

Quality Assurance and Internationalization in a Private University College

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Abstract

This study examined quality assurance practice and internationalization in a private university College (Wisconsin International University College, WIUC) with the intention of improving teaching and learning especially for international students. A descriptive design of cross-sectional nature was used. It explored from the views of respondents important issues that constitute learning satisfaction and ways to enhance effective teaching and learning especially for students. One hundred (100) respondents who are international students completed the questionnaire. Students viewed external and internal audits by the National Accreditation Board (NAB) and Quality Assurance and Institutional Relations Unit (QAIRU) of the WIUC respectively as essential to enhance quality. On student's evaluation of lecturers, respondents agreed that appropriate feedback following evaluation is essential to facilitate student participation in future events. To assure quality and improve teaching and learning in the University College, respondents agreed that full engagement of students through the amount of time and effort put into teaching, learning and assessment as well as the commitment of more institutional resources, curricula and other learning opportunities are important to promote experiences that lead to more learning, satisfaction and successful graduation.

Key Words: Quality assurance, accreditation, institutional, assessment, satisfaction

1.0 Background

The paper examined the implication of internationalization for quality in the Wisconsin International University College in Ghana. According to Oyewole, (2009), internationalization has the potential for improving the quality of curriculum, students, programmes, staff and facilities in Higher Education systems. However, in some regions of Africa, where there are no enforcement of the appropriate regulatory mechanisms, internationalization can become a threat to the quality of Higher Education as a result of the activities of dubious international providers, dubious learners and commercial and internet degree mills.

Internationalization has been defined as the conscious effort to integrate and infuse international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the ethos and outcomes of postsecondary education. It must involve active and responsible engagement of the academic community in global networks and partnerships. It has been viewed in economics as a process of increasing involvement of enterprises in international markets. Whereas quality assurance has been defined as systems, procedures, resources and information devoted to maintaining and improving standard and quality. It covers teaching, learning, research opportunities and student support services. Quality assurance and internationalization are two worlds apart. While the former concerns with the quality assurance of internationalization, the latter focuses on the internationalization of quality assurance.

A study by Ogachi, (2009) in East Africa revealed that internationalization of higher education in this region raises various questions related to its magnitude and intensity, its capacity to address issues of access, equity and regional research and developmental needs. Internationalization and regionalization as processes in higher education can synergize each other but can also limit the success of the other depending on their focus. In East Africa as Ogachi shows, internationalization has mainly involved new forms of provision of higher education and not necessarily relevant content. He had also pointed out to challenges resulting from internationalization of higher education to regional quality assurance and knowledge production in east Africa.

Ghana like other States in the West Region sub-Region has experienced great expansion in higher education in the last decade in number of institutions and enrollment rates due to reasons such as:

- Population growth and increases in youth population of the school going age
- Rise in social demand for higher education from internal and external sources (local and international students)
- Reforms initiatives and explicit policy changes undertaken by governments

Enrollments in higher education has increased with most of institutions including the WIUC recording increased female enrollments with Gender Parity Index equating to 1 on average or slightly above one. The number of universities has more than doubled with a considerable inclusion of private institutions.

With the increases in numbers of institutions and enrollments have come challenges on the part of institutions to provide adequate student support systems that are strong and targeted for various special needs of international

students. Also quality assurance and enhancement systems at institutional levels are still rudimentary and a quality culture in which annual feedback, evaluation and monitored actions and plans are the norms have not yet taken hold. Above observations call for action in the following dimensions:

- Revisitation of academic programmes and curricular to shape up learning outcomes in a way that reflects international requirements with greater emphasis on higher cognitive skills such as evaluation, critical analysis and synthesis
- Pro-active staff training and development for teaching and learning
- Networking and collaborations among institutions and academicians to help establish the required external benchmarks for improvement

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Quality Assurance and Higher Education

Five broad approaches to quality have been identified in relation to higher education. These are quality as exceptional, quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money and quality as transformation (Harvey 1997). Watty (2003), noted that the dimension of quality as perfection cannot be applicable since Higher Education does not aim to produce defect-free graduates. Quality assurance in higher education according to (CHEA, 2003) has generally been used in reference to planned and systematic review process of an Institution or programme to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced.

The purpose of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education are to ensure good education is being offered to equip students to manage their own learning and development throughout their lives to provide students with knowledge and skills that are relevant to the current job market locally, nationally and internationally and to ensure that internationally recognized academic standards are achieved (Tagoe, 2008). Writers on quality in higher education has rallied around a classic triangle of principal modes (state regulation, professional self-regulation and market forces) for directing behaviour in academic institutions (Clark, 1983; Michael, 2001; Becket & Brookes, 2008).

2.2 Quality Assurance Model Employed in Ghana's Higher Education

According to Okae-Adjei, (2012) Ghana employs a multiplicity of quality assurance models, command and control model, the professional self-regulatory model and the market model with the command and control model seemingly playing a more important role. The activities of Tertiary institutions in Ghana are regulated by governmental bodies to ensure quality. These include the National Accreditation Board (NAB) and the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE).

2.3 Responsibilities of NAB

The responsibilities of NAB include: Accrediting both public and private tertiary Institutions as regards the contents and standards of their programmes. Also determining the programmes and requirements for the proper operation of an institution and the maintenance of acceptable levels of academic or professional standards in the Institution in consultation with that Institution as well as determine the equivalences of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications awarded by institutions in the country of elsewhere (NAB Act, Act 744, 2007). The NAB uses the threshold model which seeks to identify the inputs or threshold standards required before offering accreditation to programmes and institutions.

2.4 Responsibilities of the NCTE

The NCTE serves as the coordinator of tertiary institutions in terms of budget, finance and salary negotiations, development of norms and standards to ensure transparency and accountability to the State. Its primary objective is to advice the Minister of Education on all matters relating to tertiary education (NCTE Act, Act 454, 1993).

2.5 Internal Quality Assurance Practices at WIUC

The Wisconsin International University College has an admission brochure that spells out the programmes of study and admissions requirement for each programme. The admission requirements stay in tandem to the standards set by NAB. Admissions committee made of up members of the various faculties and departments is set up to ensure that only students who meet minimum requirements and above of the various programmes are admitted into the university college. The committee meets more often during admissions period to select qualified applicants. Further the admissions unit organizes courses and entrance examinations to screen mature students before admissions.

The QAIRU collaborates with the Admissions Committee together with member of the Academic Board to undertake post admissions audits to make certain that only qualified applicants are admitted. The post-admission audits have helped to assure quality in the admission process by ensuring that only qualified applicants receive admissions.

2.6 Teaching and Learning Processes at WIUC

Wisconsin International University College has in superb buildings, facilities and equipment to promote effective teaching and learning in the university college. There are sufficient classrooms, library, laboratories, internet and audio-visual equipments for teaching and learning as required by NAB.

The QAIRU monitors and reports to management any problems arising so that appropriate actions may be taken. The unit works to ensure that scarce resources are utilized efficiently. The National Accreditation Board has as standard, 15 – 21 contact hours for student total load per week. Accordingly, WIUC management works to ensure that appointments and promotion policies meet the necessary requirements. Newly recruited staff goes through formal interview before they are appointed or promoted. For lectureship, it is a strict requirement that only applicants with a sufficient research training (minimum of research oriented Masters Degree/Mphil) are recruited. As a policy directive, more PhDs have been recruited to beef up the strength of the academic staff.

All recruited lecturers serve one year probationary period before being confirmed.

Students assess lecturers at the end of every semester. Assessment is based on items such as the provision of course outlines with references, adequate coverage of course content, the use of appropriate teaching methods and lecturer appearance among other indicators. These exercises are used to identify performing and non-performing lecturers for promotions and dismissal respectively.

The Academic Affairs has made provision for online admissions via the university college's website to Ghana admissions managed by the IT Consortium. Also the Online Students Information System (OSIS) processes records and generates forms for admissions, entry of examination results through to graduation. Students are able to visit their portals to view their course registration, results and bio-data among others. The Academic Affairs unit produces brochures and handbooks for distribution to students during orientation.

All examinations questions generated in the University College are moderated by external examiners from the affiliated universities of Ghana and Cape Coast. Examination conduction processes are made efficient by the proper distribution of students and invigilators into examination halls during end of semester examinations. Furthermore the use of student photo identity sheets in the examination rooms confirms students' identity and their presence in the examinations. The Academic affairs unit ensures that the submission and processing of records at mentor universities for the purpose of registration and graduation are done right and expediently.

2.7 Internationalization at WIUC

Jowi (2009) argues that, Africa, and other regions and countries of the world, approaches internationalization in a way that reflects its history, culture and context consistent with its current needs, priorities and circumstances. While there are areas not similar between Africa and other world regions, relating to rationales, risks, challenges and even opportunities, internationalization is a worldwide phenomenon that may require increased regional and international cooperation accompanied with workable policies, strategies and ethical standards.

The problems facing students in the future cut across systems, institutions, states, and nations and requiring global thinking and the ability to work with a diversity of individuals. Thus College graduates entering the workforce need not only multidisciplinary skills, but the intercultural skills to work on these global issues.

The demands of the modern global business thus require students to be well rounded and grounded in the affairs of the global business world.

To meet the challenge, ongoing institutional and programme changes are necessary in curricula, partnerships and faculty competencies. WIUC's efforts at internationalizing its curriculum serve as a catalyst for transforming coursework and curricular activities and help faculty to infuse global knowledge, awareness, and cross-cultural competence in the educational experience at WIUC. WIUC's internationalization efforts offer strategies and practices that help build communities of practice among students, faculty members, deans and related international educators.

The WIUC has partnered with the Bordeaux School of Management (Bordeaux Ecole de Management – BEM), Dakar in Senegal. BEM is an internationally recognized in the field of high-level training in management and accredited by three highly recognized institutions, namely; Association of Advanced Collegiate School of Business (AACSB), European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), and Association of MBA's (AMBA). BEM-Dakar is an affiliate of BEM Bordeaux and Paris all in France. The partnerships with BEM-Dakar help students who participate in the international exchanges well rounded and get adequately prepared for the job market. Students improve their language proficiency in French (Ghanaian students visiting Senegal) and English (Senegalese students visiting Ghana).

The WIUC has also partnered Azuza Pacific University (APU) of USA to run a Master of Arts Programme in Global Leadership. Programme is run on sandwich basis with faculty provided by APU. Other international engagements and partnerships had involved:

- ABE-UK Representatives Conference
- British/Canadian International Education –UK Universities fair
- Membership to the AAU
- The Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters

Thus internationalization effort at WIUC has focused on four areas:

- Pursuing pedagogical and programmatic solutions to a rapidly changing global business environment.
- Pursuing corporate partnerships with business schools.
- Taking into consideration accreditation challenges when developing international partnerships.
- Marketing our programmes abroad and recruiting students from other countries (mostly sister African Countries; Table 1 & Table 2)

2.8 Recruiting students from Abroad

At the end of the 2010/2011 academic year 69% of student population was made up of Ghanaian nationals and 31% were international students spread among 17 nationalities (Table 1 & Table 2). The university is seriously working towards a 50: 50 ratio of Ghanaians to non-Ghanaians by actively:

- Marketing our programmes abroad and recruiting students from other countries
- Building partnerships with world class institutions in running graduate and other innovative programmes

3.0 Methodology

The study employed a descriptive design of cross-sectional nature. It explored from the views of respondents important issues that constitute learning satisfaction and ways to enhance effective teaching and learning especially for international students. The study is described as cross sectional because the relevant data was collected only at a point in time when each respondent was asked to complete the questionnaire. The survey was conducted in March and June of 2012.

3.1 Population of the study

Population for the study comprised international students from the seventeen African countries who were studying at the WIUC at the time of the study. The population size approximates 853. A sample size of 125 international students (representing 15% of the population) was studied. One hundred and twenty-five questionnaires were administered to these students of whom 75 were from the Anglophone block and 50 from the Francophone block.

3.2 Questionnaire Development

Questionnaire was the main data collection instrument. Likert-type scale with five levels ranging from strongly agree (allotted 5 points), agree (4 points), uncertain (3 points), disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1point) were used to examine respondents perception on listed. It comprised four sections:

- Demographics
- Internal and external audits are necessary for quality teaching and learning
- Effectiveness of methods for evaluating lecturers/courses
- Effective ways to assure quality and improve teaching and learning

3.3 Validation of Instruments

The instruments for the study was assessed for content and construct validity (Emory, 1985). Each item of the instrument was carefully analyzed and checked to ensure that it conveyed the necessary message. The instruments were divided to four sections to ensure that the instruments provided adequate coverage of the topic under study

3.4 Data Entry and Analysis

Data was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data entry was cleaned up involving editing, coding and tabulation to detect anomalies in the responses and assign specific numerical values to responses. Data entered was analyzed and outputs printed for further scrutiny. Descriptive Statistics (frequencies and percentages) used to present results.

4.0 Results and discussion

4.1 Internal and External Audits

Table 3 shows results for some internal and external audits that students consider necessary for quality teaching and learning in private universities. Fifty-five percent (55%) of respondents agreed (23% disagree and 22% uncertain) that internal quality assurance is relevant for effective teaching and learning and 64% of respondents agreed (17% disagree and 19% uncertain) that without effective internal quality assurance, there cannot be quality in higher education. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of respondents also agreed (14% disagree and 27% uncertain) that external quality assurance is relevant for effective teaching and learning and 63% agreed (14% disagree and 22% uncertain) that without effective external quality assurance, there cannot be quality. To ensure that the internal and external quality audit processes generate meaningful and evidence based outcomes, the following steps must be followed:

1. Ethical conduct by showing integrity, confidentiality and discretion;
2. Obligation to report truthfully and accurately;
3. Application of diligence and fair judgement in auditing,
4. Independence of the activity being audited and freedom from bias or conflict of interest.
5. Maintaining objective state of mind and ensure that the audit findings and conclusions are based only on the audit evidence.
6. Audit evidence must be verifiable and based on samples of information available

4.2 Evaluating Lecturers and Courses

Excellence in criteria for the evaluation of lecturers and courses in the private university college should take into consideration the procedures that are used by students. Moses (1985) suggests that the evaluation of the competency of lecturers should include the measurement of competence in the relevant subject matter; communication skills; commitment to facilitating students learning; and, the degree of concern for individual students which makes students evaluation of lecturers and courses the best approach. Marsh (1988) approved students rating and argued that it is a source of diagnostic feedback to faculty about the effectiveness of their teaching; it is a measure of teaching effectiveness to be used in tenure/promotion decisions, and it serves as a source of information for students to use in the selection of courses/instructors.

The fact that student rating provides feedback on teaching effectiveness means that it is a valid source of data for offering useful advice to staff on how to improve their teaching. It therefore serves both as an assessment and advisory roles. In today's terms evaluation show how students respond to what approach they believe are most effective. Table 4 reveals that, 57% of respondents agreed (25% disagree and 18% uncertain) that manual methods of evaluation were effective as against 64% who agreed (20% disagree and 16% uncertain) that electronic methods of evaluation are effective. Respondents were not definite on as to whether they would prefer methods that protects their identity better with 36% agreeing, 26% disagreeing and 38% uncertain about any such method. Nearly 70% of respondents agree (21% disagree and 20% uncertain) that, their roles in evaluating lecturers and courses are important in providing effective feedback that will ensured their continual and effective participation in teaching and learning in the University College (Table 4).

4.3 Enhancing Quality of Teaching and Learning

The important elements of students learning experience include the curriculum; that is to say its goals, structure, expected learning outcomes and types of assessment to be employed. Also important is the active promotion and

support of effective learning through deployment of varied types of teaching and learning methods, provision of student support services, provision of facilities such as library and IT infrastructure, involving students in monitoring and enhancing the university college's educational provision and relevant training and development activities for staff and students.

There are various ways to interpret what precisely constitutes acceptable quality: It could mean the University College's provision should be "a match for purpose" and that it should make effective use of resources. It should also offer its students and their parents' value for money. While it is good to ensure that quality is maintained in the academic environment, it is increasingly becoming important to promote improvement of quality, not just to ensure that quality is maintained. The shift in emphasis from quality assurance to quality enhancement is taking deliberate steps to bring about continual improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience to students. Examining how important these things are to students, results from Table 5 shows that 70% of respondents agree (11% disagree and 18% are uncertain) that full engagement of students through the amount of time and effort put into teaching, learning and assessments will enhance quality the University College. Seventy-two (72%) agree (11% disagree and 17% are uncertain) that effective allocation and use of the University College's resources are essential to enhance continual quality improvement. Sixty-six (66%) of respondents agree (15% disagree and 19% are uncertain) that curricula and other learning opportunities should promote experiences that help students' to learn. A lot more students (86%) agreed (7% disagree and 6% uncertain) that student-centered learning interactions and focus on learning outcomes will enhance continual improvement in teaching and learning experiences of students in the university college (Table 5).

5.0 Conclusions

There was agreement among students that the existing internal and external audits are necessary for quality teaching and learning. It was also shown that, whether a manual method or an electronic method is used in evaluation was not a major concern for students. What was important to them was that of an effective feedback following evaluation to facilitate their participation in future evaluation efforts. Students are saying that after their evaluation of courses and lecturers, they expect appropriate feedback on improvements to be made to ensure their commitment to participate in future evaluation efforts.

On effective ways to enhance quality and improve teaching and learning, there was the general consensus that, student-centred learning interactions and focus on learning outcomes will enhance continual improvement in teaching and learning experiences of students in the university college. They also suggest full engagement of students through the amount of time and effort put into teaching, learning and assessment of students and the commitment of more institutional resources, curricula and other learning opportunities to promote experiences that leads to better learning, persistence, satisfaction and successful graduation.

I would like emphasize in this conclusion that increased use of technology to upgrade students skills and capabilities will increase students' chances for participation in teaching and learning in addition to developing their evaluation and critical analysis skills. That, academic programmes and curricular must be revisited so that intended learning outcomes would reflect international requirements with greater emphasis on higher cognitive skills such as evaluation, critical analysis and synthesis.

Adopting a pro-active stance to staff training and development for teaching, learning and assessment will aid the internalization effort and quality assurance. Finally, networking and collaborations among institutions and academics to help establish needed external benchmarks will go a long way to promoting internationalization and quality assurance efforts at the University College.

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Table 1. WIUC students from the Francophone block in Africa

NATIONALITY	FEMALE	MALE	GRAND TOTAL
Algeria	11	6	17
Benin	3	1	4
Burkina Faso	4	2	6
Togo	11	11	22
Central African Republic	1	0	1
Congo (DAR)	18	4	22
Egypt	1	0	1
Equitorial Guinea	1	0	1
Gabon	69	52	121
Guinea	0	3	3
Ivory Coast	27	13	40
Mali	9	4	13
Total	157	98	251

Table 2. WIUC students from the Anglophone block in Africa

NATIONALITY	FEMALE	MALE	GRAND TOTAL
Ghana	939	961	1900
Liberia	2	9	11
Nigeria	230	351	581
Sierra Leone	2	3	5
Cameroun (English)	2	2	4
Total	1175	1326	2501

Table 3. Some internal and external audits necessary for quality teaching and learning

INDICATORS	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	UNCERTAIN (%)
IQA is relevant for effective teaching and learning	55.2	22.4	21.6
Without effective IQA criteria there cannot be quality	64.0	16.8	19.2
EQA is relevant for effective teaching and learning	59.2	13.8	27.0
Without effective EQA criteria there cannot be quality	63.2	14.4	22.4

Table 4. Effectiveness of methods for evaluating lecturers and courses

INDICATORS	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	UNCERTAIN (%)
Manual methods are effective to use in evaluation	56.8	24.8	18.4
Electronic methods are effective to use in evaluation	64.0	20.0	16.0
I would prefer methods that protects my identity better	36.8	25.6	37.6
Effective feedback will enhance future participation	69.0	21.0	20.0

Table 5. Effective ways to enhance quality and improve teaching and learning

INDICATORS	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	UNCERTAIN (%)
Full engagement of students through the amount of time and effort put into teaching, learning and assessments.	70.4	11.2	18.4
Allocation of more institutional resources	72.0	11.2	16.8
Curricula and other learning opportunities should promote experiences that help students to learn	65.6	15.2	19.2
Student-centered learning interactions and focus on learning outcomes	86.4	7.2	6.4