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Quality Assurance in Virtual Learning Environments for Open Distance Learning

Victor J. Pitsoe and Matsephe M. Letseka

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Abstract

Quality assurance, as the fundamental pillar of higher education development, continues to remain an integral part of the e-learning process. Most importantly, it influences reforms in higher education institutions globally. This chapter departs on the assumptions that (1) quality assurance, as power relations construct, is not free from cultural hegemony and (2) quality assurance in virtual learning environments should be guided and informed by Paulo Freire's humanizing pedagogy. In this chapter, we shall argue that quality assurance is both a philosophical problem and a policy imperative that is critical for the internationalization and globalization of higher education, more specifically virtual learning environments. We will further argue that the emphasis placed on the importance of quality assurance in virtual learning practices has been blind-spotted by the fact that quality assurance can be viewed as agent of cultural hegemony and cultural reproduction of capitalist societies. While we agree with all the positive elements attributed to quality assurance in virtual learning, we argue that they should be characterized by humanizing pedagogy and the international dimension (exchange of knowledge and interactive networking) and cultural hybridity.

Keywords: quality assurance, quality, hegemony, ideological state apparatus

1. Introduction and background

Quality assurance (QA) is not a new phenomenon—it is on the agenda of many educational institutions globally. Within the academic world and in higher education policy, QA is used as a tool for rankings in higher education (HE). Federkeil [1] writes that "rankings have become a widespread phenomenon in an increasingly competitive world of higher education. They differ with regard to their aims, objectives, target groups, and with regard to their relationship to quality and quality assessment." Nonetheless, it has sparked numerous discourses

in and outside academia. Perhaps, it is noteworthy to mention that quality assurance has the material attributes of an ideological construct. As the fundamental pillar of higher education development, quality assurance continues to remain an integral part of the e-learning process and virtual learning environments (VLEs). While "social norms, values, and acceptable forms of behavior vary widely from culture to culture" [2], our thesis is that the dominant quality assurance practices in VLEs do not take into account the different cultural attitudes within the classroom.

Although some may deny it: (1) quality assurance, as a power relations construct, is not free from cultural hegemony and (2) quality assurance in VLEs should be guided and informed by Paulo Freire's humanizing pedagogy. Hence, open distance learning (ODL) institutions are also coming under pressure to guarantee that their virtual learning practices are anchored by credible quality assurance policies. In this chapter, we shall argue that quality assurance in VLEs is both a philosophical problem and a policy imperative that is critical for the internationalization and globalization of higher education. Notwithstanding the fact that a significant number of studies have shown that VLEs enhance student learning, we will further argue that the emphasis placed on the importance of quality assurance in virtual learning practices has been blind-spotted by the fact that quality assurance can be viewed as an agent of cultural hegemony and cultural reproduction of capitalist societies.

Oyaid and Al-Hosan [3] remind us that the "availability of quality in virtual and e-learning is a very important issue for any academic course, program, and educational environment." They further argue that "if quality is a prerequisite for the success of the educational process in general, it is essential for virtual and e-learning in particular." While we agree with all the positive elements attributed to quality assurance in VLEs, we will argue that they should be characterized by humanizing pedagogy and the international dimension (exchange of knowledge and interactive networking) and cultural hybridity. Drawing on the works of Paulo Freire, Basil Bernstein, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser, this chapter will (1) theorize quality assurance in the VLEs; (2) argue quality assurance as a practice of symbolic control; (3) present quality assurance as cultural hegemony; (4) critique quality assurance as an ideological state apparatus (ISA); (5) present Paulo Freire's humanizing pedagogy; and (6) propose a rethinking of quality assurance in VLEs through the lens of humanizing pedagogy.

2. Theorizing quality assurance in VLEs and e-learning

The notion of quality of teaching is derived from consumerization and standardization of higher education. Yet, the notion of quality assurance in the VLEs and e-learning is constantly evolving, very fluid in nature and is broadly perceived. Quality, just like "freedom" or "justice," is an elusive concept, instinctively understood but difficult to articulate [4]. The concept is easily misconstrued because of its rather vague characteristics. Most scholars consider quality as extremely elusive, slippery, dynamic, multidimensional, and a relative concept. Throughout the history of quality assurance, various iterations of what good quality means have come and gone. We need to take cognizance that the concepts of "quality" and "quality assurance" are not unproblematic. Both concepts have very different meanings and

interpretations to both the providers of and the consumers of quality and quality assurance. In essence, the concepts "quality" and "quality assurance" are to a large extent amorphous and contextual. Included here are some definitions of some of the shared understandings of the notion of quality assurance in the VLEs and e-learning in ODL context.

Quality can be defined as the embodiment of the essential nature of a person, collective object, action, process, or organization. For most scholars [5–12], quality in education is a combination of exceptional high standards; perfection and consistency; fitness for purpose; value for money; transformation capabilities; and product of planning, monitoring, control, and coordination. In a nutshell, Harvey [9] captures notion of quality in five categories. He sees quality as: (1) *something special* (something distinctive and elitist); perfection (consistent or flawless outcome); fitness for purpose (fulfilling a customer's requirements, needs, or desires); value for money (in terms of return on investment); and transformation (in terms of change from one state to another).

Against this backdrop, the quality of online education is a central issue for the sustainable delivery, development, and future of technology-supported learning. Oyaid and Al-Hosan [3] note that "the concept of quality in virtual and e-learning is associated in the literature and recent studies with the outcome of the educational process, most definitions of quality in e-learning have described it in terms of measuring or testing the effectiveness and quality of e-learning programs in accordance with standards and benchmarks." Biggs (as cited as cited in [3]) "calls such quality assurance processes *retrospective* activities, because they look back to see what has been done rather than looking forward (*prospective*) to see what can be done to transform and change educational processes to improve the service delivery."

3. Quality assurance as a practice of symbolic control

To start with, quality assurance does not exist in isolation. It is profoundly connected in/to the politics of "symbolic control" and is consistent with Bernstein's [13, 14] *Model of Transmission Context*—it has the attributes of *classification* and *framing*. Bernstein [15] conjures that "symbolic control is legitimized by a closed explicit ideology, the essence of weak classification and weak frames" (p. 111). According to Bernstein [16], ideology is not content, but a way of making and realizing relationships. Hence, it could be argued that quality assurance, as invisible pedagogy [17], fits through the lens of specialized agencies of symbolic control. Within this context, we hold that in the VLEs and e-learning space, quality assurance demonstrates, through the values of "*classification* and f*raming*, how power and control is differentially distributed between the transmitter and acquirer in the quest to create contextually appropriate text" [14].

It is important here to indicate that, as Bernstein and Solomon [18] observe, "symbolic control is materialised through a pedagogic device (which is the condition for the construction of pedagogic discourses). The device consists of three rules which give rise to three respective arenas containing agents with positions/practices seeking domination." For them, a pedagogic device consists of: (1) distributive rules attempt to control access to the arena for the

legitimate production of discourse; (2) pedagogic discourses are projected from positions in the reconceptualizing arenas; and (3) evaluative rules shape any given context of acquisition" (p. 269). **Figure 1** illustrates Bernstein's model of transmission within any pedagogic context.

The model of transmission context is central to the recognition and realization rules. While recognition and realization rules are in effect functions of classification, Bernstein's [14] model (1) "provides an overview of how the distribution of power and the principles of control translate into classification and framing values which select out recognition and realisation rules to create contextually appropriate text" (p. 18); and that (2) "recognition rules regulate what meanings are relevant and realization rules regulate how the meanings are to be put together to create the legitimate text" (p. 18). Within Bernstein's [14] model of transmission context, the interactional practice can be constructed as the transmission process of quality assurance policy dissemination. Hence, the higher education institutions and ODL practitioners interact with the transmitters via visual, verbal, and electronic representations. With this in mind, Bernstein [15] emphasize that

> *"the recognition and realisation rules are in effect functions of classification and framing where the recognition rules create the means of distinguishing between, and so recognizing the speciality that constitutes a context [or voice] and realisation rules 'regulate the creation and production of specialized relationships, internal to that context' [or message]".*

Notwithstanding the fact that the symbolic control theory is not always welcome, or well treated, in the Anglo-Saxon intellectual milieu, "it has provided inspiration for theoretical work in a variety of disciplines and the conceptual framework for robust and sensitive sociological empirical research on cultural and, particularly, pedagogic practices and their effects, in many parts of the world" [18]. Yet, it could be argued that quality assurance is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge appearing in the VLEs and e-learning settings—it is fragment of "selective tradition" and the dominant group's vision of legitimate knowledge. In his work *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, Michael Apple [19] convincingly demonstrates that "What counts as legitimate and one's right to determine it is lodged in a complicated politics of symbolic control of public knowledge" (p. 63).

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that, quality assurance fits through Basil Bernstein's lens of "symbolic control." The *being*-ness and the *is*-ness of qual-
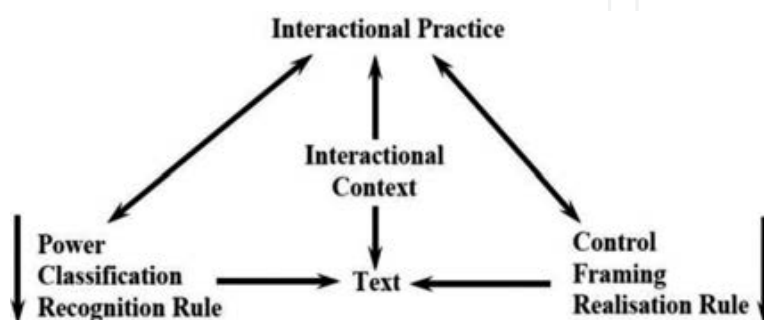

Figure 1. The model of transmission context. Adapted from Bernstein [14] (p. 16).

ity assurance as (1) invisible pedagogic device, (2) ontology and epistemology, (3) social construction, (4) social reproduction, and (5) social representation are introduced through the distributive rules. From Bernsteinian perspective, there is symbiotic relationship between the concepts quality assurance and "symbolic control." Hence, the concept "symbolic control," as a conceptual tool, is central in understanding the discourses on quality assurance in the VLEs and e-learning context. Perhaps, it is worthwhile to mention that VLEs and e-learning contexts are regulated by symbolic control (specialized and dominant forms of communication).

One interesting conclusion is that quality assurance, in the VLEs and e-learning context, has the attributes of "interactional practice," and can be perceived as classification (power) and framing procedures (control) which act selectively on the recognition and realization rules, where the text is considered to be "anything which attracts evaluation" [14]. As Bernstein [16] notes, "control is double faced for it carries both the power of reproduction and the potential for its change" (p. 19). Another important observation is that the recognition and realization rules are in effect functions of classification and framing in quality assurance. According to Bernstein [14, 17], "recognition rules regulate what meanings are relevant and realization rules regulate how the meanings are to be put together to create the legitimate text" (p. 18). For him, "set of rules shape the creation, reproduction, and possible transformations of specialised contexts."

With this in mind, we can infer that the notion of quality assurance in VLEs and e-learning context as a dominant discursive code shapes legitimate ways of thinking and ways of relating carries the attributes of regulative and discursive rules, symbolic control, and identity [14, 16, 20–26]—it acquires its *being*-ness and *is*-ness through cultural reproduction. Hence, quality assurance in the VLEs and e-learning context can be seen as the dominant agent of the field of symbolic control and hegemony that regulate the means, contexts, and possibilities of discursive resources. It could be concluded that quality assurance (in the VLEs and e-learning in ODL) is a process through which ruling power consolidate symbolic control and hegemony.

4. Quality assurance as a cultural hegemony

It is important to stress that, quite often the notion of "hegemony" is associated with issues of power and is broadly perceived. In the case of this chapter, we will draw on Antonio Gramsci's hegemony, as the key concept in understanding the very unity existing in a concrete social formation. For us, Gramsci's theory of hegemony is a fundamental part of quality assurance in VLEs and e-learning in ODL space as key sites for practicing "symbolic control" and "hegemony." We argue that the dominant group or the bourgeois society, through combining the ideas of "symbolic control" and "hegemony," gains social power. In the context of VLEs and e-learning quality assurance, power can be gained by a closed explicit ideology (classification and framing procedures). Yet, the notion of "classification" of Bernstein and the idea of "hegemony" of Gramsci have a symbiotic relationship. Despite the fact that both concepts

"classification" and "hegemony" have political, moral authority, and control connotations, perhaps it is noteworthy to emphasize that Gramsci and Bernstein's works are the analytical tools to explore the link between quality assurance and dominant and/or the ruling power.

The VLEs and e-learning in the ODL are complex and evolving and have significant operational as well as academic challenges. Hence, assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in VLEs and e-learning in ODL institutions are currently a major concern. In Gramsci's theory, hegemony is the term for the social consensus, which masks people's real interests. The hegemonic processes take place in the superstructure and are part of a political field [27, 28]. From a Gramscian stance, Pitsoe and Dichaba [29] emphasize that "the basic premise of the theory of hegemony is that man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas." Citing Gramsci [30] and Bates [31], Pitsoe and Dichaba [29] further indicate that "the foundation of a ruling class is equivalent to the creation of a *Weltanschauung*"; and that "the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class" [31].

In a Gramscian sense, hegemony is both discursive and political. Among others, it includes the power to establish "legitimate" definitions of social needs and authoritative definitions of social situations. It involves the power to define what counts as "legitimate" areas of agreement and disagreement. As Pitsoe and Dichaba [29] write, "hegemony describes the power exercised by the ruling class over the population in order to maintain "control" of the means of production." Citing Gramsci [30], they further note that "hegemony is a form of control exercised primarily through a society's superstructure as opposed to its base or social relations of production of a predominately economic character." For Pitsoe and Dichaba [29], "hegemony is consent protected by the armor of coercion. Perhaps, it is critical to emphasize that "through the power of consent, hegemony finds its way toward obtaining the spontaneous collaboration of the individuals, in order to uphold the political *status quo* in the long term" [29]. Hegemony is not a static concept—it is very complex and fluid in nature. It functions to define the meaning and limits of common sense as well as the forms and content of discourse in society" [32, 33]; and "reinforces or reproduces the political and economic dominance of one social class over another" [34]. Drawing from Williams [35], Pitsoe and Dichaba [29] conclude that (1) "hegemony exceeds ideology in its refusal to equate consciousness with the articulate formal system which can be and ordinarily abstracted as ideology; and that (2) hegemony attempts to neutralize opposition, the decisive hegemonic function is to control or transform or even incorporate (alternatives and opposition)."

In the light of the above analysis, studying quality assurance in the VLEs and e-learning from Gramscian perspective involves two major theoretical shifts. First, from a philosophical perspective, hegemony and quality assurance, as both ideological constructs, have a symbiotic relationship. In short, it would seem that quality assurance is a power relations construct. Quality assurance, as a form of powerful bureaucracy, is compatible with the behavioristic view of learning, in which both curriculum and instruction are broken down into small, sequential steps dictated by the practitioners. Just like the Industrial Revolution, which called for the redesign of schools in order to prepare a labor force for new forms of work and citizenship, the fluid nature of the VLEs and e-learning settings calls for new forms of quality assurance practices that are consistent with a reflexive practice. Second,

there is a *prima facie* case for hegemony playing a part in quality assurance. Understanding quality assurance as praxis, identity, status, virtue, or agency is a hegemonic approach to the concept. It is also an ideological approach, based on idealist articulations of what quality assurance should be.

5. Quality assurance as an Ideological State Apparatus

Ideology is a fundamental property of quality assurance in the VLEs and e-learning in ODL settings. From Althusserian perspective, quality assurance advances the materiality of ideology and serves to reproduce the relations of production. The central thesis of this section is that ideology is inescapable, it lives in quality assurance and constitutes quality assurance; and continues to be the powerful force behind the dominance of hegemonic institutions. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesized that quality assurance, as a metaphysical construct, (1) represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence; and (2) interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects. In addition, we depart on the assumption that quality assurance is compatible and consistent with notion of educational Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA)—it functions by ideology and repression, and it "has the function of regulating the relation, of individuals to their tasks, and, in so doing, ensuring the cohesion of the social whole" [36].

Yet, it should be noted that Louis Althusser's work, as a theoretical tool, is not alien to critiquing quality assurance practice in the in the VLEs and e-learning. Central to this chapter is the assumption that quality assurance, as a social construct and the struggle over knowledge control, pertains to Althusser's theoretical framework. Let us explain. In his work, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, Althusser [36] distinguishes between two forms of state apparatuses: the Ideological State Apparatus and the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). He calls Ideological State Apparatuses realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions [36]. For Althusser [36], "repressive apparatuses function by violence" (p. 145).

Althusser (1971) reminds us that, "ISAs include education, religion, family, legal system, political system, culture, mass media, trade unions, which he says are primarily private. It is also worth mentioning that these are the agencies that function by violence, by at some point imposing punishment or privation in order to enforce power." As Althusser [36] puts it, "all the state apparatuses function both by repression and by ideology, with the difference that the RSA functions massively and predominantly by repression, whereas the ISAs function massively and predominantly by ideology" (p. 149). While ideology "interpellates" subjects, in Althusser's [36] framework, hailing individuals into social beings, quality assurance as ideology, works to secure the *hegemony* (p. 150). Althusser [36] says that an "ideology always exists in an apparatus, and that while ideology in general has no history, specific ideologies have histories of their own. Ideologies interpellate people into defined subject positions through the ISA." The "subjects" thus are far less likely to oppose their status in life since they accept the "practices."

Althusser's [36] position is that "all ISAs, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e., of capitalist relations of exploitation" (p. 153). For him, the "reproduction of the relations of production, the ultimate aim of the ruling class, cannot therefore be merely technical operation training and distributing individuals for the different posts in the 'technical division' of labour" (p. 183). Most importantly, Althusser theorizes that ideology "has a material existence and that each ISA is the 'realization of an ideology'" (p. 166). He concludes that ideology "always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices" and that "individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects," which implies that the "individual is always-already subject," "even before he is born" (p. 176).

In summary, it should be admitted without prevarication that the quality assurance practice, as both an institution and ideology, fits perfectly through the lens of ISA. It is intended to perpetuate social reproduction and political hegemony. Particularly, it advances the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. Through quality assurance practice, as epistemological hegemonic dominance, individuals are transformed into subjects through the ideological mechanism. Althusser [36] concludes that the "reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order" (p. 132).

6. Paulo Freire's humanizing pedagogy

From a historical point of view, humanizing pedagogy was first enunciated by Paulo Freire, the most prolific and polyphonic voice of twentieth century philosophy on critical pedagogy. In his work Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire [38] presents humanizing pedagogy as a philosophical approach that fosters critical, dialogue, and liberatory practices. Among others, he makes a call to counter hegemonic education and dehumanizing pedagogies. As Freire [38] writes, humanizing pedagogy is "a teaching method that ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, but rather expresses the consciousness of the students themselves" (p. 51). For this reason, he contends that "teachers who are able to promote a humanizing pedagogy are more apt to develop mutual humanization in a dialogic approach with their students in which everyone ultimately develops a critical consciousness" (p. 56). Freire [38] asserts that "concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility, but also as a historical reality" (p. 43). Recently, there has been renewed interest in humanizing pedagogy. It is critical to mention that humanizing pedagogy is fast becoming a key instrument in the diverse VLEs and e-learning settings. However, a significant number of scholars [37–40] perceive "humanizing pedagogy as a process of becoming for students and teachers." Freire [38] asserts that "concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility, but also as a historical reality." Notwithstanding the fact that Freire has often been criticized for the "universalist" nature of his theory of oppression and liberation, the notion of humanizing pedagogy is critical in educational leadership. Freire urges readers to recognize that humanizing pedagogy is concerned with transforming relations of power which

are oppressive and which lead to the oppression of people. Most importantly, it "transforms oppressed people and to save them from being objects of education to subjects of their own autonomy and emancipation" [41].

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire [38] reminds us that "humanizing pedagogy is a teaching method that ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, but rather expresses the consciousness of the students themselves." For him, "teachers who are able to promote a humanizing pedagogy are more apt to develop mutual humanization in a dialogic approach with their students in which everyone ultimately develops a critical consciousness" (p. 56). With this in mind, Huerta [42] tells us that "teachers who embrace a humanizing pedagogy recognize the sociohistorical and political context of their own lives and their students' lives, including the influence of societal power, racial and ethnic identities, and cultural values" (p. 39). She further argues that "these teachers believe that marginalized students (due to race, economic class, culture, or experience) differ in how they learn, but not in their ability to learn." For her, (1) "teachers who practice a humanizing pedagogy incorporate students' language and culture into the academic context to support learning and to help students identify with, and maintain pride in, their home cultures; and (2) teachers who practice a humanizing pedagogy explicitly teach the school's codes and customs, and/or mainstream knowledge, to enable students to fully participate in the dominant culture."

On the one hand, McLaren [43] remarks that humanizing pedagogy means aiming to "transform existing power and privilege in the service of greater social justice and human freedom" (p. 46). On the other hand, for most scholars [37, 39, 44–46], humanizing pedagogy means aiming to "develop the whole person (in contrast to only developing their knowledge/skills in one particular discipline), and their awareness of self in relation to others and context"; recognizes the importance of, "the students' background and knowledge, culture, and life experiences and creates learning contexts where power is shared by students and teachers" [47]. In the same vein, Wood [48] observes that "a humanizing pedagogy informs us that we can learn from those we may deem to be inferior and furthers the wellness of all human beings, rather than only transferring academic knowledge" (p. 832).

In summary, "humanizing pedagogy respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice" [37]. In addition, humanizing pedagogy "creates learning contexts where power is shared by students and teachers" [47]. For Bartolomé [37, 47], the concept of dehumanizing pedagogy involves the "deficit approaches in teaching that result in discriminatory practices for strip students of the cultural, linguistic, and familial aspects that make them unique, self-possessed individuals." Similarly, Freire [38] emphasizes that "there is no learning or humanization without the act of mutual dialogue. Yet for dialogue to be transformative it needs to be carried out in relations of love, mutual respect, and trust." Freire [38] was profoundly convinced that "if the capacity to dialogue offers an alternative to the 'banking concept' of education, it does so because it no longer reduce the oppressed human being to the status of a thing or object." Hence, a "humanising pedagogy expresses the consciousness of the students" [38]. In the next section, we consider rethinking quality assurance in VLEs through humanizing pedagogy lens.

7. Rethinking of quality assurance in VLE through the lens of humanizing pedagogy

Robinson [49] notes that "while the adoption of VLEs is becoming widespread among universities worldwide, the cultural background of students in these institutions, especially in Western societies, have become increasingly diverse." For him, "cultural diversity can bring enrichment to the classroom, and the VLE can be rewarding in facilitating flexible teaching and learning, networked learning and cross-cultural communication, as examples of benefits." However, Robinson [49] writes that "while it may be crucial for HEIs to take full advantage of e-learning opportunities, the most pressing concerns are the impact that the VLEs may have on students' cultural differences, their online expectations and ultimately, their learning outcomes." Against this backdrop, we raise this important question: To what extent does the dominant quality assurance in VLE embrace students' cultural differences?

Perhaps it is apt to indicate that the work of Freire is not alien to the field of quality assurance practices in VLEs and e-learning, he continues to stand as an intellectual giant in the field of humanizing pedagogy. For this reason, humanizing pedagogy is crucial for exploring quality assurance in VLEs and e-learning. Among others, in the twenty-first century, quality assurance in VLEs and e-learning is very complex and chaotic—it is caught in a theoretical impasse. Hence, the state of dehumanization in dominant quality assurance practices in VLEs and e-learning calls for counter practice to dehumanization in education. In coming to grips with the philosophy of Freire, a great deal hinges on understanding his dialogue on alternative "banking concept of education." Freire [38] very explicitly and dramatically announces a move from dehumanizing to humanizing education.

It is essential to mention that "humanizing pedagogy" (also known as a process of *conscientizacão*) is broadly perceived. Notwithstanding the fact that humanizing pedagogy has many faces and histories, there is a growing interest in a critical agenda within higher education. Given its complex and fluid nature, the concept of "humanizing pedagogy" remains contested at the levels of theory, definition, and praxis. However, humanization, as a social construct, is both a philosophical problem and a policy imperative—it is central in the discourses of decolonization and dehumanization of education (from schools to institutions of higher education, as principal ISAs). Perhaps, it is noteworthy to indicate that humanizing pedagogy advocates continual critique and disruption of existing ideologies and structures; and strive toward social improvement and an eradication of the social inequalities that prevail in the oppressed societies. Hence, humanization is the "ontological vocation of man" [50] and sustains the epistemological and ontological modes of student voice.

Humanizing pedagogy is rooted in critical pedagogy. It is an undeniable fact that humanizing pedagogy is consistent with the "right" teaching strategies; and values students' (and teachers') background knowledge, culture, and lived experiences. Among others, humanizing pedagogy negates the "banking" concept of education. It could be argued that the banking concept of education is an act of depositing (the teachers are the depositor and the students are the depositories). In the words of Freire [38]:

"the banking concept of education as an instrument of oppression—its presuppositions—a critique"; the problem-posing concept of education as an instrument for liberation—its presuppositions; the "banking" concept and the teacher-student contradiction; the problem-posing concept and the supersedence of the teacher-student contradiction; education: a mutual process, world-mediated; people as uncompleted beings, conscious of their incompletion, and their attempt to be more fully human."

To end this section, with the growing influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism, there is a need for a revolutionary shift in assessment practice in terms of theory and practice. Among others, ODL quality assurance should be coined in such a way that it meets the needs of culturally diverse students. One plausible solution is to rethink ODL quality assurance practices through humanizing pedagogy lens.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have drawn on the works of Paulo Freire, Basil Bernstein, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser. We stressed that the notion of quality assurance in the VLEs and e-learning is constantly evolving, very fluid in nature, and is broadly perceived. We further delineated that quality in education is a combination of: exceptional high standards; perfection and consistency; fitness for purpose; value for money; transformation capabilities; and product of planning, monitoring, control, and coordination. Next, by employing Bernstein's Model of Transmission Context, we contended that quality assurance is a practice of symbolic control and cultural hegemony in that it has the attributes of classification and framing. We conjured that the notion of quality assurance in VLEs and e-learning context as a dominant discursive code, shapes legitimate ways of thinking and ways of relating, carries the attributes of regulative and discursive rules, symbolic control and identity, and acquires its *being*-ness and *is*-ness through cultural reproduction. Hence, our conclusion that quality assurance in the VLEs and e-learning context can be seen as the dominant agent of the field of symbolic control and hegemony that regulate the means, contexts, and possibilities of discursive resources. It could be concluded that quality assurance (in the VLEs and e-learning in ODL) is a process through which ruling power consolidate symbolic control and hegemony.

We also presented quality assurance as a symbol of power by using Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. We argued that Gramsci's theory of hegemony is a fundamental part of quality assurance in VLEs and e-learning in ODL. We further argued that the dominant group or the bourgeoisie gains social power through combining the ideas of "symbolic control" and "hegemony." We demonstrated that quality assurance is compatible and consistent with notion of educational Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), that in the same way as education, quality assurance functions through ideology and repression, and it "has the function of regulating the relation of individuals to their tasks, and, in so doing, ensuring the cohesion of the social whole." Our conclusion is that quality assurance practice, as both an institution and ideology, fits perfectly through the lens of Ideological State Apparatus. It is intended to perpetuate social reproduction and political hegemony and advances the reproduction of

capitalist relations of production. The quality assurance practice transforms individuals into subjects through the ideological mechanism.

In the final two sections, we discussed Paulo Freire's humanizing pedagogy and proposed a rethinking of quality assurance in VLEs through the lens of humanizing pedagogy. We began by exploring Paulo Freire's [38] argument of humanizing pedagogy as a philosophical approach that fosters critical, dialogue, and liberatory practices. We concurred with Freire that humanizing pedagogy should be a teaching method that ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, but rather should express the consciousness of the students themselves. Then we proposed a rethinking of quality assurance based on humanizing peda-gogy. We demonstrated that by its virtue of being rooted in critical pedagogy, humanizing pedagogy can assist to create a revolutionary shift in assessment practice in terms of theory and practical. Humanizing pedagogy can facilitate the coining of ODL quality assurance in such a way that it meets the needs of culturally diverse students.

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