Staff Development and Quality Education in Uganda: analysis of Quality Teaching and Research in Private Chartered Universities

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Abstract

This study explored the contribution of staff development to quality education in Uganda. The study was triggered by persistent public criticism of the quality of education especially in private universities in Uganda. A positivist research paradigm and descriptive cross-sectional survey research design were used to conduct the study. Data were collected from four private chartered universities registered in Uganda. Respondents included 181 lecturers, 23 heads of department, 5 deans, 3 quality assurance officers, 3 directors of research, 3 senior staff from the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and content analysis were used to analyze the data collected. The results indicated a significant positive relationship (r=0.587, p=0.000<0.05) between staff development and quality teaching and research. The results suggest that improved staff development initiatives correspond to improved quality teaching. The study recommended that private universities should share knowledge through collaborations, experience-sharing, workshops and exchange teaching and research material and ideas to learn good teaching, research and management practices from each other.

Key words: Staff Development, Quality Education, Private Chartered Universities, Positivist Research Paradigm, Cross-Sectional Survey

Introduction

Higher education environments across the globe are frequently described as turbulent and dynamic (Brookes & Becket, 2007). Global and national forces are driving change within higher education institutions across countries. These changes heightened demand for the expansion of higher education services leading to the emergence of private universities to meet the growing demand. The increase in the number of private universities has led to commercialization of higher education and the introduction of market-oriented courses and programmes and created a challenge of maintaining the quality of education (OECD 2007; Mamdani, 2007). Several strategies are therefore needed to help these institutions to improve and maintain quality by employing qualified teaching staff and devising staff development initiatives that increase opportunities for teaching staff to attain knowledge improvement and skills development.

This study was anchored on the Total Quality Management (TQM) theory and the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) model by Deming (1986). The TQM theory focuses on continuous improvement as one of the ways of improving quality (Deming, 1986) while the PDCA model specifically emphasizes and demonstrates that improvement of programmes or any performance should go through four consecutive steps (Plan, Do, Check, Act). The model was specifically used as a lens for appreciating the need for managers of universities to incorporate staff development strategies in their plans, implement those strategies, check to see if they are working and act by either concretizing those plans or devising other means.

This study focused on staff development and quality education as the main concepts. Staff development was conceptualized as a management practice which aims at bettering the efficiency of individuals and groups in organizational settings through enhancing their personal growth, preparing them for positions of greater responsibility and helping them to improve their analytical, human, conceptual and specialized skills for performance improvement and innovativeness (Garavan et al., 1995; Tiberondwa, 2000; Karemire 2013; Bloom, Genakos, Sadun & Reenen, 2011). Several scholars (Armstrong, 2009; Lumpkin, 2009; McCormack et al., 2013; International Coach Federation, 2012; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Wheeler, 2011) have advanced different approaches to staff development including: induction, mentoring, training, attendance of seminars, workshops, conferences, short courses within or outside the institution and sabbatical leave, among others.

Basing on these approaches, staff development in this study was conceptualized as a process of orienting, mentoring, training and developing lecturers in universities with knowledge, skills and positive attitudes to enable them work better and empower them to maximally utilize their abilities.

Quality education, on the other hand, has no single definition; but different scholars have defined it basing on the differences in stakeholders' interests and expectations, and the different indicators and strategies used to achieve it (Campbell & Royzsnyai, 2002; Muguad & Krone, 2012; Akareem & Hossain, 2016). It is often difficult for an education institution to meet all the expectations or needs of the various stakeholders at the same time. Therefore, different indicators may be developed to give information about the performance of an education institution in different aspects of input, processes and outcomes, and these can be based upon to define quality education. This study therefore based on the two core processes -- quality teaching and quality research -- to define quality education.

Quality teaching, according to Hénard and Roseveare (2012), is the use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students. Quality teaching involves the effective design of curriculum and course content, use of a variety of learning contexts including guided independent study, project-based learning, collaborative learning, experimentation, among others, to solicit and use feedback, effective assessment of learning outcomes, well-adapted learning environments and student support services (Hénard & Roseveare, 2012; OECD, 2012; NCHE, 2014; OECD, 2012). Quality research, on the other hand, is the creative work undertaken by a university on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humankind, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications (Tibenderana, 2013). The National Council of Higher Education (NCHE, 2014) defines quality research basing on the percentage of the university budget devoted to research and publications, support to research by policy committees, funds earned from research projects by the institution and individual staff, support that universities give to staff to promote research and staff research outputs including staff publications, citations, supervision of students in research, staff paper presentation in internal and local conferences, research groups and research grants. Quality teaching and research in this study was conceptualized basing on the OECD (2012) and NCHE (2016) indicators of the two concepts.

Statement of the problem

There is a growing criticism of university education in terms of its role in society, the effectiveness of its teaching, and the usability of the trained graduates. Literature shows that the teaching in private institutions of higher learning in Uganda is compromised by poor pedagogical skills, surface learning and inadequate skilling for the current work demands (Ssentamu, 2014; Tibenderana, 2013; Mamdani, 2007). The graduates are ill-prepared for the job market, and often criticized for failure to display the type of knowledge, initiative, maturity and capacity to contribute to national development (Agaba, 2011). The teaching in these universities concentrates more on theory than practice which creates a mismatch between training received and practical skills required by employers (Tibenderana, 2013; Bagarukayo, 2012; OECD Report, 2012). Reports also indicate some lecturers interact with students for only half of the expected contact hours, miss lectures or are not consistent in class. In addition, the quality and quantity of research done in these universities is not satisfactory (Mahmood, 2011; *New Vision*, 2011; Baryamureeba, 2016) and yet research is what differentiates a university lecturer from a secondary school teacher (NCHE, 2016).

Furthermore, reports indicate that some universities are employing unqualified staff to teach and yet Section 119 of the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act [UOTIA] (2001) provides that, "No University or tertiary institution shall employ a lecturer, instructor, or other persons recruited for the purpose of teaching or giving instructions to students whose qualifications do not conform with the standards set by NCHE". These regulations have been set by NCHE in statutory instrument No.50 of 2010.

The profit-oriented approach of running these private universities appears to have compromised the attempts of these universities as far as coming up with mechanisms of developing the staff knowledge and skills are concerned; and if this gap is not addressed, then these universities risk to continuously compromise the quality of their teaching and research.

Study Objectives

The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between staff development and quality teaching and research in private universities. The study specifically focused on the relationship between induction, mentoring, coaching, training and quality teaching and research in private universities in Uganda.

Literature Review

The importance of staff development as a management practice to improve the efficiency of individuals and groups within organizational settings and helping them to improve their human, analytical, conceptual and specialized skills has been emphasized by several scholars (Garavan et al., 1995; Tiberondwa, 2000; Bloom, Genakos, Sadun & Reenen, 2011; Karemire, 2013; Tibenderana 2013 Greatbatch & Holland, 2016). The authors affirm that staff development is central to the quality of higher education because it helps to build a culture of excellence and a professional team of motivated workers crucial to the achievement of national inspirations for economic development (UNESCO, 2017; Tiberondwa, 2000; World Bank, 1994; Malunda,

2017b). A study by Suhaemi and Aedi (2015) emphasized that staff training is the most essential component in a Higher Education system because lecturer competence development is inseparable from the university development programmes. Therefore if one is to look for an area to improve the quality of teaching and research in an educational institution, it is sensible to look for the continuous education of educators. The authors, however, do not offer suggestions on how this training should be conducted. Other crucial areas to consider in staff development are induction mentoring and coaching since they support learning from each other and help employees develop and learn new skills under the direction and advice of a seasoned expert (Malunda, 2017a; Jones, Woods and Guillaume, 2015; Zepeda, 2013; McCarthy & Milner, 2013;Wheeler, 2011). Therefore, universities should continuously enhance lecturers' knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for students considering that the volume of human knowledge is doubling every five or ten years. It is thus almost impossible for an individual staff member to remain in touch with the subject without a conscious investment in scholarship and self-tuition (Karemire, 2013; OECD, 2010; World Bank, 2000; UNESCO, 1996).

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design was used to conduct the study. The study targeted four private universities in Uganda. The sample was selected from the private chartered universities. The choice of chartered universities in this study was based on the premise that they have all the minimum requirements needed to offer quality education. The selected four private chartered universities were selected from the eight private chartered universities, representing 50% of the target population. Disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to enable representation basing on the foundation status. The selected universities included two faith-based universities and two private-for-profit universities. From the selected universities, 356 lecturers and 44 student leaders were randomly selected. Deans, heads of department, directors of research and quality assurance and senior officers from NCHE were purposively selected as key informants.

Questionnaire, interview and document review were conducted to collect data. The instruments were pre-tested before they were administered. The results of the descriptive analysis were presented in tables indicating frequencies and percentages. Correlation analyses were done to test the degree, strength and direction of the influence of staff development on quality teaching and research. The tests of significance were performed at the probability level of $p< 0.05$. Data collected using the structured interview guide, the observation checklist and document review guide was deductively analyzed basing on pre-determined variables from the conceptual framework of the study.

Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the study respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	Below 25years	2	1.1
	25 to below 35 years	62	34.3
	35 to below 45 years	89	49.2
	45 to below 55 years	13	7.2
	55 years and above	15	8.3
Level of education	Bachelors	15	8.3
	Post graduate	53	29.3
	Masters	87	48.1
	PhD	24	13.3
	Missing	2	1.1
Sex	Male	111	61.3
	Female	70	38.7
Length of service	less than 2 years	28	15.5
	2 to less than 5 years	104	57.5
	5 to less than 8 years	36	19.9
	8 to less than 11years	10	5.5
	11 years and above	2	1.1
	Missing	1	0.6
Employment status	Full time	171	94.5
	Part time	10	5.5

Source: Primary data

A summary of the demographic characteristics shows that the majority of the respondents (49.2%) were aged between 35 and 45 years. Qualifications however indicate that the number of PhDs were few (6.6%), yet according to the NCHE qualification framework, for one to qualify to teach at university level, one must hold a PhD or be in the process of acquiring one (NCHE, 2016). This meant that private universities were severely understaffed in regard to qualified staff for teaching and spearheading the research function. Results further showed that there were more male lecturers (61.3%) compared to their female counterparts (38.7%). On the issue of tenure of service, results showed that the majority of the lecturers (57.5%) had worked less than 5 years in their respective universities, which indicates lack of stability of lecturers. Demographic results also show that more full-time staff (94.5%) than part-timers (5.5 %) took part in the study, indicating a positive move of the universities towards acquiring full-time teaching staff compared to the past years where private universities were dominated by part-timers.

Descriptive Results on Staff development

The study sought the views of respondents on staff development in terms of induction, mentoring, coaching and training. A summary of their responses is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on the lecturers' views on Staff development

Staff development	Agree	Non-committal	Disagree
There is a thorough program for induction of new staff in my department in the areas of teaching	54(29.8%)	17(9.4%)	110(60.8%)
I was properly inducted when I joined this University in the area of teaching	52(28.8%)	7(3.9%)	116(64%)
My department has a well-coordinated scheme for mentoring staff in research activities	33(18.2%)	26(14.4%)	120(66.3)
Peer coaching is encouraged in our department	45(24.9%)	19(10.5%)	116(64%)
My department has put special strategies in place to facilitate staff to improve on their teaching skills	91(50.3%)	23(12.7%)	66(36.5%)
My department organizes in-service trainings to address staff training needs in teaching and research	49(27%)	13(7.2%)	119(65.7%)
There is a policy in my department that is used to recommend staff for further training	118(65.2%)	27(14.9%)	36(19.9%)
My department has a scheme in place for sponsoring staff for further studies	48(26.5%)	28(15.5%)	105(58%)
My department organizes workshops and seminars to enable staff learn from one another.	123(68%)	32(17.7%)	24(13.2%)
My department facilitates teaching staff to become innovative in their approach to teaching	125(69.0%)	15(8.3%)	41(22.7%)

Source; primary data 2017

Results in Table 2 indicate that the majority of the respondents (more than 60%) feel that staff development practices that include induction of new staff, well-coordinated schemes for mentoring staff in research activities, peer coaching and in-service trainings and research are not being properly carried out in their departments. On the positive side, however, the majority of the respondents (50.3%) indicated that their departments had put special strategies in place to facilitate staff to improve their teaching skills and were facilitating teaching staff to become innovative in their approach to teaching (69%) such as organizing workshops and seminars to enable staff to learn from one another. In addition, the majority (65.2%) agreed that departments had put in place policies to recommend staff for further training, although only (26.5%), agreed that schemes had been in place to sponsor staff for further studies. These results therefore suggest that the majority of the lecturers working in these private universities were not properly inducted, mentored, or even sponsored for further studies.

Interviews with the deans and heads of department confirmed that, indeed, staff development initiatives in these universities were lacking due to insufficient funds. The document reviewed indicated that three out of the four universities had not allocated funds to the staff development function in the last two academic years. The lack of sponsorship was

attributed to the unreliability of the lecturers who seek for employment elsewhere after being trained, causing financial loss to the universities that fund their studies.

Descriptive results on quality teaching

The study sought views of lecturers on the quality of teaching in private universities in Uganda, and below in Table 3.are descriptive results.

Table 3: Lectures' responses on quality teaching

Response on Teaching	Agree	Non-committal	Disagree
The teaching and learning materials in my department are adequate	74(40.9%)	5(2.8%)	102(56.4%)
Teaching and materials are availed easily in my department	72(39.8%)	8(4.4%)	101(55.8%)
Initiatives aimed at improving aspects of teaching have been put in place in my department	65(35.9%)	5 (2.8 %)	109(60.2%)
My department has put in place special programmes to help weak students	53(29.3%)	20 (11%)	108(59.7%)
Actions to improve student knowledge of education paths and placement/internship opportunities through specific services such as career advice are available	132(72.9%)	19(5.5 %)	37(20.5%)
The department makes effort to follow up students to know what they are doing in their internship	166(91.8%)	7(3.9%)	8(4.5%)
I assess students' performance in internship basing on their reports	142(78.5%)	11(6.1%)	28(15.5%)
The teaching and learning environment is conducive	70(38.6%)	4 (2.2%)	107(59.1%)
There is always enough space to conduct my lectures from	65(35.9%)	10(5.5%)	106(58.6%)
I prefer using the lecture method of teaching	84(46.4%)	9(5%)	86(47.6%)
I find the use of learner based methods of teaching more friendly	53(29.3%)	9(5%)	117(64.6%)
My way of teaching promotes students' critical thinking	153(84.6%)	15(8.3%)	11(11.5%)
I give assignments and projects to my students on time.	167(92.3%)	3(1.7%)	11(6.1%)
I give feedback on academic work of students promptly	171(94.5%)	6(3.3%)	2 (1.1%)
Assessment of students are planned as an integral part of teaching	167(92.2%)	3(1.7%)	11(6.1%)
Course outlines are consistent with the approved curriculum	154(85.1%)	9(5%)	18(10%)

Source: Primary Data

In Table 3 respondents were asked to give their opinions on the initiatives in their departments that were aimed at ensuring quality teaching. These included: the adequacy and availability of teaching and learning materials, the teaching methods, assessment and giving feedback to students, the teaching environment, students support services and the curriculum design.

In their response, the majority 56.4% of the lecturers indicated that the teaching and learning materials were inadequate; 55.8% said that the materials were not easily available as well. These results suggest that the required teaching and learning materials were not enough to support the lecturers to deliver the required learning content. Results, however, indicate that departments had tried to put in place initiatives to improve teaching such as: providing students with knowledge of education paths and internship opportunities (72.9%), and following up students to know what they were doing in their internship (91.8%). The results indicate, however, that learner-based approaches of delivery were hardly employed (29.3%); minimal effort was being put in place by the departments that have special programmes for weak students (29.3%); and the teaching and learning environment was largely not conducive (59.1%). On the positive side, results show that the majority of the respondents (over 85%) indicated that assessment of students was planned as an integral part of the teaching process and that lecturers (94.5%) promptly gave feedback on students' assignments. Results also suggest that course outlines were consistent with the approved curriculum.

Interviews with heads of department and senior quality assurance officers in all the selected universities pointed out inadequacy of teaching and learning materials as one major factor affecting quality teaching. One senior quality assurance officer explained thus:

> *Lack of equipment and sometimes even teaching space especially for those classes that require computers compels some lecturers to teach outside the scheduled timetables. This is a quality issue because it compromises the students' attendance and in most cases such lecturers don't teach up to the required contact hours. It also leads to disgruntlement since students look at it as being cheated and intimidated.*

Interviews further reported unethical behavior by some lecturers like hiding equipment like projectors from other potential users. Such behavior not only inconvenienced other users but also impacted negatively on the teaching.

Descriptive results on quality research

The study also set out to assess the quality of research done by the private universities in Uganda. Respondents were asked about their opinions on the quality of research in their universities in relation to the research processes, the support they were getting at the departmental level to promote the research function, and their contribution to the research output. Results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Responses of academic staff on quality research

Research	Agree	Non-committal	Disagree
There is a clear policy in my department that guides staff engagement in research activities	53(29.3%)	30(16.6%)	98(54.2%)
My department has a scheme in place for sponsoring academic staff to attend international conferences	45(24.9%)	22(24.9%)	114(63%)
The budget for research activities in my department is adequate	39(21.4%)	5(2.8%)	136(75.1%)
Promotion to a higher position in my department is based on research output	95(52.5%)	16(8.8%)	69(38.1%)
My department assists academic staff to publish their research work	24(13.2%)	32(17.7%)	123(68%)
The budget for research activities in my department is adequate	39(21.4%)	5(2.8%)	136(75.1%)
Collaborating with colleagues to do research makes it easy	165(91.1%)	5(2.8%)	10(11%)
I am always involved in carrying out research for my department	61 (33.7%)	3(1.7%)	116(64.1%)
Research groups in my department are very active	43(23.8%)	10 (5.5%)	160(88.4%)
Staff are facilitated with funding to carry out research work	69(38.1%)	15(8.3%)	97(53.6%)
My department facilitates staff to do research in terms of reduced teaching load	11(6.1%)	10(5.5%)	160(88.4%)
My department receives research grants from the researches done by the staff	15(8.3%)	6(3.3%)	160(88.4%)
I regularly publish articles in peer reviewed journals	55(30.3%)	13(7.1%)	113(62.4%)
I always publish articles in local journals	65(35.9%)	6 (3.3%)	110(60.7%)
I am usually given an opportunity to present papers in international conferences.	24 (13.3%)	14(7.7%)	143(79.0%)
I always present research papers in locally organized conferences.	108(59.7%)	12(6.6%)	61(33.7%)
My published work is usually cited by other researchers.	41(22.1%)	32(17.7%)	108(59.7%)
I always assist students to complete their research projects in time	123(67.9%)	17(9.4%)	41(22.7%)
My department usually organizes research dissemination workshops	57(31.5%)	11(6.1%)	113(62.4%)

Source; Primary data

Results in Table 4 indicate that private universities have a policy on staff engagement in research. However, majority of the lecturers (62.4%) found the policy guidelines irrelevant. Results suggest that majority of the lecturers (74%) consider the budget for research inadequate to engage them fully in research activities including presentation of papers at international conferences. The inadequate research budget could be the explanation for the low staff participation in research work (38.1%) and few research dissemination workshops (31.5%). Only 6.1% of the lecturers indicated that departments facilitated them to conduct research by

reducing teaching load. However, results in Table 4 indicate that the majority (91.1%) believed that collaborating with colleagues to do research made it easy. Despite this easier avenue of doing research, results show that only 30.3 % regularly published in internationally reviewed journals and 35.9% published in local journals. This suggests that probably collaborations were not strong or well utilized. The majority of the respondents (67.9%) indicated that they were involved in supervising students' research.

Despite the low output in research, interviews with the directors of research indicated that universities had come up with various strategies to support lecturers to carry out research; create research groups and clusters where members are encouraged to publish as a group; free trainings to lecturers in the use of different data analysis techniques like VGA splitter to enable them handle different groups at ago, SPSS, STATA and others. In an interview with the director Research, Development and Documentation (RDD) at NCHE revealed that most of the private universities exaggerated their involvement in research to advertise and to satisfy NCHE which expected all universities to deposit copies of their research works and engagements with them.

A visit to some of the university libraries did not show strong support in the research area since publications from staff were scanty and the web depository of the research works unsatisfactory. Information from document reviews revealed lack of comprehensive policies on research clearly stating the goals and objectives of research in their universities, funding, strategic partnerships and collaborations, implementation and dissemination strategies. More worrying was the absence of guidelines on conduct of research and supervision of students' research.

Verification of hypothesis

The study finally sought to establish the contribution of staff development on quality teaching and research in private universities. Correlation analyses were done to establish the relationship between staff development, quality teaching and research. The results are presented in Tables 5 and Table 6 respectively.

Table 5: Correlation analysis on staff development and quality of teaching

		Staff development	Quality teaching
Staff development	Pearson Correlation	1	.587**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	181	181
Quality teaching	Pearson Correlation	.587**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	181	181

The results in Table 5 indicate a significant positive relationship (r=0.587, p=0.000<0.05) between staff development and quality of teaching. The results suggest that improved staff development initiatives correspond to improved quality of teaching.

Similarly, a correlation analysis was done to establish if there was a relationship between staff development and quality of research. Results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Correlation analysis on staff development and quality of research

		Staff development	Quality of research
Staff development	Pearson Correlation	1	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	181	181
Quality research	Pearson Correlation	.459**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	181	181

Results in Table 6 show that similarly, there is a relationship (r =0.459, P=0.000<0.05) between staff development and quality of research. This means that improvement of staff development practices is associated with quality research in private Universities in Uganda.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between staff development and quality teaching and research in private universities in Uganda. The focus was on staff induction, mentoring, coaching and training and how these relate to quality teaching and research. Results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between staff development and quality teaching, and as well staff development and quality research. This is in agreement with the TQM theory that emphasizes continuous improvement of staff skills through training. These findings are in congruence with previous studies (Malunda, 2017a; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Karemire, 2013; Tibenderana 2013; Wheeler, 201; Ivancenich, 2010; Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, 2007) that have identified staff development initiatives as crucial in enhancing the quality of employees' work. Staff development initiatives like induction programmes are very important for all new teachers to provide logistical, emotional, and teaching support, which in the end lead to strengthening of the teaching practice (Malunda, 2017b). However, results indicated weak implementation of staff development initiatives especially in terms of induction of new staff, mentoring and peer coaching; and yet these are crucial for a university to start off lecturers and orient them in the institution's mission, goals and culture. Contention, however, was observed in the literature over this issue. For instance, Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (2007) doubts as to whether coaching really boosts quality of performance. Wheeler (2011) and Ivancenich (2010) suggest that for these initiatives to yield results, institutions must commit resources to this activity as well as coming with policies and guidelines to this effect.

Conclusion

The study concluded that staff development initiatives in the sampled private universities are inadequate in imparting lecturers with the relevant knowledge, skills and positive attitudes which are required to have high quality education.

Recommendations

In the absence of funds to support programmes for staff development, private universities in Uganda should come together as a consortium to share experiences and exchange materials and ideas. In so doing, the academic staff will be able to learn best practices from one another while university managers will learn good management practices.

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