THE PERCEPTION OF LECTURERS AND STUDENTS AND OF THE INDICATORS AND CHALLENGES OF QUALITY UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education remains an important enterprise and asset by which any society models and determines its existence. It consists in a process of propagating desirable survival skills to succeeding generations. Through education, society sets and defines its basic survival needs. Many Secondary school graduates and the working class look for opportunities to pursue quality education. This article reports on data from a study that sought to explore the perceptions on the quality of service delivery in public and private universities and the opportunities for quality education in Kenya. Data was collected from a sample of 530 university students and 140 lecturers using questionnaires. Data sources were four universities which were purposively selected. The universities were two private and two public. It was found out that public universities do not have the necessary physical facilities such as lecture hall, laboratories and libraries and adequate teacher capacity to effectively offer service to its current student body. The study recommended that to absorb a large number of students and offer quality education, careful investment in physical facilities, teaching and research resources, innovative Information Communication Technology must be done.

Key words: Quality, quality assurance, indicators, challenges and university education

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In the twenty first century of the world, whether developed or developing, countries are aiming to become knowledge based economies (World Bank 2002). Kenya is no exception. Social demand for education higher education has been increasing and will continue to swell. Education is an important tool which no country can choose to ignore as it is an act of creating and recreating society. University education is charged with the responsibility of providing high level human resource for national development. Indeed, a country whose citizens are illiterate and unskilled is doomed to slow down national developmental progress. This is due to the fact that it has to rely on hiring foreign expertise which is too costly. It is within this realization that the government allocates 35 to 45 percent of the National income to education (Republic of Kenya, 2006).

The concern with the quality of higher education, and subsequently how to assure it, has gained considerable importance (Gudo, Olel & Oanda, 2011). Quality assurance is the practice of managing the way services are provided at the universities to make sure they are kept at a high standard. According to Vlasceanu et al (2004), quality assurance is an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating, monitoring or reviewing, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving the quality of higher education system, institutions or programmes. Quality assurance can be done under two levels, that is, internal quality assurance and external quality assurance. Internal quality assurance refers to the policies and mechanism implemented in an institution or programmes to ensure that it is fulfilling its own purposes and meeting the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular. The individual universities are likely to do some activities such as setting and marking internal examinations at a higher standard, to ensure effective teaching and learning, admission of qualified students and employing proper mechanism for students retention, curriculum evaluation and revision, recruitment and retention of qualified lecturers and improvement of physical facilities, installation and upgrading of technological equipment and replacement of outmoded books. External quality assurance refers to the actions of an external body, which may be a quality assurance agency like the Commission for Higher Education, in order to determine whether the institution and its programmes are meeting the agreed or predetermined standards. This will enable a solid quality culture of academic excellent and quality assurance (CHE, 2008).

Dill (2003) postulates that the concept of quality is much disputed in higher in education and often used by stakeholders in order to legitimize their specific vision or interest. It is therefore difficult to define quality in higher education. This is because there is no consensus on the exact objectives of higher education. Although some common objectives can be stated, such as to produce a qualified work force, or to train people for a career in research and provide efficient management of teaching profession, the processes of achieving all these are not the same. Again, higher education, like any other type of education, is a multi-dimensional and complex process, which is based on the relationship between and among teachers and learners. It is difficult to grasp the interaction of inputs and throughputs and the exact determinant of outputs. The quality of the graduates will depend to a large extent on quality of facilities and learning equipment. The quality of learners, teachers and learning facilities and equipment vary from university to university. What is quality in one university may not be quality in another. What might seem to be an adequate definition of quality for one type of course or institution may be quite inadequate for others (Sanyal, 2006).

A basic distinction can be made between two conceptions of higher education, that is, standard versus fitness for purpose. The "standards- based approach", is conformity to set requirements (Sanjaya, 2007). In this case, quality is measured against pre-defined standards. It focuses on standards and the extent to which they are being met. The standards-based approach may imply two things: ensuring a) that minimum quality standards are met in all institutions and b) that programmes and institutions performing below the pre-defined standards are closed down. The standard-based approach becomes predominantly a vehicle for

quality improvement, and leaves ample room for institutions to fulfill the set standards to avoid closure. The "fitness for purpose" approach assumes that quality is equal to goals, purposes and objectives set by the institution. The commission for University education examines the institution's adherence to the set purpose, goals and objectives. Quality, according to this conception will mean that the set objectives have been achieved but under different traditions of universities, which may also be located in different environments and may be responsive to needs of different communities. Quality is not merely a question of setting standards; it is very much an issue as to who is defining it and on the basis of what interest. Academics will judge the quality of a higher education course or institution according to the quality of research work done by a colleague or an institution. According to Lemaitre (2003), undergraduate students will focus on the quality of teaching, their learning experiences and environment. The climate or environment of the institution will be wrapped up in what the university stands for, what its priorities are, what its standards are and what it considers important. Professional bodies tend to focus on professional standards and skills related to the professions that students are trained for. This means, therefore, that any methodology for external quality assessment has to balance the different views of stakeholders in order to reach a consensus on the meaning of quality education. This can be achieved by a quality assurance and quality control agencies, to enable the universities to attain international standards (Levasseur, 2005).

According to Clark (2009) quality of education can also be identified through quality control which refers to the traditional functions whereby governments make sure that higher education provision is in line with the minimum requirements for quality. This is the practice of having periodic checks on educational programs or services to ensure that they are of standards. When the majority of higher institutions were public, quality control used to be less prominent because it was assumed that sufficient input steering would produces acceptable levels of quality. This is now questioned and in addition, the ongoing process of privatization and proliferation of private national and international universities has enhanced the need for national government to check on minimum levels of quality, to protect national consumers and make sure that the higher education provision relates to national development objectives in one way or another (Kozma, 2003).

The quality of higher education would be of high quality if it meets the following criteria in the university that apply as stipulated by Gudo et al (2011): Preparation for teaching with clarity aims and objectives for each course component, content, high quality notes or handouts, preparation of materials and equipment, slides and videos; Quality of delivery teaching and learning evidenced by lecturing with evidence of small group teaching (tutorials), practical teaching in laboratories, postgraduate supervision, amount of time spent on teaching, experience of a wide variety of teaching methods, and content of intrinsic difficulty; Innovation in teaching as indicated by innovations in curriculum or course design, innovation in methodology for example the use of technology to teach in lecture halls or distance learning materials, collaboration in team-teaching, national or international repute in the teaching of the specific subject area or course and modular program development; better communications with students within class and outside class through guidance and counseling and having co-curricular activities; Properly laid assessment or examination, marking examinations and compiling reports at the right time for feedback; Evaluation of own teaching through systematic and regular use of peers or students evaluation, regular reflection on teaching aims and objectives; management of teaching by course leadership, chairing of program committees, responsibilities for learning support, staff and student consultant committee duties and enterprise tutorship and Invitation to teach elsewhere, to national or international conferences, seminars, regular teaching visits to other university departments; Given by external agencies scholarships for teaching, and researches or project work; Graduates being easily absorbed into the job market and students easily finding places for internships or attachment and involvement of employers in sponsoring some students for academic advancement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the past two decades, there has been tremendous expansion in university education in Kenya leading to using the term "mushrooming" derogatively to imply the rapid spread and increase in the number of universities and satellite campuses. To a large extent, the growth in the number of universities and their campuses and the exponential rise in enrolment are good indicators of success in terms of improving access to higher education (Gudo et al 2011). However, this rapid growth has serious ramifications. This is due to the fact that the expansion has not been matched with resources, including lecturers and proper teaching and learning facilities. The growth has diluted the quality of learning in the universities are producing half-baked graduates (Vlasceanu, 2004). The major concern for all colleges and universities starting satellite campuses is ensuring they have put in place mechanisms for controlling standards and quality assurance (Eshiwani, 2009). Mwiria and Nyukuri (1994) recommended that physical facilities be expanded including tuition and boarding facilities due to congestion in lecture halls or theatres, science laboratories, libraries and dining halls. There was also a recommendation for changes related to the organization of the three semester year which necessitated the availability of facilities throughout the year. Gudo et al (2011) advised for some changes related to staff incentives such as recruitment of more teaching staff, promotion of lecturers and the introduction of monetary incentives. This therefore indicates that quality of education is lowered.

Universities are established to meet specific objectives such as imparting hands on skills and capacity to perform multiple and specific national and international task; creation of dependable and sustainable workforce in form of human capital for national growth; creation of entrepreneur capacity for empowering individuals to create self-employment and employment for others; offering opportunities for advancement of learning beyond basic education with strong leaning towards scholarship and research; creation of a strong national base at various sectors of economic and national development; bridging the gap between theory and practice in various disciplines of education and training; creation of a strong sense of nationalistic and global development; and inculcation of a culture of precision, moral discipline and work ethic which are necessary in modern industrial and technological world . In the event that these objectives are not met, then they cannot justify huge public expenditure on them (Sanjaya, 2007).

Currently, the Kenya government is pursuing vision 2030, which is the country's new blue print covering the period 2008 to 2030. It aims at transforming Kenya into a newly industrializing, "middle-income country providing a high quality life" to all its citizens by the year 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2006). Critical players in achieving Kenya vision 2030 are the universities as they are meant to train teachers, doctors, social workers and engineers (Gudo et al 2011).

The following questions sought to get answers:

1. What are the perceptions of students and lecturers of quality education?
2. What checks and balance have been put in place to ensure high quality standards in higher education?

METHODOLOGY

This was an independent study which was done during class work as per the requirements of Statistical data management and analysis course in May 2013. The study adopted a concurrent mixed methods research design. The use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches provided a more complete understanding of the research problem than either approach alone. Mixed research design involves both collecting and analyzing Quantitative and Qualitative data (Kothari, 2011). The quantitative approach used descriptive survey research design which can describe, explain or explore the existing status of variables at a given time. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a sample of between 10-30% is appropriate in social sciences. Purposive sampling was utilized to obtain a sample of four universities, two private and two public. Data was collected from a sample of 530 university students and 140 lecturers using questionnaires. Observations and examination of relevant documents and interviews were also done to offset the shortfalls of questionnaires. For the purpose of this study, the instruments were developed and presented to the statistician at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (UEAB) to be scrutinized and assessed for further guidance. To test reliability, a pilot study was conducted and for validity, the experts' comments from the supervisors were also incorporated. Thereafter, amendments were made to ensure the simplicity and clarity of some questions.

The questionnaire format consisted of closed and open-ended items. This was necessary to diversify responses as well as reduce what Kothari (2011) calls 'question fatigue'. The open-ended section offered the respondents an opportunity to make a comment, expand or clarify some information on their responses and thus helped the researcher gain some insight in their perspectives on quality of education. After the collection of data, the copies of Questionnaires from the field were coded manually. Quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics in form of frequency counts and percentages. The analysis was done item by item based on the questions of the study. Qualitative data collected from observations and interviews was transcribed and analyzed on an ongoing process as themes and sub-themes emerged.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the research indicated several emerging issues at the higher institutions of learning.
The following trends would be developed from the findings in table 1:

Table 1: Indicators of Quality University Education

| | | LECTURERS (N=140) | | | | STUDENTS (N=530) | | | |
| | | AGREE | | DISAGREE | | AGREE | | DISAGREE | |
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Availability of adequate physical teaching and learning Facilities	20	14%	120	86%	50	9%	480	91%
2	Adequate Lecturers	12	9%	128	91%	30	6%	500	94%
3	Enough Tutorial classes	26	19%	114	81%	80	15%	450	85%
4	Lecturers are engaged in research duties	40	29%	100	71%	35	7%	495	93%
5	Universities have adequate coping mechanisms	33	24%	107	76%	29	5%	501	95%
6		28	20%	112	80%	134	25%	396	75%

	Student welfare is in place							
7	Examinations are well organized/ coordinated	21	15%	119	85%	55	10%	475	90%

The results indicated that the private universities have sufficient physical and teaching facilities with 69:05% for private universities to that of 43.48% of public universities. In table 1, 86% of the lecturers and 90% of the students disagreed that the available physical teaching and learning facilities were adequate. It was correctly noted that accelerated growth in student numbers in the public universities has not been matched with the expansion of physical facilities and academic infrastructure as also identified by Okwakol (2008). The outdated laboratory equipment in most departments in the public Universities are obsolete to be used in conducting experiments. Quality teaching and learning in the current times requires modern equipment and current books as emphasized by Eshiwani (2009).

It was observed that the existing facilities are characterized by serious congestion, with some students being forced to sit outside the classroom and listen to their lecturers through the windows. There was no use of public address system to enable audibility of the lecturers as was also noted by Gudo et al (2011). Under such circumstances, the quality of education offered is compromised with. This was compounded with Technology not being embraced to enable learning to take place by use of computers and Internet services. The libraries were said to be having very old books even though the staff members were trained. The insufficient physical and teaching facilities were because of insufficient funding by the government.

It emerged from the findings that there is a shortage of lecturers both in private and public universities for quality teaching and learning to take place as indicated by 91% of the lecturers and 94% of the students. Public universities are the worst hit to the extent of going as far as hiring more part time lecturers than permanent ones. It was noted with a lot of concern that the public universities go as far as allocating teaching units to some staff, outside their areas and core competencies. Some of them do not even comprehend the content. Inadequate staffing according to Mario et al (2003) and Mutisya (2010) is a serious threat to offering quality education. Part time lecturers are available for the scheduled lecturing hours but not for consultation. The absence of tutorial classes which are meant to give students a deeper understanding of subject matter through critical inquiry in guided debate was highly noted by 81% and 85 % of lecturers and students respectively. It is not possible to have tutorial classes without enough lecturers and the end result could be rote learning and poor developed thinking. Ngovoloi (2006) agrees that increased workload and lack of competence by some led lecturers could be affecting the delivery of quality education to students in Kenya.

On universities having adequate coping mechanism, 76 % and 95 % of lecturers and students respectively, disagreed. That both public and private universities had shortage of lecturers was a cause of concern since coping mechanisms would involve increased workload and employment of incompetent staff. According to Gudo et al (2011), some public universities tend to relax the criteria for recruitment of new staff as well as the promotion of those already working at the institutions. Odebero (2010) noted that to supervise the heavy workload, faculties developed survival mechanisms such as assigning graduate assistants and tutorial fellows full teaching responsibility to teach both junior and senior classes; assigning graduate and tutorial fellows advisory responsibilities including assessment of students in the field; Masters done by project, that is, through coursework, examination and minor research instead of the rigorous thesis; assigning junior faculty members to supervise. Lecturers are forced to supervise up to 50 graduate students due to a high demand for graduate studies and finally appointing supervisors from other disciplines and some of them rarely comprehend the content.

It emerged from the findings that the quality of research is better in public universities than private universities. This means that their research quality was also compromised with as indicated by 71% of the lecturers and 93 % of the students. High quality research requires adequate regular lecturers. Reliance on part time lecturers in private universities and parallel degree progams is likely to compromise with quality as rightly supported by Chacha (2004) who postulated that there has been a decline in terms of output of quality and regular publications due to decline in scholarly research. Reduction in the number of quality research carried by the lecturers was due to overloading of staff with mainly teaching and marking. This is very true as such lecturers will not have adequate time to research and publish their findings. Eshiwani (2009) notes that decline in government funds to the universities had greatly lowered the quality of teaching and research as well as the general working conditions in universities.

It was found that 80 % lecturers and 75 % of students from both public and private universities were not satisfied with sporting activities. Fox, et al (2010) indicate that participation in sports enhances academic performance, moral adjustment, self-esteem and more positive self-concept among the students. It also emerged that guidance and counseling services were effective in private universities with 78.95% students satisfied, while 44.4% in public universities. Standa (2000) and K'okul (2010) emphasized that ineffective guidance and counseling services as well as unsatisfactory sporting activities have led to anti-social behaviors among students such as student unrest, prostitution and drug abuse to the expense of their studies. This does not lead to quality but wastage. However, some of these anti-social behaviors could be as a result of poverty or some underlying problems within individuals. Student unrest can stem even from flimsy excuses such as poor diet or lecturers missing classes or fear of failure among low academic achievers.

Examination process was reported to be flawed. It emerged that the higher number of students has negatively affected the quality of invigilation of examinations. The responses showed that 85 % lecturers 90 % of students disagreed with the statement. Inadequate invigilation and supervision of examinations, more especially in public universities and satellite campuses, can negatively affect the quality of education due to cheating in examinations. The prevalence of cheating in examinations is higher

in public universities due to inadequate control measures taken against examination cheating and remote chances of detection. A study done by Eshiwani (2009) found out that cheating in examinations was an opportunistic behavior attributed to inadequate student preparation and lack of confidence to face examinations. The same study recommended for adequate control measures to be taken against examination cheating and to have strong detection of those cheating. Mutisya (2010) confirmed the view that the quality of education in Kenya's universities has been lowered among other reasons, due to cases of missing marks, sexually transmitted grades and people who write papers and projects for students in return for pay. Birungi (2006) noted that, how the students are assessed for what they have learnt is an important element of quality assurance for the regulatory agencies and for the individual universities.

From interviews and observation it was also noted that external examination was reported to be dysfunctional in private universities. External examination was not in use but relied on its lecturers to moderate the examinations and results. This could compromise with quality as the lecturers know one another and may be hesitant to correct or criticize a colleague with regard to syllabus coverage and depth covered in examinations. It is important to handle each other with due respect and honesty, as this would make people to abide by the set standards even though not 100%. Ngolovoi (2006) noted that effective education is judged by process and product and the methods of assessing achievement must be put right by the Universities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was concluded that:

1. Universities do not have adequate capacity to admit more students in regular and also parallel programs. This is because the demand for university education in Kenya exceeds the capacity of public universities to accommodate all the qualified KCSE candidates.
2. There is a shortage of physical facilities for teaching and learning which are also outmoded, including libraries, laboratories with obsolete equipment and lack of technological equipment for internet services or teaching. This leads to chalk and talk alone.
3. Unsatisfactory students' welfare services such as sports and guidance and counseling are a problem to specific universities.
4. It was also concluded that the shortage of lecturers is a problem affecting both private and public universities. Lecturers perform a multiplicity of functions as undergraduate lecturers, as researchers coupled with postgraduate teaching and as administrators. This creates a huge workload which is normally unmanageable leading to incompetency in teaching and learning.
5. Inefficient management of university examinations and inadequate funding for research are problems affecting both private and public universities.

The following were recommended:

1. Universities should hire adequate teaching staff to correspond to increasing number of enrolled students. Installation of computers and Internet services are very vital ingredients to modern day education. Because of the overload condition which is a dominant factor in academic life at present, the universities should think of exploring other approaches such as E-learning or internet or overhead projectors.
2. The government should collaborate with the private sector in putting up physical facilities for accommodation, laboratories, libraries and lecture halls within the campuses. This is due to the fact that the government support is decreasing with each new day due to the increasing number of student enrolment that outstrips the supply.
3. General communications with students within class and outside class times, guidance and counseling, motivation of students and having co-curricular activities should be improved.
4. Universities should have plan for properly laid assessment or examinations and compiling reports at the right time for feedback to the students and parents and guardians.

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