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INSTITUTIONAL INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: IS IT EFFECTIVE IN KENYA?

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ABSTRACT

Kenya recognizes that higher education plays a key role in economic growth and development through improvements in knowledge and skills of those in productive sectors of the economy. This recognition also drives the notion that the value of an education institution's certification and awards lie in the integrity of curriculum design and delivery processes, and in the confidence that stakeholders have in its standards. Entrenching high standards of quality in skills development and training is one way of ensuring that institutions contribute to national development endeavors. But available evidence shows inadequate development and review of programmes, and decline in the effectiveness of classroom delivery. These may have a negative impact on education quality. This study sought to determine the effectiveness of selected internal institutional mechanisms for assuring university education quality. The selected mechanisms were curriculum design and development, and teaching mechanisms as perceived by lecturers and students. Correlational research design was used. A sample of 524 respondents from both public and private universities in Kenya was selected for use in the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. Qualitative data was transcribed, and presented in themes. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics; percentages, means, Chi square (χ^2) was used to determine compliance to and the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms. All statistical inferences were done at $\alpha=0.05$. This study benefits university management with regard to decisions on levels of enrolment vis-à-vis human resources for university education. It provides evidence on the state of education quality both at institutional and national level; it may empower students and other stakeholders to make informed choices in favor of institutions that pursue excellence and pressure universities to prioritize quality.

KEYWORDS: Higher Education; Quality Assurance; Accreditation; Self-assessment; Peer review

1. INTRODUCTION

Kenya recognizes that higher education should play a key role in her economic and social development endeavors (Republic of Kenya, 2007; 2019) through improvements in knowledge and

skills of those in productive sectors of the economy. Entrenching high standards of quality in skills development and training in universities is one way of ensuring these institutions contribute to national development endeavors. The value of an educational institution's award lies in the integrity of curriculum design, the delivery processes, and in the confidence that stakeholders have in its standards. These components drive quality assurance in education and have a bearing on the relevance of an educational output to national development. Challenges and constraints facing higher education institutions around the world were recognised and reported as symptomatic of a crisis as the early 1990s (World Bank, 1994). Massification of higher education had seen evolution of programmes offered in a wide range of environments: infrastructure, academic calendar cycles and intensity of teaching varying greatly from one institution to another. This is in addition to regulations governing curriculum content and education providers. Further, students were reported as coming to universities from diverse education backgrounds with differing aspirations for academic and career progression. This posed challenges to institutions on how students were to be inducted to proceed from a platform of harmonized entry behaviour. Aijing & Westerheijden (2018) point at lessons of the evolution from control, to a balance between accountability, quality improvement and trust. Yet issues are further compounded in the face of inadequate review of programmes, increased teacher loads, reduction in the period of student exposure to curriculum content, congestion (or the problem of large classes). An examination of issues in quality assurance can provide insight into possible remedies to maintaining education standards in universities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on quality reveals that no uniform approach to quality assurance (QA) has been accepted so far (El-Khawas, 1998). Recent standards and guidelines in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) show institutions are on their way towards coherent quality assurance policies with room for improvement and investigation (Bejan, Jurvelin, Jonatinnen, Minke, & Vacareanu, 2016). The responsibility for design, and delivery of academic programmes on the one hand and the quality assurance function on the other are a key principle in accountable quality assurance. Accountability is viewed as capable of being transparently achieved when an independent quality assurance agency constituted outside the normal chain of management reviews processes (El-Khawas, 1998; Bjorn & Lee 2013).

Traditionally, quality was determined through peer review by those judged to be competent based on their previous contribution to their disciplines (IUCEA, 2010b). It was a matter for academics alone to determine when quality both in teaching and research was achieved. These approaches are now insufficient given the many higher education systems that operate in very diverse circumstances. There are technological, legal and regulatory issues on how to create new institutions and programmes in the public and private universities across countries.

Disparities also exist in the extent to which Quality Assurance Agencies address issues related to expansion and new modes of education delivery (Cheng & Leung, 2014). Some issues have receiving

prominence in debates while other equally important ones receive no attention at all (Skolni, 2010). The question of unified performance indicators to measure quality have been deemed reductionist, offering inaccurate comparisons, and is unduly burdensome (Baker, 1988). In the absence of widespread consensus governments are forced to adopt positions that requires institutions to provide huge amounts of quantitative information to quality assurance bodies for purposes of monitoring performance. Others have introduced performance indicators as part of the contracts for conditional institutional funding without wholly considering who benefits when performance results have financial consequences (Materu, 2007). The consequences of rewarding good performance through supplementary funding, and punishing poor performance through withdrawal of funding are discernible. The community and students who are the primary beneficiaries stand to be injured most, and the decisions can have adverse consequences on the academic health of an institution.

The question of how to measure educational quality in the face of widening use of technology and the growing interest in global delivery of education services also poses challenges to quality assessment (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013). A dilemma exists on the criteria to assess quality and the teams to be involved. With new technology, one would expect development of new benchmarks embracing all stakeholders across university education sectors. Yet this new criterion may posit questions on whether solutions will be competitive in the labour market, be cost effective and socially acceptable. Differently structured programmes also pose challenges (Pham & Nguyen, 2023; Vettori, 2023) because it is not clear if one should measure learning accomplishments or time spent on programme, when students enroll full time, part time, change fields of study, interrupt their studies and also transfer to new institutions (El-Khawas, 1998). Difficulties thus emerge in developing inspection methods appropriate to a new focus on learning regardless of its setting or provider. Electronic methods of delivery challenge the relevance of physical settings and raise questions about the purpose of inspection visits to institutions (El-Khawas, 1998). With a variety of higher education providers organized along profit making, difficulties exist in demonstrating that resources necessarily imply ability to offer programmes and its related services at an expected level of quality.

Though (Massy, 1996) argues that it is generally agreed that quality can be assured by an institution itself through a self-assessment process, the scale of objectivity in attempts to compare an institution's observed performance against preset thresholds of quality for the purpose of endorsement vary. This poses a dilemma on whether to approach quality assurance through peer reviews or through approved independent professional bodies and associations (EAQAHE, 2009). There is even debate as to whether the focus of review for accreditation should be institutions or individual academic programmes. Clearly dilemma exists about decisions on learning objectives to be assessed and evidence to demonstrate accomplishment of these objectives. These need to be put in context with respect to the Kenyan situation.

Quality assurance systems in Africa are thought to be at an infant stage and confronted with many challenges. It is widely acknowledged that successful accreditation audits and academic reviews

demand human capacity, and the legitimacy and credibility of results depend on quality and integrity of people serving as peer reviewers (Massy, 1996). But trained and qualified people are often rare. Where people are available, they lack teaching and research experience at universities. Training of peer reviewers and pre-review preparation is in some cases insufficient: trainings take a short time with hazy information about the review processes, the institutions to be reviewed, together with guidelines on how to evaluate standards. Indeed, Materu (2007) observed that scholars contend that audit and accreditation processes demand too much time from administrators and teaching staff. Added to the existing staff work load, these processes could contribute to a decline in research output.

Besides, financing quality assurance is an expensive undertaking. The drivers of costs include the number of standards or criteria to be reviewed, quality of data management in the institution and size and competence of the review team. Together with the quality of professional staff at national quality assurance agency, these components determine adherence to standards. Given most of African universities are underfunded and expected to look out for alternative sources of finance (Gogo, 2011) relegating quality processes lower on the priority scale is a possibility.

The legitimacy of the QA process largely depends on keeping the process transparent, open and free from interference. In Ghana, Kenya and Mauritius public universities have resisted national accreditation efforts but remained among strong advocates of accreditation for private universities (Materu, 2007). They argue that the public must be protected from excessive entrepreneurialism, and accreditation of private institutions is an appropriate mechanism to set minimum standards of quality. These arguments seem disingenuous in the context of declining quality and lack of coherent quality assessment undertakings in most public universities. Private universities therefore feel unfairly treated and limited in their desire to compete fairly with public universities.

The place of accountability for quality assurance is another area that poses challenges to QA efforts. It is generally agreed that the primary responsibility for QA improvements rests with individual institutions (IUCEA, 2010b). The establishment of QA agencies has therefore been misconstrued as transferring responsibility for QA to an external body. Often this resulted in lack of cooperation between institutions and national QA agencies in countries that have implemented programme accreditation. So, the crisis of quality (Materu, 2007) can only be solved if external pressure is imposed to foster quality improvement. The challenge is how to make this happen while protecting institutional autonomy and the legitimacy and integrity of the QA process. Effective communication throughout the process of developing and implementing the QA system is critical. Negative reactions to system reviews are often associated with failure to build consensus around guidelines provided by national QA agency before the system is implemented. It is critical that challenges to quality assurance efforts in Kenyan universities and measures to redress them be based on evidence derived from available data.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the theory of consumer choice, which relates preferences for the consumption of goods and services to consumption expenditures. The theory is traced to Alfred Marshall, who recognized the role of consumers in determining prices of products, rather than focusing on the cost with the producer as its determinant (Hands, 2009). The theory contends that consumers freely choose a vector of goods that they most prefer, to maximize their utility subject to a budget constraint that says they cannot spend more than their total wealth (Levin and Milgrom, 2004). Otieno (2005) observed patterns of demand for education as likely to have a close relationship with the utility derived from its consumption, and argues that perceptions about the value of education have a relationship with this utility. These perceptions influence enrolment (demand) decisions among students whose numbers are regulated by their ability to pay fees (the budget constraint). Thus, enrolment trends reflect the mixed messages in the information about the costs and benefits which students can expect. Institutional resource provision in terms of facilities, personnel, and equipment determine the number of education places to be supplied (or the capacity of providers of education to absorb more students). The competitive drives among education providers aims at having them gain market share and profit. Students (consumers) on the other hand want to outbid each other for the various academic programs on offer based on their quality.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed correlational research design which is useful in exploring relationships and making predictions in the study. The target population consisted of 22 public and 14 private chartered universities in Kenya. An accessible population of two universities each from among public and private universities were selected by random sampling.

A Sample of 524 respondents was selected for use in the study in selected universities, based on enrolment sizes and staff establishments. Students and lecturers were randomly sampled from identified programmes in schools and departments. Two Deans of schools and four Chairpersons of Departments (CoDs) were purposively sampled from each of the selected universities to provide information on institutional policy and on education quality assurance processes.

Data was collected using both questionnaires and interview schedules. Questionnaires were used to collect information from students, lecturers, and CoDs. Interview schedules on the other hand were used to collect information from Deans, CoDs. This was helpful in clarifying issues that were not clearly articulated in questionnaires.

Select standards were identified based on common guidelines for internal quality assurance work in higher education as prescribed by Commission for University Education in Kenya (CUE, 2008), Inter-university Council of East Africa (IUCEA, 2010) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EAQAHE). A checklist from a domain of indicators that measured the concept

‘education quality’ was important in ensuring validity of constructs in the tools, which were presented to experts in field of education for scrutiny to determine if they contained representative indicators.

Instruments were pretested to determine their reliability; Cronbach’s Coefficient, alpha, was computed. A reliability index of 0.73, 0.78 and 0.86 was obtained for students’ questionnaire, lecturers’ questionnaire and questionnaire for CoDs and Deans of faculty respectively. The index was above the 0.7 threshold (Wallen (1990) acceptable for making inferences in a study.

Data collected was appropriately coded. Qualitative data was transcribed, and presented in themes, while quantitative data was analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics. All statistical inferences were done at $\alpha = 0.05$.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of findings of the various data collected is outlined as hereunder:

4.1 Curriculum Design and Development

Opinions were sought from lecturers on their level of agreement with the effectiveness of selected quality assurance practices under program design and development in universities where they taught. Results of the analysis (table 4.8) showed a high compliance rating (more than 70%) for all elements in this process parameter. This suggested that mechanisms for quality program design and development within institutions were effective. Since differences in responses from lecturers in the two categories of universities were not significant ($p > 0.05$) program design and development issues in both public and private universities may have been done in a similar manner.

Table 1: Lecturers’ Perception of Curriculum Design and Development in Universities

| Quality Curriculum Design and Development Mechanisms | Responses | Public University (n=46) | | Private University (n=42) | | Total (n=88) | | χ^2 | df | p | Mean |
|--|------------|---|-------|---------------------------|------|--------------|------|----------|----|------|------|
| | | f | % | f | % | f | % | | | | |
| | | Curriculum Design and development involves all relevant staff in the department | Agree | 45 | 97.8 | 35 | 85.4 | | | | |
| | Don't Know | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 4.9 | 2 | 2.3 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 1 | 2.2 | 4 | 9.8 | 5 | 5.7 | | | | |
| Employer and other stakeholder requirements incorporated into curriculum before implementation | Agree | 38 | 82.6 | 26 | 63.4 | 64 | 73.6 | 4.27 | 2 | 0.12 | 1.43 |
| | Don't Know | 3 | 6.5 | 7 | 17.1 | 10 | 11.5 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 5 | 10.9 | 8 | 19.5 | 13 | 14.9 | | | | |
| Curriculum structure and content are reviewed at regular intervals | Agree | 40 | 87.0 | 30 | 73.2 | 70 | 80.5 | 2.65 | 2 | 0.27 | 1.32 |
| | Don't Know | 3 | 6.5 | 5 | 12.2 | 8 | 9.2 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 3 | 6.5 | 6 | 14.6 | 9 | 10.3 | | | | |
| Teaching calendar provides adequate time to implement the curriculum of all courses you teach | Agree | 31 | 67.4 | 32 | 78.0 | 63 | 72.4 | 1.25 | 2 | 0.54 | 1.49 |
| | Don't Know | 3 | 6.5 | 2 | 4.9 | 5 | 5.7 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 12 | 26.1 | 7 | 17.1 | 19 | 21.8 | | | | |

Source: Field data

To gain a deeper insight into lecturers' perception of the effectiveness of program design and development mechanisms, their responses on challenges to quality program design and development practices in the universities were sought through open ended items in the questionnaire. This allowed them to put issues in the manner they deemed fit without the constraint of closed ended questions. The results were analyzed, grouped into themes presented in table 2.

Table 2: Lecturers' Perceptions of Challenges to Quality Program Design and Development

| Perceived Challenge | Public Universities (n=43) | | Private Universities (n=26) | | Total (n=69) | |
|---|--|------|-----------------------------|------|--------------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| | Inadequate support for program development | 43 | 37.4 | 26 | 22.6 | 69 |
| Lack of policy on program development | 3 | 2.6 | 3 | 2.6 | 6 | 5.2 |
| Limited expertise involved in program development | 15 | 13.0 | 13 | 11.3 | 28 | 24.3 |
| Dynamic nature of labour markets kills needs | 4 | 3.5 | 3 | 2.6 | 7 | 6.1 |
| Short time frames for curriculum implementation | 2 | 1.7 | 3 | 2.6 | 5 | 4.3 |

Source: Field data

An examination of table 2. reveals that two major issues were working against quality program design and development. These were: inadequate institutional support for program design and development (60%) and limited expert involvement in program design and development (24.3%). More respondents in public than private universities perceived challenges to effective program design and development in their institutions.

However, the high compliance levels in table 1 seemed to run counter to responses to open ended items in the questionnaire, and those of the same lecturers sampled for face-to-face interviews. Interviews with lecturers revealed worrying practices in curriculum design and development. In both public and private universities, they expressed apprehension with the manner in which curriculum design and development was conducted. One lecturer responded thus:

“At institutional level, there is no incentive for those involved in curriculum development activities ... unlike those who engaged in research and publication who are sure of being promoted on the basis of their research output. Curriculum review and development is viewed as an administrative function that is hardly considered for reward”.

It also emerged from interviews that those involved in program development activities at institutional level were not appropriately facilitated. One chairman of department observed thus:

“There is gross under staffing and inadequate provision of materials and equipment to support curriculum development work in departments ... no budget line for curriculum review

activities both at department and school levels ... little in-depth research goes into curriculum review activities within respective departments”.

In all institutions that were sampled, lecturers indicated, during interviews that no structured training schedule existed to build capacity for department specific staff involved in curriculum development activities. It emerged that curriculum review panelists were nominated on the basis of departmental representation and seniority rather than on the expertise in curriculum issues. Consequently, reports of panelists were adopted by academic boards with little variation. This position departs from the practice in Britain and other countries within the European Union area, where institutions implement rigorous internal curriculum reviews that are part of their strategic vision on quality (Massy, 1996; EAQAHE, 2005; Materu, 2007) while external audits provide independent assurance that that sufficient internal processes exist to assure quality.

Though curriculum was the core around which other activities took place in universities, there was notable absence of discussions and highlights of curriculum issues in important university bulletins. Curriculum reviews are an important accountability plank in quality assurance practices in education (Pauntney, 2009; Toole, 2013), and many scholars underscore the value of accountability without which even those with the best intentions may begin to waver in their obligations as other priorities impinge their commitment. This observation lends credence to perceptions that curriculum change in universities is driven more by forces from outside the institutions; they respond to pressure to attract and retain students (Sall, 2004; Abagi et al, 2005), and as a response to the needs of employers who drive demand for education.

These findings were, however, not unique to Kenyan Universities. The absence of in-depth research into curriculum issues to back curriculum development was also highlighted by Barnatt and Coate (2008) (cited by Pauntney. 2009) as an issue to worry educators. He averred that with lack of research in curriculum issues, the rationale for reviewing what was known about the curriculum may not have real empirical basis. Similar findings were reported (World Bank, 2000b; Akinwumi, 2010; Gudo et. al, 2011) with indications that little graduate training existed in core areas of instructional engagement even in Africa’s flagship universities. With the current pace of internationalization of higher education, the notion of curriculum change in universities should not be limited by the institutional setting.

4.2 Effectiveness of Teaching Mechanisms in Universities.

Quality teaching is an activity whose undertaking helps demonstrate institutional efforts to be recognized as trustworthy providers of education. Institutions have to take deliberate steps to support diverse activities, including monitoring the processes aimed at supporting quality teaching. Select quality aspects were identified for examination under effectiveness of teaching mechanisms: lecturer engagement in teaching activities and students’ perceptions of institutional quality teaching practices.

4.2.1 Lecturers’ Engagement in Teaching Activities.

Level of engagement in teaching was used as an indicator of the intensity with which lecturers were involved in the delivery of classroom related services over a given period. Townsend and Rosser (2007) acknowledged that understanding what teachers do with their time is the first step in understanding their productivity. But it would be futile to attempt to measure all the time that lecturers work to meet their job responsibilities: hours spent on instructional activities, time spent on research and other scholarly activities. Lecturers from sampled universities were requested to indicate their course workloads per week, the average student enrolment in the courses they taught and the cumulative course hours for which they were to be engaged in a week. They were also requested to indicate the number of teaching weeks in a semester, and semesters (teaching sessions) in a year.

These aspects constituted measures of personnel utilization. Responses were analysed using independent t-tests to determine variation between actual and recommended thresholds of workloads, and if differences in workloads existed between public and private universities. A summarized analysis of results is highlighted in table 3.

Table 3: Lecturers’ Engagement in Quality Teaching Practices

| Variable(s) | Public Universities (n=46) | | Private Universities (n=42) | | t-test for Equality of Means (Equal Variances Assumed) | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------|--|----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | Mean | Std Dev. (σ) | Mean | Std Dev. (σ) | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Teaching Practice | | | | | | | | | |
| Lecturer’s Workload | 4.15 | 2.14 | 4.76 | 1.25 | -1.61 | 86 | 0.11 | 0.61 | 0.447 |
| Recommended Workload | 3.43 | 4.05 | 3.86 | 0.98 | 0.66 | 86 | 0.512 | -0.42 | 0.792 |
| Average Class Enrolment | 157.61 | 223.4 | 26.31 | 18.56 | 3.80 | 86 | 0.000 | 131.30 | 41.116 |
| Average Weekly Course Hours | 13.20 | 5.88 | 12.64 | 5.81 | 0.45 | 86 | 0.658 | 0.56 | 1.243 |
| Average Weeks in Semester | 14.28 | 1.38 | 13.21 | 1.42 | 3.58 | 86 | 0.001 | 1.07 | 0.297 |
| Semesters in Year | 2.76 | 0.43 | 2.88 | 0.35 | -1.14 | 86 | 0.258 | 0.10 | 0.085 |

Source: Field data

From the results of the analysis (table 3), the mean teaching workloads in terms of number of courses allocated were higher than internally recommended loads in both public and private universities. Public universities recorded greater variability both in allocated and recommended teaching workloads. However, there were no significant differences between public and private universities both in allocated and recommended teaching workloads ($p > 0.05$).

In order to have an understanding of the degree of commitment in teaching activities, lecture hours per week which are an indicator of the extent of engagement in classroom delivery were examined. Results (table 3) showed that public universities operated on a relatively higher weekly time loading than private universities. The differences in workloads were not statistically significant. With the observed average of fourteen-, and thirteen-weeks semester periods in public and private universities respectively, lecturers in public universities were more engaged in class teaching activities. Teaching time cumulated respectively to 377 hours and 334 hours annually in public and private universities per lecturer. According to Makhanu (2004), 270 hours per year is the universally accepted Full Time Staff Equivalent (FSTE) for teaching staff at universities. The findings therefore documented loadings that overshot those universally accepted by up to 39.6% in public universities and 23.7% in private universities.

These findings demonstrate that quality of university education may be grossly undermined by teacher overload. This assertion is based on studies that found hours of teacher engagement in instructional activities to have a direct relationship with teaching quality - a concept measured by the extent of the effective and efficient execution of the workload within stipulated timelines to achieve institutional objectives (Nkweke, 2011). The Q-factor, which is a measure of the time a teacher has for marking and preparation per hour of teaching falls as the workload increases (Geoff, 2012).

Teacher loading beyond recommended thresholds is not unique to Kenyan universities. Wilson (2011) observed that top-level universities in the USA frequently battle to recruit star professors some of who are encouraged to bargain for smaller teaching loads that give them more time for research. In fact, teaching loads at these universities were estimated to have fallen by 42% between 1988 and 2004 (Vedder et al. 2013). The fall was driven by institutional incentives and rewards policies: faculties are rewarded for publishing articles, the results of which can be precisely measured and is observable nationally and even globally. Other staff step in to shoulder the loads for periods when these professors are unable to take their teaching roles, effectively raising their loads above recommended thresholds.

In recent times, universities keen on efficiency have been cutting back on arrangements that gave professors fewer classes in exchange for research engagements (Wilson, 2011): starting new academic programs, chairing academic departments and important faculty committees. It is argued that to reduce costs for students and increase quality of instruction, professors should return to their primary role as classroom instructors and have their teaching loads increased. In fact, Moran (2012) estimated that doubling courses for lecturers was practically reasonable and would cut the cost of educating a student by more than 31.4%.

For the case of Kenyan universities, teaching workloads need to be reduced to enhance quality. One has to be alive to the now established fact that the academic calendar runs three terms each of about 13 weeks for both public and private universities. Without a firm resolve to optimally engage staff in teaching and limit concessionary employment of lecturers, a full year's engagement of some lecturers

would push teaching hours to more than double the FTSE that Makhanu (2004) proposes, escalate costs to unsustainable levels as education quality plummets.

4.2.2 Class Enrolment Practices

From the results (table 3), public universities were noted to have much higher average class enrolments (157.61) compared to private universities (26.31). Public universities had higher variations in class enrolment (223.37) compared to private universities (18.56). The mean difference in class enrolments between public and private universities was statistically significant ($P = 0.000$). These findings were as expected: research findings have documented enrolments which public universities were unable to cope with (Pham, 2013; Angelopulo, 2013).

This scenario poses a threat to overall institutional quality output. The Kenya's higher education regulator, (CHE, 2005; 2008a) requires that institutions conform to full time staff student ratio of 1:10 for Applied Sciences; 1:15 for Arts and Humanities; 1:7 for medicine and allied sciences; 1:10 for pure and natural science; and 1:18 for social sciences. What was observed in public universities was, however, incredibly higher than recommended levels. This confirms concerns that lecturers were overwhelmed by large numbers of students and could not deliver to the expected standards (Republic of Kenya, 2008b; Gogo, Ayodo and Othuon, 2010; Mulongo, 2013).

Studies have associated large classes with poor quality education provision. Monks and Schimdt (2010) reported findings which indicated that large class sizes for which a lecturer was responsible had a negative impact on self-reported outcomes of amount learnt, instruction rating, course rating and expected course grade – all indicators of quality educational provision. Specifically, their findings revealed that large class sizes had a negative impact on critical and analytical thinking required in courses, the effectiveness of teaching methods, the lecturer's daily preparedness for the class, the lecturer's availability to students outside class, the adequacy of comments on students' work and the timeliness of feedback to students.

One option out of large class sizes would be widespread use of part-time lecturers who may reduce class sizes. But the flip side of this arrangement is that administrative policies on hiring of part-time lecturers to teach numerous sections of courses in order to minimize class size may ignore the important role that total student responsibility plays in how a department actually teaches those courses. The situation in public universities calls for more drastic measures in order to put these institutions on the international radar, whose positive ranking is often based on the percentage of course sections that have fewer than twenty students.

4.2.3 Institutional Quality Enhancing Teaching Practices

Students' views about the quality enhancing practices emanating from institutional processes whose effects they experience on a regular basis can serve as a reliable indicator of the effectiveness of the quality assurance mechanisms in university education. Their verdict on the effectiveness of quality

mechanisms can serves both the accountability and quality enhancement goals (IHEQN, 2007). Accountability takes care of the interest of society (which students represent) in safeguarding quality and standards of education (Avdjieva and Wilson, 2002), while quality enhancement provides an opportunity for institutions to reflect on and consider whether their quality processes contribute to the quality culture within the institutions. Information on internal quality enhancement practices was sought from students on six parameters whose outcome are outlined in table 4.

Table 4: Students’ Perception of Institutional Quality Enhancing Practices

| Quality Enhancement Practices | Responses | Public Universities (n=167) | | Private Universities (n=150) | | Total (n=317) | | χ^2 | d | p | Mean |
|--|------------|---|-------|------------------------------|------|---------------|------|----------|---|------|------|
| | | f | % | f | % | f | % | | | | |
| | | Academic load allows for adequate attendance to both your academic and other social needs | Agree | 125 | 74.9 | 110 | 73.3 | | | | |
| | Don't know | 10 | 6.0 | 13 | 8.7 | 23 | 7.3 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 32 | 19.2 | 27 | 18.0 | 59 | 18.6 | | | | |
| You are involved in regular assessment of the teaching process in the courses that you undertake | Agree | 113 | 67.7 | 107 | 71.3 | 220 | 69.4 | 1.30 | 2 | 0.52 | 1.53 |
| | Don't know | 12 | 7.2 | 13 | 8.7 | 25 | 7.9 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 42 | 25.1 | 30 | 20.0 | 72 | 22.7 | | | | |
| Lecturers attend to all scheduled lessons in all courses offered in your program | Agree | 64 | 38.3 | 107 | 71.3 | 171 | 53.9 | 40.17 | 2 | 0.00 | 1.81 |
| | Don't know | 18 | 10.8 | 16 | 10.7 | 34 | 10.7 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 85 | 50.9 | 27 | 18.0 | 112 | 35.3 | | | | |
| There are accurate mechanisms to monitor students’ daily class attendance | Agree | 74 | 44.3 | 107 | 71.3 | 181 | 57.1 | 27.51 | 2 | 0.00 | 1.78 |
| | Don't know | 12 | 7.2 | 12 | 8.0 | 24 | 7.6 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 81 | 48.5 | 31 | 20.7 | 112 | 35.3 | | | | |
| There are adequate teaching aids to support teaching in all the courses that you are enrolled | Agree | 52 | 31.1 | 84 | 56.0 | 136 | 42.9 | 22.49 | 2 | 0.00 | 2.03 |
| | Don't know | 18 | 10.8 | 17 | 11.3 | 35 | 11.0 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 97 | 58.1 | 49 | 32.7 | 146 | 46.1 | | | | |
| Large numbers of students in classroom undermining teaching quality | Agree | 98 | 58.7 | 70 | 46.7 | 168 | 53.0 | 5.24 | 2 | 0.07 | 1.82 |
| | Don't know | 15 | 9.0 | 22 | 14.7 | 37 | 11.7 | | | | |
| | Disagree | 54 | 32.3 | 58 | 38.7 | 112 | 35.3 | | | | |

Source: Field data

It was evident from the results in table 4, that students in public universities generally had a low opinion of quality enhancement practices in their universities with ratings of below 50% on many parameters. Those in private universities on the other hand had fairly positive sentiments on a number of quality enhancement practices, with ratings of above 50% at the time of the survey. The most highly rated quality enhancement practice in public universities (having workloads that allowed for both academic and other students’ social needs) was 74.9% followed by “regular assessment of teaching process” (67.7%); the most lowly rated on the other hand was “large number of students undermining teaching quality” (58.7%) and “having adequate aids to support teaching in all courses enrolled” (31.1%). Private universities, however, posted positive sentiment at over 70% on most process parameters. However, significant differences in students’ perceptions of quality enhancement practices were noted on only three parameters: “lecturers’ attendance to scheduled lessons”, “monitoring students’ daily

attendance” and “adequacy of teaching aids”. These findings suggest that mechanisms for enhancing quality may be more effective in private than public universities.

The low rating for public universities on the highlighted quality enhancement practices was therefore a cause for worry for government and other stakeholder in education provision. Service quality is determined by comparing expected and perceived service performance (Ivana, Andjelija, Ugljesa, Igor, and Milan, 2013), and improving service quality requires bridging of the gap between expectations and perceptions about the service. These measures serve as proxies for students’ exposure to desired skills and competencies, and have a direct bearing on education quality.

Open ended items in students’ and lecturers’ questionnaires were used to capture perceptions about challenges affecting teaching processes, and how they could be resolved. These perceptions were analysed into four themes and tabulated as shown in table 5 and 6 respectively.

Table 5: Lecturers’ Perceptions of Challenges to Quality Teaching Practices

| Perceived Challenge | Public Universities (n=41) | | Private Universities (n=24) | | Total (n=65) | |
|--|----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|--------------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Inadequate working space | 10 | 24.4 | 2 | 9.1 | 12 | 19.0 |
| Work overload | 3 | 7.3 | 4 | 18.1 | 7 | 11.1 |
| Poor supervision of teaching processes | 24 | 58.5 | 12 | 54.5 | 36 | 57.1 |
| Inadequate teaching support utilities | 4 | 9.8 | 4 | 18.2 | 8 | 12.7 |

Source: Field data

From table 5, it emerged that poor supervision of teaching processes, at 57.1% was perceived to be the biggest challenges to quality teaching practices, standing at the same levels in both public and private universities; this was followed by inadequate working space at 9.0%, but which was more severe in public than private universities; inadequate teaching support utilities, at 12.7%, was perceived to be a bigger problem in private than public universities and work overload, at 11.1% was seen as a bigger problem in private than public universities in the order of the items perceived to undermine quality teaching practices.

Table 6: Students' Perceptions of Challenges to Quality Teaching Practices

| Perceived Challenge | Public Universities (n=261) | | Private Universities (n=120) | | Total (n=381) | |
|--|-----------------------------|------|------------------------------|------|---------------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| | Large class sizes | 124 | 47.5 | 60 | 50.0 | 184 |
| Inadequate supervision of teaching processes | 84 | 32.2 | 51 | 42.5 | 135 | 35.4 |
| Poor teaching approaches | 43 | 16.5 | 9 | 7.5 | 52 | 13.6 |
| Inadequate teaching support utilities | 10 | 3.8 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 2.6 |

Source: Field data

An analysis of students' responses (table 6) revealed that class size was perceived to pose the greatest challenge to quality teaching practices at 49.3%, followed by inadequate supervision of teaching processes 35.4%, with the two perceptions cutting across both public and private universities in undermining quality. Students did not seem to consider inadequate teaching support utilities to be a major threat to quality teaching practices. However negative sentiments about quality teaching processes were more pronounced in public than private universities.

To follow up on issues underlying the low rating of some quality enhancing teaching practices, discussions with students in groups were organized. On the issue of lecturers' attendance to scheduled lessons (table 5 and 6), a sizeable proportion of students voiced unexplained incidents of missed lessons on the part of lecturers - an indication of lack of focused supervisory attention to teaching. It emerged that such failure to adhere to lesson schedules occasionally resulted in unplanned arrangement for lessons to make up for lost lesson hours; this compounded the pressure on students who could have attended to other scheduled activities. Research evidence has shown that supervision has a major influence on overall performance and efficiency of projects (Alawi, Humpton, and Mohamed, 2001), with reports that inadequate supervision was the major cause of rework on defects after project completion.

5. CONCLUSION

This study sought to determine the effectiveness of selected internal institutional mechanisms for assuring university education quality. The selected mechanisms were curriculum design and development, and teaching mechanisms as perceived by lecturers and students.

Evidence from findings indicate that curriculum design and development followed requisite processes. However, challenges of inadequate support for curriculum design and development and limited expert involvement in program development stood out. It was also observed that lecturers were engaged to teach longer than the recommended hours. Classes were also disproportionately over enrolled, with public universities bearing the brunt of this challenge. Available options to mitigate this problem like hire of part time staff still had the negative consequence of eroding quality enhancing services that full time staff would offer. Students had positive sentiments about quality enhancing practices like optimal course loading, regular student assessments, monitoring attendance to scheduled lectures among

others. However, inadequate teaching aids and large classes were seen as major factors undermining quality. Challenges to quality teaching as perceived by lecturers included poor supervision of teaching and inadequate teaching space. Staff workloads and inadequate teaching support utilities were not rated highly as undermining quality. Overall, the combined effect of these challenges on quality was negative.

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