Oman. Quality Culture in Higher Education
A Good-Practice Example[1]

Dr. Nicola Huson

German Jordanian University
School of Applied Humanities & Languages
P.O. Box 35247
Amman 11180
Jordan
E-mail: Nicola.Huson@gju.edu.jo

Abstract: Quality culture in higher education goes beyond the establishment of Quality Assurance processes and systems. The concept of quality culture in Higher Educational Institutions is being discussed widely in the professional literature as to its defining characteristics and forms of implementation. A new era in quality management is developing which "is moving away from a mechanistic to a holistic and cultural view of quality in education" (Ehlers 2009: 343).

Following this line of thought the case presented here reflects on the evolution of a teaching initiative launched at the German University of Technology in Oman and provides a good-practice example for an higher education institutional enhancement of quality culture with consideration of its environmental setting, institutional and initiative factors and its verification in the framework of a theoretical concept of quality culture.

Qualitätskultur in Hochschulen geht über die Einrichtung von Qualitätssicherungsprozessen und -systemen hinaus. Das Konzept von Qualitätskultur wird in der Forschungsliteratur vielseitig disktutiert hinsichtlich der bestimmenden Merkmale und der Implementierungsformen. Eine neue Ära des Qualitätmanagements entwickelt sich, weg von einer mechanistischen hin zu einer holistischen und kulturellen Betrachtungsweise von Qualität in Bildung (vgl. Ehlers 2009: 343).

Diesem Ansatz folgend liefert die folgende Reflektion zu der Entwicklung einer Lehrendeninitiative an der *German University of Technology* in Oman ein *Good-Practice*-Beispiel für die Förderung einer Qualitätskultur innerhalb einer Hochschulinstitution. Diese erfolgt unter Berücksichtigung der soziokulturellen, institutionellen und initiative-bezogenen Rahmenbedingungen und verifiziert das Beispiel innerhalb eines theoretischen Qualitätskulturmodells.

Key words: Quality culture, quality assurance, higher education, Oman, German University of Technology in Oman, good-practice example, bottom-up approach, quality teaching, teaching initiative, German language survey, teacher/course evaluation, ADRI Quality Cycle, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), holistic approach, teacher training; Qualitätskultur, Lehrendeninitiative, Qualitässicherung, Good-Practice Beispiel, holistischer Ansatz.

1. Introduction

Quality assurance (QA) processes and evaluation mechanisms are becoming increasingly important for higher education institutions (HEIs) searching for national and international recognition and accreditation. A "successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement)" (ENQA 2015: 5). There is a general understanding that "[t]he definition of educational quality can not be normatively pre-defined and imposed but has to be developed in negotiation and through stakeholder participation" (Ehlers 2011: 2) therefore there is no "single approach […] from one single perspective" (Al-Hassnawi 2011: 10). A variety of QA models in the form of continuous improvement cycles (cf. ENQA 2015: 5) has been developed or adopted by HEIs, national and international

quality agencies and accreditation institutions to help improve the quality of HEIs' operations. The ADRI quality cycle developed by the Curtin University represents such a model and incorporates four steps: Approach-Deploy-Review-Improve (ADRI):

Fig. 1: ADRI Quality Cycle (Curtin University Website 2013: 1)

As part of the **Review** parameter of the AD**R**I cycle, course/teacher evaluations have an important function with regard to student feedback and teaching/learning improvement. Student feedback in the form of formal question-naires has become a standard tool used by institutions of higher education through automation software platforms or management systems to collect data for review and quality assurance. While these instruments represent a relevant element in quality assurance at the institutional level and provide comparable long-term data, they also suffer from a lack of qualitative depth, and their results should be regarded as what they are—*indicators* for a number of factors influencing the course/teaching/learning situation. Clearly, negative feedback on teaching skills or attitudes need to be addressed at an individual level using supportive measures. As the coordinator and a lecturer in a Master's teacher training program for German as a Foreign Language at the German Jordanian University, I try to guide my Master's students to develop reflective thinking in order to enhance the quality of their learning and consequently the quality of their teaching skills (see for example *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages. A reflection tool for language teacher education* in Council of Europe 2007). Moreover, I also encourage my students to consider looking beyond critical or negative feedback ostensibly directed at the course or themselves during their future careers as teachers, as it quite often conceals other underlying factors that should be taken into consideration as part of a wider picture. This objective, however, requires individual and institutional commitment to quality en-hancement; hence, as a minimum engaged lecturers and an institution open to critical reflection are needed.

The teaching initiative documented here demonstrates a good-practice example for an attempt to look at the wider picture in order to understand what is going on and to improve teaching and learning quality. It takes into considera-tion a period of uncertainty between 2009 and 2012 about the effectiveness and the necessity of German language courses at the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) raised by formal course/teacher evaluation feedback, resulting in a bottom-up initiative taken by the team of teachers at that time to gain an overall understand-ing of the real factors influencing the performance and motivation of students. The quality teaching initiative was met with a positive reaction in its unique institutional context, and the insight that it provided resulted in an over-arching inclusive institutional approach.

To put the good-practice implications of the University's perception of the initiative into a comprehensive perspec-tive—in the sense of a holistic view—it is necessary to consider the institutional setting against its environmental background. GUtech is a young university with a transnational institutional partnership in a rapidly developing re-

gion where educational advancements are influenced by each country's efforts and challenges to adapt to the needs of their changing societies. Critical voices about the under-achievement of the educational reforms in the Arabian Gulf in the last several years in spite of the vast financial investment and the establishment of satellite universities and valid discussions of societal impact and measures for improvement need to be taken into consideration (cf. G-Mrabet 2010; Kerr 2013; Therin 2011; Total Quality Culture n.d.; Walters, Walters & Barwind 2010).

2. Environmental background

Since the 1970´s Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have been experiencing enormous economic and societal changes as a consequence of the discovery of their gas and oil resources and the subsequent need to catch up with the rest of the world. In this dynamic process of development and modernization education has been identified as being a "major component in building their nations and the foundation of economic development and social change" (G-Mrabet 2010: 47), hence leading to a "rapid expansion in their education systems" (Zand & Karrar 2010: 391) and an influx of Western-style educational reform arriving "on a grand scale" (G-Mrabet 2010: 47) with entirely new institutions being built from scratch (cf. Walters et al. 2010: 13).

G-Mrabet (2010) points out that Western educational influence is creating major challenges for its societies to "develop […] educational systems that can produce students capable of tending to the needs of a changing society while at the same time preserving traditional Islamic values" (47) and concludes that

> the sudden introduction of foreign concepts and practices has disrupted society, and interaction between Arabs and Westerners has resulted in conflicts in some cases. It has also led to a division within society between those who feel that change is necessary for progress and those who feel that change is an assault of Western morals and values on their societies (ibid.).

G-Mrabet bases the conceptual framework of her study on Everett M. Rogers' Diffusion Theory (cf. Rogers 1995 in G-Mrabet 2010) which examines the principles of dissemination and implementation of new ideas in societies and "delineates the process of adaption, why some people or organizations adopt new ideas before others, and how they are influenced at each stage" (G-Mrabet 2010: 47). Applying Rogers' Diffusion Theory to the Gulf region she discusses the consequences of innovations which are—contrary to common belief—not always positive, and analyses them along Rogers' classification of consequences, namely "1) desirable and undesirable, 2) direct and indirect, 3) anticipated and unanticipated" consequences (48).

Highlighting the phenomenon of Western universities coming to the Gulf with the idea to "cut and paste" their model of education instead of modifying, tailoring, and adapting it to the local context, G-Mrabet warns in a concluding note that

> [c]ontinued change in the Arabian Gulf is inevitable, but the resistance to reform is powerful and in some cases, extreme […]. People want to move forward like Western societies but they are afraid that they will take on all of the West's problems. It is very important to keep in mind that each country must evolve at its own pace. Furthermore, it is imperative that the change agent understands fully his or her own culture to understand how he or she may be perceived by the host culture and thus communicate better and avoid some of the misunderstandings that are repeated over and over. Equally important experts and consultants need to take their time to understand their clients and analyse the setting where their educational projects are to be implemented (51).

Oman is paying close attention to the impact of Western-style educational approaches at the national and institutional levels and at which speed it chooses innovation to evolve. In terms of Rogers' Diffusion Theory Oman is following the path of *re-invention* where it is not playing the role of a "passive recipient of change" but an "active adapter of new ideas" (50)—in other words, refraining from a copy-and-paste adoption of Western-style approaches in favour of modifying, tailoring, and adapting them to the Omani context.

2.1. Quality assurance in the Arabian Gulf

The road to educational reform in the Arabian Gulf with all its intricacies has been laid out. Confronting the socio-cultural challenges by continuously improving and adapting the educational system in line with the interests of the local populations is the only way forward.

Amongst the many "strings attached to innovations" (G-Mrabet: 50) are also the questions of sustainability and quality. Education in the Gulf is only partially publicly funded; most universities are private although in many cases they receive governmental incentives and support—which means that education is a money-making business that is also striving for a "time after oil" towards building "knowledge-based economies". Hence, the "future of higher education in the Gulf revolves around the issues of numbers and quality" (Therin 2011).

Accordingly, the framework for overseeing the developments and enhancing HEI quality is monitored through ministries, national quality assurance agencies, and in some cases also through international accreditation bodies. "On quality, all the local agencies are now clearly engaged in quality-oriented auditing and accreditation processes. But there is still a long way to go before a sustainable higher education industry appears in the Gulf—and there are many possibilities that the business models will implode before then" (ibid.).

Sincere efforts are being made to collaborate and share best practices across the Arab world (a comprehensive overview on treaties and agreements can be found in Zand & Karrar 2010: 390) and internationally resulting in a regular exchange in the form of workshops, congresses and conferences, and joint agreements at the governmental level. Furthermore, it is considered imperative that graduates be made mobile and employable across the region with their degrees recognized in all countries. Zand & Karrar (2010: 392) compare the higher education situation and challenges in the Arab world in 2009 to those of the European Union before the Bologna Process where education was organized along "different educational philosophies and institutional structures". They commend the Bologna Process "as a model which is relevant to the harmonization of educational systems of the Arab countries", enabling a "closer co-operation among the agencies responsible for quality assurance in member states with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies", and point out that "[a]mong the Arab countries, GCC countries provide a most suitable environment for establishing a Bologna-type Higher Education area" (395). A proposal was tabled to establish a Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ibid.), a possible first step. Its first meeting was held in March 2015 in Muscat, Oman (cf. Highbeam Research 2015) with the outcomes yet to be announced and possible future collaborative efforts in sharing best-practice quality assurance networking knowledge between the EU and GCC higher education entities to be seen.

2.2. Quality assurance in Oman

With the introduction of the Oman Accreditation Council in 2001 and the Quality Plan in 2006 (cf. Caroll, Razvi, Goodliffe & Al-Habsi n.d.), Oman has chosen a unique path and stands out within the group of GCC countries in "making a real effort to improve academic quality" (Therin 2011), anchoring its national commitment to HEI quality in its national higher education framework.

Institutions of higher education in Oman undergo institutional accreditation in two stages where the first stage is an institutional quality audit and the second is the institutional standard assessment (cf. OAAA Website 2014). Inspired by the ADRI approach this system ensures that the HEI's in Oman feel committed to a reflective approach and the development of an institutional culture of quality, quality teaching and quality learning (cf. Caroll, Razvi & Goodliffe 2008).

Formal evaluation procedures using automation software platforms or management systems in the Middle East to collect student feedback for review at the institutional level seem to have been implemented successfully in order to provide long-term data for quality assurance. In the wake of the Bologna Process initiated in 1999, European universities also experienced a comparatively quick 'technical' implementation of quality management systems (cf. Jonach, Gramlinger & Hartl 2012: 2). However, nine years later—in 2008—Harvey & Stensaker pointed out that in Europe systems, procedures and rules were being applied which were "creating much data, many reports and much

attention", [yet] there was "still a lack of staff and student attachment and active involvement in these processes" (Harvey & Stensaker 2008: 1). Thus, "the existence of formal structures […] [does not] guarantee that educational organisations actually live the concept of quality and implement it or continuously attempt to improve" (Jonach et al. 2012: 3).

3. Quality Culture

Establishing a quality culture encouraging staff and student involvement "in the sense of 'shared values' and a collective (quality) responsibility of as many members as possible in a higher education organisation […]" (Jonach et al. 2012: 2) progresses slowly (3) and needs to be enhanced explicitly within an HEI. After extensive discussions about the concept of quality culture the European University Association agreed on the following definition of quality culture:

> [Q]uality culture refers to an organisational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterised by two distinct elements: on the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts (EUA 2006: 10).

In order to achieve a quality commitment at the collective as well as individual level within an institution *communication, participation* and *trust* are three key factors (Fig. 2), which will enable its stakeholders—students, teachers, administration, and management—to take responsibility for developing quality in their area of influence.
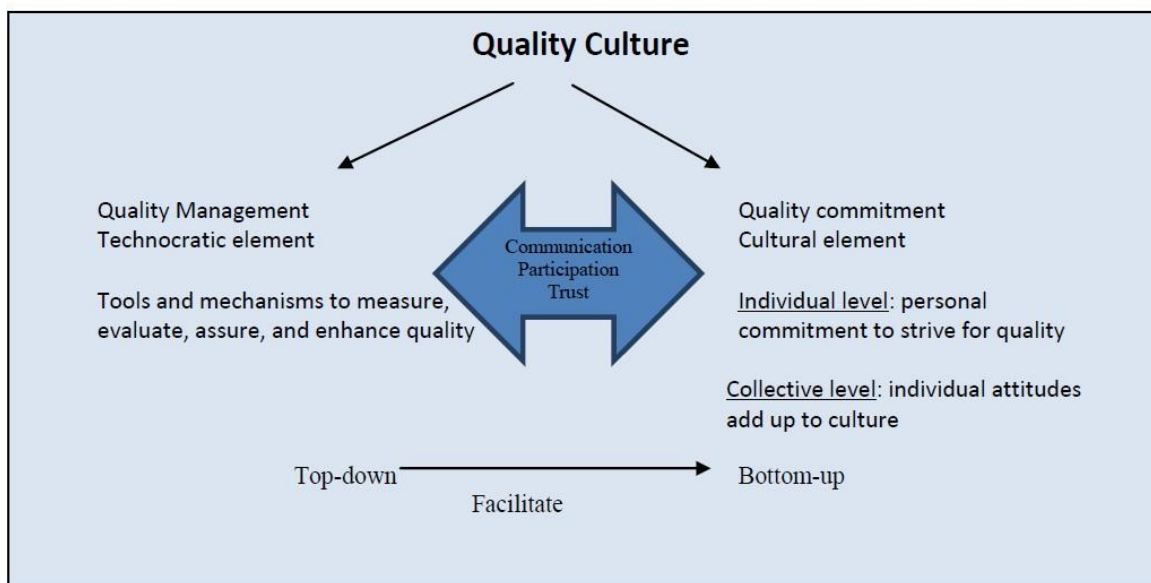

Fig. 2: Graphic following the concept of Quality Culture of the European University (EUA 2006: 20)

Harvey & Stensaker (2008) emphasise the interrelationship between quality assurance and quality culture and point out that "quality culture can be enforced by structural decisions which stimulate shared values and beliefs" (Harvey & Stensaker 2008: 8). However, as Ehlers (2011: 2) points out, it should not be a top-down process and

> aspects like quality management systems and instruments, competencies and individual and organisational values [should not be] seen as separate entities of a quality development process but […] combined in holistic concepts. […] Communication, participation and the combination of top-down and bottom-up interaction is of key importance to the success of a quality culture.

This supports the notion that teacher/course evaluations should not be considered as an isolated tool to measure quality teaching, but should experience reflection and discussion within the institutional framework or the environment.

3.1. Quality teaching

In an OECD study on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) (cf. Hénard 2010) 29 higher education institutions across 20 OECD and non-OECD countries were reviewed with respect to the quality of their teaching. Observations made by Hénard (2009: 5) in this study were that "[the] vast majority of initiatives supporting teaching quality are empirical and address the institutions' needs at a given point in time. (Initiatives inspired by academic literature are rare)" and he suggests that "a quality culture at institutional level can be better achieved through diverse initiatives, the consolidation of bottom-up initiatives, small-sized experiments at course or programme level, replication of success stories, the evaluation of quality teaching as a vehicle of discussion, and the participation of technical and administrative staff to provide mediation between academia and students" (8).

Hénard elaborates that "initiating an institutional policy to support quality teaching remains an adventurous, lengthy but potentially rewarding project" (6) which requires a multi-level endeavour involving three inter-dependent levels:

- *The institution-wide level*: including projects such as policy design, and support to organisation and internal quality assurance systems.
- *Programme level*: comprising actions to measure and enhance the design, content and delivery of the programmes within a department or a school.
- *Individual level*: including initiatives that help teachers achieve their mission, encouraging them to innovate and to support improvements to student learning and adopt a learner oriented focus.

[...] However, supporting quality teaching at the programme level is key so as to ensure improvement in quality teaching at the discipline level and across the institution (Hénard & Roseveare 2012: 7).

The OECD case studies present a holistic approach and a full-scale analysis which was applied to the complex situations in the institutions in order to

> understand reactions, behaviours and effects of the initiative—through the structures the organisation and the persons involved—as a frame of reference [and] the analysis of each Quality Teaching initiative went through the exploration of its inclusion into a wider context (influence of international trends and setting, of the national context, specificities of the regional area surrounding the institution), in relation with the institutional distinctive features, mission and strategy

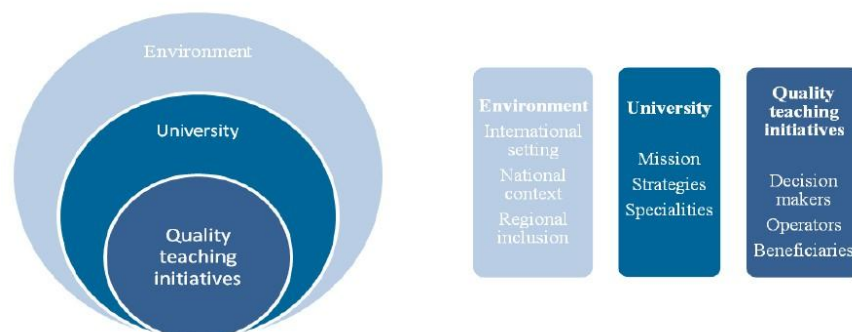(OECD Higher Education Website n.d.) as visualized in Fig. 3:

Fig. 3: The OECD case studies' holistic approach (slightly adapted)

With the slight adaptation the model is applicable to the good-practice example presented in this paper. The broader context of the environmental background was discussed in Chapter 1. The following case description will highlight the institutional setting, the teaching initiative taken, the institutional reaction, and the outcomes.

4. Institutional Setting—The German University of Technology in Oman

At the German University of Technology quality assurance is reflected in the institutional structures, along with the challenges and the commitment to acknowledge them in order to serve as a bridge between tradition and modernization.

The German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) was established in 2007 and is a transnational project in cooperation with the RWTH Aachen. English is the language of instruction and German is a compulsory subject. The course Language and Cultural Skills (LCS) is offered in the first two years for all students in the six bachelor programmes. Depending on their proficiency in the English language, students study German for 3 to 5 semesters and are placed in the Standard or Advanced German groups, respectively.

Having worked for six years (2007-2013) as a German language lecturer and as the head of the German Department at the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech), I was able to experience personally the founding years of the university's establishment with its growth, its successes, and its challenges.

The ADRI approach as a reflective quality management system was introduced at GUtech from the beginning—in line with the national QA approach discussed earlier—and quality assurance mechanisms such as formal course/teacher evaluations, regular workshops, etc. have been the standard ever since. Formal course and teacher evaluations at the time were conducted every semester via the management system EvaSys, and the results were collected as relevant documentation at the individual, programme, and institutional levels. They were sent to the lecturers before the end of the semester in order for them to receive feedback on important aspects about the course content, methodology, and outcomes, and to ensure that students receive comments on their feedback from the lecturers.

In the formal EvaSys evaluation, the following categories were assessed at GUtech every semester: *Course, Instructor, Educational resources, General information, Self-evaluation, Overall evaluation. S*pace was also given for *Additional comments*, where students were able to comment in detail on what they *Like, Dislike,* and to make suggestions for *Improvement.*

As stated in the GUtech Audit Quality Report published in 2013 EvaSyS surveys (results) conducted at the end of every course across the University "show consistently high levels of student satisfaction in this area" (OAAA 2013: 28).

4.1. Quality Teaching Initiative—"German at GUtech"

The overall student feedback on the German courses showed the same high level of satisfaction. However, at the same time a substantial number of remarks in the Additional Comments section and informal feedback gave the teaching team course for concern because they seemed contradict the overall appreciation of their German courses. These comments appeared, for example, under the section *What did you dislike?*:

- *"...nothing actually but the pressure that I get sometimes from the other courses, gets in the way of this course and it would be better if it was optional"*
- *"its large effect on my GPA"*
- *"The additional effort apart from what is needed to do my own course. The fact that it is not related to my own course"*
- *"the course is tough"*
- *"The timings, the classes should be shorter, and more often"*
- *"thats its compulsery so therefor it infuences our gpa"*

- *"i dislike the fact that this course is compulsory and its just an overload to us students. the fact that this course is compulsery, and its included in the grade which causes to effect our GPA"*

(Extracted from GUtech EvaSys results academic year 2010-2011).

Summarizing the two key themes in the comments, these were: the German classes impact the grade point average (GPA) and distract students from their core subjects. Although they were only a minority, this group of students needed to be taken seriously in an institution caring about quality teaching, quality learning and learner orientation. Continuous discussions among the lecturers about the underlying factors were the result; they eventually triggered a bottom-up approach urging the team of teachers to critically discuss the—at that time—teaching period of just over 3 years (2008—2011) and to take action in order to find out what was going on and to reflect on:

- what and how they were teaching,
- why they were teaching what they were teaching, and
- what needed to be improved or changed.

It was of utmost importance to understand in more detail the students' expectations from learning German and to determine which factors influenced the students' motivation (for further reading on motivation in foreign language learning see amongst others Riemer & Schlak 2004).

4.2. Survey[2]

Questions were compiled that were intended to reflect the lecturers' understanding of the relevant learning motives, programme aims, learning outcomes and possible factors influencing the students' motivation in class. A question-naire with 50 questions was developed that covered four areas of research interest:

Intrinsic motivation and personal relevance

1) Professional/career motivation
2) Cultural relevance
3) Academic/study program motivation

At the time of the survey in the academic year 2011/12 a total number of 162 students took or had taken German. Trying to get the highest possible feedback, 162 questionnaires had been distributed of which 123 were returned, amounting to a feedback rate of 76 %.

Of the 162 students 75 were current and 48 were former students of German. 79 were Standard learners and 44 were Advanced learners.

The overall satisfaction with the German courses was confirmed by the study, as shown in Fig. 4. However, 22 % of the students evaluated *German as not being helpful* was clearly visible, which were grounds for concern.

Overall importance of German courses at GUtech

I think …

- learning German for three/five Semesters is adequate. — 40%
- I would like/would have liked to continue my German classes as electives after the 3rd year. — 39%
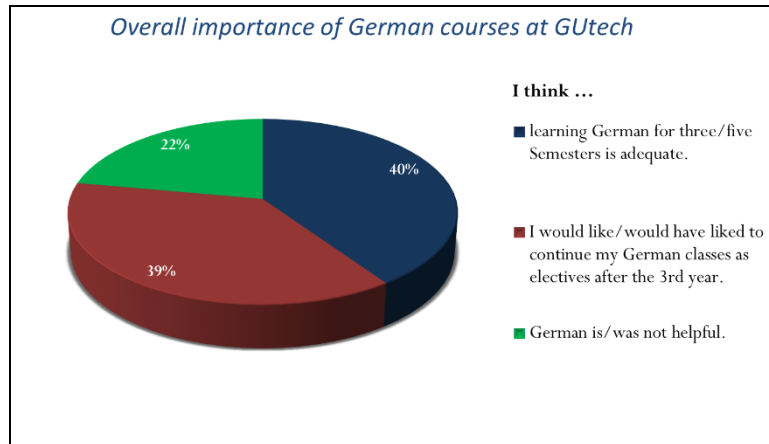- German is/was not helpful. — 22%

Fig. 4: Overall importance of German courses at GUtech

Looking at the data about the students' intrinsic motivation in Fig. 5 and 6 the results show a generally positive attitude towards learning German (in particular statements 16, 17, 18, and 24) and an acknowledgement of its personal relevance for students.

Intrinsic motivation, personal relevance
How strongly do you disagree/agree with the following statements?

Statement	agree	disagree
16 Knowing German is a personal enrichment.	71%	23%
17 Learning German is important and has value for me.	61%	37%
18 Learning German strengthens my academic self-confidence.	57%	35%
19 What I learn in this course is more important to me than the grade I get.	39%	49%
20 I use German outside class (with professors/interns, internet, music, …)	38%	58%

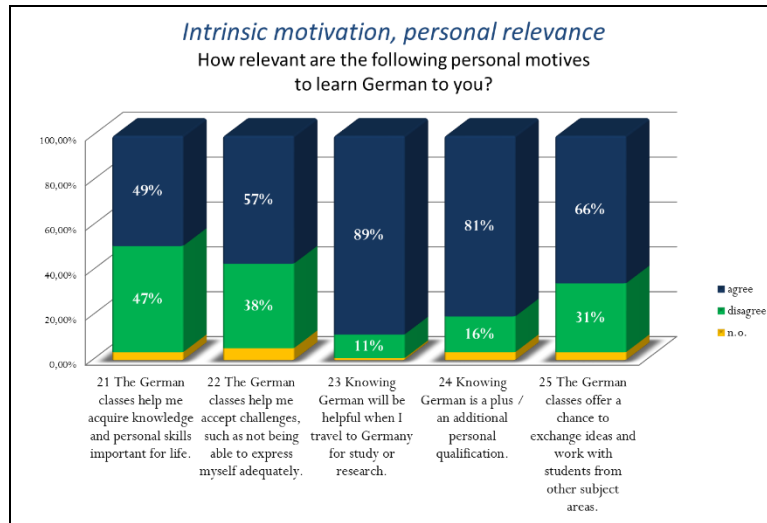Fig. 5 Intrinsic motivation, personal relevance

Fig. 6: Intrinsic motivation, personal relevance

The results for statement 19 ("What I learn in this class is more important than the grade I get") indicates a noticeable negative trend; however, it may be too much to expect students to put content ahead of grades.

The cultural relevance of the language courses was rated at an even higher level of acceptance as shown in Fig. 7, confirming the important aims and learning outcomes of the courses.
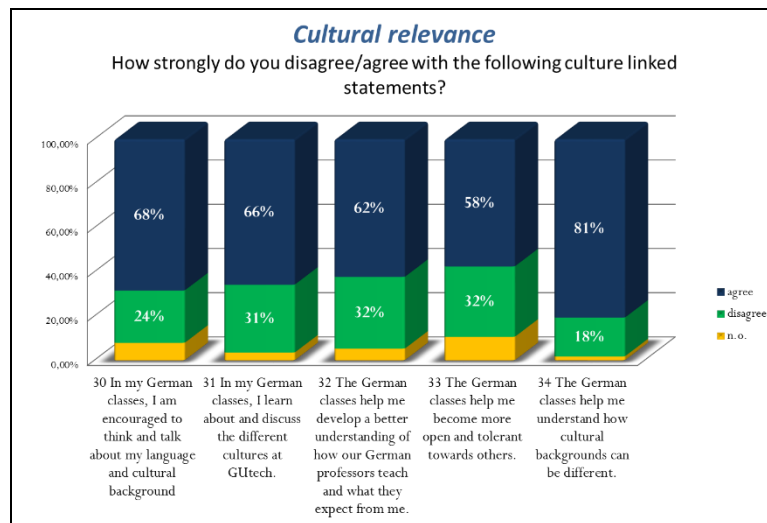

Fig. 7: Cultural relevance

However, when asked about the benefits and challenges of the German classes in relation to their programmes of study, the results provided further evidence of the conflict already observed in the EvaSys surveys. As shown in Fig. 8 (statements 36, 45, and 46) the majority of the students tended to evaluate negatively the impact of language classes on their study subjects.
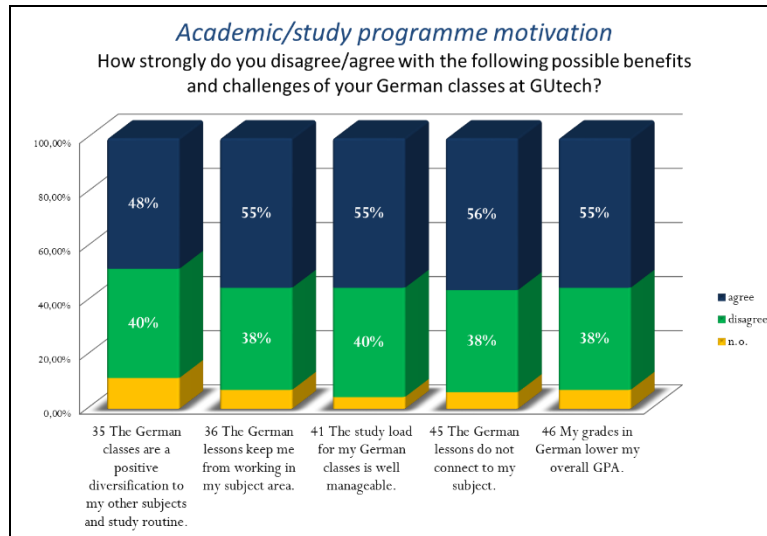
Fig. 8: Academic/study program motivation

The implications of the survey suggested a further investigation into this conflicted relationship between the major study programmes and the mandatory language programme. Bringing it to the attention of the university's administration as a challenge relating to the institutional strategy was the next logical step.

5. Institutional Inclusion—Culture of Quality

Having a range of possible (re-)actions available to this bottom-up approach, the university administration chose to be supportive and bold and guided the initiative towards an institution-wide level, stimulating a more inclusive approach within the university context and enabling a multi-level reflection on the factors influencing language learning at the University. Following the method of triangulation (see Fig. 9) the survey was included in an overall analysis using document analysis and a cross-departmental workshop to investigate further why students claimed that German language classes were negatively impacting their GPAs and distracted them from their core subjects.

In addition to the survey to appraise the status of German against the university's mission and graduate attributes and skills, it was decided to consider feedback from the Ministry of Higher Education, to evaluate data concerning the influence of German on the GPA, to investigate the entire Language and Cultural Skills curriculum including English, and to collect feedback from the study programmes. Finally, the findings were to be discussed in the joint workshop between management, study programme representatives and the German and English language departments.
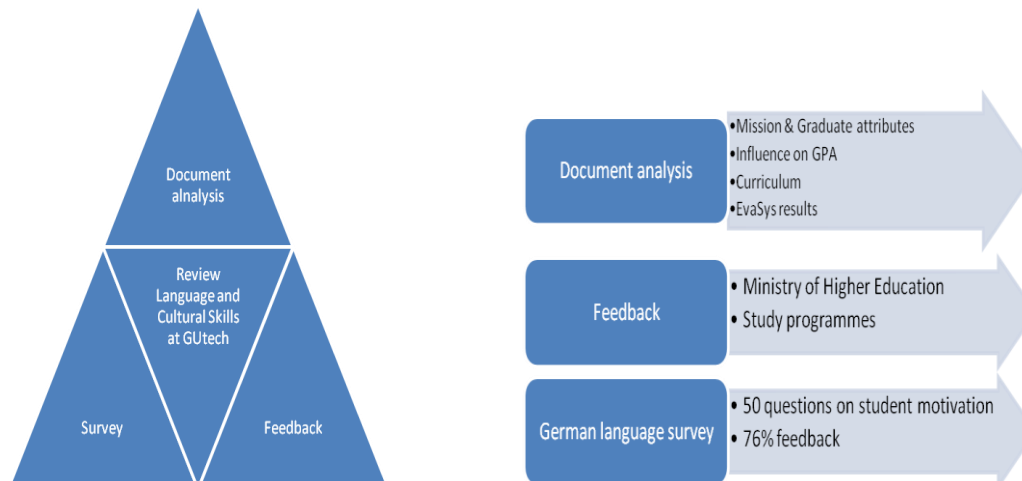
Figure 9: Triangulation approach to "Reflection on 4 years of LCS at GUtech"

In the workshop conducted in May 2012 the above-mentioned collected data were presented under these categories:

- Justification for LCS courses
- Facts about Cultural Skills, German language and English language courses
- Feedback from Students, Staff, Ministry of Higher Education

Having identified a number of interrelated factors challenging a certain percentage of students to do well in studying their core subjects in English and to learn German after English, the second step in the workshop was to intensify the discussion by debating some provocative and some hypothetical questions in order to find possible solutions:

- Do we need LCS courses?
- Do they need to be the same across all Bachelor programmes?
- Do they need to account for 10 % of all credit points?
- Does the German language course need to be compulsory?
- Does is need to be graded or could it be a pass/fail course?
- Would it be possible to allow weak students to choose between English and German courses in Semester 3 and 4?
- Do we need LCS III and LCS IV in English?
- Do we need an English Language Support Centre? If yes, how would this be integrated with the LCS and other courses?

Finally, the results of the workshop were documented and discussed in a meeting between the university management and the heads of the language departments.

Having identified key factors related to language learning that are evidently influencing the learning performance of a group of students, action points were framed and procedures for improvement implemented. The workshop results and action points were then communicated to all staff.

6. Conclusion

The detailed results and procedures for improvement are relevant for the University itself as well as for further research on teaching German as a Foreign Language after English in transnational university projects (for further reading on this discussion see HRK/DAAD 2014). Of interest here is the documentation of a commitment to a culture of quality: looking beyond formal course/teacher evaluation of the German language programme resulted in a

bottom-up initiative taken by the teaching team to further investigate underlying factors. With a range of possible (re-)actions to a bottom-up approach at hand the university management chose to be supportive and bold and guided the initiative towards an institution-wide level examination. Encouraging c*ommunication* and *participation,* a more inclusive approach within the university context was fostered, and a multi-level reflection on the factors influencing language learning at the university was encouraged in order to achieve results which consider the wider picture.

Trust between the involved stakeholders was promoted by sharing values and expectations, thus taking the concerns of the lecturers seriously, acknowledging the feedback of even the smallest percentage of students, and appreciating the initiative of the management.

One may argue that GUtech at that time was a small institution where information flows and straightforward decision-making processes facilitated a better dissemination of quality teaching initiatives (cf. Hénard 2009). However, as Hénard points out

> […] the large size of some institutions can be an asset for quality teaching as it allows for a variety of approaches to innovation. Regardless of size [...] a quality culture at institutional level can be better achieved through diverse initiatives, the consolidation of bottom-up initiatives, small-sized experiments at course or programme level, replication of success stories, the evaluation of quality teaching as a vehicle of discussion, and the participation of technical and administrative staff to provide mediation between academia and students (Hénard 2009: 8).

It is very desirable that we do not pay attention solely to formal evaluation results, but enhance the interrelationship between formal quality assurance processes and quality commitment, and if we acknowledge each other's responsibility to encourage communication, participation, sharing institutional values and taking the initiative in order to promote a positive teaching and learning culture.

7. Outlook

Following a holistic approach, hence reflecting on the teaching initiative against the background of its environmental and institutional settings, my introductory remarks addressed the extraordinary cultural challenges of higher education development in the Arabian Gulf region and the institutional review focused on the development of quality culture in a HEI (GUtech) in Oman. The teaching initiative discussed was presented from the point of view of a department head and lecturer at the German University of Technology in Oman. Thus, my intention was to give an insight from a bottom-up perspective in order to promote awareness of possible procedures for quality culture enhancement at the management and programme level while encouraging commitment at the lecturer level. Bottom-up initiatives are clearly dependent on engaged staff. Therefore, my concluding words are directed to the lecturers and the question of how to prepare students in the Arab world to become engaged lecturers who are aware of the *wider picture* and willing to take initiative to ensure quality teaching.

In my current position as the coordinator of an MA teacher programme for German as a Foreign Language at the German Jordanian University, I am contemplating the educational implications with respect to "teaching" about the concept of quality culture in teacher training programmes. I believe that the slow progress observed by Jonach et al. (2012: 3) with regard to establishing a culture of quality is also related to the fact that teachers—depending on their education, cultural background, personal skills, and previous experience—may or may not (yet) be reflective thinkers and thus may not be receptive to ideas of an individual institutional commitment or a loyalty that goes beyond their immediate area of responsibility; it is also important to keep in mind the whole complex of power distribution in an institution.

So, while research suggests that the institutional leadership has a crucial role in initiating institutional commitment, participation at the individual teacher level is not necessarily ensured (Loukkola & Zang 2010: 23) and positive critical and evaluative reflection are not necessarily internalized as a professional trait. Future teachers need to be educated to become reflective thinkers, and they need to understand formal quality assurance procedures and learn

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how to appreciate and evaluate them. Consequently, in order to develop self-assurance and become active and engaged lecturers in their institutions, they need to receive guidance leading to an understanding of the concept of an institutional culture of quality.

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Notes

[1] The article is based on a paper presented at the 3rd OQNHE Conference on Quality Management & Enhancement in Higher Education in Muscat, Oman in February 2015 titled *How Do We Know We Are Doing Well? Quality assurance—looking beyond formal course/teacher evaluation towards a culture of quality. A good practice example.*

[2] Unpublished survey: Krause, Katrin; Sermen, Susanne; Huson, Nicola (2012), *German Language at GUtech, Oman.*