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Assessing the Effect of Peer Reviews Mechanisms on the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Private Higher Education Institutions in Post Conflict Somalia

Running Title: - Assessing the Effect of Peer Reviews

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Abstract

This study focused on the effect of peer review on the quality of teaching and learning in private higher learning institutions in post-conflict Somalia. There have been persistent complaints by different stakeholders in the said country over the deteriorating quality of teaching and learning in many private higher education institutions. For example, many stakeholders are concerned that students are not obtaining a good higher education and are not competitive on the job, with the private universities being more concerned with making money than raising educational standards. The study employed a non-experimental, descriptive, cross-sectional survey design. A total of 253 academic staff, randomly and purposively selected, participated in the study directed by one objective and one hypothesis. The study hypothesis was tested using Linear Regression Model ($F = 0.21$, $p = 0.648$, $p > 0.05$). The study's findings revealed that peer review mechanisms were not considered an important factor in determining the quality of teaching and learning in private institutions of higher learning in Somalia. The study recommended that managers of higher education institutions continuously encourage the academic staff to participate in peer review to enhance their skills in teaching hence improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Quality, Peer reviews, Teaching and Learning

Introduction

The Somali Civil war that began in 1991 led to the collapse of the Somali state and has destroyed the country's education infrastructure (Aynte, 2013; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2008, Ainebyona, 2016). This has resulted in massive internal and external displacement, with scholars and academicians not being spared. Much of the higher education sector's infrastructure - physical, human, institutional and social - has been severely destroyed by the conflict, and the only university (Somali National University [SNU]) has been shuttered (Eno et al., 2015). Higher education in conflict-affected areas faces many problems posed directly or indirectly by conflict, including physical destruction, population displacement, war-related circumstances, and a lack of sector resilience (Milton & Barakat, 2016). This is supported by Babury and Hayward (2013), who states that the battle impacted the educational system's physical infrastructure, with most buildings being damaged or in disrepair, equipment being ruined or missing, laboratories being shut down, and libraries being stripped.

The repercussions of the civil war's instability were visible in Somali higher education, according to IIEP (2010), as most academic members fled the nation during the early years of the civil war. In the country's post-conflict period, violence against academics and a high level of displacement persists. In 2006, growing sectarian violence exacerbated what was already a large-scale academic 'brain drain,' displacing an estimated 5000 academics. The higher education system was left in ruins and decay at the end of the civil war, with many of the best professors fleeing, being imprisoned, or being slain (Babury & Hayward, 2013).

Objectives of the Study

The sole objective of this study was:

To establish the effect of peer review as an internal quality mechanism on the Quality of teaching and learning in private higher education institutions in post-conflict Somalia.

Hypothesis

The study hypothesis that:

Internal quality peer review mechanisms have a significant effect on the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions in post-conflict Somalia

Review of Related Literature

Peer review is seen as a vital internal quality assurance mechanism in developing the quality of teaching and learning in higher education since it is regarded as a tool for change (Pagani, 2002). Cole (2003) identified peer review as an essential process for reviewing ideas, catching mistakes, and improving teaching and learning quality. This process provides a method of assessing policies and performances to help each other improve and ensure compliance with standards (Blackmore, 2005). In recognition of the importance of excellence in teaching and learning, many universities now deliver educational-development programs that include peer review teaching for academic staff (Woodman, 2015). The success of peer review of teaching in shaping teaching practice during an academic's formative years may depend on the peers' teaching experience and evaluation frequency (Woodman, 2015). Academic-development experts suggest that the optimal framework for constructive peer review of teaching includes pairing inexperienced and experienced teaching staff (Bell & Cooper 2013).

Similarly, there is a need to change the traditional method of teaching evaluation to a more collegial design (Blackmore, 2005). Peer review of teaching includes the observation of lectures and tutorials. It is about furthering the development of faculty members through expert input based on knowledge and understanding, although it can be used as part of performance appraisal and tenure portfolios (Kohut, Burnap, & Yon, 2007). Peer review of teaching also sharpens individual skills, such as observing and critically reflecting on the dynamics and social context (Peel, 2005).

Many researchers invested in writing peer review as an internal quality assurance mechanism (e.g. Blackmore, 2005; Thomas et al., 2014; Bell & Mladenovic, 2008). For Instance, Blackmore (2005) carried out a study to investigate the critical evaluation of peer review via teaching observation within higher education in the United States and found out that students can evaluate whether they have learned and how well their instructors helped them achieve course goals. On the side, Thomas et al. (2014) wrote a qualitative literature review on peer review teaching in higher education in UK universities. They used an extensive online search for literature search and concluded that peer review of teaching helps develops faculty members to execute their work properly. Bell and Mladenovic (2008) carried out a study on the benefits of peer observation of teaching for tutor development in Australia. The study found that peer observation is valuable and enhances academic development programs in any discipline since suggestions for augmentation and improvement are provided. Since none of the above studies was done in Somalia, this raises the contextual gap and the relevance of carrying out the study in Somalia.

Research Methodology

The study was non-experimental, descriptive, and cross-sectional. It was cross-sectional in that the researchers visited all the respondents simultaneously during the data collection process, as Amin (2005) recommends. The cross-sectional survey was chosen because it is both time and cost-effective and because the study entails many participants (Kisige & Neema-Abooki, 2017). The study was descriptive since it detailed the current state of internal quality curriculum review procedures at higher education institutions. Data was gathered quantitatively, with variables being measured in terms of numbers. Data was gathered from 253 academic staff members of Somalia's higher education institutions. Due to the vast population, 108 academic staff were chosen using Krejcie and Morgan's (1975) sample size determination table (response rate= 73%). The questionnaire was disseminated to academic staff that was nominated purposively and were requested to rate themselves following a five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, and simple linear regression.

Findings

In the 85 respondents polled, slightly more than half (45.9%) had less than five years of teaching experience, 45.9% were between the ages of 30 and 40, and males (84.7%) dominated the sample when it came to academic qualifications. The majority of respondents (64.7 percent) had a master's degree, while 35.2 percent had both a bachelor's and a doctoral degree. Most lecturers in the sampled universities (58.8%) held the lecturer position regarding academic rankings.

This study aimed to test the hypothesis that internal quality peer review mechanisms significantly affect the quality of teaching and learning in private higher education institutions in post-conflict Somalia. Internal quality review mechanisms were operationalized into eight quantitative items. Using the seven quantitative items, lecturers were requested to do their self-rating based on a Likert scale ranging from: "strongly disagree", "disagree", "undecided", "agree", and "strongly agree".

Table 1 depicts the results from there.

Respondents' Rating on Peer Reviews

Indicator	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly disagree	Mean
In my department, peers review my9 teaching materials, e.g. teaching notes and course outlines, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning	18 (10.6%)	18 (21.2%)	1 (1.2%)	44 (51.8%)	13 (15.3%)	3.40
In my department, peers review my10 assessment materials, e.g. exam papers, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning	13 (11.8%)	13 (15.3%)	2 (2.4%)	50 (58.8%)	10 (11.8%)	3.44
In my department, peers review my7 publications, e.g. conference papers and journal articles, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning	13 (8.2%)	13 (15.3%)	33 (38.8%)	23 (27.1%)	9 (10.6%)	3.16
In my department, we use external14 reviewers to assess the quality of our teaching materials, e.g. teaching notes and course outlines, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning	14 (16.5%)	44 (51.8%)	14 (16.5%)	9 (10.6%)	3 (3.5%)	2.55
In my department, we use external14 reviewers to assess the quality of our assessment materials, e.g. exam papers, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning	14 (16.5%)	47 (55.3%)	16 (18.8%)	5 (5.9%)	3 (3.5%)	2.25
In my department, we use external14 reviewers to assess the quality of our publications, e.g. conference papers and journal articles, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning	14 (16.5%)	38 (44.7%)	21 (24.7%)	12 (14.1%)	0	2.36
In my department, we use co-teaching as1 a peer review method to enhance the quality of teaching and learning	1 (1.2%)	5 (5.9%)	21 (24.7%)	47 (55.3%)	11 (12.9%)	3.73

Table 1 portrays the rates regarding the item “In my department, peers review my teaching materials, e.g. teaching notes, course outlines, to enhance the quality of teaching and learning”, in which 67.1% of the respondents showed that they either agreed or strongly agreed that their teaching materials are peer-reviewed in their department as compared 31.8% of the respondents who either disagreed or strongly on the same. The relative fair rating is further supported by a relatively fair mean of 3.40, pointing towards fair acceptance of peer review of teaching materials.

On the item “in my department peers review my assessment materials, e.g. exam papers to enhance the quality of teaching and learning,” it is shown that the majority of the respondents, 70.6%, either agreed or strongly agreed that their assessment materials are peer-reviewed compared to 27.1% of the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed. The relatively fair rating was confirmed by a fair mean of 3.44 that reflecting a good majority of the respondents agreed that their assessment materials are peer-reviewed.

Regarding the item “in my department, peer review my publications, e.g. conference papers, journal articles to enhance the quality of teaching and learning,” it is shown that 37.7% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed compared to 23.5% of the respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This rating was confirmed by a mean value of 3.16,

which reflected that the respondents agreed.

On the item “in my department, we use external reviewers to assess the quality of our teaching materials, e.g. teaching notes, course outlines to enhance the quality of teaching and learning,” the table shows that 14.1% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed compared to 68.3% of the respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This low rating of the item was further supported by a low mean value of 2.55, which indicated that most of the respondents disagreed with the item.

As per the item “in my department we use external reviewers to quality of our assessment materials, e.g. exam papers to enhance the quality of teaching and learning,” it is shown that 9.4% of the respondents were either agreeing or strongly agreeing compared to 71.8% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. This was further supported by a low mean value of 2.25, which indicated that most respondents disagreed with the item.

Regarding the item “In my department, we use external reviewers to assess the quality of our publications, e.g. conference papers, journal articles to enhance the quality of teaching and learning”, it is indicated that 14.1% of the respondents agreed compared to 61.2% of the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed. This was further supported by a low mean value of 2.36, which portrayed that most respondents disagreed with the item.

On the item “in my department, we use co-teaching as a peer review method to enhance the quality of learning,” it is shown that 68.2% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed compared to 7.1% of the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed. The relatively high rating was confirmed by a mean value of 3.73, reflecting that most respondents agreed with the matter.

To get an overall picture of how the lecturers rated peer reviews, items in Table 1 were aggregated into one average index PR as an acronym for peer reviews.

Table 2 gives a summary of the results.

Model	Coefficients	Significance (p)
PR R ² =0.003 F= 0.210	0.026	0.648

Table 2 results show that peer reviews explained a 0.3% variation in quality teaching and learning (R² = 0.003). This means that 0.003% of the variation was accounted for peer review as the rest was affected by extraneous variables, other factors not considered in the study. The regression model was not good as F = 0.21, p = 0.648, p > 0.05. The null hypothesis was not rejected against the research hypothesis that peer review mechanisms significantly determine the quality of teaching and learning amongst institutions of higher learning in Somalia. This suggested that the peer review mechanism did not significantly determine the quality of teaching and learning. It also implied further that peer review mechanisms were not given due consideration to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

Discussion

The study's hypothesis stated that peer reviews significantly affect the quality of teaching and learning. The findings were contrary to that of Blackmore (2005), Thomas et al. (2014) and Bell and Mladenovic (2008) as reviewed in the literature and with this study's expectation. As Blackmore (2005) argues, peer reviews provide a best practice for peers in the same department to improve the quality of teaching and learning amongst themselves and bring insight into the perception of quality of teaching and learning.

The results showed that this university did not pay much attention to peer review. This might be caused by anxiety in some faculty members about their peers, apparently passing judgment on them since they regard peer review as a burden (Blackmore, 2005). This rhymes in line with Zeng's (2020) argument that teachers are reluctant to participate in peer review of teaching, as many lecturers feel that observing their teaching is a threat to their academic freedom. As results indicate, a factor that can lead to less focus being given to peer review is that it is not done seriously; as Iqbal (2014) argued, the reviewers rarely give feedback to the reviewed person, and when they do, they make comments were vague or focused on the positive hence feedback not contributing to professional growth in teaching. Faculty members' attitudes and perceptions of peer review are crucial for feasibility and implementation (Blackmore, 2005; Iqbal, 2014). Many lecturers resist peer review, fearing critique that makes them lose their positions. Lomas and Nicholls (2005) regard peer review of teaching as a complex process that requires careful and sensitive management. Peer review of teaching aims to enhance the quality of teaching and learning; therefore, it should be done for self-improvement and to establish a good practice to

enhance student learning (Lomas & Kinchin (2006).

Conclusion and Recommendation

In this study, the researchers sought to establish the effect of peer review on the quality of teaching and learning. The findings of the study revealed that peer review mechanisms were not regarded as an important factor in determining the quality of teaching and learning in Somalia's private institutions of higher learning. This makes it hard for the young and growing academicians to benefit from their peers to review each other which should have enhanced the quality of teaching and learning by imparting the transferable skills of the 21st century relevant to the demands and needs of the global competition. It is recommended that higher learning institutions' managers continuously encourage peer review among the academic staff and the academic staff to embrace the relevance of peer review to their career building.

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