



Quality Matters

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Quote of this issue

The dissatisfaction of stakeholders in HEIs is expressed by a reduction in student admissions. Therefore, the extent of stakeholder satisfaction is the most important criteria in quality improvement initiatives and HEI management has to evaluate the extent of their stakeholders' satisfaction periodically. (Kitchroen (2004:20)

This newsletter is published every three months by the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) of St. Mary's University (SMU). The objective of the newsletter is to inform the SMU community as well as interested public, private, non-governmental stakeholders about the activities and accomplishments of the institution in fostering quality education and research in the Ethiopian Higher Education Setting.

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From the Editorial Desk

Quality of service and customer satisfaction is the key focal area in higher education institutions. When considering quality of educational service, stakeholder satisfaction can be taken as more important. In Institutions of Higher Learning, most of the performance management systems are not succeed to address and consider the entire stakeholder needs despite the importance and contributions of stakeholders to the institutions.

At present quality is at the center of the national agenda in the education sector in Ethiopia. It has also become a big issue among both government and private higher learning institutions. But, the type and level of roles to be played by the various stakeholders have not yet got wider recognition.

Stakeholders are in all of the people that are in one way or another affected by the new product or service. Since an organization will relies on various stakeholders prior to developing its project plan in which roles and responsibilities are typically defined, it is important to understand the roles and responsibilities early in the process. Members of society, citizens of state, and autonomous individuals who are able to fulfill their various specific functions with initiative, confidence, cooperation and innovation constitute stakeholder



roles (Cadora, 2008). In this respect, stakeholders are individuals or entities who stand to gain or lose from the success or failure of a system or an organization.

Gross and Godwin (2005) identify education's stakeholders as parents, students, alumni, administrators, employers and communities. In this context St. Mary's University strives to satisfy different stakeholders by delivering quality education as much as possible. Furthermore, to **meet stakeholder needs, in addition to three other annual conferences, St. Mary's University** has organized an annual conferences focusing on private higher education since 2003. Scaling up its national status to an international level since 2011, to date, eleven conferences have been organized; of which the 10th was organized in collaboration with the Association of African Universities and the African Union in the United Nations Conference Center.

This newsletter focuses on stakeholders' participation in quality assurance and enhancement in higher education institutions.

Enjoy reading it;

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NEWS

COSULTATIVE MEETING HELD

CEIQA has conducted a half day discussion with Quality Assurance Enhancement Committees of the various units, schools and faculties of the university on Thursday, 24, April, 2014. This communication session is one of the two annual consultative meetings planned to be conducted by the CEIQA. The central issue of the discussion is in looking ways of stimulating St. Mary's university in assuring quality academic provisions and service deliveries. The participants proposed so many issues that strengthen the overall quality assurance strategy of the university. Among others, the need to establish and to strength the quality assurance committee, the need for training, quality monitoring activity, course experience survey, staff concern and satisfaction surveys are the main issues raised in the course of the discussions. The challenges and the feed back in the implementation of quality assessment and enhancement activities on the service delivery and academic provision were discussed in this consultative meeting. The participant reached an agreement to strength the quality assurance committees and to enhance the quality of education and service delivery of the university in line with priority five of the institutional strategic plan..



Consultative Meeting Participants



A HALF DAY TRAINING CONDUCTED

CEIQA conducted a half day training on Quality and Quality Assurance concepts targeting undergraduate students from diverse departments on Saturday 26, April, 2014. The purpose of the training was to create awareness and understanding on what quality and quality assurance means in higher education. During the training program three conceptual papers were presented; the Concept of Higher Education and Quality by Ato Adugnaw Alamneh' the Concept of Quality Assurance by Dr. Wondimagegn Chekol, and students' role in Quality Assurance by Dr. Melaku Girma. Furthermore, students raised key questions and the presenters responded accordingly. Finally, the participants have found the middle ground that quality is a concept, a philosophy a journey and what we practice. Quality for us is all of these. CEIQA requested the trainees to transfer the knowledge to their classmates.

RESEARCH CORNER

Research Title: Quality in Higher Education: A Variety of Stakeholder Perspectives

By: Siew Fun Tang and Sufean Hussin

Publication: *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 2011

In higher education, stakeholders' views are crucial and should be taken into consideration by the education suppliers in rising above cognitive skills as well as improving quality progression. With the increasingly diverse profile of students nowadays, the writers seek

to evaluate the perception of higher education stakeholders on quality in higher education. This study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach. Interview participants in this study expressed different views but majority seemed tending towards graduate qualities.

It was emphasized that quality higher education should not only produce academically good graduates, but graduates with good character and meet industry expectations. Other perceptions specific to the stakeholders were also revealed. A survey was also conducted to investigate the perceptions of students who are the receiver of higher education provision. Structural Equation Modeling was employed and the



results revealed that Effective Teaching and Learning, Personal Development, Supportive Learning Environment, Improved Communication Skills, and Information Availability, Accuracy and Accessibility were the reliable indicators of the underlying construct of perceived quality in higher education.

The concept of quality is more complex in higher education as opposed to in the industry where the end products are clearly defined. Harvey and Green (1993) concurred that the underlying differences between higher education and other service providers were transformation process in higher education frequently engage in cognitive transcendence in the students and not just providing service for them. However, rapid changes in higher education nowadays have significantly narrowed the gap in how universities and other types of organization view quality (Lomas, L. (2007). Concern about quality in higher education always has been in existence and is visible in many ways. Due to the increasingly diverse student profile, it is essential that stakeholders' views, especially the students', be taken into consideration by the higher education institutions for quality process improvement. This is supported by Srikanthan and Dalrymple who suggested that the students' criteria for quality in higher education should be clarified to provide them with an evidence of the comparatively high standards in order to guide their academic choices Srikanthan, & Dalrymple, (2003).

In Malaysia, student feedback is gaining importance in higher education course provision review and development. From the literature review, it was found

that the meaning of quality differs for many writers. As higher education evolves, Watty (2003) cited that there are two schools of thought. The first, which was supported by Baird (1998), Fry (1995), and Nordvall and Braxton (1996) links quality to a perspective for it to have a meaning attached to it. For example, it is not uncommon to find that quality is made with reference to the student intake, academic programs, program designs, lecturers, teaching and learning, students' experience and academic as well as non-academic support for the students. In such cases, attempt to define the term is usually ignored. A second way of thinking about quality relates to a stakeholder-specific meaning. Quality values may be different to many higher education stakeholders as each thinks quality in different ways because they may have different interest in higher education. The early works of Middlehurst (1992) and Harvey and Green (1993) highlight the importance and value of considering quality from a variety of stakeholder perspectives. This study is framed using the second way of thinking and aims to evaluate the meaning of quality in higher education from a variety of stakeholder perspectives.

Findings from Interviews

Participants expressed different views when they were asked to comment on the meaning of quality in higher education. From the employers' perceptions, it was not surprising that they perceived quality in higher education as producing quality graduates. A senior manager from a private company Nordvall, & Braxton, (1996) who has three graduates from University A currently working in her company explained, "quality in



higher education is not just making sure students know the technical aspects but also making sure in building their character". She stressed that good character was what she looked for when recruiting new staff. "It simply means that the person must be willing to take up more responsibilities and this will in turn provide them with opportunities to explore themselves, in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. The role of a university is to produce people with academic knowledge and students should use the university environment as a mini working world to learn how to interact with each other. Students nowadays either learn in the university or for some, after they have left the university" (University A, Employer (Nordvall, & Braxton, (1996).

The views of employers pointed to quality in higher education as to produce graduates with certain expected level of academic achievement as well as good character and soft skills such as communication, interpersonal, and working in teams. Graduate Recruiting Manager (Gerbing, & Anderson, (1993) for a private bank who has recruited students from University B, shared the same opinion. "To me, quality higher education is just not preparing them [the students] for the industry but also making sure that they become a complete person" (University B, Employer (Gerbing, & Anderson, (1993)). That explains why he insisted to meet the interview candidate when making selection because by looking at the resume was not good enough to make a judgment of his or her capabilities and suitability to the position applied. Parent (Marsh, Balla, & Mc Donald, (1988) from

University A referred quality in higher education to reputable universities with relevant syllabus, competent teachers and qualification awards that are well recognized. This thought was supported by Parent (Fry, H. (1995) from University B who also felt that quality higher education generates independency and creativity in the students. She said his elder son would not have worked in Shanghai, one of world's most populous countries full of talents and perceived by many as the best place to work in, if not for having graduated from a top quality university. "During his studies, he had the opportunity to meet up with the top achievers from all over the world whereby he realized that they were also great thinkers with very creative mind and this has inspired my son to learn from them and initiate them (University B, Parent (Fry, H. (1995). Graduate (Lomas,(2007) from University A, perceived quality higher education as "one [university] that adequately trains and is capable of providing the means to a graduate to be competent, versatile and independent in his/her major field of study" meaning "an increase in the quality and quantity of employment opportunities. Quality refers to the (i) standard and reputation of the employing company, (ii) remuneration and benefits and (iii) learning and career progression potential. Quantity simply refers to employability". To Graduate (Browne, & Cudeck, (1993) from University B, quality higher education does not only prepare the students well for working life but also provide a conducive learning environment to enable participation learning and confidence building, and for students to have a well-balanced social life while



studying. He added that quality can be viewed from other aspects such as lecturers, environment and peers. He said employers including his present company which is an investment bank; prefer graduates from better learning grounds or highly regarded universities. He argued, that was the reason why parents are willing to invest so much in their children's education by sending them to better universities. Student from University A referred quality higher education as its qualification awards being international recognized to facilitate student mobility. Student from University B has the same opinion as Student University A, but stressed quality higher education provides good learning facilities including sufficient and a wide range of reference books and journals. Dean from University A expressed that quality in higher education can be reflected in quality of its staff and eventually quality of its students' learning experience. According to her, quality of staff can be represented by the extent of faculty focus on research development while quality of students' learning experience can be viewed from the rigorous assessments that students have to go through in order to generate "real graduates". She defined "real graduates" as graduates who possess the required academic knowledge, right attitude and the necessary work skills to meet the expectations of the industry. Head of Department from the Engineering School in University A also linked quality higher education to graduate qualities. "Students must be able to perform those tasks required by their future employers. Some employers may require good communication skills and

some knowledge on engineering products. Some may have robots to operate on. **As long as they can meet the requirements of the future employers, it is a quality education.** Employers are the ones that determine whether a university or higher education is of quality" (University, A, Head of Department Joreskog (1993). Lecturer (Bollen,(1986). from University B viewed quality higher education as having quality students as inputs. To him, quality students have good personality and are proactive in their own learning. He added, "a quality university provides student support services to facilitate student learning but at the end it is still up to the students themselves to take the opportunities to improve themselves". At institutional level, University A's Chancellor and University B's Vice Chancellor (Baird, (1998) brought in the community perspective when defining quality in higher education. Statements made by Hill, Lomas, & MacGregor, (2003), and (Baird, (1998) of their perceptions of quality in higher education reflected their beliefs in leading the university. This belief, in turn forms the university's directions undertaken currently or in the near future towards a quality culture. Chancellor (Hill, Lomas, & MacGregor, J. (2003) viewed quality higher education as helping the nation to meet the manpower requirement, producing graduates that meet global demands, and having quality inputs such as students, curriculum and staff, especially staff with international experience. According to Vice Chancellor (Baird, J.R. (1998), one of the measurements of quality in global higher education is that quality assurance must be in place, meaning that processes must be well kept and



well developed. He said that is something quite becoming important agenda to university, especially for the private universities. He then expressed quality higher education as having good governance, positive impact of teaching on quality of graduates, engagement in research and development of new knowledge, and positive impact to the community. Governing Council Member, Ramsden,(1991).viewed quality in higher education as “what you say you are going to do and then you conform to it. Quality is not an adoption of a standard that someone says it should be”.

He recalled that quality was perceived to be costly previously but he acknowledged nowadays, “there is a growing realization among the higher education providers especially the larger ones that quality is an opportunity for the institution to enter into a virtual circle. By that it means if you invest in good facilities or resources, then the students' satisfaction will be higher. If the students' satisfaction is higher, then the feedback and student experience will be positive and they will tell their friends to come to the university. More and more students will come in which then give you more funds which make you reinvest in better facilities and resources. So it is a virtual circle”. He then described quality higher education as meeting stakeholders' expectations especially the parents' whereby their main concern is about their children's experience in the university. What the students think about their learning experience as what determines their future success is also important to the higher education providers. He acknowledged that quality higher education required

huge capital investment in people, systems and facilities to ensure excellent learning and non-learning experiences for the students but he expected the return on investment to be even greater. According to him, institutions with their dedicated campuses, brand value and brand promise are the ones that parents will send their kids too.

Discussion

The literature shows there is no easy definition of quality in higher education. Therefore, no wonder that participants in this study expressed different views when they were asked the meaning of quality in higher education. In the end, the majority seemed inclined towards the output, that is, the students' learning experience or the graduate qualities which include both the academic and no-academic aspect of having good character that meet industry expectations. The effective teaching and learning scale of the questionnaire considered good teaching, student active engagement in learning and the relevancy of educational outcomes. Ramsden (1991) defines good teaching involves giving clear explanation through interesting lessons and providing useful and timely feedback. Being supportive of students' problems is also essential. Kettunen and Kantola (2007) describe the teachers as being in a key position for quality assurance in higher education and their sense of ownership is important in ensuring quality in teaching and learning. Kehm (2010) [agrees that the teacher plays a cast role in facilitating the learning experience by creating opportunities for acquiring such skills in the classroom. Srikanthan and Dalrymple, (2007) in



developing a holistic model for quality in higher education, emphasized that learning is based on dynamic engagement between students and teachers, especially about the nature, scope and style of their learning. They recommended transformation by shifting attention from 'teaching' to 'learning'. In particular, students should be involved as partners in internal quality assurance activities in the teaching and learning initiatives. The sense of responsibility and high level of engagement between the teachers and students makes quality assurance effective (Kettunen and Kantola (2007). The personal development scale reflects the extent to which students perceive their studies in university would foster the development of a set of generic skills recognized by the university as a valuable outcome of university education, in addition to discipline specific skills and knowledge. It is worth noting that "improved communication skills" emerged as a separate factor on its own rather than included in the personal development scale. This may be explained by its increasing importance as one of the most appealing skills to the employers. Both personal development and improved communication skills are perceived as important quality values to the students. Known as graduate capabilities to many universities, these skills represents the traits that are commonly wanted by employers, thus preparing the students to be work ready, as expected by the employers. Examples include critically analyzing, problem solving, thinking inventively, logical reasoning, confidence and ability to see things from different perspectives. Supporting this, Kehm (2010) posits that these skills

together with the subject-specific learning outcomes must be clearly defined and the curricular be revised to teach and assess them. While most of the time the teachers are unsure when left with these assignments, it is recommended that training be given to the teachers in terms of appropriate assessment strategies for such skills and ways to generate opportunities for students to acquire these skills. These skills are not just helpful in finding work in the career of their choice but may lead them to a more contented personal life. While there is a basic assumption that these skills are innate traits, close scrutiny on these skills would suggest that they can be acquired and cultivated over time. Higher education institutions can nurture these skills using several ways. Modeling helps to inspire students to follow what they see in others, especially the teachers in demonstrating them. For example, when a teacher works through a problem together with the students during their lesson by illustrating the critical arguments in solving the problem, students not only realize the value and feel inspired to use them but they see how and when to apply them. Introducing puzzle questions encourages students to think critically and allow logical reasoning that would put students in a more competitive learning environment. This method enables students to contemplate others' viewpoint and reframe their thinking. Students also see quality higher education as having a supportive learning environment especially getting support from their teachers.

A study on students' perception of quality in higher education by Hill *et al.*(2003) also suggested that social or emotional support systems are the important



factors. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2007) postulate that one of the important aspects of quality in higher education is the significant commitment by the university and individuals and providing students a supportive environment. As mentioned earlier, the teacher's role is regarded as vital in cognitive transcendence in the students and they look up at their teachers as role model in their demeanor and interest for the subject. Satisfaction in any learning experience must at least be achieved in the classroom, even though many feels that it should goes beyond the classroom. The teacher's response towards promoting an atmosphere that motivates self-directed and cooperative learning is crucial. This requires the mental change in the teachers that would need tactical influence of leadership and clear direction from top management regarding a shared vision about service quality improves overall institutional performance Yeo, R. K. (2008). In addition, teachers who exhibit professionalism by showing respect for students and demonstrate commitment in ensuring learning are definitely supportive in creating a supportive learning environment for the students. This is supported by Telford and Masson (2005) who agreed that lecturer commitment is one of the quality values in congruence among the higher education stakeholders. One surprising outcome of this study was the emergence of the Information Availability, Accuracy and Accessibility factor. This implies that students view information in terms of its availability, accuracy and accessibility as important to quality improvement. Majority of the current student population is the generation Y who

grew up with the internet. They are familiar with the online universe that they may even have the more updated facts than their teachers. They use technology extensively for variety, stimulation and access to information. It definitely changed the way they communicate and relate to learning. Hence, information is expected to be easily available especially in the electronic mode which warrants for quick availability and accessibility. The findings from this study provide greater insights into the perceptions of internal and external stakeholders on quality in higher education which can impact how universities, formulate their quality assurance as well as business strategies to remain sustainable in the increasingly competitive industry.



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PERSPECTIVE

Advancing Stakeholders' Involvements in Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education

By Dr. Melaku Girma, CEIQA Director

Quality in higher education is owned and determined by the stakeholders (Harvery and Green, 1993; Shanahan and Gerber, 2004) and most attempts to characterize quality are highly related as they adopt a 'customer' or 'stakeholder approach' (Cullen et al, 2003). Becket and Brooks (2006) for example suggest that the different perspectives of the stakeholders of higher education must be considered when addressing the issue of quality. In support of that, Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003) claim that any quality model developed must be sensitive and represent the expectations of the stakeholders. Many authorities in their area argue that, as far as quality is concerned the key issue is the ability of the quality concept to facilitate the perspective of a range of stakeholders. Green (1994) recommended that the best approach to quality in higher education is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder has for judging quality and to take into consideration these different views when assessing quality. If quality is 'stakeholder defined' who are then the 'stakeholders' of higher education? Modern quality

management supports that there are many 'customers' or 'stakeholders' especially when dealing with service providers such as higher education institutions (Lagrosen et al, 2004). Some studies use the term 'customer' and others prefer the term 'stakeholder'. This article uses the term 'stakeholder'. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003) suggested that there are many stakeholders for whom the quality of higher education is vital, such as the government, the funding bodies, students, academic staff, employers and society at large, to name just a few. Cheng and Tam (1997) identify both internal and external stakeholders in the quality management process. Current students and academic staff are internal constituents in the quality management process where as employers, governments funding bodies, institutional management, prospective students or professional bodies are external; these stakeholders are likely to have disparate definitions of quality as well as different preferences for how quality is assessed (Cheng and Tam, 1997). Primarily, several authorities stress that the commitment of the leadership to quality and quality assurance can have a large influence on the outcomes of the quality assurance activities. The implementation of policy, strategy and core process will be more successful



if closely coupled with leadership. Leadership should not be separated from policy, strategy and process ownership. Hence, the support of the leadership together with the establishment of a separate body to guide the quality assurance effort at the institutions is a point to be underlined.

Students remain at the fore-front of quality and quality enhancement process. Brennan et al . (2003) argue that there are two principal reasons for collecting feedback from students. The first is to enhance the students' experience of learning and teaching and the second is to contribute to the monitoring and review of quality and standards. For Harvey (2003) feedback from students is more action – oriented. It provides internal information to guide improvement and external information for potential students and other stakeholders, including accountability and compliance requirements.

Mintzberg (1979) characterized higher education as a professional bureaucracy with professionals in the operating core given considerable control over their own work. Therefore, much power rests at the bottom of the organization in the hands of those professionals. Hence faculty members in the different departments can impact positively or negatively the development and implementation of quality assurance system. Thus, they also stand at the fore – front of the quality assurance process. Much efforts needed to bring the administrative staff on board the quality management process, though the process seems to be difficult. Weick (1976) analyzed higher education organizations as loosely coupled systems in which vertical and horizontal integrations are

difficult to achieve and where response to external pressures for change might not touch upon the technical core or organization. In addition to students and academic staff, the leadership should bring administrative staff and other internal stakeholders on board to build ownership among the different university community. Academic and administrative units should stop the tendency to go their separate ways and act as fiefdom, unaware that the whole is greater than the sum of their individual parts. The traditional great divide between academics and administrators should be abolished in quality enhancement process.

Apart from the above stakeholders, there are other key stakeholders and key actors such as government agencies, employers, professional associations, funding bodies, etc., which have to be brought together in coordinating the quality enhancement process. A successful quality enhancement is to be made from an organic, bottom- up approach where focus is on key stakeholders to get the bigger picture of quality.



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Virtual Links

1. Ethiopian Ministry of Education (<http://www.moe.gov.et>)
2. Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (www.higher.edu.et)
3. Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE) (www.allbany.edu/eaps/prophe)
4. International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE) <http://www.inqaahe.org>
5. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK) (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk>)
6. Center for International Research on Higher Education (<http://bc.org/avp/soe/cihe>)
7. Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia (<http://www.qsae.org>)
8. International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (<http://www.eric.ed.gov>)
9. International Network for Higher Education in Africa (NHEA) (<http://www.be.edu>)
10. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (<http://www.enqa.eu>)
11. Asian Pacific Quality Network (<http://www.apqn.org>)
12. Association of African University (www.aau.org)
13. International Council for Open and Distance Learning (www.icde.org)
14. Talloires network (www.talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu)
15. Institute of International Education (www.iie.org)



INTERVIEW

This column features interviews of people including government officials, policy makers, top management of universities or colleges, experts as well as students on quality related issues. In this edition of the newsletter, quality matters interviewed Ato Kassahun Kebede who is the Quality Audit Directorate Director at Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) regarding stakeholders' role in quality and quality assurance practices. Ato Kassahun is a PhD candidate at Addis Ababa University in International and Comparative Education. He got his Masters degree from Addis Ababa University in Curriculum and Instruction in 2005 and his 1st degree in Pedagogy from Bahirdar Teachers' College, AAU, in 1991. He also served as a senior Expert, at HERQA and worked as a lecturer at Dilla University and as Head of Department at Hosanna College of Teacher Education.



Ato Kassahun Kebede, Quality Audit Directorate Director at Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA)



Quality Matters: Who are the stakeholders of higher education?

Ato Kassahun: All those who have interest in what is happening in the higher education system can be considered stakeholders of higher education. Some of the most important stakeholders of higher education are students, parents, the government, employers, higher education institutions, professional associations etc.

Quality Matters: What roles do stakeholders play in assuring quality in higher education institutions?

Ato Kassahun: Simply put the very reason higher education institutions exist is to address the needs of stakeholders. Higher education institutions therefore should be able to negotiate with the needs of stakeholders before they spell out their visions and missions. To do this, they need to involve stakeholders in many ways.

The government, for instance, as a principal stakeholder, is very keen on what is happening in the higher education institutions. It wants to make sure that higher education institutions produce students who are capable contributing to the overall development of the country on the basis of its economic, social and political policies. So it is or should be involved in the course of designing the vision, missions and goals of higher education institutions, assessment and review of programs, evaluation of research outputs and community development endeavors.

Students also have a very huge stake in what is going on in the institutions. They are anxious about the quality of education offered in higher education institutions because they are concerned about their own lives and the society they live in. Whatever they learn in the institutions, it should help them make their future brighter. As a result, they strongly need to be represented in the governance of institutions,

participate in the design and implementation of programs, and influence the methods of teaching and assessments employed by teachers.

Parents also want their needs to be addressed by institutions. They aspire that what students learn in higher education institutions, for instance, should be able to land their sons and daughters in some kind of job or make them independent economically. So they want to be involved in assuring the quality and relevance of programs launched by higher education institutions. Therefore, they can contribute during the review of curriculum and programs, selection of agenda for research activities and community service endeavors.

In general, all stakeholders can involve in the day-to-day activities of higher education institutions in one way or another to make sure that the education and training offered in higher education institutions is addressing their interests.

Quality Matters: How do you evaluate the experience of stakeholders' involvement in quality and quality assurance practice in Ethiopian higher education?

Ato Kassahun: I say it is minimal. In most of the higher education institutions, parents' view have not been taken into consideration while designing new programs, students are not properly represented in the senate, academic commissions and department councils. Teachers' views are not seriously taken into consideration while higher education institutions are preparing their vision, mission statements and reviewing their curricula. We are however now witnessing an improvement in the situation.

Quality Matters: Do you think there are differences of perception in quality and quality assurance among different stakeholders of higher education institutions? If so what are the differences?

Ato Kassahun: Obviously, there are differences in perceptions of quality and quality assurance among



different stakeholders and it is normal that these differences exist. This is because what the employer expects from education can be different from what the student expects. The government, parents and the society in general also do have their own views of quality education. However all of them, though they define and view quality education differently, are talking about the same student who should be capable enough to contribute to the industry, social and economic development of the country and eventually become self sufficient and eventually become a conscientious citizen.

Quality Matters: What are the challenges to advance the involvement of different stakeholders in quality monitoring and enhancement practices in Ethiopia higher education system? What shall be done to improve the situation?

Ato Kassahun: The first and most important challenge is lack of adequate awareness that a quality assurance of higher education cannot be achieved without the participation of stakeholders. We can go ahead and guess or try to find out what the stakeholders think about our services. However, we have to know that if we want to be good at what we are doing we have to create forums through which stakeholders can directly contribute to the quality and relevance of education we are offering.

The other challenge, I believe, is lack of effective communication lines through which we can continuously receive the feedback of the stakeholders. I think this is called "feedback loop". What do teachers, students, parents, the government and other sections of the society think about our programs, trainings etc? What should the programs include and how should they be improved to meet the needs of our stakeholders? After all, whatever we do in higher education institutions is all about meeting the needs of our stakeholders.

Quality Matters: Are there any good practices to highlight in regard to stakeholders involvement?

Ato Kassahun: Yes, now higher education institutions are getting used to conducting stakeholders' conferences and workshops before and after programs are launched. Some higher education institutions, like St Mary's University, have even gone to the extent of spending thousands, if not millions, on newsletters, bulletins, journals and annual national and international workshops. These are indeed good practices that need to be highlighted. They are ideal forums of discussions for stakeholders.

Quality Matters: What do you think are the roles of HERQA in addressing the issue of stakeholders' participation?

Ato Kassahun: HERQA, as I mentioned earlier, strongly believes that stakeholders should participate in the decision making process of HEIs. As an external quality assurance agent, the Agency is controlling, monitoring and enhancing the quality of higher education offered in HEIs. To this end, the Agency has included this idea in the ten focus areas it is using to assess HEIs. For instance, if you look at focus areas 1, 2, 6, 9 and 10, they hold participation of stakeholders as the most important preconditions to design vision and missions, review curriculum and programs, conduct research activities etc .

Quality Matters: Do you have any other tips to add with regard to stakeholders' involvement in quality improvement in Ethiopian higher education system?

Ato Kassahun: I think I have said enough. Thank you

Quality Matters: Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts.



The Six A's of Quality Education

By Harry A. Patrinos

Co-authors: Eduardo Catherine Yan Wang

Over the past several decades, developing countries have made remarkable progress in achieving *quantitative* education targets. Since the turn of the millennium, almost 50 million children around the world have gained access to basic education – and most are reaching completion. But as recent Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) data shows, this is not typically the case for *qualitative* improvements in education. A persistent learning gap remains for an estimated 250 million children who are unable to read and do math, even after spending three or more years in the classroom.

Education systems reforms are needed in many countries to turn the tide. In a recent article we propose the following as six necessary components (referred to as the 6A's) to achieve such reforms:

1. **Assessment. Benchmarks** and benchmark-based assessments are the cornerstone of education planning and reform aiming to improve quality. Countries that are unable to determine where their education system stands currently will find it difficult to make improvements or to reach their goals. One example of success in this area can be found in

Jordan, where use of international tests for benchmarking and the use of feedback loops led to impressive gains.

2. **Autonomy.** Empowering schools will determine quality improvements. This includes giving them ownership, resources,
3. And voice while enhancing school competitiveness. Across Australia, Canada, Finland, Japan and Korea – the five Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries with both an above-average student performance in science and a below-average impact of socio-economic background on student performance – 80% of 15-year-olds are in schools which report competing with one or more other schools in the area for students. Students in districts with 85% of schools competing with other schools tend to perform better. Autonomy's potential for transforming education systems depends on whether increased autonomy is accompanied by enhanced accountability mechanisms.
4. **Accountability.** As mentioned, autonomy and accountability are closely related. Accountability increases time on task and academic achievement. As decision-making power is redistributed, local authorities, school principals, teachers, and students are given new responsibilities for resource deployment and school activities. In an autonomy-based



structure, school principals are held accountable to municipal authorities for (efficient) use of financial resources. Likewise, school principals are held accountable to both parents and local authorities for improving the learning environment and outcomes. An accountability-based system usually entails a shift of decision-making authority from the government to the community, which is represented by school governing boards and integrated by teachers, parents, and community members.

5. **Attention to teachers.** Studies across the world show that a good teacher—one that adds value to the learning process—can be effective in helping students to improve their learning outcomes. The top-performing school systems recruit their teachers from the top third of each graduate cohort: top 5% in South Korea, top 10% in Finland, and top 30% in Singapore and Hong Kong SAR, China. This screening helps to ensure that teachers possess the skills and knowledge necessary to be effective educators. Additionally, in-service training helps teachers to maintain those skills.

6. **Attention to early childhood development.** Early childhood development (ECD) may be the most cost-effective educational investment. Empirical evidence demonstrates that quality ECD interventions increase educational success and adult productivity, and decrease public expenditures later on. A Study

in Jamaica found that children in a treatment group, whose mothers were taught ways in which to promote cognitive, physical, and emotional development during their child's early years, earned on average 42% more as young adults than children in the control group who did not receive these benefits.

7. **Attention to culture.** Culture is important and often neglected. The use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction is one cultural area frequently disputed in many countries. For some, the topic has political overtones, for others it can be associated with religious values, and still for others costs are used as an excuse for opposition. In many countries, a significant number of students do not speak the national language in the home, which has practical implications for education. We, and others, have found that schools using mother tongues as the language of instruction have higher attendance and promotion rates, and lower repetition and dropout rates. This trend has specifically been noted in the case of indigenous peoples in Guatemala. Students also better learn their national language by the end of basic education if they first become literate in their mother tongue.

Successful education system reform requires a combination of institutional factors and structural quality elements. In order to improve the quality of



education, countries must enable a benchmarking system to determine current learning levels and future learning aims; provide schools and communities with ownership of their systems; and set up mechanisms to ensure and monitor various responsibilities, all while supporting teacher quality, promoting the importance of Early

Childhood Development (ECD), and being mindful of context and culture. Policymakers must consider each aspect of the education system in defining an appropriate reform that will provide an inclusive and holistic approach to improving education outcomes

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

CALL for PAPERS

The 12th International Conference on Private Higher Education in Africa

Date: 23 August, 2014

Venue: United Nations Conference Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Conference Theme: Retrospect and Prospect of Private Higher Education Provision in Africa

Sub-theme 1: Educational Policy and Financing of PHE in Africa

Policies of major financial institutions (Eg. International Financial Corporation, World Bank, Domestic/National banks, African Development Bank, etc) and donor organizations (Eg. European Union, USAID, etc) towards private higher education providers and the challenges of securing funding for teaching and research; Financial constraints and lack of skilled manpower for program diversification by private higher education institutions in Africa; Re-visiting higher education policies of African governments as instruments of opportunities and challenges (with case presentations); Demand for higher education in Africa and its opportunity for the private education



providers; National policies on public-private partnership pertinent to private HEIs; Causes of student attrition, and the implications to private higher education institutions in Africa; The dilemma of increasing tuition fee in the face of declining enrollment rates at private HEIs in Africa; Status, Challenges and Opportunities for International Partnership of Private HEIs (University to University, Donor to University, Business/Industry to University); and Others issues related to the sub-theme.

Sub-theme 2: Systems of Ensuring and Assuring Quality of Education in Private HEIs in Africa

The status of quality of education in private higher education institutions in Africa; Ethical issues hampering quality of higher education provision by private higher education institutions in Africa;

Practices of incentive schemes in HEIs as outcomes of quality audit results; Continental experiences on systems and mechanisms of ensuring and assuring quality of higher education provision in

Africa; Employability of graduates of private higher education institutions in Africa; University governance and its relationship to quality of higher education in Africa; The use of ICT in teaching and research by private HEIs in Africa, and mechanisms to improve quality of student's research activities; and Other similar issues related to the sub-theme.

Sub-theme 3: Gender Mainstreaming, HIV/AIDS, Community Services in PHE in Africa

Gender policies and practices of private higher education institutions and its contributions towards increasing girls' tertiary education performances; Community services by private higher education institutions and students' involvement in extra-curricular activities; Challenges faced by private higher education providers due to HIV/AIDS and their contributions towards creating responsible students/graduates; National policies to reduce girls' attrition in HEIs and their impacts.

The deadlines for submission of abstract and full paper are 31 May & 31 July, 2014 respectively.

Address your submissions and/or further enquiry to:

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