

The Battle For Legitimacy
Of “Student Engagement”
in External Quality
Assurance Of Higher
Education from Asian QA
Perspectives-
*A Rhetoric, in Practice or
Just a Cultural
Reflection?*

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Outline of the Presentation

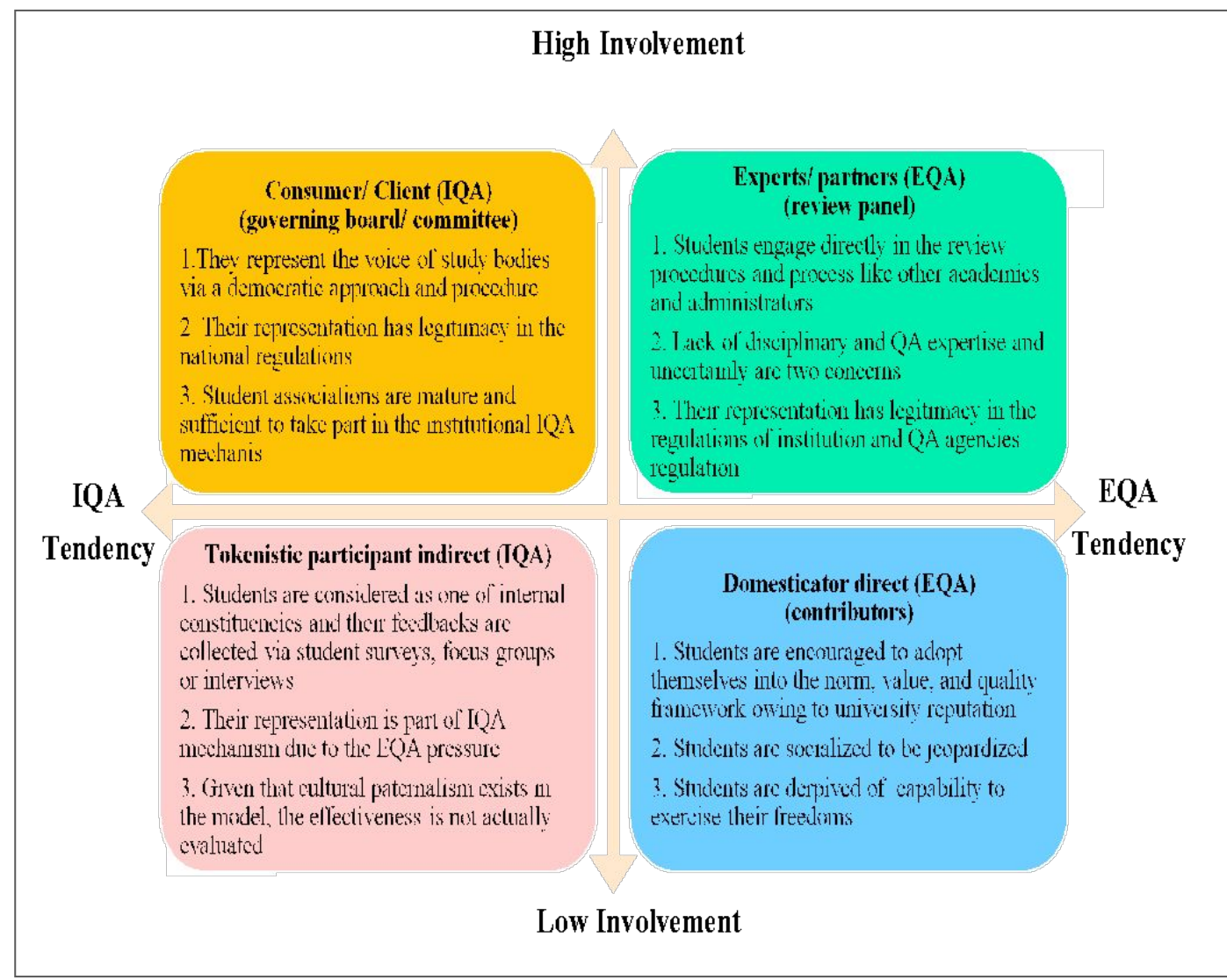
- Context
- Literature and Conceptual Framework
- Research Method
- Major Findings
- Discussions
- Conclusion

Background and Context

- Higher education (HE) landscape has incorporated varying stakeholders to address quality concerns
 - Complexity and diversification
- As one of the key HEI stakeholders, students “make substantial contribution to the steering and monitoring of educational provisions” in universities (Klemencic, 2018, p. 332)
 - They are invited to take part in the IQA mechanism and process
- Student engagement in EQA
 - with formal representation in EQA systems started in Europe
 - Remains an issue in most Asian nations because students are often considered “younger, academically weaker, and less self-disciplined” (Shen, et. al., 2013) to carry out the professional activities

Legitimacy of stakeholders in higher education and role of students

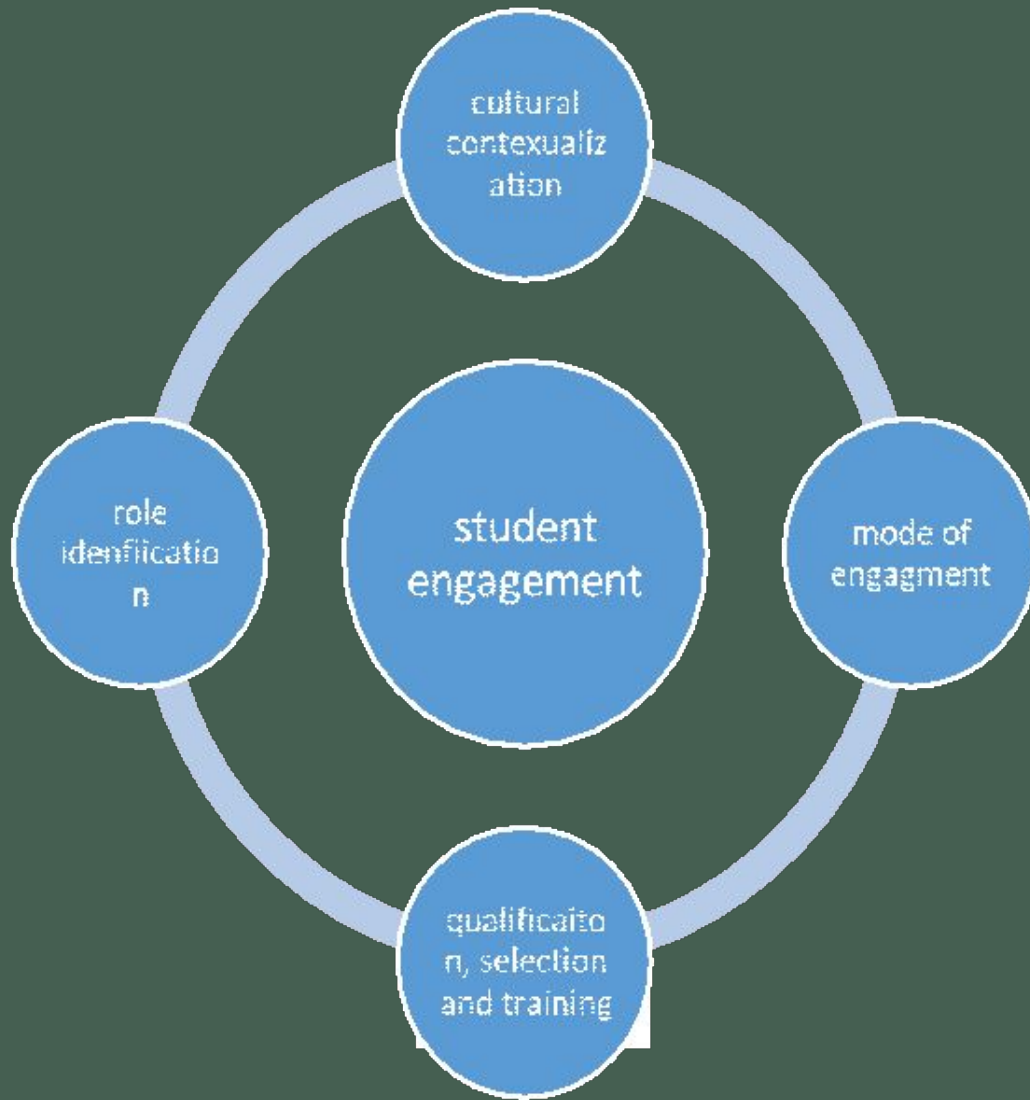
- HE has a variety of stakeholders, including internal (faculty members, administrative staff, students) and external participants (governments, employers; parents; society) with direct or indirect involvement.
 - Stakeholder influence of “power, legitimacy and urgency” on HEIs differs according to level of involvement (Marshall, 2018)
 - There are three types, *latent stakeholder, expectant stakeholders and definitive stakeholders*
- *Student representation in HE is, to some extent, identified as internal stakeholder but latent actor outside campus in some contexts*



Conceptual framework for student engagement in higher education and quality assurance

International guidelines, regional discourses and local practices over student engagement in external quality assurance

- **INQAAHE GGP**
 - national accreditors should have “adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria”
- **The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)**
 - 2.4 peer-review
 - “external quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s)”
 - Homan, et.al. (2020) report showed that 97% of 34 European QA agencies has engaged students in the QA process and governance.
 - Common approaches adopted
 - students as panel experts and external auditors, participating in the planning process of accreditation procedures, or sitting on the advisory board of the agency, etc. (Elassy, 2015)
- **APQN Chiba Principles**
 - The criticism
 - “involving all stakeholders may pose problems and have certain disadvantages, and argued that stakeholders are less prepared for ‘developing’ standards and criteria and that they can only be consulted”



Dimensions of student engagement in EQA governance

Research questions

- *How is the legitimacy of student engagement in higher education and quality assurance being established under glonacal system?*
- *What approaches and models did Asian national QA agencies adopt to engage students in external QA governance and review procedures?*
- *What are the challenges that Asian national QA agencies encountered while engaging students in QA governance and review process?*

Research method

- **21 responding agencies out of 40** , from 16 nations, constituting a 52.2% response rate
- The opinions of five heads of Asian QA agencies, Japan, Malaysia, Australia, Mongolia and Taiwan, were collected through **semi-structured interviews** or e-mail from April, 2019 to June, 2020

Major findings

52% of the responding Asian QA agencies engaged students in EQA governance and processes but East Asian agencies did not implement the policy at all

- The majority of respondents indicated that they still considered students as key HE stakeholders who should contribute to the review panel during onsite visits.
- Pressured by global trends, one agency is planning to implement student engagement in EQA governance. Cultural paternalism still poses a threat to engaging students in EQA mechanisms in East Asian nations

The most common approach for selection of student representative and qualifications

- university recommendation, student unions or bodies nominations and individual application are the three common approaches adopted by QA agencies in Asia
- Seven agencies in central and southeast regions responded that they would invite universities to recommend student representatives
- student candidates should major in the related field of accredited program and performance academically well
- QA agencies provided a list of training courses with student nominees as the same as academic reviewers, including QA standards and review mechanism, job responsibilities and work ethics, report writing, interview skills, etc

QA agencies' perceptions toward student engagement and challenges

- 85% of the respondents highly agreed that student engagement would enhance QA system, QA credibility and quality of HEIS; vice versa, they were a little bit hesitant about students as being an assessor or taking in part in QA decision making.
- The implementation group agreed highly that student engagement made greater contribution to added value to QA system, EQA credibility and quality of higher education, vice versa, non-implementation group did not
- Limited to QA exercises, not being considered as experts, and selection mechanism are three top challenges to engage students from QA perspectives

Discussions

- Policy contextualization as one of the key factors for student engagement in EQA governance in Asia
 - Asian countries remain conservative about student engagement in EQA governance due to rising state control and cultural paternalism (Authors 2020). Students are conceived “as equal partners in accreditation, but they are not provided with the adequate support” (Assylbekov & Kalanova, 2015, p. 299) and are lacking in legitimate recognition in most Asian contexts (Authors, 2020)
- The inclination of student engagement from divergence to convergence
 - students as HE stakeholders are considered more and more important to contribute their valuable learning experiences to HEIs despite complexion of cultural and political contextualization

Conclusion

- Global attention to student engagement gradually drives inclusiveness of internal quality assurance and a paradigm shift of EQA in Asia. It is a predestined perception that engaging students would assist in achieving a mutual understanding across different sectors and HE stakeholders
- Concurrently, the student engagement issue has successfully drawn public attention in Asia and started to impact QA governance and quality culture on campus accordingly. An attempt by Asian QAA and HEIs to enhance legitimacy of student engagement in HE and its relevance to QA is on the rise.



Stensaker (2018)

“this interdependence between EQA and could be legitimated in different ways, including the ability to innovate EQA procedures and demonstrating the continuing relevance of EQA, or focusing more on the moral forms of legitimacy and highlighting the inherent values and norms of higher education and the need to balance social, cultural and economic purposes of higher education” (p. 60)



THANK YOU

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