ICT) was not at its prime as in the last decade.

The author submits that the social responsibility agenda is less visible and yet, IHEIs have ample opportunity to embrace social responsibility as an integral agenda. The author presents the UNESCO 2030 goals as a major opportunity for IHEIs to collectively contribute to the glocal footprint of a socially responsible and sustainable higher education framework. The author also proposes that IHEIs adopt a Higher Education Social Responsibility (HESR) Strategy as a curriculum project aligned to teaching and research agendas across disciplines.

In the following section, the author clarifies mutually acceptable understandings of quality assurance and social responsibility as they appear in current literature. Next, a critical review of emerging literature is précised to illustrate that advocates of balancing social responsibility agendas of IHEIs within a quality education framework, have long upheld that IHEIs should demonstrate their commitment to upholding social responsibility. Further, there is optimism that with social responsibility and quality education as core agenda items, those IHEIs that have fallen prey to the flawed corporate models in recent decades might redirect their energies to building the resilience and sustainability of glocal communities. Finally, within the context of the UNESCO studies, projects and the UNESCO 2030 Sustainability Development Goals, the author redirects the attention of the readership to focus on a future oriented commitment to IHEIs’ moral obligation as gatekeepers of social responsibility, quality education and sustainable quality of life of present and future glocal communities.

2. Literature Review

The author presents a critical review of the current literature on quality assurance and social responsibility from a communication studies theoretical perspective. The review of relevant literature is analysed from within a glocal development and communication for development and social change context. The paper engages a cross-disciplinary approach bringing together quality education goals and social responsibility commitment within international higher education as it highlights the undercurrents of the political economy of international higher education as it struggles to strike a balance between quality education and social responsibility. Further, the author recommends that IHEIs have opportunities to align with the UNESCO 2030 SDGs thereby advancing sustainable development and quality education for developing world communities. The critique focuses on the challenges facing international higher education within the turbulent political economy that continues to drive IHE agendas.

The ‘academic revolution’ and the political economy of international higher education

Over the last decade, international higher education has undertaken various challenges which have all been part of what Albach et al. (Albach et al., 2010, p.1) refer to as ‘an academic revolution’ – a series of transformations that have affected most aspects of postsecondary education institutions worldwide. The certainty in the patterns of ‘academic revolution’ is that countries in different regions of the world have subscribed to an ongoing development of higher education from an elitist beginning through the massification era to a universal education. The more concerning fact is that the current 21st century international higher education trends remain a significant replica of member-states of the Organisation of the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which are “mainly developed countries”.

The political economy of international higher education remains hijacked, owned and delivered as a ‘first-world’ investment (as noted in the OECD member-state composition)
along similar footprints as that of the origins of the International Monetary Fund (Patel, 2017a) in which developed countries set the agenda (in this case for international higher education) from a developed country perspective with little regard to the needs of developing communities, their human capability development, inadequate resources, and sub-standard quality of life.

Within that developed world context, in this era of international higher education, IHEIs continue to lead in the field of quality education, quality assurance policy and process. Australian higher education institutions are experiencing turbulence nearly a decade on from Australia’s commitment to quality assurance enhancement agendas, as noted by Shah et al. (Shah et al., 2011). A decade ago, the turbulence in Australian higher education (Shah et al., 2011, p.268) was associated with the new government policies being rolled out to regulate and monitor higher education providers, develop and apply quality assurance processes, provide funding to reward universities (Shah et al., 2011, p.267), and increase access to higher education for cohorts of students who were underrepresented previously. However, as noted by Shah et al., these measures led to an over-demand of university spaces, and when the equity agenda of the Australian government became exhausted, so did the funding. This in turn led to an underfunded higher education system hanging on to the aspirations of a quality assurance vision that was stretched thin in regard to the design and delivery of quality assurance measures by the very regulatory bodies that were established by the Australian government. IHEIs are rife with inequalities regarding resources, access and opportunities for marginal communities. Some IHEIs (from the developing countries, for example) compete and desire to be in the centre. However, they remain on the periphery while others (developed countries) find themselves centre stage (Albach et al., 2009) as a result of their research record, reputation for excellence and quality education. Nevertheless, there is growing tension around the center-periphery dynamics” (Albach et al., 2009) in IHEIs.

Within the aforementioned scenario, another key factor that led Australian higher education to a state of turbulence in the last decade, according to Shah et al. (Shah et al., 2011, p.268) was the economic downturn in the international student market (following changes to immigration policy). As history often repeats itself, at the end of the second decade (current 2019-2020) of Australia’s quality assurance journey, Australian higher education and other international higher education systems (including UK and Canada) are experiencing a new wave of turbulence which is influenced by a downturn of international student enrolments. What began as an over-demand of the international student market in the last decade has now rapidly become a downturn in the market once more as the IHEIs, governments and nations of the developed world (Australia, Canada, UK, USA for example) continue to engage in a risky game of chess using international student cohorts as pawns. “Traditionally, postsecondary education has been seen as a public good, contributing to society through educating citizens, improving human capital, encouraging civil involvement and boosting economic development” (Albach et al., 2009, p.xii). Recently the debate has shifted to higher education as a “private good” (Albach et al., 2009, p. xii) and at this juncture the debate of public versus private good problematises international higher education’s commitment to a socially responsible design, delivery and critical assessment of its contribution to the upliftment of human endeavour and social consciousness. Weingartner et al. (Weingartner et al., 2018, p.4), maintain that “public postsecondary education is the quintessential socioeconomic leveller, providing opportunity for social and economic advancement to all who access it. The mission of our higher education system is to deliver the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to ensure the overall prosperity of the province and its people. The success of our economy and society depends upon high performing postsecondary
institutions” and yet in recent decades there is less visibility of IHEIs undertaking the role of “socioeconomic leveller” in regard to their commitment to social responsibility and enhancing the IHEIs profile in designing, delivering and critically assessing the quality of its academic programs in terms of their impact on public good.

The political economy of Australian higher education and that of other IHEIs is intricately linked to the success and failures of the nations’ leaders and the national budgets for higher education (Weingartner, 2018; Hunter, 2019). It is the ability or inability of the nations’ leaders to provide IHEIs with a sustainable higher education budget and the necessary financial and human resources and forward-looking vision that is paramount to its impact on quality of life in the glocal sphere. Within a glocalization framework (Patel, 2017b) that embraces glocal development, IHEIs require a vision of sustainable, equitable, diverse and inclusive higher education, morally bound by ethical values. IHEIs require a sustainable budget with a commitment to socially responsible measures to enhance the quality of life of glocal communities through the provision and monitoring of quality education for indigenous communities, other minority groups and marginalized communities. However, simply attaching performance measures to funding without a sustained, collaborative engagement with IHEIs and the quality assurance higher education standards, policies and processes from inception might create further inequities in regard to which IHEIs will receive the benefits and for what purpose. For example, Hunter (Hunter, 2019) reports that the Australian government has introduced a funding scheme for universities that will measure their performance in “graduate employment outcomes, student success, student experience and enrolment of indigenous, disadvantaged and rural students”. This may appear on the surface to address inequities in higher education access and funding. However, it also has the potential to sabotage the noble intentions of the seemingly inclusive quality education agenda. Furthermore, in comparison to the higher education policy developments prior to 2011, this appears to be a step backwards if we compare it to the measures introduced in the last decade as noted in the study by Shah et al. (Shah et al., 2011). Once again, some universities will benefit more than others, some communities might have better access than others and the inequities may not be resolved. Balancing quality education and social responsibility (Puukka, Jaana, 2006; Vascilescu, R., 2010; Kvasničková Stanislavská et al., 2014) in IHEIs requires more than a one-off budget plan each year. It requires a sustainable HE budget, alignment to the quality assurance and education process and a short and long term vision for expanding financial and human resources to enable and empower internal and external stakeholders to make a glocal impact that is visible and meaningful in meeting the UNESCO 2030 SDGs and moving beyond 2030.

Understanding quality assurance, quality education and social responsibility
Quality assurance is understood in various ways depending on how it is framed within a higher education context at the regional, national and international level. “Quality assurance in higher education has risen to the top of the policy agenda in many nations” (Albach et al., 2009, p.x). While there are a diverse range of approaches to quality assurance based on the regional context and local needs, there appears to be an absence among them (within the developed country context) in recognition of the significant role of academic, professional and administrative staff, students and the local community in quality assurance policy and process development. More importantly, there is less visibility of the critical review, assessment and assurance of social responsibility commitment of IHEIs to local and global community projects and programs as an imperative in quality assurance mandates. Except key senior management level staff and some low-level administrative staff, there is less visibility of the significant invited contributions of internal and external stakeholders (people
who champion, support and promote quality education) as the most valuable assets in the IHEIs. Recently, in some quality assurance processes, an alarming increase of adjunct faculty (or part-time teachers) have come under scrutiny as the subject of quality assurance reviews. The high mobility of professional and administrative staff remains a non-event in quality assurance processes and yet, it is their ongoing support of academic performance that ensures quality assurance in quality education agendas. The value of human potential, aspirations and endeavours on a glocal level and its impact on the glocal social responsibility footprint is minimized and dismissed in the quality assurance policy and process development processes.

Focus on program and course reviews remains uppermost in most quality assurance policy and process development internationally. For example, focus on learning outcomes and assessment in Domain 1 and Teaching in Domain 3 drives quality assurance processes in the national Australian Higher Education Standards Framework (Australian Higher Education Standards Framework, 2015); Weingarten et al. (Weingarten et al., 2018, p.15) in reference to the sustainability of postsecondary education in Ontario (HEQCO), Canada. It highlights that “the most important observation that has emerged is the importance of measuring academic quality - of programs, of learning, of the student experience and of outcomes” again with a notable absence of the multiple stakeholders in the quality assurance process; program review, assessment, design and delivery under Standards 2 and 3 are a key emphasis in another provincial Canadian (SHEQAB) quality assurance approach (SHEQAB, 2014). Ansah et al. (Ansah, F. et al., 2017) contend that quality assurance requires a framework that includes a critical quality review of people along with programs and place in the PPP model (Filardo cited in Ansah, F. et al., 2017) applied in the study (Ansah, F. et al., 2017) of quality assurance in which “quality assurance activities within higher education institutions ought to cover and involve all these key stakeholders” (Ansah, F. et al., 2017, p.32). Ansah et al. (Ansah, F. et al., 2017) note in their study of their local context that quality assurance activities should place equal emphasis on the quality of staff (academic, professional and administrative), the empowerment of students and on the physical infrastructures. However, their study highlighted that “there is a clear indication of over-concentration of quality assurance activities on programme areas such as teaching and learning, curriculum design, research, student admission, staff recruitment, staff development, and student support services. Even under programme areas, teaching and learning appear to take the centre stage of quality assurance activities. This gives an indication of the imbalance with regard to the focus of quality assurance activities in universities and stakeholder involvement is even over-concentrated on senior academic and administrative members” (Ansah, F. et al., 2017, p.41) suggesting there is an imbalance in not inviting all stakeholders in an all-inclusive quality assurance process.

Similar trends are observed in quality assurance processes in other country contexts where quality assurance processes are concentrated on the quality reviews of academic programs and courses and less visible are the contributions of the larger stakeholder groups of students, academics and support staff in administration, student support, technical services, alumni, industry partners, parents and local communities. Ansah et al. (Ansah, F. et al., 2017, p.41) conclude that “over-concentration on teaching and learning activities suggests unstable quality assurance frameworks”. This might resonate with key stakeholders in international quality assurance processes who remain on the periphery instead of being in the centre. IHEIs have a social responsibility to engage all stakeholder groups to the table in a quality assurance process from inception and to apply equity, diversity, inclusivity and sustainability principles to all areas of their quality assurance process in assuring quality education. There should be visibility of social responsibility programming in the design, implementation and
assessment of programs and projects that impact the quality of life of local and global (glocal) communities.

**IHEIs: Gatekeepers of social responsibility**
The literature on the social responsibility mandate of IHEIs is growing swiftly (Alzouydi, A.L. & Bani-Hani, K., 2015; and Kromydas, T., 2017), calling for an integration of social responsibility within the higher education quality education and sustainability imperative.

It is time to balance the shifting goal posts and to integrate the Higher Education Social Responsibility strategy (HESR) as a sustainable glocal development commitment beyond the UNESCO 2030 SDGs. The HESR strategy is not the same as the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy of the large world conglomerates which have been managing their social consciences through handouts to developing world and other disadvantaged communities through charity foundations, programs and scholarships. The HESR strategy (Patel, 2019) is not to be confused with the CSR policy and practice of corporations. The HESR strategy is not a one-off donation. It is a sustainable long term glocal development fund that is integrated in the mission, vision and values of IHEIs, embedded in the curriculum design and delivery across all levels and programs, aligned to research portfolios developed collaboratively among internal and external stakeholders and includes financial contributions from federal and state/province coffers, institutional departments and from faculties, schools and departments as well. The HESR strategy is a holistic framework from inception including human endeavour, policy, practice, infrastructure and actions for change in collaborative partnership among all stakeholders. (Refer to Patel, 2019 for further information)

Adopting the UNESCO 2030 SDGs is a pragmatic first step to IHEIs commitment to sustainable, socially responsible quality education. The Malaysian IHEIs and other developing country communities (Ansah, F. et al., 2017) can provide indigenous knowledge perspectives, and valuable pragmatic alternatives to the current developed country perspectives. Wells (Global University Network for Innovation, 2017, p.32) contends that, “there is the need for the higher education sector to not only engage in the traditional pillars of higher learning and research but to do so in a way that is both reflective of, and responsive to, the present realities of today’s world challenges as communicated in the Education 2030 agenda and each of the seventeen SDGs.”

Recommendations to adopt the UNESCO 2030 SDGs based on exemplars from Malaysia, for example, are presented in the paper Glocal Development for Sustainable Social Change (Patel, 2019).
Struggle in International Higher Education

Among the struggles and tensions identified over the last decades, Albach et al. contend that “at the first stage, higher education systems struggled just to cope with demand, the need for expanded infrastructure and a larger teaching corps” (Albach et al., 2009, p.iii-iv). During the past decade, systems have begun to wrestle with the implications of diversity and to consider which subgroups are still not being included and appropriately served. In the early 21st century, higher education has become a competitive enterprise. In their assertion that globalisation and internationalisation have contributed to the flow of the political economy of higher education, Albach et al. (Albach et al., 2009, p.iv) point to the fact that globalisation exerted an external influence on higher education in regard to the impact of factors such as “an integrated world economy, new information communications technology (ICT) and the international knowledge economy.” Internationalisation is approached as the establishment of internal measures within universities such as student abroad programs, international student mobility, and institutional partnerships, as responses to the globalisation phenomenon.”

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The author presented a critical overview of the emerging literature on quality education, assurance policy and process development and IHEIs accountability as socially responsible institutions of higher learning. Further, the author asserts that IHEIs have opportunities to reclaim higher education, as a socially responsible space with strong commitment to the UNESCO 2030 SDGs and beyond, so that together the IHEIs can work as a collective to uplift glocal communities from poverty and inequality to a higher quality of life through quality education. The paper provides a range of perspectives and approaches to quality education and assurance policies, practices and social responsibility in international higher education institutions (IHEIs). This demonstrates that although IHEIs are grappling with multiple factors in assuring quality education for marginalized and disadvantaged glocal communities, developing country nations are applying innovative and creative energies to meet sustainable glocal development goals; and that, although developed country nations might be benefitting from their new corporate identities they are struggling to harmonise their quality education and social responsibility agendas.

The paper addresses the subject of international higher education struggling to balance its quality assurance and social responsibility agendas, in general. In particular, the author highlighted the contradictions and tensions of critical concern for higher education stakeholders (internal and external) who remain on the margins of quality education policy.
and process. Further, the author asserts that IHEIs can do more to review and redress the injustices in IHEI practices, to enhance the quality of life through quality education that is aligned to social responsibility actions among glocal communities.

In recommending context-based solutions for sustainable glocal development, it is apparent that IHEIs:

- must work together within a collaborative IHEI-stakeholder-community partnership model to collectively accomplish their social responsibility actions;
- require sustainable higher education funding to commit to sustainable HE agendas;
- are obligated to adopt and deliver on the UNESCO 2030 SDGs and;
- pursue a Higher Education Social Responsibility strategy that is integrated into quality education endeavours as a sustainable lifelong learning agenda.

The political economy of international higher education should be aligned with quality education that is committed to social responsibility actions since the quality of life of human endeavour is central to the core goals of IHEIs, as beacons of social responsibility and justice. Malone (Global University Network for Innovation, 2017, p.34) asserts that “The United Nations University occupies a unique position in the constellation of higher education institutions – its mission and purpose are rooted in the very idea of social responsibility.” IHEIs should aspire to such a mission and purpose by aligning their quality education and social responsibility agendas reclaiming their role as gatekeepers of social responsibility to assure quality education and sustainable quality of life of glocal communities.

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