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HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND PRACTICE IN THE MALDIVES: A CASE STUDY FROM A SMALL DEVELOPING NATION

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Education

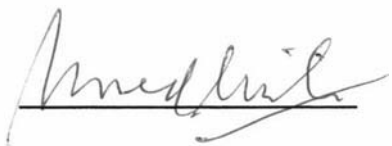
at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand

Ahmed Ali Maniku

2008

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research, except where due acknowledgment is made, and contains as its main content, work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.



Ahmed Ali Maniku

ABSTRACT

This thesis comprises a case study of quality assurance policy and practice in the emerging higher education sector of the Maldives. The policy analysis is extended to incorporate a *glonacal* perspective, allowing analysis of quality assurance policy issues from the global, national and local contexts. In order to illuminate the analysis in the Maldives' primary case study, two secondary less intensive case studies are presented of quality assurance processes from a New Zealand polytechnic and the University of the South Pacific. Documentary evidence and semi-structured interviews from Key Informants form the main evidence base for the study. Data analysis is facilitated using NVivo.

The thesis argues that the upsurge in quality assurance in higher education is primarily legitimated within a neoliberal discourse. Urged by transnational organisations such as the World Bank, there is widespread policy convergence in quality assurance. Whilst neoliberalism has had partial effects in the case of the Maldives, the study reveals that neoliberal ideology and the associated strategies of marketisation, privatisation, human resource development and managerialism have shaped quality assurance policy processes in varying degrees in the three cases. Findings in this study contribute to a fuller understanding of quality assurance policy processes in a small developing nation context: a perspective largely missing from current debates on the subject.

The findings confirm that a combination of global, national and institutional factors influenced quality assurance policy processes in the Maldives. From the global context, globalisation and internationalisation of higher education trends affect quality assurance policy. At the national level, the desire for higher quality education found expression in the state's reassertion of its role in protecting public interest in regulating the sector through formal quality assurance. The social demand for international comparability has also lead to a growing trend of transnational quality assurance practices. The creation of the Maldives College of Higher Education was shown to be the principal impetus in quality assurance development. This national college played a lead role in developing a quality assurance model that tends to promote a regulatory compliance to quality. The study argues for a more inclusive model that acknowledges external compliance but also seeks to assure quality of teaching and learning leading to improved student outcomes.

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LIST OF COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAU	Academic Audit Unit
ADB	Asian Development Bank
APNZ	Association of Polytechnics New Zealand
AQMS	Academic Quality Management System
AUQA	Australian Universities' Quality Agency
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CMS	Centre for Maritime Studies
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EFTS	Equivalent full-time student
EQR	External Quality Review
FET	Faculty of Engineering and Technology
FHTS	Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies
GATS	General Agreement for Trade in Services
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCE	General Certificate of Education
HEI(s)	Higher Education Institution(s)
HOD	Head of Department
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ISO	International Standards Organisation
ITE	Institute for Teacher Education
ITO	Industry Training Organisation
ITP Quality	Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality
ITPNZ	Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics New Zealand
KI(s)	Key Informant(s)
MAB	Maldives Accreditation Board
MCHE	Maldives College of Higher Education
MNQF	Maldives National Qualifications Framework
MOE	Ministry of Education
MPND	Ministry of Planning and National Development
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee
NPM	New Public Management
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NZAAU	New Zealand Universities' Academic Audit Unit
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZVCC	New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBRF	Performance Based Research Fund
PDO	Planning and Development Office
PQC	Pre-qualifying Criteria
QA	Quality Assurance
QMS	Quality Management System
SSC	State Services Commission
STEP	Statements of Tertiary Education Priorities
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEI(s)	Tertiary Education Institution(s)
TQM	Total Quality Management
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USP	The University of the South Pacific

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