Academic Staff and Students' views on Quality Education Indicators in Selected Private universities in Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

The demand for higher education has led the Kenyan government to encourage and grant charter to several private universities. These universities absorb qualified students who could not be admitted by the then Joint Admission Board of public universities. Therefore in recent years, there has been an increase of students' enrollment in private universities which may mean that parents and students have observed quality education indicators in these institutions. In effect, there is need to establish the views that staff and students have on the indicators of quality education in selected private institutions in Kenya. The purpose of the study was to assess views of academic staff and the students on the indicators of quality education. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design. The study population was 2500 that included both the academic staff and students (third years and fourth years). From this population, a sample of 320 respondents was used to collect data which included the teaching staff and students of the selected universities. The respondents were sampled using purposive, stratified, and simple random techniques. Closed-ended questionnaires were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data. Data was presented using tables, frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed that the key indicators of quality in private universities were excellent job performance of graduates in their place of work, comprehensive course content coverage, quality test assessments and evaluations, students' involvement in research, completion of course in good time and a job market oriented course. It is recommended that private universities put in place parameters or indicators of quality that apply across the board so that any institution aspiring to offer higher education will benchmark itself.

Key words: Academic staff, students, quality, education, indicators, private universities

Introduction

The establishment of private higher institutions has been embraced both in developed and developing countries as a means of expanding access, equity and equality to higher education. Varghese (2004) points out that in many African countries, public universities for many years have nearly monopolized the provision of higher education. But due to market friendly reforms, deregulation policies and the financial crisis that many African states are experiencing, an enabling environment for the development of private higher education has been created. According to Teferra and Altbach (2004), private higher education is a growing trend in most African countries and although religious groups founded such institutions for specialized training, a good number of them have diversified their academic programmes so that at the moment they offer a wide range of academic and professional disciplines. From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that although the establishment of faith based private universities account for a small share of enrolment of students in comparison to those joining public universities, the private sector is a fast expanding segment of higher education in Africa.

Due to the increase in number of students seeking higher education, the government of Kenya has encouraged and granted charter to twenty six private universities. This is because these universities make a major contribution towards the development of higher education in the country. Also in Kenya currently, there are parents who prefer the private universities for their children's higher education for various reasons such as quality education in some of those universities, or relatively shorter period taken by their children to complete their education due to absence of long breaks as witnessed in the public universities.

Chande (2006) points out that quality in higher education can be viewed from three perspectives: educational inputs, educational outputs and educational processes. Education output refers to the consequences of the educational process as reflected in measures such as levels of knowledge, skills and values acquired by students, while educational processes refer to all processes from curriculum development to final assessment including admission, teaching and learning. The multidimensional concept of quality in higher education according to Chande (2006) includes all the related functions and activities that form part of the academic life in a university system. Some of the main indicators of quality in education are identified as quality of support staff and

the teaching staff. Chande (2006) points out that quality of staff can be seen from two perspectives. The first is faculty development which seeks to change the structure, policies and organization and environment in which instruction takes place and secondly, is the instructional development which focuses on the systematic design (e.g. course content, semester patterns), development, implementation and evaluation of instructional materials, lessons, courses and curriculum.

Another indicator of quality education is the quality of students admitted to a particular institution. The quality of students constitutes the raw materials of any higher education which requires special attention to their problems of access in light of criteria related limit (abilities and motivation), proactive policies for the benefit of the disadvantaged who would not have qualified to join certain course. This is followed by quality of the curricula. This category calls for special care in the definition of the objectives of training provided in relation to the requirements of the world of work and the needs of society, an adaptation of teaching methods to make students more active and to develop an enterprising spirit; an expansion of, and greater flexibility in training facilities so as to make full use of Information Technology (IT) and networking of curricula, students and teachers. Then there is quality of infrastructure: This has to be internal and external and the basis through which research is done. This is possible where effective and efficient technology has been put in place.

Lastly, there is the quality of management and governance. This is the quality of the management of the institution as a co-ordinate and coherent whole, interacting with its environment, as institutions of higher education do not exist as isolated enclaves. This means that rapid growth of knowledge useful to management will demand a higher quality of managers and other scholars. Dill and Maanja (2005) have operationalized key performance indicators into five, more so, from the perspective of academic staff. These are; teaching and supervision, research and innovation, writing and publication, consultancy, and service to the university. From these arguments, it can be pointed out that quality in higher education is a multivariable concept, involving policies and programmes which revolves around both the student and the academic staff and whose realization is dictated by its design and the nature of higher institutions. Based on the studies done on the expected quality education in higher education, this

research addressed three indicators of quality namely: commitment of academic staff, employability of graduates, teaching effectiveness, and research and publication.

Statement of the problem

Due to the increase in number of students seeking higher education, the government of Kenya has encouraged and granted charter to twenty six private universities. This is because these universities make a major contribution towards the development of higher education in the country. Also in Kenya currently, there are parents who prefer the private universities for their children's higher education for various reasons such as quality education in some of those universities, or relatively shorter period taken by their children to complete their education due to absence of long breaks as witnessed in the public universities. Higher education institutions in Kenya have put in efforts to ensure that quality education is offered in the institutions. However, no studies have been done to investigate on what constitutes quality education indicators in the institutions of higher learning in Kenya. This study therefore was conducted to establish the views academic staff and students have on quality indicators in private universities in Kenya.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the views academic staff and students have on the quality education indicators in selected private universities in Kenya.

Objective of the study

The study was intended to establish the academic staff and students' views on quality education indicators in selected private universities in Kenya.

Research question of the study

What are the academic staff and students' views on the indicators of quality education in selected Private universities in Kenya?

Methodology

Research design

This research utilized the descriptive survey design. This type of design is used to collect information from a sample that has been drawn from a predetermined population and using a predetermined set of questions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). An advantage of using survey design is that it draws a sample of the population and then generalizes the finding from the sample to the population (Graziano & Raulin, 2007). It also helps to assess people's thoughts, opinions, and feelings and provides a flat form to summarize and generalize the views of all respondents succinctly (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2000). The predetermined population included those subjects that have the expertise of the information relevant to the study.

Population

According to the Commission for University Education statistics, the number of private universities that have been chartered in Kenya are fourteen (14) (CUE, 2012). In this study, four (4) chartered private universities were sampled using purposive technique which formed 28.5% of the total chartered private universities in Kenya. The four institutions were chosen since they have been established for a long period of time as faith based institutions due to time constraints and data management. The other reason for selecting these institutions was because they have been re-inspected by the Commission for University Education. From these universities the average total population in each was 625 that comprised all employees, students (third years and fourth years) which translated to a population size of 2,500. Using a modified table of population sampling (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) and setting the confidence level at 95% (significance level P < 0.05) then the sample size was 320 respondents. The researchers therefore, obtained data from 320 respondents. The main reason for choosing the third and fourth year students of each selected private chartered university was because they had been in their respective universities longer to assess quality education offered.

Sampling Procedure and Sample size

Participants for this research were selected using purposive, stratified and simple random techniques. Purposive sampling technique enabled the researchers to target a group of people

believed to have the characteristics of interest to the research. The technique had an advantage in that it could be used with both quantitative and qualitative studies (Kombo & Tromp, 2007). This was important because this research utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. Purposive technique was used to sample the private universities from which respondents were drawn. The teaching staff that included the full time and the part-time teaching staff were sampled using purposive sampling technique.

Stratified sampling technique was used to group subjects based on their responsibilities. Two strata were formed: the teaching staff (Full time and Part-time) and the students (Third and Fourth year). In the students' strata, two sub strata were formed; that of male and female students based on their year of study. The reason for using stratified sampling was to obtain specific information on views from each segment of the population. From the two strata of teaching staff and that of students, simple random sampling technique was applied to obtain the actual respondents. In total, the sample size was 320 (Full-time academic staff=168; Part-time academic staff=32 and Students=120)

 Instrumentation

Questionnaires were used to obtain data from teaching staff (both full time and part-time) as well as from the students. To ensure validity, the instruments were developed based on the objectives and the variables of the study. The researcher specified the domains of indicators which were relevant to the concept being measured (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). These domains were based on the objectives and reflected the contents of the instrument. The instruments then were subjected to a pilot study. From the pilot study, the data obtained was used to establish reliability using Cronbach's alpha. A reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained which was above the threshold of 0.7 for education and social sciences. The instrument was therefore considered reliable (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999).

Data analysis

The obtained data was edited, coded, analyzed and summarized in readiness for analysis. The researcher used quantitative methods for data analysis. The data was presented using percentages The respondents were required to respond to the items either as SA (strongly agree), A (Agree),

UD (Undecided), D (Disagree) and SD (Strongly disagree). In effect, responses to each intensity were converted into percentages. This was followed by a discussion for the purpose of interpretation of data, recommendations and conclusions. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0 for windows.

Results and Discussion
This section presents the results and discussion of the study findings.

Indicators of Quality Education

The study aimed at establishing the academic staff and students' views on quality of education indicators in selected private universities in Kenya. A number of factors were cited by students and academic staff as indicators of quality education in selected private universities. Among these were: course completion in good time, taking a course that is relevant to job market, student involvement in research, attainment of high grades in the course, comprehensive course content coverage, excellent job performance in their place of work (where they are employed), high ranking jobs after graduation, and quality tests, assessments and evaluations. These factors were rated differently by the respondents. For instance, 88.3% of the students' respondents supported the assertion that course completion in good time was an indicator of quality education. Only 6.7% of the respondents did not see timely course completion as an indicator of quality, while the rest of the respondents (5.0%) took a neutral position on the issue. Timely course completion presumably is taken to mean that its contents has been fully absorbed and integrated into quality deliverable as a show of what education has done to an individual. Such a kind of response is expected given that one factor that was also rated high as indicator of quality education is quality tests, assessments, and evaluation

In this case then, timely course completion is likely to influence the content of the tests and general evaluation of the course. Thus, this will eliminate negative skew of the course where the course syllabus varies with what is being examined. If quality education will be subjected to external quality assurance team as proposed by IMQAAHE (2001), the input (in terms of content) will most likely dictate the output (reflected in tests and evaluation results).

Similarly, a greater percentage of respondents pointed out that quality education is indicated by taking the course that is linked to job market. From Table 1, 85.8% % of the students

respondents agreed that taking a course that is linked to the job market is an indicator of quality education. Only 5.8% of the respondents were undecided and the rest 8.3% did not agree with this. This claim indicates quality as a process of shaping product to a finished valuable form in this case (person or student). It tends to support Chande's (2006) argument that students are the raw materials which are transmitted for organization utility and Rameez (2002) that job oriented course is a concept of quality education. Here, quality of students (which is determined by the education they receive) constitutes the raw materials. From employer's perception, quality seems to be measured by how they perform in place of work. The same item (question) was similarly rated by academic staff (85.5% respondents) accepting that offering job oriented courses is a significant indicator of quality education. This is a slight variation of 0.3% when compared with 85.8% respondents of students who supported this view. Generally then, the academic staff like the students supported this assertion with 85.5% agreed, 9.0% undecided and 5.5% disagreed. Related to taking the course that is linked to job market was student's involvement in research. This factor was supported by 85.0% of the respondents agreed. Only 10.8% were undecided while 4.2% disagreed with that view. The higher percentage of students' respondents who supported this view implies that students' involvement in research is an indicator of quality education. This is in support of Dill and Maanja's (2005) who argued that research and innovation is one of the key performance indicators of quality education.

Another indicator that was pointed out by both the students and academic staff is that of attainment of high/best grades by the student. This research revealed that students' attainment of high grades in the course was supported by slightly half of the respondents with 55.8% supporting this agreed. Out of the remaining respondents, 25.0% were undecided while 19.2% disagreed with this statement. Though this factor was cited by a relatively law number of respondents compared to the other factors, those who supported this fact is still high. This could be attributed to the fact that students' graduation achievement is determined by the quality of the grades attained which will also extend to the work place as employers tend to pick those with high academic honors. The attainment of high grades is what Houston and Preble (2008) termed as value added to or gained by students. This then presupposes that by adding the value to students' knowledge and abilities, the institutions would be increasing employability of their graduates if what the employer use to determine quality is by attaining good grades.

On the same issue of attainment of best grades, the academic staff rated this factor relatively high compared to the students' response. Whereas 35.8% of student respondents supported this assertion, 80.0% academic staff respondents supported the same resulting in a deviation of 24.2% between the two groups of respondents. Only 9.5% academic staff were undecided whether attainment of best grades was an indicator of quality while the rest 7.5% and 3.0% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. A deviation in high ratings of this factor by students and academic staff reflects the perspectives the two groups have on the immediate product of education. Given the fact that academic staff are the ones doing the evaluation; they understand the content of quality with regards to examination. The students on the other hand are likely to be seeing quality from different perspectives, where they probably believe that quality is not just attaining grades but the utility of what one is endowed with.

Attaining high grades may be related to another factor cited as an indicator of quality. This is comprehensive course content coverage. It clearly shows that 40.8% of the student respondents strongly agreed that comprehensive course content coverage is an indicator of quality education, 40.3% agreed with this view while the rest 10.8% and 5.0% were undecided and disagreed respectively. This could be attributed to two things: first, course content determines course evaluation which in turn determines individual performance in terms of the grade they get in their assessment. Second, it is also possible that what is comprehensively covered in the course could be utilized in work place and not necessarily in the examinations. This could explain the reason why a greater percentage of student respondents (84.2%) were of the opinion that comprehensive course content coverage is an indicator of quality education. This is even further amplified by academic staffs' response when considered that 93.5% of them argued that comprehensive course coverage is one of the critical indicators of quality. When it is compared to students' response, academic staff's view is high. A total of 93.5% academic staff agreed that comprehensive course content is an indicator of quality education. This leaves only 6.5% academic staff who were undecided.

Comprehensive course content coverage as an indicator of quality education is supported by the Universal Council for Online Education Accreditation (2003) which uses course content among other factors to guarantee basic level of quality in an educational institution. Additionally,

excellent job performance in work place was cited among the factors that indicate quality education. It is clear from the tabulation that 86.7% of the student respondents observed that excellent job performance in work place is an indicator of quality education. Only 11.7% of the respondents were undecided leaving the rest 1.7% disagreeing with this.

Interestingly, academic staff poorly rated high ranking jobs after graduation as an indicator of quality education with only 48.0% supporting it. However, taking consideration of those who were undecided (21.5%), it leaves 30.5% respondents who disagreed with this, which means that high ranking jobs after graduation to some extent is not a strong indicator of quality education when we take 48.0% respondents who supported against 30.5% who objected to this. The rationale here is that not all those who occupy high ranking jobs were necessarily of high academic caliber. Some rise through experience, continuous training and development while others through innate talents of leadership which may not necessarily be related to quality papers they have or grades attained. On one hand it means they have quality education as well as inherent leadership and management skills which are likely to put one at a pedestal of high ranking jobs. On the other hand, it implies that individuals may have best grades, best education but their poor leadership skills, poor commitment to work may make them never to rise above the positions they occupied immediately after recruitment.

This is even further augmented when we consider another indicator pointed out by academic staff; that of ability of students to perform in work place. Unlike the preceding factor "high rank jobs after graduation", academic staff rated ability of students to perform in workplace highly with 89.5% supporting this assertion. The rest 10.0% were undecided, and 0.5% strongly disagreed. This response strongly points out that job performance remains the key indicator that denotes the kind of education a student obtained in his/her university education. It can therefore assertively be argued here that job performance by students after graduating is a significant indicator of their quality education attained during his/her training. It is that part that enables the employer and the lecturer to observe and evaluate the practical part of the student that is, if the graduates have been able to translate the skills, knowledge and abilities obtained while undergoing training into work set up. The success or failure to utilize what is leaned in workplace denotes the success or failure of the student to reflect quality or substandard of what has been learning.

Quality tests, assessments and evaluations were ranked high among the indicators of quality with 90% of student respondents supporting this. Only 10% were not sure whether quality tests, assessments and evaluation are indicators of quality education. Quality test is highly linked to the other factors already discussed such as comprehensive course content coverage. This statistics shows that quality tests and assessment is a leading indicator in determination of quality education. It supports Biggs' (2001) findings that the threshold standard for assessing quality education may include among other things, faculty students assessments. Generally then, student respondents rated highly the following items as indicators of quality education: course completion in good time (88.3%), course linked to job market (85.8%), student involvement in research (85.0%), attainment of high grades in the course (55.8%), comprehensive course content coverage (84.2%), ability to performance in workplace (86.7%), and quality tests, assessments and evaluation (90.0%). All these factors from the students' and academic staff respondents are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. The abbreviation SA, A, UD, D, and SD throughout this study are used to mean: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), UD (Undecided), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree).

From the preceding discussions, it is clear that for quality education to succeed, certain pre-requisites have to be in place.

Table 1: Students' responses on indicators of quality education

Indicators	SA %	A %	UD %	D %	SD %
Course completion in good time	44.2	44.1	5.0	4.2	2.5
Students' course link to job market	52.5	33.3	5.8	5.0	3.3
Students' attainment of high grades	33.3	39.2	25.0	19.2	0.0
Comprehensive course content coverage	40.8	43.3	10.8	0.0	5.0
Ability of students to perform in work place	35.9	50.8	11.7	1.7	0.0

Quality tests, assessments and evaluations	45.0	45.0	10.0	26.0	0.0

Table 2: Academic staff responses on indicators of quality education

Indicators	SA %	A %	UD %	D %	SD %
Job oriented courses	35.5	50.0	9.0	4.5	1.0
Attainment of best grades by students	32.5	47.5	9.5	7.5	3.0
Students' attainment of high grades	33.3	39.2	25.0	19.2	0.0
Comprehensive course content coverage	52.5	41.0	6.5	0.0	0.0
Ability of students to perform in work place	42.5	47.0	10.0	0.5	0.0
High ranks jobs after graduation	2.5	35.5	21.5	26.0	4.5
Quality tests, assessments and evaluations	45.0	45.0	10.0	26.0	0.0

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the indicators of quality education include completion of course syllabi on time, taking a course that is linked to job market, comprehensive course content coverage, student involvement in research, attainment of high grades, and quality tests, assessments and evaluations.

Recommendation

(i)   In order to determine the quality of their graduates, private universities should develop some monitoring systems that can enable them to know how their graduates are performing in the field.

(ii) Universities need to avoid disruptions in academic programmes that delay students' graduation on time.

(iii) Both private and public universities should develop and review their programmes in consultation with stakeholders that include employers and industries to ensure market driven programmes are offered to students.

(iv) Universities should maintain the needed resources which in turn will keep the required quality standards.

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