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Original Article

The Influence of Academic Staffing Practices on Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Selected Universities in Uganda

David BaikoAjuaba[1], Proscovia Namubiru Ssentamu[1] & Marc Cutright[2]*

[1] Uganda Management Institute, P. O. Box 20131, Kampala, Uganda.
[2] The University of North Texas, 1155 Union Cir, Denton, TX 76205, United States.
[*] Author for Correspondence Email: ajuabadavid@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Quality assurance in universities has always been the professional duty of the faculty. In Africa quality assurance mechanisms (QAMs) were initiated as soon as universities were established in the continent. Although in Uganda the teaching staff are at the center of QAMs, inadequacies in academic staffing practices in the areas of remuneration, quality and quantity of the teaching staff have been some of the challenges experienced by universities in the country. This led to the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education to promote QAMs. This study established the extent to which academic staffing practices influenced QAMs in selected universities in Uganda. The study adopted the systems theory where the academic staffs are part of the inputs universities employ to offer services. The study is based on the pragmatic paradigm and cross-sectional survey design. By use of the disproportionate stratified random sampling 180 and 120 students and academic staff members respectively responded to questionnaires. In addition 47 students were conveniently sampled to participate in focus group discussions and 20 managers were purposefully sampled for individual interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze and interpret the quantitative data and corroborated with qualitative data. The results presented a mixed picture; chi-square test for the academic staff is not statistically significant and for students is statistically significant. The study concludes that there is moderate influence of academic staffing practices on QAMs in the selected universities in Uganda. In order to enhance QAMs, the study recommends the need to further improve levels of remuneration, quality and number of academic staff in the universities.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, quality assurance as an attribute of university education was traditionally the professional responsibility of the teaching staff (Harvey & Askling, 2003). Van der Bank and Popoola (2014) noted that in Africa Quality Assurance Mechanisms (QAMs) in the higher education sector are as old as the establishment of university education in the continent. Materu (2007) observed that the newly established universities in Africa were subjected to QAMs of their parent institutions in Europe. In Uganda QAMs started with the opening of Makerere Technical College in 1922 as the first Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the country. In 1949 when Makerere Technical College became a university college of the University of London it also adopted the QA mechanisms of the institution. But towards the end of the 20th century, African universities experienced a decline in quality due to among others rising enrollment and falling finances (Mamdani, 2007 & Materu, 2007). In East Africa, the inadequate number of senior academic staffs among other challenges was found to be one of the problems facing universities in the region (Kuria et al., 2012). Accordingly, this gave rise to the establishment of Quality Assurance (QA) agencies to among others promote QAMs (Shabani, et al., 2014).

In Uganda the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions (UOTIA) Act (2001) (as amended in 2006) led to the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) with the mandate of accreditation of private universities. The findings of this inquiry are based on organizational theories, the systems theory in particular. From the perspective of systems theory, universities receive inputs from the environment that are transformed and the products are released into the external environment as graduates and services. The academic staffs are some of the inputs in universities, accordingly, QAMs in universities depend on academic staffing practices. This study is based on the argument that securing an adequate number of academic staff with the required qualifications with appropriate levels of remuneration is a pre-requisite for effective implementation of QAMs in the selected universities in Uganda. According to Kansay (2012) QAMs in universities are dependent on the recruitment of an adequate number of academic staffs. Redder (2010) observed that the quality of services in a university cannot be better than the quality of the teaching staff. The formulation, approval and review of curricular, assessment of learning and other duties of the academic staffs constitute the processes employed to transform learners. In the opinion of Strydom, et al., (1997) university programs that fulfill quality standards are likely to enable students to develop adequate competencies required in the job sector.

The focus of the systems theory is that universities as open systems have both internal and external environment. The academic staff members together with other stakeholders are part of the internal environment while legal policy issues for quality assurance in universities in Uganda form the external environment. In this study academic staffing practices are the academic staffing activities required in the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms in universities. The operationalization includes the levels of remuneration, quality and number of academic staff. Quality assurance mechanisms are the procedures and strategies for efficient and effective implementation of quality assurance measures in order to improve university education, critical in the production of graduates with the necessary competencies required at work.

In the context of this study due to the rapid increase in the number of universities in Uganda, there was a lot of debate in regard to the maintenance of QA

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mechanisms among all stakeholders as well as Uganda government. Accordingly, in 2001 the government established the NCHE so as to regulate the quality and relevance of Higher Education (HE) in the country. The UOTIA act (2001) established the NCHE to; 1) regulate and guide the establishment and management of HEIs and 2) regulate the quality of HE, equate HE qualifications as well as advise the government on HE issues. In 2006 the NCHE developed the National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) to regulate the quality of HE in Uganda. The framework has a regulatory part at the national level and the institutional part at the level of each HEI. At the regulatory level the NQAF established the following benchmarks to maintain QA; a) institutional accreditation, b) accreditation of individual programs, c) merit-based admissions into HEIs, d) the quality of the teaching staff, e) examination regulations and standardization of academic awards, f) students' assessment of academic staff, g) institutional infrastructure, h) collaboration with professional bodies and i) regulating cross-border higher education.

Part two of the NQAF allocates the core responsibility for quality management to HEIs. In section 3.0 of the NQAF, HEIs are required to have an independent unit or Directory for QA with the responsibility to develop quality control guidelines and to frequently review all programs, teaching and assessment. In that section the key measures for QA at institutional level are; 1) institutional governance, 2) the quality of teaching and learning, 3) the quality of academic staff, 4) sufficiency of educational facilities, 5) research and publication, 6) the quality of outputs, 7) institutional financial management and 8) the university and the community. This study is based on the third aspect of the NQAF.

Basing on the measures set in the NQAF to manage QA in HEIs, most universities in Uganda would be closed if the implementation of the mechanisms were followed to the letter. According to NCHE (2010) Uganda's universities are associated with problems of low-quality faculty. The NQAF requires that at least 60% of university academic staff be PhD holders and a staffing level of less than 10% of PhD holders is considered unacceptable. In an analysis of human resources in Ugandan universities Businge (2013) revealed that in the top four public universities; Makerere, Mbarara, Kyambogo and Gulu there were 53 professors constituting only 3% of those set in the NQAF. Businge further noted that Kyambogo University one of the biggest universities in Uganda only had two professors instead of the required 43. To date there is minimal improvement in the number of professors. Several universities in Uganda are still characterized by inadequate accommodation for staff and high student-lecturer ratios, dependence on part-time lecturers among others (Kwesiga, 2013 & NCHE, 2011). Media reports in 2023 indicated that a lot of programs in universities in Uganda expired due to delayed reviews.

Statement of the Problem

The faculty are critical to the sustainable implementation of QAMs in universities. Rowley (1996) notes that lecturers in universities are key inputs and their level of commitment in doing university work very much influences the extent to which learners experience QAMs. Chaffee and Sheer (1999) maintained that constant improvement in quality is achieved when the academic staff are put at the center of it. However, there are a lot of challenges associated with academic staffing in the universities in Uganda. Many universities in Uganda have low quality academic staff with lower ranks (NCHE, 2010 & Matovu, 2017). Matovu (2017) observed that a lot of universities in Uganda employ part-time academic staffs with less commitment to their duties in the universities. This confirms the findings of Tibarimbasa (2010) where Nkumba University, one of the leading private universities in Uganda had inadequate number of academic staff. According to Businge (2013) there were only 53 professors (representing only 3% of those required by NCHE) in the top four public universities in Uganda; Makerere, Kyambogo, Gulu and Mbarara University of Science and Technology. This has led to high student-lecturer ratios. It is quite hard to expect universities to fully implement benchmarks for QAMs set in the NQAF under such circumstances. Nabaho et al., (2017) argued that QAMs are observed if the curriculum is implemented by qualified teaching staff in the

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required numbers. This study sought to establish the extent to which academic staffing practices have influenced quality assurance mechanisms in selected universities in Uganda.

Study Objectives

The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which academic staffing practices influenced quality assurance mechanisms in selected universities in Uganda, with emphases on the practices of academic staff remuneration, as well as their quality and quantity.

Literature Review

The scope of the academic staffing practices is limited to how levels of remuneration, academic staff quality and quantity influenced QA mechanisms. The academic staff members are key to the sustainable practice of QA mechanisms in universities. For instance, to have a good quality of teaching members of the faculty need to be motivated, have the required competencies and numbers.

One factor that determines academic staff motivation is remuneration. According to Adolfson and Jornamger (2009) the level of salary is normally the easiest way to motivate employees to perform better. During the World Conference on Education for All, (WCEFA) in 1990 the general observation was that teaching staff in Africa operate under a lot of hardships because most get low pay and have poor prospects of production. Some lecturers in universities in Uganda were forced to take on second jobs due to low salaries described to be below token levels. However, the recent trend in Uganda indicates enhanced salaries of the academic staffs in public universities. But the academic staffs in many private universities in the country have continued to receive low pay partly due to financial constraints. Tibarimbasa (2010) discovered that in Uganda a good number of private universities lacked a salary scale. Salaries were negotiable and payments to the staff were at times determined by the kind of relationship with the top leadership. He pointed out Kampala International University (KIU), Nkumba University (NU) and Kampala University (KU) as some of the private universities in which the teaching staff members were not sure of their payments. It should be noted that the result of low remuneration in HEIs is resignations, lecturers dodging responsibilities, verbal complaints, strikes and high staff turnover. This study sought to establish the extent to which the level of remuneration influenced QA mechanisms in the selected universities in Uganda.

The focus of universities is to realize an easy operationalization of their activities to achieve their visions. Colling and Harvey (1995) emphasized that highly qualified human resources enable universities to have meaningful practices particularly, teaching. However, the composition and number of the faculty in many universities in Africa has not shown much improvement in terms of both quality and quantity. Abagi (2006) reports that in Kenya out of the 84-teaching staff in Day Star University barely 10% had PhDs and in Central University College of the 56 academic staff nine had doctorates. In its report the NCHE (2011) noted that there were about 12.8% of the academic staff members in Uganda's HEIs with PhDs, 48.1% with master degrees and 39.1% of the faculty members had bachelor degrees. Tibarimbasa (2010) notes that on several occasions whenever the private universities in Uganda were in need of lecturers it was hard to get those with PhDs. Matovu (2017) observed that in terms of quality, a lot of universities in Uganda lack faculty members with senior ranks such as professors but those with the lower ranks of teaching assistants and assistant lecturers are in a sizable number though not also adequate enough. In some Ugandan universities the profit motive appears to have compromised their attempts of coming up with ways of developing the academic staff knowledge and skills. This exposes them to the risk of lowering the quality of the faculty, by extension QA mechanisms. Quality assurance in universities to a great extent is influenced by the quality of the teaching staff because they are crucial in teaching and learning, research and stimulating critical thinking among students. This study established how much QA mechanisms were influenced by such practices.

In a survey of six countries in Africa; Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya

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Varghese (2006) maintained that about 50% of the faulty jobs were occupied by part-time lecturers. He further reports that in the United States International University, by 2002 from a population of 106 teaching staff, 65 were part-time lecturers. He also noted that around this period of the 115 faculty members at the Catholic University of East Africa in Kenya, 58 were part-timers. Thus, the responsibility of teaching in most HEIs is shared between permanent academic staff members and part-timers. To cope with the volatile situation in Uganda's universities, the institutions make use of part-time faculty (Tibarimbasa, 2010). This maintains versatility and reduces on costs in the respective universities. However, many part-time lecturers are normally less committed to university work compared to the full-time academic staff. Matovu (2017) observed that most universities in Uganda depend on part-timers who have less commitment and time to do university work. Accordingly, sometimes students get hardships in reaching to them especially outside lecture hours.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question and test the hypothesis, this study is based on the mixed methods approach and cross-sectional survey design. The quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in the study to ensure complementarity as well as collecting adequate data on the academic staffing practices to sustain QA mechanisms. The mixed methods enhanced triangulation with several sources of data and respondents consulted. The study was carried out in six selected universities in Uganda, but the universities are of two major categories. Accordingly, stratification was important to come up with two strata of government universities and private universities due to their large number and heterogeneous nature. The three public universities selected; PU1, PU2 and PU3 were in existence when the NCHE made quality assurance mandatory in universities. While the private universities; PR1, PR2, and PR3 were all chartered. All three public universities were expected to get full government support to maintain and /or improve quality assurance mechanisms. The fact that the three private universities had completed the entire process of registration was considered important to examine their academic staffing practices for quality assurance. Hence, the study adopted stratified purposive sampling to enhance representativeness in the selected universities. Members of management from the ministry of education and sports (MOES), NCHE, the universities as well as the faculty and students from the selected universities constituted the statistical population. Sampling theory requires that when the statistical population is established, a sampling frame is created. However, in the context of this study, the sampling frame was difficult to compile due to the fluid nature of the faculty and students especially in the private universities. Accordingly, the researchers stratified the accessible population by category i.e. members of management, the faculty and students. The stratified purposive sampling technique employed enhanced representativeness in selection of the universities and respondents. Disproportionate stratified random sampling followed by simple random sampling and the use of lottery system was used to get cross-sectional data from questionnaires filled by 180 learners and 120 academic staff members. Disproportionate stratified random sampling involved use of different fractions to sample the faculty and students in order to ensure that sub-sample of the faculty was large enough for analysis of data collected. Heidar, et al., (2015) noted that stratified random sampling technique is employed when the population is heterogeneous but can be divided into homogeneous strata. Accordingly, each stratum was exposed to simple random sampling. The 47 students who participated in focus group discussions were conveniently sampled and a purposive sampling technique was used to identify the 20 managers from the selected universities, MOES and NCHE. Dornyei (2007) observes that convenience sampling involves a situation in which individuals of the target population who have met a number of parameters including nearness, being present or the readiness to take part in a study at a given time are selected. Accordingly, the willing students to participate in focus group discussions constituted the sample. Amin (2005) notes that purposive sampling technique is critical to get respondents who hold positions that make them

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knowledgeable experts in an area. Hence, purposive sampling enabled selection of managers charged with the responsibility of formulating quality assurance strategies, quality assurance policies and implementation of quality assurance mechanisms in universities. Expert judgment technique suggested by Gay (1996) was used to establish the validity of the research instruments and a pilot study on few students and academic staff members from universities that were not part of this study were used to establish the reliability of the instruments. Frequency tables and percentages were employed to analyze the quantitative data and the results interpreted using chi-square. In order to establish the extent to which academic staffing practices influenced QA mechanisms, a test of significance performed at the probability level of $p < 0.05$ was used.

Results

Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

	Type of respondent			
	Academic staff		Students	
University	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Private University (PRU)1	20	16.7	30	16.7
PRU2	20	16.7	30	16.7
PRU3	20	16.7	30	16.7
Public University (PU)1	20	16.7	30	16.7
PU2	20	16.7	30	16.7
PU3	20	16.7	30	16.7
Total	**120**	**100**	**180**	**100**
Gender				
Male	72	60	116	64.4
Female	48	40	64	35.6
Total	**120**	**100**	**180**	**100**
Educational Qualification				
Diploma	3	2.5	-	-
Bachelor Degree	20	16.7	-	-
PGD	3	2.5	-	-
Master Degree	77	64.2	-	-
PhD	17	14.2	-	-
Total	**120**	**100**	-	-
Academic Rank				
Teaching Assistant	20	16.7	-	-
Assistant Lecturer	30	25	-	-
Lecturer	51	42.5	-	-
Senior Lecturer	17	14.2	-	-
Associate Professor	1	0.8	-	-
Professor	1	0.8	-	-
Total	**120**	**100**	-	-
Length of service at the university in years				
1 – 5	40	33.3	-	-
6 – 10	19	15.8	-	-
11 – 15	18	15	-	-
16 – 20	21	17.5	-	-
20+	22	18.3	-	-
Total	**120**	**100**	-	-
Academic year of study				
2nd	-	-	71	39.4
3rd	-	-	45	25

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University	Type of respondent			
	Academic staff		Students	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
4th	-	-	36	20
5th	-	-	28	15.6
Total			**180**	**100**
Age of students				
20 – 25	-	-	65	36.1
26 – 30	-	-	67	37.2
31 and above	-	-	48	26.7
Total	**-**	**-**	**180**	**100**

Source: primary data

A number of bio-data of the respondents were of interest to the researcher. The characteristics of the academic staff investigated included; gender, educational qualification, academic rank and length of service and among students, in addition academic year of study and age distribution were studied.

The response rate from the participants was one hundred percent since all the 300 targeted questionnaires were returned. Only 58.8 percent of managers responded to individual interviews and 78.3 percent of students participated in focus group discussions. This is an indication that most respondents picked interest on the topic of study. Sixty percent of the academic staff were male and 40% were female, while 64.4% of the students were male and 35.6% female. Gender distribution of respondents was an important variable to obtain the different outlooks on quality assurance mechanisms from both genders.

Educational qualification of the academic staff was of interest in this study in order to establish the quality of academic staff recruited. The findings showed that majority of the respondents had masters' degree qualifications. Those with bachelor's degree qualifications were 16.7% and those with PhD qualifications were 14.2%. A small number of the respondents had diplomas and post-graduate diplomas. This suggests that most of the academic staff members in the sampled universities had masters' degree qualification. This fulfills the requirements of the NCHE, schedule 4, regulation 9. The less than 15% of PhD holders in the sampled universities is an indication of the need for improved academic staff qualifications.

In order to establish seniority among the academic staff, the results indicated that 42.5% were lecturers, 25% were assistant lecturers and 16.7% were teaching assistants. The higher ranks of senior lecturer, associate professor and professor had 14.2% and 0.8% respectively. This reflects that there were few academic staff members from the ranks of senior lecturer to professor in the selected universities. The domination of the universities by teaching staff at the ranks of lecturer and below shows a serious gap in academic staffing which is likely to have a negative influence on QA mechanisms.

The level of experience among teaching staff was established by investigating the length of service. Majority of the respondents served between 1-5 years, 18.3% spent over 20 years in the universities, and 15.8% served between 6-10 years in the universities. Fifteen percent of the academic staff worked between 11-15 years while 17.5% had worked in the universities between 16-20 years. The findings are suggestive that majority of the academic staff members were still relatively new in the respective universities. This is consistent with the lower ranks of most academic staff members in the universities since rising through the ranks partly requires spending sometime on the job. Thus, a lot of activities in the universities such as assuring the quality of teaching and learning may be difficult to achieve.

The year of study among students was important to get reliable data. Accordingly, majority of the respondents were in second year, 25% in 3rd year, 20% in 4th year and 15.6% in 5th year. All students involved in FGDs were from second year onwards. This gave a chance to only those learners who had

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been in the universities for more than one year. The results suggest that the respondents had some experience of university education and adequately responded to quality assurance items.

To establish the level of maturity among students the age distribution of the respondents was investigated. Majority were in the age bracket of 26-30 years, 36.1% were between the ages of 20-25 years and 26.7% were above 31 years. The indication is that students of different age groups participated in the study. This reflects that both undergraduate (normally younger) and postgraduate (older) students showed interest to express their views on the influence of institutional practices on QA mechanisms in the respective universities.

Descriptive statistics on the level of remuneration to maintain quality assurance mechanisms

Table 2: Responses from the academic staff on payment practices for quality service delivery.

Payment practices	Disagree		Not sure		Agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
The university has an established salary structure	40	33.4	18	15	62	51.7
The academic staff are satisfied with amount of salary	61	50.9	21	17.5	38	31.6
The salary paid is commensurate to the amount of work done	62	51.7	21	17.5	37	30.9
Salary is regularly paid	60	50	19	15.8	41	34.1
Salary paid is comparable to the one paid in other similar universities	53	44.2	24	20	43	35.8
The academic staff are entitled to salary advance, bonus and allowance	76	63.3	15	12.5	29	24.2

Source: primary data

On finding out whether the sampled universities have an established salary structure for quality service delivery, the results revealed that 51.7% of the academic staff agreed while 33.4% disagreed and 15% were not sure. The results indicate that some of the sampled universities do not have an established salary structure to enhance quality service delivery. The academic staff members employed in universities with no clear salary structures might be less motivated to deliver services, particularly those who feel that they are under paid. Accordingly, the quality-of-service delivery is expected to be low.

On the statement whether the academic staff are satisfied with amount of salary, 31.6% of the respondents agreed, 50.9% disagreed and 17.5% of the teaching staff were not sure. The findings suggest that most of the academic staff members from the selected universities are not satisfied with the salaries they are getting. With the dissatisfaction expressed by some members of academic staff it is difficult to expect them deliver best quality services in their respective universities.

Results indicate 51.7% of the academic staff members disagreed with the statement that the salary paid is commensurate to the amount of work done. While 30.9% agreed and 17.5% of the respondents were not sure. The findings seem to indicate that majority of the academic staff members felt the salaries they are getting are small compared to the work load. Under such circumstances some members of academic staff may not deliver quality services.

The results on Table 2 show half of the academic staff members were of the opinion that salaries are not regularly paid. Slightly over a third of the respondents observed that salaries are regularly paid. While 15.8% of the academic staff members were not sure. The results suggest that in some universities salaries are not regularly paid and this may be inhibiting quality service delivery. Irregular payment of salary creates a chaotic pattern in the earnings of the faculty. In addition some of the lecturers might completely miss payment for work done. All these might force some of them to provide low quality services.

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On the statement salary paid is comparable to the one paid in other similar universities, 35.8% of the respondents agreed, 44.2% disagreed and 20% were not sure. This seems to indicate most of the academic staff members felt that they are being paid lower salaries compared to other universities. Wide disparities in the salaries of the academic staff may inhibit quality service delivery in universities with low pay. Members of the faculty with low pay might feel that their services are not valued, as such, are likely to provide poor quality services.

The study findings showed that the majority of the respondents disagreed with the view that academic staff members are entitled to salary advance, bonus and allowances. One fifth of the respondents agreed and 12.5% of the academic staff were not sure. This seems to show that most of the academic staff members in the selected universities do not get salary advances, bonus and allowances. In such a situation some members of academic staff may not fully utilize all their potentials to deliver quality services.

From analyses of the interview results, poor remuneration is a phenomenon found across the sampled universities. According to both students and managers in the universities selected cases of low pay, delays in payment and salaries not being commensurate to the work load especially in the private universities were found to be a common practice. A manager from PU2 revealed that *"there are unexplained delays in paying lecturers; some lecturers teach for a whole semester and into the next semester and produce results without receiving pay. As a result part-time lecturers decline to take on extra work".* Another manager from PR3 narrated that payment delays have led to the absenteeism of lecturers. He said;

As a head of department I have tried to reach some academic staff members, but they would say they do not have money for transport and lunch. These are included in the salary and where salary is not paid a lecturer uses this as a basis not to come and teach.

However, during discussions with some managers they were of the opinion that salaries of the academic staff members in the government universities are adequate. Accordingly, a manager from PU2 said; *"the academic staff are well remunerated since lectures' salaries have been harmonized in all public universities"*. A second manager from PU2 noted that the remuneration to lecturers is adequate because over the last three years government has improved salaries of those on payroll. He said *"in the last three years salaries have doubled".* This mixed picture is indicative that the level of remuneration to a great extent presents a threat to the quality-of-service delivery by the academic staff in some of the sampled universities.

Descriptive statistics on the quality of academic staff to enhance quality assurance mechanisms

Table 3: Responses from students on the quality of academic staff for quality service delivery

Quality of academic staff employed	disagree		Not sure		Agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Professional competence of the academic staff is high	55	30.5	2	1.1	123	68.3
The academic staff have PhDs as a basic requirement to be a lecturer	59	32.8	10	5.6	111	61,6
The academic staff have the required experience to teach in the university	57	31.6	10	5.6	113	62.8
The academic staff have relevant qualifications for programs assigned to them	48	26.6	5	2.8	127	70.6
The academic staff are recruited basing on their qualifications and experiences	79	43.8	17	9.4	84	46.7
Faculty members have high skills in instruction, course planning and student assessment	60	33.3	7	3.9	113	62.8

Source: primary data

From Table 3 majority of the respondents agreed that the professional competence of academic staff members is high. Slightly less than a third of the respondents disagreed and a small minority were

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not sure. The results seem to indicate that many faculty members from the selected universities practice professionalism. During interviews both students and higher education managers were of the opinion that members of academic staff in the universities of this study undertake professional practices such as preparation of detailed course outlines with adequate coverage, regular teaching and assessment of students. However, according to some of the respondents some members of the academic staff are involved in unprofessional practices such as sex for marks, money for marks, absenteeism, and inadequate coverage of the course content, poor assessment and discrimination. One of the student interviewees from PRU3 was of the view that *"some lecturers force themselves to teach areas where they are not qualified to get more money since payments are done per hours taught"*. Another student from PRU1 revealed that *"some lecturers in the study centers accept to teach areas in which they are not well qualified and keep gambling, never give adequate information and explanations to the learners"*. It seems low pay, particularly in the selected private universities has led to some teaching staff to denounce professionalism. The unethical practices are an indication that some academic staff members do not conform to key performance indicators. This does not reflect steps towards quality service delivery.

Most of the respondents supported the statement that the academic staff members have got PhDs, a basic requirement to be a lecturer. About a third of the respondents expressed a contrary view. The rest (5.6%) of the students were not sure. The results suggest that to a great extent the teaching staff recruited in the sampled universities have PhDs. This is not in agreement with the interview data. One of the respondents from ministry of education and sports (MOES) revealed that *"apart from PUI that has gone beyond the minimum to recruit lecturers at PhD level, majority of the universities are recruiting lecturers at master degree level".* A manager from PRU2 said; *"it is very difficult to get PhD holders in specialized areas such as law, procurement, medicine, engineering, secretarial studies and hotel management in order to fulfill the NCHE requirement of recruiting lecturers at PhD level*. However, there were reports of increasing numbers of PhD holders in some of the sampled universities. In this regard a manager from PU3 said; *"when I came in 2003 we had only four PhD holders but today we have a lot of PhD holders".* The small number of the faculty with PhDs in the universities is likely to hinder the quality of services in the universities especially in the area of research. This raises a serious question on the QA mechanisms pertaining to the quality of academic staffs employed in the selected universities.

On whether members of the academic staff have the required experience to teach in the university 62.8% of the respondents agreed, 31.6% disagreed and 5.6% of the respondents were not sure. The above information seems to indicate that most of the academic staff members in the universities selected are experienced. This means majority of the academic staff members might be efficient in their service delivery. During the interviews some respondents expressed their satisfaction with the level of experience of some academic staff members manifested by the giving of current and relevant examples during lectures. However, some respondents were dissatisfied with the presence of retirees who are still teaching in some universities because they are not current enough, are conservative and some doze during lectures. There were also cases of novice teaching staff being assigned courses in which they are not fully qualified. All these have not reflected the practice of the best QA mechanisms.

On Table 2, 70.6% of the respondents felt the academic staffs have relevant qualifications for programs assigned to them. A marginal percentage were not sure and 26.6% of the respondents felt that the academic staffs lacked qualifications for programs assigned to them. The results are indicative that although a lot of the teaching staff in the sampled universities had the required qualifications in their programs, a good number were serving in areas where they lacked the required qualification. Those academic staff members without the required levels of qualification relevant for programs assigned might not provide high quality services. It is difficult to say that quality

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education is being provided by simply seeing the faculty and students meeting in lecture rooms.

Analyses of the interview data generally shows respondents were satisfied with the qualifications of the academic staffs across the sampled universities. A manager from PRU2 revealed that the university recruits the right academic staff for the right programs. She said; *"lecturers with areas of specialty are recruited in areas that require people with the right academic qualification and not every person who has done MBA can teach quantitative methods and not every lawyer can teach criminal law".* On whether the academic staff are recruited basing on their qualifications and experiences, 46.7% of the respondents felt this is correct, 43.8% were of the opinion that the academic staffs recruited lacked qualifications and experiences and 9.4% of the students were not sure. This data suggests that about half of the academic staffs recruited in the selected universities have inadequate qualifications and experiences. This seems to clearly show that there is a shortage of qualified and experienced academic staff members across the selected universities. This reflects that many members of the faculty may find difficulties in providing quality services.

Some interviewees expressed opinions that showed inadequacies in the qualifications of the academic staff recruited in the sampled universities. There were reports of undergraduate students being taught by holders of bachelor degrees. This demonstrates that the QA benchmarks set in the NQAF are not fully implemented. According to the NCHE the academic staff offering courses at universities should have a qualification one level higher than the one on offer. A manager from PU3 expressed her dissatisfaction with the recruitment process in the university, she said; *"promotions are difficult in PU3, sometimes some lecturers are not promoted genuinely, there are many people who have qualified to be professors but have not accessed the ranks due to bad politics in the university"*. In addition a manager from the MOES noted that *"in the private universities there are many academic staff members who have less qualification"*. He further said; *"there was a case where a master degree holder was supervising a PhD candidate".* This is comparable to a situation where a blind person leads another with visual difficulties. Under such circumstances worst service delivery are expected in the universities concerned.

Findings from Table 3 show majority of the students were of the opinion faculty members have high skills in instruction, course planning and students assessment. A third of the respondents had a contrary view and 3.9% were not sure. The results are indicative that a lot of members of the faculty in the universities selected have good skills of instruction, course planning and students assessment. These are good indicators of quality service delivery in the sampled universities. This is because planning of courses accompanied with good delivery and assessment practices are vital in improving service delivery in universities.

The general evidence from interview data shows that the practices of most academic staff in the sampled universities involved the display of good skills in instruction, course planning and assessment. A manager from NCHE summarized this by saying that *"teaching in most universities is done well".* However, the following were some of the weaknesses respondents identified; inadequate preparation for teaching, irregular assessment and limited variety of assessment techniques to test many competencies. In this regard a manager from PU3 said; *"there is lack of planning on the side of lecturers i.e. the following questions are not adequately answered by many lecturers; what will I teach and how? What examples? How will I involve the students and how will I assess the students since class sizes are not the same?"* One of the student interviewees from PU1 noted that *"some of the excellent performers in academics do not have the skills to transfer knowledge and hence become rude or uncooperative to students during teaching".* This suggests that it is very difficult to expect quality education by simply looking at the high grades of the teaching staff. Universities are also expected to look for other competencies such as communication skills and team work in the faculty.

Descriptive statistics on the quantity of academic staff to enhance quality assurance mechanisms

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Table 4: Responses from students on the quantity of academic staff for quality service delivery

Quantity of academic staff employed	Disagree		Not sure		Agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
The university employs a lot of part-time academic staff	67	37.2	11	6.1	102	56.7
The university uses the few lecturers to teach many courses	84	46.7	7	3.9	89	49.5
The university uses lecturers from other departments to teach	89	49.5	10	5.6	81	45
Postponement of courses/programs when lecturer(s) are not available	97	53.9	1	0.6	82	45.5
The university has enough academic staff	81	45	11	6.1	88	48.9
The university has enough full-time academic staff	67	37.2	9	5	104	57.8

Source: primary data

On the question whether the university employs a lot of part-time academic staff members, 56.7% of the respondents agreed, 37.2% disagreed and 6.1% were not sure. These results are indicative that the quality-of-service delivery in the sampled universities is threatened by shortage of full-time academic staff members. Part-time academic staff members normally do not have enough time to address students' challenges outside the classroom environment. This is because most of their useful hours of work are spent at the jobs where they are full-time workers. It is difficult to expect sustained commitment and engagement of students in QA mechanisms without the fulltime involvement and engagement of many members of academic staff. Hence their chances to deliver quality services are limited.

From results in Table 4 about half of the respondents 49.5% were of the opinion that the universities use the few lecturers to teach many courses. Barely half (46.7%) of the respondents had a contrary view and 3.9%) were not sure. The results seem to suggest that the few academic staff members in the sampled universities are overloaded with course units. In a situation where few members of the academic staff are teaching many course units, the chances of some lecturers teaching areas outside their qualification are high. Higher education has areas of specialization and this also makes the teaching staff to specialize in particular disciplines. Teaching many course units is likely to compromise the quality-of-service delivery. This raises concerns on the maintenance of QA mechanisms in the selected universities.

The data presented indicates that 49.5% of the respondents never subscribed to the statement that the university uses lecturers from other departments to teach. Forty five percent of the respondents supported the statement and 5.6 % were not sure. These findings suggest some lecturers from the sampled universities are shared across departments which could be affecting the quality of services they deliver. However, a number of course units in some universities are foundation courses done by all students in the institution. Therefore, lecturers coming from the department of foundations are likely to teach across departments. This does not necessarily lead to poor quality service delivery since they could be having the required qualifications.

Analysis of data concerning the postponement of courses/programs when lecturer(s) are not available indicate that 53.9% of the respondents disagreed, 45.5% agreed and 0.6% of them were not sure. The results are indicative that some universities of this study run courses/programs even when some of the lecturers are not yet available. Starting programs without ensuring the availability of teaching staff for the courses ultimately presents a big concern on the implementation of QA mechanisms in the affected universities. This raises questions on the quality of services delivered. The implication is that the few lecturers are either overloaded or some of the course units are not taught. Under such circumstances it is difficult to expect delivery of high-quality services.

On the question whether the sampled universities have employed enough academic staff members for

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quality service delivery, the results show that less than half (48.9%) of the students were in support of the statement. Forty-five percent never subscribed to this view and 6.1% were not sure. This raises a serious question on the adequacy of academic staff members employed in the universities of this study and the quality of service delivery. Shortage of teaching staff leads to high student-staff ratios in some programs in the selected universities. The inadequate number of faculty in universities normally contributes to the overloading of the few members of academic staff who may not be efficient in the delivery of their services in teaching and supervision of research. These findings demonstrate that there is a gap between the actual QA mechanisms of the universities and the expected best mechanisms of QA.

On whether the universities had enough full-time academic staff members, 57.8% of the respondents agreed, 37.2% disagreed and 5% were not sure. Since majority of the respondents reported having enough full-time academic staff members, this suggests that the quality-of-service delivery in the sampled universities is above average. The sufficient number of full-time academic staff makes them generally available to students for consultation in areas of clarification. However, in a situation where some full-time academic staff members engage in moonlighting, the QA mechanisms in the universities are compromised because their full implementation requires the full-time involvement of the academic staff.

From the questionnaire when the respondents were asked to express their views on the academic staffing practices that enable and hinder quality assurance mechanisms in their universities, some of the key enabling practices were; the regular review of programs with a lot of inputs from members of the academic staff, some of the members of the academic staff were involved in the development of quality assurance manuals and guidelines to build quality culture. There was also team spirit as well as embracing of staff development by the academic staff members. There has also been sustained enhancement of academic staff salaries especially in the public universities with clear salary structures.

However, according to the respondents the following practices hinder quality assurance mechanisms in their respective universities; many academic staff members were part-time staff with very busy schedules and limited time to attend to students' individual weaknesses, poor quality of some academic staff members with lack of professionalism reflected in low teamwork, poor assessment practices, strikes, absenteeism and lack of mentorship to students. There were also cases of poor pay to the academic staff members leading to demotivation, high turnover, a fall in the number of academic staff members and an increased workload.

When the respondents were asked to suggest ways to improve the academic staffing practices to enhance quality assurance they identified the following; full involvement of members of the academic staff in quality assurance through formation of quality assurance committees so that they can own the quality assurance practices, continuous improvement in the welfare of academic staff members, adoption of both short term and long term staff development practices and closer supervision from the management by carrying out frequent quality assurance audits.

Analyses of the interview data from students and higher education managers from the sampled universities, MOES and NCHE are similar to the results that there is inadequate number of academic staff members for quality service delivery. One of the interviewees from MOES summarized this by saying that; *"the majority of the universities are seriously understaffed"*. He added that *"this is worse in the private universities"*. A manager from PU2 adds that *"the staff ceiling is never reached, where ten academic staff members are required only five are hired"*. He added that *"where you are running programs ranging from certificates to PhDs with limited full-time academic staff members, it is a big challenge"*. A manager from PRU2 was of the opinion that sharing of the few professors across the universities does not promote quality service delivery.

The interview data also revealed that there is heavy reliance on part-time academic staff members in the sampled universities. A manager from PU3 reported that out of the 57 academic staff members in his

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department only 13 were full-time staff. Similarly, a manager from PU2 reported that his department had only 10 full-time academic staff members, the rest were part-time academic staff. In the same connection, a manager from PR1 said this; *"most of the academic staff members are part-timers and sometimes they are not reliable since they get engagements from their full-time jobs"*. Consequently, the few full-time academic staff members are overloaded with work. In this regard a manager from PRU1 puts it that *"it is normal for a lecturer to handle four course units"*. This raises doubts on the quality of their service delivery. However, there were reports of some lecturers sharing the coverage of what was contained in the same course unit in an effort to improve the quality of service delivery.

On testing the hypothesis; Academic Staffing Practices do not Influence Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Selected Universities in Uganda, a chi-square test for the academic staff indicated that the results were not statistically significant, i.e. the chi-square p-value of 0.195 is > the critical p-value of 0.05. This shows that there is no significant association between academic staffing practices and quality assurance mechanisms and the null hypothesis is upheld. But the chi-square test for students had statistically significant results, i.e. the chi-square p-value of 0.025 is less than the critical p-value of 0.05. This means that academic staffing practices influenced quality assurance mechanisms in the selected universities in Uganda; hence the hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion and Implications of the Study

In the university academic staffing is a key component in planning and implementation of its teaching and learning activities. A university cannot be better than the quality of its faculty members because they are at the center of the teaching/learning processes in the universities to produce graduates of acceptable standards. Therefore, the promotion of QA mechanisms in the universities heavily depends on the level of knowledge, skills and expertise as well as the availability of time to the academic staff members. Hence in order to enhance QA mechanisms, universities should ensure that the academic staff recruitment and appointment procedures have a means of making certain that all academic staff members have the necessary competence.

The study findings from the selected universities indicated that practices of academic staff remuneration were still quite poor. Comparing salaries paid across the universities half (50%) of the respondents were dissatisfied with the amounts received. Others showed their disappointment with the wide gap in salaries between permanent academic staff members and part-timers who are not paid regularly. These practices have contributed to absenteeism and high staff turnover. The findings are in agreement with Tibarimbasa (2010) who discovered that in some private universities in Uganda often members of the teaching staff are not regularly paid and pointed out that in some universities the academic staff members were demanding arrears of nearly six months. Tibarimbasa added that some faculty members left teaching because of poor payment practices in the universities.

He further revealed that in universities such as Kampala International University, Nkumba University and Bugema University had pay structures that were not implemented yet the management paid rates that were not formally recorded down. Though many organizations are striving to achieve efficient remuneration practices, the situation looks different in some Ugandan universities. It is difficult to maintain QA mechanisms under such circumstances. Buwa (1991) noted that the level of commitment among the teaching staff can only be higher if the longevity of the qualified staff members in the learning institutions can be achieved and that this is only possible through favorable and attractive payment.

The findings indicated that most (68.3%) of the respondents had the view that the teaching staff from the selected universities practice professionalism. Gaither (1998, p.87) points out that *"the most successful quality assurance programs are initiated, maintained and enhanced through the professional commitment of the faculty".* However, respondents pointed out a number of unprofessional practices of some academic staff members such as

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sex for marks, marks for money and absenteeism that are a hindrance to QA mechanisms. Some respondents mentioned the tendency of other faculty members to force themselves to lecture in areas where they were not qualified enough and as a result were poor in knowledge delivery. Quality teaching needs lecturers with required competencies relevant to the courses allocated. Wilger (1997) observes that in an institution QA should be the responsibility of everyone within which a self-critical commitment to its maintenance and enhancement is a part of the professionalism of all faculty members.

In violation of one of the benchmarks in the NQAF there were reports of undergraduate students being taught by holders of bachelor degrees. The NQAF requires that lecturers teaching in the programs of a university should possess academic qualification a step above the one they are teaching. This could have been the result of under staffing in the universities visited. The findings are in agreement with Tibarimbasa (2010) who noted that the major complaint at the NCHE was the insufficiency of academic staff numbers in Ugandan universities. Shortage of academic staff members has forced some of the universities to use a few lecturers to teach many course units. Tibarimbasa (2010) observed that the use of the few lecturers by private universities in Uganda has led to the teaching of many courses and overloaded lecturers with limited time to prepare and teach, mark, and attend to students' demands. This kind of situation does not provide a conducive environment for QA mechanisms.

The findings showed that the number of teaching staff with PhD qualifications was low in the universities of this study. This seems to indicate that the academic qualifications of a number of faculty members in the universities are below the set benchmarks of NCHE. Schedule four of the NCHE indicates that the ideal size of the faculty members in Ugandan universities with PhD is sixty percent. But in practice most of the sampled universities had much fewer academic staff members with PhD qualification taking them to the unacceptable level. This concurs with the findings of Matovu (2017) who noted that most universities in Uganda have teaching staff of lower ranks than those of higher ranks. Reports from NCHE (2011) indicated that the teaching staffs with PhDs in the HEIs in Uganda were about 12.8%. At the time of this study there was no much change in the academic qualifications of the teaching staff. European University Association (EUA) (2008) suggested that there should be procedures of recruitment, selection, placement and development of the faculty as part of the QA mechanism in any university.

More than half (56.7%) of the respondents were of the opinion that the selected universities heavily relied on part-time academic staff members especially the private universities were operating at unacceptably high percentage of part-time academic staff members. Tibarimbasa (2010) notes that private universities depended on part-time lecturers to reduce costs because they are only paid when they are in session compared to full-time staff who receive monthly pay. He further noted that some universities had the tendency to deny pay to part-time teaching staff. Consequently some were not dedicated to the university work. In addition part-time academic staff members at times do not have enough time to address students' individual problems. When students are faced by a difficult situation and unable to timely and appropriately obtain assistance from the people they need it from, this does not reflect maintenance of QA mechanisms.

In the course of this study a number of limitations were experienced, notable among them were difficulties in raising finances to conduct the study associated with increasing costs. However, the investigators worked hard to secure the necessary funds for the study to progress. The second major limitation was time constraint to implement the research procedure. This was minimized by judiciously following a clear time schedule.

The study findings have theoretical implications in managing quality assurance mechanisms in the universities in Uganda. It is expected that university managers will design models to enhance the contribution of the academic staff to maintain and/or improve quality assurance. In the context of this study, a conceptual model with the basic principles of teacher training, staff development,

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self-assessment, and staff appraisal would ensure quality assurance mechanisms in universities.

In practice results of this study will help universities to adopt the principle of professionalism where pedagogical training of the academic staff will make universities to be staffed by professionally competent and committed teaching staff. ENQA (2007) notes that academic staff members must be of adequate quality and posses' professional and pedagogic knowledge and skills. Whatever form quality assurance takes, the capabilities of the academic staff members are fundamental for the success of universities.

Conclusion

From the findings it is concluded that there is a moderate influence of academic staffing practices on quality assurance mechanisms in the sampled universities. The chi-square test result for the academic staff was not statistically significant. This suggests that members of academic staff were of the view that academic staffing practices have no influence on quality assurance mechanisms. But the chi-square test result for students was statistically significant. This shows that in the opinion of learners academic staffing practices have influenced quality assurance mechanisms in the respective universities. This mixed picture indicates on average academic staffing practices have influenced quality assurance mechanisms in the sampled universities in Uganda. A lot of academic staffing practices have continued to present a challenge to QA mechanisms in the sampled universities. Many of the academic staff members particularly in the private universities still do not have the required academic qualification, are poorly remunerated, and are part-timers with divided attention which obvious limits their commitment to their university jobs.

Recommendation

There is a need for the management to further improve academic staffing practices. The government should continue to enhance the salaries of the academic staff and the governing councils together with the management in private universities that have continued to operate without salary structure urgently need to become more ethical and develop salary structures whose payments should be subjected to continuous improvement. In collaboration with government and governing councils the management in the sampled universities urgently need to increase the number of academic staff members especially at the senior level to get the desired higher numbers as well as reach standards set by the NCHE of 1:15 academic staff and student ratio. The universities should have ways of satisfying themselves that the academic staff members recruited are qualified with adequate professional competence. This requires management in sampled universities to recruit more PhD holders and undertake serious staff development so as to take the universities nearer to the NCHE set standard of 60%. Quality teaching and learning require academic staff with appropriate academic qualifications, motivation, and commitment relevant for the programs to which they are assigned.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest on the part of the authors of the article. The report is based on the findings of a PhD Thesis of the correspondent author and the co-authors as the research supervisors. This is therefore to confirm that the article is based on factual data and in agreement with the co-authors. The paper is not under review for publication.

Availability of data and materials

This article has been developed from findings in objective three of the corresponding author's PhD research. Therefore, data and materials for the research output is readily available

About the Authors

Ajuaba David Baiko, PhD is a lecturer in Uganda Christina University Arua Campus. His publication interests lie in higher education and development and governance of Higher education, gender and higher education management among others.

Email: ajuabadavid@yahoo.com

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Proscovia Namubiru Ssentamu, PhD, Associate Professor and Head of Quality Assurance Department, Uganda Management Institute.

Work Email: psnamubiru@umi.ac.ug

Website: https://proscovianamubirussentamu.academia.edu/

Marc Cutright, Ed.D, Associate Professor and Director of the Higher Education Development Initiative. Fullbright Scholar to Uganda 2013-14.

The University of North Texas.

Marc.Cutright@unt.edu

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