PERFORMANCE INDICATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING: IMPERATIVES FOR LECTURERS

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Abstract

Quality assurance at higher education institutions involves more than a mere establishment of bodies (CHE, HEQ) to oversee the process. Without a self-driven approach towards quality assurance, institutions will hardly get the cooperation and/or motivation to implement it successfully. Institutions need to establish mechanisms and procedures to self-assess their effectiveness on a continuous basis where the emphasis falls more on accountability at all levels (academic and professional staff, students and management) than on improvement. Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures should be designed to serve a positive purpose in furthering the interest of the university, its staff and its students in their teaching and learning.

1.   INTRODUCTION

The dawning of a new higher education dispensation in 1994 put, amongst others, the need for a quality assurance mechanism, for the South African Higher Education system on the transformation agenda. Consequently, various investigations and policy initiatives set the pace for major changes that will hopefully lead to the enhancement of teaching and learning quality at all South African higher education institutions. The first initiative that endorsed the establishment of a quality assurance system that, on the one hand would make higher education relevant to the developmental needs of the country, while on the other hand, ensure global competitiveness, was the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996).

A single coordinated higher education system was proposed, based on equity, redress of past imbalances, democracy and quality (NCHE 1996:82). The latter lead to a statutory process and the acceptance of the White Paper on Higher Education and the promulgation of the Higher Education Act (both in 1997). In addition, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, with its embedded National Qualifications Framework (NQF), is currently playing a pivotal role in the enhancing of quality assurance on programme levels. It is assumed that SAQA and the mandatory registration of programmes and qualifications on the NQF for subsidy and accreditation purposes, will force universities not only to reconsider the quality of their programmes and curriculums, but also to revisit existing teaching practices and the ways their students are learning (if they learn at all)!

Another important transformation-inspired development was the passing of the Higher Education Act (Act No.101 of 1997). This act made provision for the establishment of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The CHE appointed the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to oversee quality assurance at both institutional and programme levels. The establishment of a quality assurance system for South African higher education, however, was not

problem-free, nor free of intolerance. Fortunately, at the beginning of the year 2000 it can be reported that satisfactory progress has been made and that the HEQC will start their work soon.

Given South Africa's history with especially the discrepancies between Historically Black Universities (HBUs) and Historically White Universities (HWUs), quality as a phenomenon will not be accepted in the higher education community with equal enthusiasm by all quarters. Historically Black Universities, with a long history of being accused of low standards and not offering quality programmes could rather be offended and suspicious. Historically White Universities, who no longer enjoy the protection and good will of a 'white' government with shared ideologies, are also uncomfortable with the idea of quality audits and the infringement on their academic freedom/autonomy. It will surely take some time before the HEQC will be accepted as a body with the improvement of institutional quality as core business.

With the above introductory remarks in mind, it is important to discuss the following issues:

- What is quality?
- What notions, approaches and ideological viewpoints persuade in the quality debate?
- Why is a self-evaluative approach towards teaching and learning imperative?
- Do there exist performance indicators in teaching and learning that determine quality?

2.   SO WHAT IS QUALITY ALL ABOUT?

Christopher Ball (1985) quite appropriately asks the question:' What the hell is quality?' In the world of trade and industry it is easy to define the quality of a product or service. To determine quality in higher education is however not so easy as, in higher education, there are 'no simple, discern ble end-products ... Higher Education is an ongoing transformative process that continues to make an impact long after any formal programme of study has been completed ...' (Harvey 1995:xii).

2.1   Philosophical approaches towards quality

According to Maassen (1995), quality can philosophically be approached from an essentialist, nominalist or an objectivist perspective. The essentialist perspective attempts to identify the essential or fundamental aspects of quality. The nominalist point of view regards the search for definitive descriptions as rather unfruitful and accepts that there are as 'many definitions as there are stakeholders and purposes'. This perspective settles for conceptions on which 'sufficient' agreement can be reached. The objectivist approach tries to apply a common methodology across a system to obtain an 'objective operational measure' of quality (Maassen 1995:64).

Dill (1992) identifies three approaches to quality in higher education:

The reputational approach: The basic instrument of judgement in this approach is peer review.

The outcomes approach: This approach relies on outcome indicators such as the proportion of students who pass, throughpul rates, the number of publications, etc. This approach has two main weaknesses: many of the outcomes are difficult to interpret because of interrelations with reputational measures and input differences, and the lack of clarity on how to link these outcomes to measures that improve quality.

The total quality approach: which stresses broad participation, continuous improvement, organisational learning and a focus on the needs of the customer, this approach is used mainly in industry, but is increasingly being promoted as a model for higher education (Cloete 1998).

2.2   Notions of quality

Trying to classify quality into various notions brings the multifarious nature of quality to the fore. The following three categories are identified in the literature (Bergquist 1995:79-80; Harvey & Green 1993:12; Lategan 1997; Mosha 1997:2):

- *Quality as exceptional:* This notion regards quality as elusive, distinctive and easily recognisable. It refers to high standards that can be attained only in limited circumstances with exceptional students and staff, and is therefore usually the dominant notion in elitist higher education systems and institutions.

- *Quality as efficient production:* Here quality is disconnected from an absolute standard and made relative to 'specifications'. Based on practices in industry, it means that a quality product is one with 'zero defects'. Related to this notion is the one of 'fitness for purpose', meaning that quality is the extent to which the product or service meets the 'designer and customer specifications'. The best known example is the Japanese Total Quality Management system where every part of the organisation works towards 'customer satisfaction'. The notion of 'value for money' in terms of achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness is also closely associated with this notion. Performance indicators are the main method of assessment of efficiency.

- *Quality as transformation:* This notion refers to an attempt to enhance the abilities of students regardless of their initial level of functioning, and regards 'adding value' as the key objective. For example, an institution that enrols the best students but adds little to their development is of poorer quality than one that manages to add value to less-prepared students. The assessment of 'added value' is still a weakness in this approach. Much more research should be undertaken to determine how

much value has been added to a student's overall personal and intellectual development.

In the South African context, many unprepared students enrolled, for example, at historically disadvantaged institutions. According to researchers more value needs to be added to these students due to their impoverished intellectual background than to students with high matric symbols entering historically white universities. For the latter it is sometimes the most obvious and natural thing to achieve distinctions, whereas lecturers at historical disadvantaged institutions have to make greater efforts to get these students through, let alone enable them to earn distinctions.

2.3   Self-evaluation as cornerstone of quality assurance

Without a self driven approach towards quality assurance, institutions will hardly get the cooperation and/or motivation to implement a quality assurance system. Experts in the field of quality assurance (e.g. Kells 1988,1992; Brennan,Fr azer & Williams 1995; Vroeijenstijn 1993, 1995) propose that to ensure the efficiency of a quality assurance system, it should be an internally driven process. Such an approach towards quality will obviously be in co-existence with an external quality assurance system.

Self-evaluation should form part of the planning cycle of an institution. This would ensure that the quality assurance process is not an 'added on' approach focusing more on accountability than on improvement. Kells (1992:35) confirms this by stating that institutions that are more regulated by external bodies are more vulnerable to external environments. Vroeijenst jn (1995:33) takes it a step further when he states that if the quality assurance process is primarily externally driven, it will soon become a window dressing exercise.

2.4   Quality in teaching and learning

The question basic to our discussion relates to the mechanisms and procedures an institution could implement that will enhance quality in teaching and learning? During an institution's self-evaluation process the absence or presence of these mechanisms and procedures enables the institution to determine whether they are enhancing their quality. In such a self-evaluation exercise the main idea is to determine the institution's mission statement and, in line with this, its goals/aims and objectives in the light of its notion of quality and the role it sees for itself.

It is extremely important that the institution prioritise identified mechanisms and procedures. Ideally institutions should reflect on aspects such as the following:

- What are we trying to do?
- Why are we trying to do it?
- How are we trying to achieve it?
- Why are we doing it in this specific way?

- How will we know if this is the best way of doing it?
- How will we know we are successful?
- How can we improve our current practices?

These types of questions encourage increasing self-awareness and ensure connections between the broader goals of an institution and the strategic management and planning framework which give effect to the mission. Around these systems - such as appointments, staff development, course design, course approval, teaching and learning, assessment and evaluation - a university needs to establish mechanisms which provide the information that the institution requires to assess its effectiveness (Strydom 1998:22; Hall et al. 1997:423). It is also worth noting that quality assurance mechanisms and procedures form part of a continuous system of review. In this regard, self-evaluation could also be understood as part of a continuous cycle of review and change. Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures could also be seen as the necessary audit paths for quality assurance. They should furthermore be designed to serve a positive purpose in furthering the interest of the university, its staff and its students.

2.4.1 *Examples of quality assurance mechanisms and procedures in teaching and learning*

Most universities are committed to encouraging and supporting excellence in teaching. However, this is an area that is often most neglected. It is important to mention that for self-evaluation to have an impact on the quality of teaching in practice there should be teaching and learning involvement at every level of its design and implementation, which includes student evaluation and lecturers' self-evaluation.

Examples of quality assurance mechanisms and procedures that can be applied to teaching and learning could be the following: student admission and selection criteria, internal assessment and examination, external examiners, student development and support, programme planning, staff appointment, staff (peer) appraisal, etc. Note that most of these quality assurance mechanisms and procedures evaluate practices whereas others like staff (peer) appraisal encourage improvement

Table 1 indicates areas for self-evaluation which could enhance the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, the following 'checklist' will also be useful for lecturers when conducting self-evaluation on their teaching and learning:

- Use of a variety of methods, well-matched to outcomes;
- Accurately assessing tests and encouraging understanding;
- An appropriate range of assessment methods, both formal and informal;
- Lecturers are knowledgeable about students' level of performance;
- Lecturers use assessment to identify students' learning and academic problems;Information about progress is regularly and freely given;
- Assessment is formative in nature;

• Assessment is designed to help students develop self-evaluation skills and take responsibility for their own learning;

Table 1: Areas for self-evaluation for improving the quality of teaching and teaming

IMPROVING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (University/faculty/departmental level)	IMPROVING PROGRAMMES/ COURSES	RECOGNISING AND REWARDING EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING
Academic staff profile analysis	**Quality** of learning and teaching (e.g. quality of teaching process; staff-student relationships and programme ethos)	Planning and preparing for lecturing (e.g. lectures have clear outcomes for learning)
Staff professional activities	Quality and relevance of modules and programmes (e.g. expert review, including external stakeholders; adhering to criteria of quality in programme self-assessment)	Process of teaching (e.g. explanations, and questions are clear and at appropriate level)
Staff development (e.g. participation in seminars and courses)	Student progress and achievement (e.g. quality of learning outcomes; responsiveness to particular needs)	Assessment of students and their learning outcomes (e.g. students obtain high quality, regular feedback on their progress and a formative assessment approach)
Faculty management: leadership and planning (e.g. effectiveness of Dean's leadership in shaping the learning and teaching environment)	Management for excellence in teaching and learning: especially in leadership and planning (e.g. the effectiveness of academic leadership in promoting successful learning and teaching is important)	Evaluating and improving teaching (e.g. information from assessment used to modify teaching)
Evaluation processes (e.g. surveys of student experiences and their effects)	Evaluation processes (e.g. existence of effective methods for monitoring student progress)	Programme coordination and leadership in teaching (e.g. models of good practice and innovation in teaching) Scholarship in

		leaching (e.g. publications on teaching that arc informing practices)

- Good use is made of assessment information to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching, and to change teaching strategies in order to improve student learning.

In answering the following questions, institutions could be assisted to reflect critically on the quality of teaching staff:

- Have they been trained appropriately and inducted into the teaching profession?
- Do they have intellectual honesty and curiosity?
- Do they take a sceptical and self evaluative attitude to their work?
- Do they know and use literature in their discipline(s)?
- Are they up to date in their field?
- Are they willing to criticise the work of their peers and that of their students and to be criticized by them and to learn from them?
- Do they care for the students whom they supervise? Do they communicate the results Of their work to others?
- Do they care enough about the effect of their work and its outcomes on others?
- Are they recognised by their peers for the excellence of their work?

The following discussion indicates the important performance indicators that need consideration in any teaching and learning situation.

2.5   Performance indicators

Lewis and Partington (1991) describe performance indicators for excellence in teaching and learning:

2.5.1 Preparation for teaching

- Clarity of outcomes for each module
- Preparation of content/quality of notes, handouts, etc.
- Preparation of material and equipment, and of acetates, slides, videos, etc.

2.5.2 Quality of delivery of teaching

- Evidence of lecturing effectiveness and excellence
- Evidence of small group teaching effectiveness and excellence
- Evidence of practical teaching effectiveness and excellence
- Evidence of fieldwork effectiveness and excellence

2.5.3 Volume and range of teaching

- Evidence of postgraduate supervision effectiveness and excellence Amount of time spent on teaching Experience of a wide range of teaching

2.5.4 Innovation in teaching

- Innovations in curriculum/programme design
- Innovations in methodologies e.g. distance learning materials, resource based learning materials
- Collaboration in teaching - team teaching, etc.
- Innovations of national/international repute in the teaching of the specific subject area
- Short course development Modular programme development

2.5.5 General communication with students

- Availability outside class times
- Guidance and counselling
- Motivating student

2 5 8 Assessment/examination procedure

- Evidence of range of methods of assessment used
- Innovation in assessment techniques

2.5.7 Evaluation of own teaching (self-evaluation)/////

- Systematic and regular reflection on all the above practices
- Regular use of peer/student evaluation
- Continuing reflection on teaching in relationship to the overall teaching aims and objectives of the Department, and
- Other topics in the course and the programme/curriculum as a whole

2 5 8 Management of teaching

- Course leadership
- Chair of programme committees e.g. for curriculum/programme development, modularisation, assessment, etc.
- Responsibilities for learning support Staff/student consultative committee duties
- "Enterprise" tutorships

Although most of the above indicators seem obvious not all academics view them to be of equal importance or integrate them into their teaching practices.

3.   CONCLUSION

In our discussion, we have stressed that all institutions and lecturers should take full responsibility for what and how they teach their students. No institution can afford not to implement sound quality assurance mechanisms and procedures, based on a self-evaluation system. To earn and keep the credibility of all stakeholders lecturers should become reflective practitioners and disseminate good practices. Quality assurance is not only the responsibility of lecturers but also of students who need to critically reflect on their own performance and to make a contribution to their own learning. Management at higher education institutions should also become aware of areas for self-evaluation and for improving the quality of teaching and learning at their institutions. Quality assurance is therefore the responsibility of everyone involved in teaching and learning at higher education institutions in South Africa.

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