

Institutional Human Resources Challenges and Quality Assurance in Universities in The Gambia

¹ Ms. Isatou Mbowe, ² Dr. Banna Sawaneh, ³ Dr. Gibriel Badjie

School of Business and Public Administration

University of The Gambia

Article Information		Abstract
Submission date	13 Desember 2023	Research aim: This study aims to evaluate the Institutional Human Resources Challenges and Quality Assurance in Universities in The Gambia.
Revised date	14 Februari 2024	Design/Method/Approach: The study adopts a descriptive survey design, utilizing a mixed method approach involving the use of questionnaires (self-administered, online surveys, Google Forms) and conducting interviews. The sampling technique employed is proportional to size with a sample size of 248.
Accepted date	15 Maret 2024	Research Finding: The research findings reveal that there is adequate human resource capacity for quality assurance in universities in The Gambia. However, the findings also indicate inadequate financial resources in these universities to support quality assurance procedures. Furthermore, the research findings provide insights into how problems with institutional human resources affect the university systems selected to ensure the quality of higher education. Additionally, the study uncovers challenges in managing human resources at universities, including managing employee relations, retaining qualified workers, providing strong leadership support, fostering a positive work environment, promoting diversity and inclusion, and empowering university leaders. Theoretical contribution/Originality: The theoretical contribution of this study is to strengthen understanding of how human resource issues impact university capacity in ensuring effective quality assurance. Practitioner/Policy implication: The practical and policy implications of this study underscore the need for greater attention to human resource issues in Gambian universities to enhance the effectiveness of quality assurance processes. Research limitation: Limitations of this study include sample size constraints, limitations in the methodology employed, and geographic constraints in research coverage. Keywords: Human Resources, Institutional, Quality Assurance

Introduction

The pivotal role of quality assurance in The Gambia's higher education, specifically at institutions like the University of The Gambia (UTG), International Opened University (IOU), and American International University, West Africa (AIUWA) cannot be undervalued for the fact the university education in The Gambia is still young. It underscores the multifaceted nature of quality assurance, addressing continuous improvement, stakeholder satisfaction, and human capital integration. The challenges faced by these institutions, such as budget constraints, human capital and capacity issues are highlighted, along with the evolving perspectives on quality in higher education. The narrative stresses the significance of strategic tools like SWOT analysis for quality maintenance and the importance of these measures in ensuring educational standards and effective resource allocation. Overall, the research issue centers on implementing quality

assurance in The Gambia's higher education, acknowledging its vital role in sustaining educational excellence and stakeholder confidence.

According to Materu and Peter (2007), anything that is appropriate for its purpose, complies with, or is in conformity with, general standards as set forth by an institution organization, a quality assurance body, and significant academic and professional communities, constitutes quality in higher education. In higher education institutions, management efficiency, governance, and leadership are key determinants of quality assurance (Materu & Peter, 2007). An institution's human resources, or its staff, directly affect the institution's quality assurance and quality control.

Human resources issues such as a diverse and female labor force, layoffs, changes in regulatory requirements, globalization of technology, and the start of change processes all have an impact on quality assurance in higher education institutions (Hashim & Hameed, 2012). Quality in any higher educational institution means that the institutions or academic community set a goal to always be the best, by always being at the top and achieving better outcomes than others (Parri, 2006). Better quality outcome of institutions can only be attained by better input of the institution.

Human resources are the workforce of an institution, and its management is the process of hiring, deploying and the management of the institution's workforce or the employees (Chai & Sutner, 2017).

A major human resource challenge affecting proper quality assurance in the higher educational sectors is the politicalizing of its appointments including the vice chancellors, communal consideration, favoritism, and corruption most especially in public universities (Singh, 2011).

. Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2017) found out from their study 'Institutional Constraints Affecting Quality Assurance Processes in Tanzania's Private Universities which used a descriptive survey design, four key institutional constraints affecting quality assurance in universities which are Insufficient funding for the implementation of quality assurance processes by the institutions, lack of qualified human resource capacity in quality assurance, lack of good institutional framework and proper policies on quality assurance, and poor academic leadership style and lack of familiarity among academic staff and the issues surrounding quality assurance. These findings indicate that university stakeholders are not fully involved in designing and implementing quality assurance related programs. Yang (2011) as cited in Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2007) identified that poor unsuccessful implementation of quality assurance policies a result of lack of knowledge, skills, value, and empowerment of stakeholders. As also cited by Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2007), Watty (2003) discovered that inadequate training on assessment and peer review to improve the academic staff skills has effects on the implementation of self-evaluation in private Universities.

Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2007) concluded that the first constrain that institutions face in trying to implement quality assurance policies is that the process affects the effectiveness of managing the quality of higher education provided, this is so because some of the quality assurance processes which are integral to the accreditation process and constraints participate to a mismatch between the expectations of universities making it difficult to regulate and supervise quality. Another conclusion drawn from this study is that the constraints facing these institution's quality assurance processes deeply affected the length at which private universities effectively conduct the quality assurance processes which can consequently undermine not only quality education but also the accreditation of the university. Finally, Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2007) concluded that, to remedy the challenges of quality assurance in universities, intervention

measures in both the university level and the body responsible for higher education in that country putting into consideration the required budget. Unavailability of financial resources, expert personnel and facilities can challenge quality assurance and the transformation of service delivery approach of a university when it is needed most, for that reason, the issue of quality assurance budgeting and financial support should be respected by universities to ensure there are materials and resources needed to implement quality assurance policies (Kilonza, Onkware, Oloo & Omare, 2021).

Empirical evidence from Sawaneh and Fatajo (2022) on the topic “Assessment of Monitoring and Evaluation Instruments for Quality Assurance at The Gambia College” which used a qualitative research design indicates that NAQAA requires The Gambia College to adopt monitoring the assessment quality which demands quality assurance practitioners to be in line with the assessment criteria, learner performance, standardization of assessment criteria, examination questions, moderation, and measuring of learner's achievement of learning outcomes and to attain success in this processes there is need for continuous evaluation and quality audit shortly before assessments periods such as question moderation. And even though Moderation procedures are attained to strengthen NAQAA's recommendations, it is not fully implemented to improve assessment quality, or it is not a measure of attainment of the key performance indicator.

Student learning processes such as curriculum-based monitoring tests, frequent evaluations, and formative assessments whose processes determine the extent of minimum skills and knowledge gained or transferred in a particular course. These were also indicators of quality assurance in Gambia college. The performance of each student in every question should be systematically analyzed to help figure out where improvement or emphasis is required. In other words, a continuous analysis of student performance is necessary in each course by each lecturer in each semester (Sawaneh & Fatajo, 2022).

According to the theory of limited supply, asserts that expensive and comprehensive schools are of great quality, while others assert that extremely selective universities, universities with a national reputation, and universities with outstanding resources are the universities with the best quality (Bogue, 1998). The theory of quality in higher education as supported by Bogue and Saunders (1992) claimed that quality should be in accordance with the mission and goals achievement of the institution and the quality should be monitored by accepted standards of accountability and integrity. Similarly, Diana Green asserted that an institution with high quality standards is an institution that clearly defined its mission or purpose, and such an institution is usually efficient and effective in achieving its goals.

Statement of Problem

This study on Institutional Human Resources Challenges and Quality Assurance in Universities in The Gambia aligns National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authorities in The Gambia agenda which of late discovered gaps related to quality issues in institutions of higher education in The Gambia.

The overarching concern is the inadequacy of quality assurance measures across departments, falling short of National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA) standards. The distinctions between public and private universities are acknowledged, emphasizing the financial advantages of private institutions, but it is underscored that all universities, regardless of their status, should adhere to a minimum acceptable quality standard. The challenges outlined encompass insufficient funding, poor infrastructure, lack of staff commitment to internal quality

assurance, and political involvement in administrative appointments, all of which contribute to hindrances in delivering quality education.

Furthermore, the specific challenges faced by UTG, including inadequate staff competence, lack of training and development initiatives, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, paint a detailed picture of the human resource issues affecting quality. The influence of political appointments on leadership dynamics and bureaucratic inefficiencies adds complexity to the quality assurance challenges. Similar difficulties are noted in AIUWA and IOU, with both institutions facing hurdles in human resource capacity, academic staff shortages, and dependency on non-resident staff for essential roles. Overall, the identified challenges underscore the urgent need for strategic planning and systemic improvements to enhance human resource management and ensure quality delivery across Gambian universities.

Research Objectives:

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Assess the human resource capacity of universities for quality assurance in The Gambia.
2. Determine the effect of institutional human resource challenges on quality assurance in the selected universities in The Gambia; and
3. Investigate the human resource challenges facing universities for quality assurance in The Gambia.

Method

The research investigates human resource challenges affecting quality assurance in universities in The Gambia employing using a quantitative approach. A descriptive survey research design is chosen, aiming to delve into the experiences of participants. The methodology incorporates self-administered online survey questionnaires and interviews, recognizing the diversity of staff literacy levels and roles, especially among auxiliary personnel. The study's focus is on universities in The Gambia, with specific attention given to the University of The Gambia, American International University West Africa (AIUWA), and the Internationally Opened University (IOU). The population consists of 701 staff members from these universities, and a proportionate distribution was applied to determine the sample sizes for each institution. A sample size of 248 was determined using Cochran's (1960) formula. A total of 248 questionnaires were distributed among the three universities.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study on objective one which is to assess the human resource capacity of universities for quality assurance in The Gambia revealed that there is adequate human resource capacity for quality assurance in universities in The Gambia. 42.2% of the respondents also revealed that there is not enough money in their universities to support the quality assurance procedures.

The same study by Gede, 2014 also revealed that the quality of education provided at higher learning institutions in Ethiopia directly depends on the pre-university preparation of students. The policies and processes of the MoE of Ethiopia, despite having a weak foundation in their academic studies, many students were enrolling at public institutions.

The findings of the study on objective two indicate that issues with institutional human resources may have an effect on university quality assurance. Several significant aspects point to potential difficulties:

The analysis showed that, 16.8% of the respondents were unsure of the vision, purpose, and

values of their university. This ambiguity makes it difficult to create the precise goals and objectives that are required for efficient quality assurance.

Also, the findings revealed that 43.4% of respondents expressed uncertainty about whether employees, students, and external stakeholders were adequately represented in university governance. Lack of representation can result in decision-making procedures that do not sufficiently consider the variety of viewpoints required for quality control.

Furthermore, 51.8% of respondents expressed uncertainty over staff awareness of quality assurance policies and the provision of sufficient resources to support university programs. Effective quality assurance techniques can't be implemented if there aren't enough resources or awareness.

In addition, 65.5% of respondents noted a lack of program coordinators and program alignment with institutional goals and vision. It becomes difficult to guarantee consistent and high-quality program delivery without sufficient coordination and alignment.

The analysis further showed that, 54.4% of respondents expressed uncertainty regarding student and alumni participation in curriculum review as well as whether teaching and learning strategies considered the needs and difficulties of all students. Inadequate student engagement and disregard for different learning styles can impact the quality of education.

Therefore, the lack of clarity, representation, awareness, resources, coordination, and student involvement, among other human resource issues, can collectively obstruct the efficient implementation of quality assurance processes in universities.

In comparison, a study by (Kilonza, Onkware, Oloo & Omare, 2021) discusses the reliance on individual efforts rather than university management for innovating pedagogy in higher education.

The findings of the study on objective three revealed that 28.3% of respondents weren't sure if their university had a plan in place to keep qualified staff employees, suggesting a possible difficulty in doing so. Many respondents (35.8%) expressed doubts about their university's ability to provide strong leadership that supports quality assurance, raising the possibility of a struggle in assuring such support, sizable percentage of respondents (47.8%) weren't sure whether the general working environment at their university fosters an environment for raising the caliber of instruction and learning.

Also, a substantial proportion (28.3%) of respondents were unsure whether their university had a plan in place to keep skilled staff employees, indicating a potential challenge, many respondents (35.8%) indicated skepticism about their university's capacity to offer strong leadership that supports quality assurance, suggesting that securing such support may prove challenging.

Moreover, a substantial portion of respondents (47.8%) were unsure of whether their university's overall working environment creates a culture that encourages enhancing the standard of instruction and learning. Many respondents (28.8%) expressed uncertainty about whether their university encourages diversity, equity, and inclusion, suggesting a possible difficulty in creating a varied and inclusive atmosphere within the university community. A sizable portion (38.5%) of respondents weren't sure whether their university's human resource department gave leaders the information, tools, and assistance they needed to succeed, indicating a potential difficulty in effectively empowering and supporting university leaders.

And finally, many respondents (51.3%) didn't know whether their human resources department taught leaders to listen more than they spoke, which suggests that building strong communication and listening skills among university executives may be difficult. And a sizable

portion (39.8%) of respondents were unsure of whether or not their university effectively manages employee relationships to encourage good coexistence in the workplace, highlighting a potential challenge in fostering wholesome relationships and a peaceful workplace.

These issues with human resources add up to significant barriers that Gambian institutions may have in assuring the quality assurance of their educational programs. A similar study by Gede, 2014 on Quality assurance policy in Higher Education showed that regarding to leadership commitment to quality learning in the universities, there existed limited professional knowledge and skills as to what it takes to integrate quality assurance systems in the institutional culture. The lack of vision and enthusiasm to do the groundwork on the part of the leadership seemed to have weakened efforts to put in place functional institutional quality assurance systems. The low participation of students and academic staff in quality assurance affairs was regarded as the main weakness of the HEIs under study. The teachers had a pivotal role to play in the development and implementation of QA.

A similar study was conducted in Kenya by Kagodu and Marwa (2017) and a comparison of that study to this one revealed the following:

According to the findings from objective one of this study carried out in The Gambia, universities have sufficient human resource capacity for quality assurance. However, issues with insufficient finance, a lack of physical infrastructure, and uneven access to resources and support were brought up. To improve these institutions' overall capacity for quality assurance, additional measures are recommended.

Table 1. Result Test

Assessment of the Human Resources Capacity of Universities in The Gambia for Quality Assurance

Assertions	I don't Know	No	Yes	Descriptive Statistics N=226	
	f and (%)	f and (%)	f and (%)	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
Does your university have the human resource capacity in quality assurance issues?	58 (25.7)	55 (24.3)	113 (50)	2.24	0.84
Does your university have adequate funding of quality assurance processes?	74 (32.7)	100 (44.2)	52 (23)	1.90	0.74
Does your institution have sufficient lecture and office spaces for courses and programs?	174 (77)	4 (1.8)	48 (21.2)	1.44	0.82
Do lecture halls in your university have internet access and projectors and are well maintained and secured to allow for power point presentation	143 (63.3)	10 (4.4)	73 (32.3)	1.69	0.93
Does your university have adequate laboratory facilities?	182 (80.5)	12 (5.3)	32 (14.2)	75.33	69.15
Do academic and administrative staff have access to computer resources and the internet?	27 (11.9)	11 (4.9)	188 (83.3)	1.34	0.71
Do students have access to electronic library resources to support teaching and learning?	62 (27.4)	55 (24.3)	109 (48.2)	2.71	0.69
Does your facility department provide you with the right services to ease your work at your university?	95 (42)	24 (10.6)	107 (47.3)	2.21	0.85
Does your university provide training to capacitate its employees on their different roles?	99 (43.8)	40 (17.7)	87 (38.5)	2.05	0.95
Does your university usually experience unnecessary absenteeism from employees which might negatively affect the labor turnover?	41 (24.6)	62 (37.1)	32 (19.2)	1.95	1.050

Source: Field Survey (2023)

NB: f =Frequency; %=Percentage

Conclusion

The findings of the study on objective one showed that while the universities in the Gambia have some capacity in terms of human resources for quality assurance, there are also areas of concern, such as inadequate funding, a lack of adequate physical infrastructure, and varying degrees of access to resources and support. To increase the total quality assurance capability in these colleges, additional steps might be required.

The result of study on objective two showed that the lack of clarity, representation, awareness, resources, coordination, and student involvement, among other human resource issues, can collectively obstruct the efficient implementation of quality assurance processes in universities. Finally, the result of the study on objective three showed that the lack of good employee retention strategy, leadership, working conditions, financial resources, staff motivation, employee involvement in decision making, human resource department support, leadership training for active listening, employee relationship management and diversity, equity and inclusion in these selected universities can create huge barriers for these institutional for quality assurance.

The implications of these conclusions are: Gambian universities can overcome barriers, enhance quality assurance practices, and ultimately provide a higher quality education to their students. It requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including university leadership, faculty, staff, students, and external partners, to create a culture of continuous improvement and excellence.

In summary, the study's outcomes affirm the initial hypothesis that human resource issues significantly impact the provision of quality assurance in Gambian Universities. These issues have a detrimental effect on both the delivery of education and the overall quality assurance processes. The findings underscore that a range of challenges related to human resources collectively impede the universities' capacity to ensure effective quality assurance. The study, therefore, underscores the intricate interplay between human resource challenges and their extensive ramifications for quality assurance and employee satisfaction within Gambian universities. Addressing these challenges through targeted strategies, such as improving resource allocation, enhancing communication, promoting leadership development, and fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment, is imperative for enhancing the quality of education and organizational effectiveness.

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