Original Article

University Education in Kenya: Stakeholder Perspectives on Assessment Quality

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ABSTRACT

Industry demand for skills whose application is dependent on changing technological innovations has been on the rise in Kenya. This has put a spotlight on professionals engaged in higher education and training roles. Society expects higher education institutions to not only provide opportunities for learning, but to deliver education in forms that are relevant to socio-economic productive processes. Decisions on teaching and examinations which were previously accepted on the basis of competence and professional discretion are now being challenged, based on the dynamic demands of the labour market. Universities are required to legitimize and communicate results of their activities to the public, which effectively means transferring control of education to a larger stakeholder constituency. Of interest to this research therefore, was the role of facilities and the effectiveness of internal institutional mechanisms for assuring assessment quality to stakeholders. This study sought to explore the extent to which universities in Kenya have embraced reforms to meet demand for increased quality and accountability in education assessment. A sample of 524 respondents from both public and private universities 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 analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (percentages, means, Chi square ($X2$)) to determine the effectiveness of quality assessment processes. All statistical inferences were done at $\alpha = 0.05$, This study stands to benefit university managers by providing evidence on the state of assessment quality at institutional level. This can help empower students, and other stakeholders involved in supporting university education, to consider quality among criteria for support, and to help foster competition among institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Education is valued both for its own sake and for the benefits it confers to both individuals and society. Surveys show that the world map of illiteracy as coincides with the world map of poverty (World Bank, 2010; 2000). The poor regions typically score poorly in knowledge economy indices and absorption of latest technologies (World Bank, 2010; 2012). According to Wamba (2010) argues that literacy plays an important role in moving people out of poverty towards self-sufficiency. But this movement is linked to skills and other outcomes of the learning processes. Assessment and certification of these skills is what gives assurance that appropriate competencies are being conferred by an education system. The expectation (World Economic Forum, 2013) is that graduates of the education system will contribute to socio-economic development. Education of appropriate quality therefore is a means for improving the quality of life.

Expansion of university education has largely been driven by demand - a desire by diverse groups of people to be educated to higher levels (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008; Abagi et al 2005). These groups have different interests and needs that university systems need to meet. Before 1990s access to university education was severely limited. However, a large number of young people especially in developing countries (UNESCO, 2006) has been fuelling demand for higher education. In Kenya, increased enrolments that effectively outstripped government capacity to provide financial support to qualified and deserving students was observe after liberalization of education in the early 1990s.

Government's inability to fully finance education under prevailing demand pressures had had repercussions. Key among the repercussions is a shift from responsiveness to national needs as mediated through planning, resource allocation and regulation by government, to responsiveness to students (who fund their own education) as mediated market forces through their preferences and choices. The trend among universities has leaned towards greater autonomy from government and competition for students and resources (Yusuf, 2007). This competition gained global attention as students and academics became more mobile and perceived a wider range of options.

With aggressive international marketing and recruitment of students (Coaldrake, 2002) pressures started being experienced by universities around the world to respond more effectively to rising student expectations. A consumerist pattern of thinking was becoming prevalent among students (Coaldrake, 2002), with reports of demand for explicit value for money: students expect to be spoon fed in their learning. The anticipation by students to be treated fully as customers risk diminishing the role of universities as social institutions serving public interest. Ultimately, there is a danger of education being reduced to a simple transaction with fee paying individuals.

Quality was for long considered an intangible concept (Lenn, 1992) whose definition was seen as problematic. But globalisation and international mobility of students and scholars have heightened the need for internationally recognised standards and benchmarks to help guide the evaluation of professional qualifications and other awards. According to Sayed (1997) the concept of quality should be built into the recognition of its essentially moral, political and ethical nature. Judgment of quality can only be useful if it captures all variables that go into education provision, with the transparency that exposes decision making to critical and informed dialogue. Quality principles in academic

processes (Education Commission of States, 1995) should be entrenched through accountability mechanisms. Without accountability mechanisms, even those with the best intensions may begin to waver in their obligations as other priorities come to impinge on their commitment (Jedemark & Londos, 2020). Common elements of accountable quality assurance processes include setting education standards and carrying out monitoring and evaluation assessments (Massy, 1996).

It is thus generally accepted that quality can be assured by the institution itself through a self-assessment process, peer reviews or through assessment by approved independent professional associations. But as agitation for reforms in education to meet demand for increased quality and transparency take root (Solbrekke & Karseth, 2006), institutional self-assessment which guaranteed institutional professional autonomy through collegial decisions, expertise and discretion are being replaced with standardized assessments and documentation for external scrutiny. Professionals are therefore required to conform to predefined goals and communicate their results to the public (Hausen et. al, 2019). Through increased control and management of results, the professionals' control over their work is replaced, and discretionary decision making limited as is their academic autonomy.

Requirements for transparency with increasingly standardized metrics and examinations procedures (Carvalho & Videira, 2019), have coincided with students' focused learning strategies. Teachers' professional approaches will depend on curriculum expectations and society's image of the profession (Fletcher, 2012) which influences what a university teacher should know and do based on their experience or background in practice as university teachers. Since students spent a lot of time identifying ways to handle and apply requirements related to courses (Jedemark & Londos, 2020) assessment itself has a great impact on student learning and constitute the actual curriculum. Fletcher (2012) avers that students need to understand the assessment process in order to make the learning process as effective as possible. How this provision is entrenched in institutional operations was a matter of interest to the study.

Obstacles stand in the way of standardized operations when universities are underfunded, to the extent that they have to looked out for alternative sources of finance (Gogo, 2011). Current literature depicts teachers as overloaded and de-motivated to levels that undermine delivery of relevant and quality education (Akinwumi, 2010). High student-teacher ratios make it difficult for lecturers to focus on each student in order to ensure they achieve the objectives of their classes. Kenyan universities as is the case in most of Africa are faced with resource scarcity that includes basic infrastructure that would support implementation quality standards (Akinwumi, 2010; Tefarra & Altbach, 2003). Increase in enrolment which has not been matched by corresponding increase in resource provision, has created a view that quality is compromised (Wolhuter et al, 2014). This study examines the extent to which this may be true.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Kenyan society expects education to support their welfare through skills and competencies that are acquired by those participate in it. Skills and competencies are the drive behind demand for higher education and society's readiness to finance its provision. Regulation and control through government financing previously facilitated establishment of mechanisms that safeguarded public interest, with institutions ensuring education provision met society's most desirable skills of appropriate quality. However, with emergence of marketization principles by which determination of education value shifts to students and market forces, universities' role as agents of society in determining society's desirable skills has been supplanted. Complaints about quality of graduates vis-à-vis industry needs abound, as professional autonomy through collegial decisions, expertise and discretion are being replaced with standardized assessments and documentation for external scrutiny. How has this affected internal mechanisms for assuring

assessment quality? This study sought to determine the perception of students and lecturers on internal quality practices to bridge that gap.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted on the basis of the following objectives:

- To determine students' and lecturers' perception of the effectiveness of assessment mechanisms in universities in Kenya.

- To assess the lecturers' and students' perception of the effectiveness of facilities in supporting assessment quality in universities in Kenya.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed both descriptive survey and correlational research designs. Correlational research design was useful in exploring relationships and making predictions once the survey had identified and accurately described the important variables in the study (Trump, 2006; Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999).

The target population consisted of 22 public and 14 private chartered universities in Kenya. Sampling involved placing universities in the category of either public or private and for each category, randomly selecting two universities. An accessible population of two universities each from among public and private universities were therefore obtained.

Table 1: Accessible Population

Population	Population subcategory		Population	Population subcategory	
Public Universities	Student Enrolment	Teaching Staff	Private Universities	Student Enrolment	Teaching Staff
A	13,937	303	C	3,149	176
B	26,767	425	D	2,141	113
Total =2	40,704	728	Total=2	5,290	289

Source: MHEST (Assorted files)

A Sample of 524 respondents was selected for use in the study. In construction the sample, the recommended minimum threshold of 100 cases in major subgroups and 20 – 50 cases in minor subgroups (Kathuri and Pals, 1993) was adopted. The number of students in two identified schools in each university constituted a major subgroup while lecturers constituted minor subgroups. For the two selected universities, programmes on demand were identified based on enrolment sizes

and staff establishments. Students and lecturers were randomly sampled from the faculties and departments identified. Two Deans of faculty and four CoDs were purposively sampled from each of the selected universities to provide information on institutional policy on demand and quality of university education. This procedure was used because it provided an efficient mechanism for capturing the heterogeneity that existed in the target population.

Table 2: Sample Sizes

University	Students		Teaching Staff		CoDs	Deans	Total
	Enrolment	Sample Size	Available	Sample Size	Sample Size	Sample Size	Sample
A	13,937	100	303	25	4	2	131
B	26,767	100	425	25	4	2	131
C	3,149	100	176	25	4	2	131
D	2,141	100	113	25	4	2	131
Total: 4	45,994	400	1017	100	16	8	524

Source: MHEST (Assorted files)

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 and lecturers who were helpful in clarifying issues that were not clearly articulated in questionnaires. A checklist from a domain of indicators that measured the concept 'assessment quality' was an important in insuring validity of constructs in the tools, which were presented to experts in field of education for scrutiny to determine if they contained a representative range of 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 deans of faculty respectively. These indices were within the 0.7 threshold (Wallen,1990) acceptable for making inferences in a study.

RESPONSE RATE

The response rate for the study on whose basis generalization of findings to the target population were made is summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Response Rate for Universities

Respondents	Public University		Private University		Overall	
	Number Returned	Response Rate (%)	Number Returned	Response Rate (%)	Number Returned	Response Rate (%)
Students	167	83.5	150	75.0	317	79.25
Lecturers	44	88.0	42	81.0	86	86.0
CoDs	5	62.5	6	75.0	11	68.75
Deans	2	50.0	3	75.0	5	62.5
Total	218	82.4	201	77.1	419	79.96

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

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Assessment is a process that involves the holistic examination of student progress and their needs using systematic data collection and analysis procedures (Khandelwal, 2011). It often includes recommendations for improving the program and strategies for such ongoing improvements. This study used a Likert type questionnaire, and interview guide to capture information across major aspects of the evaluation processes, and the contribution of facilities to quality assessment processes.

LECTURERS' PERCEPTION OF EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Closed and open-ended questionnaires were used to collect information and data from students and lecturers. Effectiveness of students' assessment practices were determined based on responses from lecturers and students. Closed ended questions were analysed using cross-tabulations while open ended questions were summarised into themes. Percentages and means were used to estimate the effectiveness of assessment mechanisms while Chi-square tests were used to determine differences in responses from public and private universities. The results from lecturers and students were summarised in table 4 and table 5 below:

Table 4: Lecturers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Students' Assessment Practices

Course Assessment Practice	Responses	Public Universities (n=46)		Private Universities (n=42)		Cumulative Total (n=88)		χ^2	df	p	Mean
		f	%	f	%	f	%				
Entire course content is always covered before students are examined	Agree	41	89.1	38	90.5	79	89.8	0.04	1	0.84	1.20
	Don't Know	0	0	0	0	0	0				
	Disagree	5	10.9	4	9.5	9	10.2				
Examinations always make an accurate assessment of students' academic ability	Agree	35	76.1	28	66.7	63	71.6	3.16	2	0.21	1.44
	Don't Know	3	6.5	8	19.0	11	12.5				
	Disagree	8	17.4	6	14.3	14	15.9				
Examinations are always moderated to enhance quality	Agree	41	89.1	35	83.3	76	86.4	0.79	2	0.67	1.23
	Don't Know	2	4.3	2	4.8	4	4.5				
	Disagree	3	6.5	5	11.9	8	9.1				
Some students cheat during examination	Agree	35	76.1	29	69.0	64	72.7	1.94	2	0.38	1.48
	Don't Know	4	8.7	2	4.8	6	6.8				
	Disagree	7	15.2	11	26.2	18	20.5				
Complaints raised by students regarding examinations are promptly resolved	Agree	34	73.9	30	71.4	64	72.7	0.25	2	0.88	1.44
	Don't Know	4	8.7	5	11.9	9	10.2				
	Disagree	8	17.4	7	16.7	15	17.0				

Source: Field data

The results (table 4) revealed that lecturers had high regard for internal students' assessment practices with all parameters examined parameters posting above average ratings (more than 65%). The negative aspect of the assessment mechanism was the rating on cheating which averaged 72.7% for both institutions. Private universities rated assessment processes lowly, relative to public universities on all quality indicators except on cheating where they were marginally better off compared to public universities. However, there were no significant differences in responses from lecturers in public and private universities regarding the effectiveness of students' assessment practices ($p > 0.05$).

An analysis of open-ended questions which addressed challenges to quality assessment mechanisms were summarised into five themes as shown in table 5 below.

Table 5: Lecturers' Perceived Challenges to Quality Examination Practices

Perceived Challenge	Public Universities (n=58)		Private Universities (n=27)		Total (n=85)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Cheating	9	15.5	1	3.7	10	11.8
Inadequate supervision of examination processes	14	21.1	19	70.4	33	38.8
Inadequate facilities	23	39.7	1	3.7	24	28.2
Under staffing	7	12.1	2	7.4	9	10.6
Poor quality students	5	8.6	4	14.8	9	10.6

Source: Field data

From the results in table 5, inadequate supervision of examination processes stood out as the biggest challenge to quality assessment processes in universities (38.8%) with the challenge being at its highest in private universities (70.3%). This was followed by inadequate facilities (28.2%) and cheating (11.8%). Public universities recorded a higher proportion of negative sentiments on quality assessment practices, especially on adequacy of facilities (39.7%) and cheating (15.5%). This was indicative of ineffective mechanisms for student assessment in both public and private universities.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF EFFECTIVENESS OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

The effectiveness of assessment practices as perceived by students was examined using six indicative parameters to which students responded. Data from closed ended items were analyzed using chi-square, while open ended items were summarized into four themes and presented in percentages and means. The results of the analysis are shown in table 6 and table 7 below.

Table 6: Students' Perception of Effectiveness of Assessment Practices

Quality Indicator	Response	Public Universities (n=167)		Private Universities (n=150)		Total (n=317)		χ^2	df	p	Mean
		f	%	f	%	f	%				
Examination regulations are enforced to facilitate smooth running of examinations in the university	Agree	139	83.2	137	91.3	276	87.1	4.7	2	0.09	1.21
	Don't know	9	5.4	5	3.3	14	4.4				
	Disagree	19	11.4	8	5.3	27	8.5				
The examinations you undertake make an accurate assessment of your academic ability	Agree	96	57.5	113	75.3	209	65.9	14.6	2	0.00	1.62
	Don't know	10	6.0	11	7.3	21	6.6				
	Disagree	61	36.5	26	17.3	87	27.4				
Procedure for expressing dissatisfaction with examination processes are well known to you	Agree	57	34.3	84	56.0	141	44.6	20.4	2	0.00	1.98
	Don't know	19	11.4	22	14.7	41	13.0				
	Disagree	90	54.2	44	29.3	134	42.4				
Complaints regarding examinations are promptly acted on by university authorities when reported	Agree	44	26.3	81	54.0	125	39.4	26.3	2	0.00	2.08
	Don't know	24	14.4	18	12.0	42	13.2				
	Disagree	99	59.3	51	34.0	150	47.3				
Course content is adequately covered before being examined for awards	Agree	74	44.3	108	72.0	182	57.4	27.3	2	0.00	1.78
	Don't know	13	7.8	11	7.3	24	7.6				
	Disagree	80	47.9	31	20.7	111	35.0				
Cheating in examinations takes place in this university	Agree	92	55.1	48	32.0	140	44.2	18.2	2	0.00	2.09
	Don't know	25	15.0	42	28.0	67	21.1				
	Disagree	50	29.9	60	40.0	110	34.7				

Source: Field data

From the results (table 6), students' perception of assessment practices was negative on most parameters, especially in public universities. Enforcement of regulations to ensure smooth running of examinations was the highest rated process parameter in both public (83.2%) and private universities (91.3%). Students in public universities were highly dissatisfied with the process of resolving complaints about examinations when reported to university authorities (59.3%); this was followed by knowledge of the procedure for expressing dissatisfaction with examination processes, at 54.2% dissatisfaction. The corresponding rating for private universities on the parameters was 34.0% and 29.3% respectively. Prevalence of cheating in public universities was much higher (55.1%) compared to private universities (32.0%). The differences in responses between public and private universities were significant ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, one may infer, based on these findings that students' assessment practices were more effective in private than public universities.

The possible outcome of these findings is that students in public universities were more likely to suffer both from the negative effects of the slow pace at which authorities responded to complaints raised by student about examination processes (59.3%) and the consequences of their ignorance of procedure for raising complaints in situations that require appeals for redress (54.2%). The self-reported revelation that course content was not adequately covered before courses were examined for awards in public universities (47.9%) also put them at a point of disadvantage relative to their counter parts in private universities. The notion that examinations did not make accurate assessment of students' academic ability (27.4%) and the reported prevalence of cheating in examinations (44.2%) all point at the grim picture about the assessment quality in universities.

Table 7: Students' Perceived Challenges to Quality Examination Practices

Perceived Challenge	Public Universities (n=193)		Private Universities (n=74)		Total (n=267)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Cheating	41	21.2	7	9.5	48	18.0
Poor supervision of examination processes	78	40.4	31	41.6	109	40.8
Congestion in rooms	49	25.4	23	31.1	72	27.0
Students financial challenges	25	13	13	17.6	38	14.2

Source: Field data

Results in Table 7 indicate poor supervision of examination processes was the greatest threat (40.8%) to quality assessment practices; this was followed by congestion (the problem of large classes) in examination halls (27.0%) and financial challenges (14.2%). The challenges were more pronounced in private than public universities, an indication of weaker mechanisms for assuring quality of examinations in private universities.

From the above analysis of findings, assessment practices were below the expectations of students who are a major stakeholder group in many respects. The vision statements of sampled universities demonstrated their resolve to be leading institutions in their desired disciplines. However, poor supervision of examinations, congested examination halls and the reported high level of cheating among students threatened the integrity of output quality. Since cheating flourishes in congested sitting arrangements, the findings seem to underscore the problem of congestion in public universities. Congestion (or the problem of large classes) does not allow for adequate space for students to be free from the influence of neighbours during assessment sessions.

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An analysis of challenges as reported by lecturers and students indicated that poor supervision of examinations processes was one of the threats to students' quality assessment in universities. It was reported that supervision of examinations was not strictly handled with some invigilators failing to turn up for supervision at the time of examinations. Coupled with congested sitting arrangements, this escalated the problem of cheating during examinations. During one of the interviews, a lecturer in a public university responded thus:

> "*Students have become extremely innovative in sneaking materials into the examination rooms in ways that are not easy to detect ... and disciplinary processes do not provide sufficient deterrence to cheats ... straight forward cases of cheating are subjected to lengthy investigative procedures which often end without serious deterrent action as stipulated in the regulations governing examinations"*.

The setting of examinations also presented a challenge to the evaluation process. It was reported that there existed content variation arising from differences in course outlines for courses shared among lecturers even when standard course content format was given. This resulted in discrepancies in examining of common courses which were co-taught by two or more lecturers (table 4; 5). One lecturer observed that students were not evaluated with the seriousness they deserved on Course Assessments Tests (CATs) because setting and administration was left at the discretion of those teaching the courses. Some students failed to submit CATs assignments while others connived to submit work duplicated from what others had done. In laboratory-based assignments, congestion and inadequate equipment to match student numbers was an issue that was likely to dampen the spirit of those keen to make headway in independent academic pursuits.

Other issues outside the realm of examination processes were also noted to adversely impact the quality of examinations processes. In all the universities, examinations were used to capture students who had not cleared fees. Effectively, ability to pay was the basis upon which students were registered and allowed to sit examinations before proceeding to the next level along the academic ladder (table 7). Late registration of students interfered with scheduling of examinations as more students than anticipated turned up for examinations in rooms set for a smaller number of previously registered students. And those who failed to pay fees were required to sit the examinations when the course was next offered, further escalating the numbers expected to be catered for in subsequent examinations.

Follow up questions to students on challenges afflicting examination processes elicited responses that pointed at the need to strengthen management of this important process. There was evidence of poor supervision and enforcement of examinations regulations which resulted in part to exposure of examinations prior to being sat for, and cheating. One of the students captured the examination situation in her institution thus: "there are no effective mechanisms to curb cheating in this university; in as much as regulations on examinations malpractices are in place cheating will always be eminent".

DISCUSSION

This discussion is presented on the basis that lecturers (from among whom CoDs and Deans are drawn) are core agents in facilitating the development of relevant professional competencies and skills that are essential for graduates' successful contribution to societal needs (Kara, Tanui, and Kalai, 2020). Students on the other hand are subjected to assessment not only as a control for students qualifying with desirable attributes, but also as an educational tool to influence the learning process. Findings from the study revealed that lecturers and students had common views on some aspects of assessment practices which undermined quality. One negative aspect of the assessment mechanism common among the groups was cheating whose rating averaged 72.7% lecturers in both public and private institutions. Among students, the rating

was higher among students in public relative to private universities.

Literature documents cheating as occurring at various levels of education systems for diverse reasons. The task force on alignment of the education sector to the constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2012) attributes inappropriate teaching methods that do not add value to the quality of delivery as a basis for students to cheat. In a study on factors that influence cheating in Kenyan universities (Ruto, Kipkoech and Rambaei, 2011) found that poor preparation for exams was a major reason for smuggling unauthorised materials into examination rooms to facilitate cheating. Low self-esteem among students (Cochran, Wood, Sellers, Wilkerson & Chamlin, 1998) on the other hand was found to drive academic dishonesty among students in the University of Oklahoma. A cross-sectional analysis of select institutions (Bailey, 2001) also established that where punishment for cheating was mild or not supported by university administration, widespread incidents of cheating were experienced.

Cheating is therefore a complex issue that has been occurring at an alarming rate at all levels of education across countries of the world (Brown, 2013). The overall effect of cheating is to con students out of high-quality education and cheat the public out of accurate information about school quality. Though students have a responsibility not to cheat, universities have a duty to organise examinations in ways that make cheating difficult, and create awareness among students that cheating will not be tolerated. Indeed scholars (Browne, 2013) have linked cheating to institutional culture and the level of distrust between students and teachers; he explained that students who felt teachers were not helpful to them also admitted to cheating in examinations. Already, findings in this study have documented the low ratings for lecturers' attendance to scheduled lessons; poor supervision of teaching and examination processes; weak mechanisms for monitoring students' lesson attendance and inadequate teaching aids to support effective instruction. Therefore, institutional culture should be addressed jointly with other strategies such as full application of forensic tools including unusual score gains, patterns of similar responses, and analyses of high number of erasures to root out the vice. Thus, causes of cheating are diverse and will require situation specific interventions for redress.

An analysis of challenges as reported by lecturers and students indicated that poor supervision of examinations processes stood out as a key threat to students' quality assessment in universities. It was reported that supervision of examinations was not strictly handled, with some invigilators failing to turn up for supervision at the time of examinations. This position would seem to contradict students' widespread perception that examination regulations are enforced to facilitate smooth running of examinations in the university. Research by Ruto et. al (2011) found that where lecturers and students reported that lack of strict supervision that allowed cheats to go unnoticed, a feeling developed among the rest that cheating can go unpunished and should be attempted. In extreme situations, Murray (1996) found that lecturers abated cheating by their hesitance to take action against cheating behaviour because of the stress and discomfort that follows the disciplinary process: it is a recipe for anarchy in the conduct of examination.

Moderation of examinations to enhance quality was an aspect that received widespread endorsement by lecturers. However, follow up assessment revealed that teaching and setting of examinations presented a challenge to the evaluation process. Only a small proportion of students reported course content was adequately covered before being examined for awards. Besides, administration of Course Assessments Tests (CATs) was left at the discretion of those teaching the courses. Some students failed to submit assignments while others connived to submit work duplicated from what others had done. In laboratory-based assignments, congestion and inadequate equipment and facilities to match student numbers was an issue that likely to dampened the spirit of those keen to make headway in independent academic pursuits.

This brings us to question the quality of examinations moderation conducted in universities. Moderation can support standardized teaching practices and ensure quality of the entire learning process (Bloxham, 2009). In a study on the effect of internal and external moderation on quality of examinations in public universities (Domenitor, Adhiambo, Mwalw'a and Waweru, 2018) it was found that internal moderations were not consistently carried out in Kenyan universities. Goos and Hughes (2010) seemed to concur with this finding when they observed that whereas moderation was an activity considered to support professional learning, management accountability was seen to inhibit assessment practices. Further, Bloxham (2009) reported arguments to the effect that rigorous moderation procedure created a huge burden for markers but added little accuracy or reliability; it also created additional work for staff, constrained assessment choices, and slowed down feedback to students. This could explain the huge dissatisfaction among public university students with regard to the process of resolving complaints about examinations when reported to university authorities. Without a strong support and enforcement mechanism, lecturers could choose to stay within safe and manageable modes of assessment.

The challenge to quality associated with facilities, equipment and congested sitting arrangements, was a matter that prominently featured among the findings. Facilities did not provide adequate space for quality assessment of students. This is not an isolated fining. Swaziland is cited among other Sub-Saharan countries (World Bank, 2010b) as a place where poor physical facilities and high student-teacher ratio have negatively impacted the quality of instruction. There is research evidence to demonstrates that teaching and learning spaces have an important contribution to the quality of the school and student achievement (Chepkonga, 2017; Ndirangu & Udoto, 2011). Substantive issues about facilities (Jedemark & Londos, 2020) relate to size and effectiveness classroom spaces, access to computers, and students' practical experience in laboratories.

It emerged from this study that private universities enjoyed better facilities and student support services. World Bank (2011) reported about social groups in low-income countries which have remained marginalized in accessing education, and disparities in facilities in private and public universities could be indicative of this problem. Are there barriers for some social groups to access private university education? If available lecture rooms in public universities are grossly affected by the problem of over established enrolments, it will undermine the quality of students' learning experience. Research evidence has linked quality facilities (availability of classrooms of reasonable sizes, libraries and other infrastructure) both to students' academic achievement as well as teacher retention (Chapman & Carrier, 1990, Haneveld & Craig, 1996). It has also been predicted (Mohamedbhai, 2008) that public universities will likely continue to suffer shortfalls in public funding, which will put pressure on institutional infrastructure and compromise institutions' ability to discharge their teaching and research mandate. Where institutions lack a cogent facilities management team of professionals capable of introspectively determining the performance of facilities and relating this performance to the core business objectives institution (Loosemore & His (2001), benefits of education would be missed out.

CONCLUSION

Mechanisms for assuring quality assessment and strategies to safeguard public interest and accountability existed in all institutions sampled for the study. There were mixed satisfaction levels on assessment indicators identified. Some indicators of quality assessment required to be monitored to enhance effectiveness of assessment especially in public universities. Major areas of weakness included inadequate supervision of examination processes; inadequate facilities or congestion in classrooms, and poor response to students' complaints about examinations. Consequently, there was need to match student enrolment with available facilities and other requisite student support utilities. It was noted that professional discretion was still rooted in

institutional operations as evidenced by diverging views between lecturers and students on issues like planned content coverage, and cheating: whereas few lecturers negatively rated these indicators, students had high negative ratings on them. Students should be made to clearly understand assessment processes since that is what makes them focussed on courses for which they will be examined. High workloads (or high students to teacher ratios) should be moderated to make teaching effective and student centred. The challenge of inadequate finances was real and affected students' attendance and participation in assessment processes. Universities were likely to benefit if they instituted elaborate mechanisms to monitor examinations processes and enforce examinations regulations as part of efforts to enhance assessment quality. There should be a trade-off between technology driven expansion of higher education, market forces and public interest so that a middle ground position is attained for the benefit of all stake holders in the higher education assessment process.

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