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Examining the Relationships between Quality Assurance, Training Need and Choice of Study Destination: A Study of Nigerian Students in UUM

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ABSTRACT

Several studies identified quality of education as a major criteria influencing international student's choice of study destination. But only recently has it seems to have gain a huge momentum by emerging as a theme which involves empirical studies. However, despite such momentum previous studies do not provide sufficient evidence linking quality assurance and international student's choice of study destination. This paper therefore presents a study of international student's perception of higher education quality assurance practices, as well as how it affects their choice of study destination. The paper tries to examine how training needs play a role in influencing such choice also. The paper through descriptive analysis identified six dimensions of quality assurance in education: "Tangibles" "competence" "attitude contends," "delivery," and "reliability" as well as three dimensions of training needs such "occupational" "organizational" and "individual" needs. Hence it present the inter-relationship between quality assurance, training needs and choice of study destination using the above nine dimension; it concludes with Implications and recommendations to stimulate further studies on study destination choice by the international students from other countries especially from the Arabian and the middle-east.

Keywords: Choice of Study Destination, International Students, Quality Assurance

JEL Classifications: M00

1. INTRODUCTION

It is believed generally that higher education is a fundamental and vital ingredient for the establishment of a knowledge-based economy and the development of human resource all over the world (Okojie, 2013; Yusoff and Khan, 2013). The above conception is informed by the fact that skills and expertise constitute the most significant tools for economic development which can be acquire through training, learning and knowledge accumulation, hence educational institution stand out as the most effective instrument for human capital development in the contemporary time (Adeniji, 2002).

To this end, the importance of education in human resources development cannot be over-emphasize, because as rightly observed by Rao (2003). Training plays a significant role both

at organizational and individual levels, this is because, and the consensus among human resource experts is that both organization and individuals should develop simultaneously for their survival and attainment of the collective goals (Onasanya, 2005). Similarly, Okebukola, (2012), assert that the most important factor in determining the rate of development in a given state is the proportion of eligible population who have access to quality education as well as the vibrancy and effectiveness of the training institutions available.

Quality assurance processes in higher education have therefore in the past couples of decades continued to gain an increasing popularity in the European and American societies (Qureshi et al., 2014). This can largely be attributed to the of importance attached to well-educated workforce as an essential factor for higher productivity

and the maintenance of a competitive edge in the global market. This invariably resulted to an increase government attention through public expenditure, which is geared toward addressing the quality issues in higher education (Khan et al., 2014) as well as making the university education more accessible to all citizens, especially the disadvantaged and the under-represented groups (Koslowski, 2006; Yusoff, et al., 2013).

The above development has invariably resulted to an increasing demand for greater accountability by educational institutions as well as output measurement through quality assurance processes (Harvey, 2005; Harvey and Knight, 1996; Koslowski, 2006; Bhatti, 2014). Quality assurance involves the process by which standards are maintained in services and products by either inspection or testing of samples. Okebukola (2010) maintains that the quality assurance represents a very big umbrella concept which covers host of practices which are designed to improve the quality of services in higher educational institutions. In the same vein, Ayodele (2007) asserted that the quality assurance signifies the standard of instructional materials available, the school environment, equipment, curriculum, quality of instructional delivery and instructor qualification.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENTS

It is an established fact that education has become insufficient to meet up with the challenges of the developing world not only in Nigeria but in the whole world as well. The demand for higher education has, thus, become an imperative and is quickly raising geometrically (Fabiya and Oladipo, 2008). Globally there is a consensus on the fact that for economic and social development to be achieved there is a need for acceleration in, and application of knowledge. The World Bank/UNICEF (1996) reported that education holistically, and university education specifically, is a key to the development of knowledge economy and society in all nations of the world. The report recognized that the potential of higher education system in the emerging nations to meet up with this obligation is often than not slow-down by the long standing issues of funds, effectiveness, value, quality and administration. These difficulties are connected to the increasing role plays by knowledge in economic development, rapid changes in Information and Communications Technology and the globalization of exchange and labor markets.

The report of the Gender Budgeting Initiative (2003) highlights the significance of access to quality education as both a fundamental need (one which is important to the satisfaction of an individual needs) as well as a strategic need (that which will yield access to other opportunities, for example, health, employment and political awareness). It further buttress the fact that access to quality education by all individuals regardless of class or sex is an important component of development, as education serves to sustain democracy and consolidate peace. In this perspective, the acquisition of education, most particularly university education, is basically essential and useful to man and to the society as a whole.

Furthermore, Ene (2004) asserted that there is by all accounts a general recognition among Nigerians that only a university degree

can guarantee a decent future. As observed by him, the needs for university education have reached a remarkable abnormal state so that double the current number of universities in the nation, will be required to satisfy this need.

However, government attempt to revamp the enrollment and enhance educational quality are seriously hampered by the increasing shortage of qualified academic staff. Somewhere around 1999 and 2011, the number of academic staff declined by 12% even as enrollment stretched by 13%. Long-term brain drain combine with deficient yield from national postgraduate programme amid the unprecedented increase in the enrollments, has left the federal university system with only 48% of its staffing capacity filled (Oladipo et al., 2013). The above scenarios significantly depict the challenges of the university education, which resulted, to decline both in quantity of manpower and quality of the skills and expertise.

Coincidentally the last two decades witness the influx of Nigerian post-graduate students into Malaysian institutions where in university Utara Malaysia for instance 344 Nigerian students are currently enrolled.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to assess the relationship between the education quality, the training needs and the decision to study in Malaysia by the Nigerian post-graduate students. In specific terms the study has the following objectives:

1. To ascertain the relationship between the training needs of the Nigerian post-graduate students and their decision to study in Malaysia.
2. To find out whether the quality of the universities has influence the decision of Nigerian post-graduate students to study in Malaysia.
3. To find out the extent to which the post-graduate students employers are involve in the choice of Malaysian universities for study.
4. To examine the relationship between the perceived quality of Malaysian universities and the training needs satisfaction of the prospective students.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. Quality Assurance

Quality assurance has been subjected to several interpretations by different scholars the term is often applied in a blurred and vague manner. For instance from the managerial point of view “working on quality,” may simply involve engaging in activities which are geared toward improving the organizational performance. Quality is directly related to continue learning how to do something in a better and more effective way (Rasli et al., 2014). It also connotes identifying an area in organization, which requires change to ensure that customers’ needs and expectation are met. Two types of “quality” exist as follows: Quality of the process and quality of design.

Quality assurance depicts a managerial tool “which seek to ensure that service or product has confidently satisfy a given

requirements for quality and for usage through systematic and planned actions.” So Quality Assurance programme involve “the totality of actions which are geared toward realizing such required standard” (ISO, 1994).

According to Okebukola (2008) quality assurance covers “the systems, approaches, strategies, and resources allocated by an organization in order to satisfy itself that the requirements for quality and standards are satisfactorily met.” Similarly, Oladosu (2012) views it as “the process of continuously sustaining and improving standards through monitoring quality and ensuring they are improving upon.” He further maintains that quality assurance connotes the constant process of assessing, maintaining, improving and evaluating quality by an organization, agency or higher education system. Quality assurance is therefore devised by an institution to improve and safeguard the quality of its input, process, output and outcomes (Oyebode et al., 2008).

The important yardstick of ensuring quality education center around developing and equipping the teachers by establishing a minimum standards of qualification, expected educational achievement of students and the adoption of a more ruthless managerial approach for the educational sector in order to facilitate a more vibrant operating procedures and policies which can serve as well documented guide for quality control. Such approach could eventually develop into a full-pledge management system practice by higher education institutions globally.

4.2. Training Needs

A training need can be seen as an organizational shortage in skills and expertise which requires improvement through training and development in order to eliminate or reduce any gap such shortages might have created in the organization. Training needs constitutes a serious managerial challenge in an organization in the sense that it hinders the organizational drive to objectives as well as preventing employees from fulfilling their assigned tasks and responsibilities. Training needs may be as a result of a insufficient knowledge, skills, or expertise, or due to re-organization of the entire or part of the process in the workplace (Holden, 2002).

Training needs covers all the areas and gaps existing in the organizational or related to its employees abilities, skills and knowledge’s, which demand accomplishment through training and education. In a strict sense of word training need showcase the discrepancies that exist between the job requirements and the skills and expertise possess by employees or by department (Pischke, 2001).

Training needs help the organization to perform effectively by identifying the specific areas or skills at the organizational, departmental or the employee disposals that need to be improved upon. Training Needs may arise due to one or some of the following factors:

- Introduction of new equipment/technology or re-locations
- Business process re-engineering
- Changes in laws/regulations
- Layoffs/transfers/new hires, staffing changes/promotions
- Re-organization or process improvements
- Problems in production/safety.

4.3. Training Needs Analysis

Training needs analysis is a systematic process which is geared toward ensuring that a giving training programme is in line with the existing needs, is link with the organizational objectives, and is conducted in an efficient and effective manner. This analysis involves adopting techniques such as monitoring/observation, questionnaires and interviews in order to assess the current organizational performance with the view to identifying the level and type of training required and devising the best way it can be provided. Such analysis also involves the anticipation of problems or future shortfalls.

The rationale behind training needs analysis is the identification of the abilities, knowledge, skills as well as the performance standards requires by an organization and its employees to achieve the pre-determined goal. A good training needs analysis always tries to channel the organizational resources to areas of greatest needs. Training need analysis must have a strong linkage with the organizational mission by addressing the problems of improvement in productivity, quality of products and services through effective allocation of resources needed to fulfill such objectives. Training needs analysis tries to ascertain the “gap” between performance standard and actual performance. If discrepancies have being identified, it investigate the rationale for such discrepancies as well as devising a means of reducing or eliminating the discrepancies. There are three approaches to training needs analysis: Organizational approach this tries to assess the level of an agency performance by determining the knowledge, skills, and the abilities needed by an organization. It established the actions to be taking by an agency to overcome such weaknesses as well as enhancing its strengths and competencies. Organizational needs analysis must takes cognizance of marginal variables such as demographic and technological changes, as well as the political and the economy trends.

Occupational approach this seeks to appraise the knowledge, abilities and skills needed by a given occupational groups in the organization. Occupational analysis tries identifies all the occupational gaps existing in the organization, as a result of the emergence of new direction of an organization. Its therefore identify the best ways of discharging the job which best address such gaps or discrepancies.

Individual approach this seeks to examine the quality of an individual employee job as well as ascertaining his capability of doing new or different task. Individual analysis therefore provides an agency with information on which of the employees need training and what type of training does he want.

4.4. Quality Education and Training Needs: The Nexus

Training has now constitutes an essential element which determines the success of organization and individual employees. Consequently, any agency be it private or public to keep moving and be relevant, they must develop the capacity for achieving with their needs and those of the employees being trained and those of the organization as a whole. In this situation, Ndiomu (1989) argued that quality education entails educational systems which address the needs of the society both at individual and at the organizational level. He further

argued that such societal needs should reflect the socio-political and economic advancement of the society in terms of producing competent workforce capable of handling the challenges of the complex and globalized world. It therefore implies that quality education is that which address the needs of society in terms of building skills, abilities, ideas, values, attitude and knowledge which empowers the recipients of such education with capability to make informed decisions and live a self-sustaining life.

4.5. Measurement of Quality in Education

Quality of education could be measured from four perspectives as follows.

4.6. Quality of Resource Input

It is a well-known adage “that no education can rise above the quality of its teachers.” This is because the teacher serves a very pivotal role in the educational delivery process, in the sense of all the inputs that go into educational system teacher is the most important as he control and coordinate the other factors. To this end, achieving highest quality education requires teachers of highest quality as pre-condition.

4.7. Quality of Output

The academic achievement on tests scores, progression and students success rates determines the quality of education this is because quality does not only depend on the capacity of the inputs, but also on the internal and external efficiency of a particular educational institution.

4.8. Quality of Process

Another important factor to consider in measuring the quality of education is the level of learner participation and engagement in learning which implies student/lecturers interaction in the learning process, where the teachers dominated the lessons by posing few open-ended questions the learning outcome will definitely reflect low quality.

4.9. Quality of Content

Another factor at the epicenter of quality measurement is the content of the educational system curriculum when the content does not sufficiently address the needs of the learner in terms of abilities and skills the quality will be poor.

4.10. Factors Influencing Choice of Study Destination

Several studies on students’ choice of study destination mostly tried to address factors that tend to influence students’ decisions about which institution to attend. Extensive review of such studies revealed myriads of factors which often influence students’ choices of study destination. Some of these factors relate to the role of a third party, some relate to individual personality, while others centered on the student perceptions about the value, costs and institutional characteristics. Against the above background, following is the review of the several discussion and findings of previous studies concerning some of the main factors influencing students’ choice of university or college.

4.11. Cost

According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), several studies in the past have consistently established a significant negative

relationship between increases in tuition fee and enrolment rate. As such financial aid seems to tackle the obstacle face by students as a result of study cost. As observe by Hossler et al., (1999) financial aid tend to plays a significant role in increasing enrollment by lowering the net cost of college attendance. In same vein Foskett et al., (2006) revealed that reasonable accommodation costs, availability of financial aid and flexibility of fee payment plays a significant role in determining the students’ choice of colleges and universities.

4.12. Reputation

According to Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), the popularity and impression create an institution also serve as an important factor consider by students in university or college choice to them with the increase numbers of universities and colleges, students have started becoming so analytical and critical in deciding where to go for studies. Hence past experience, hearsay, and marketing activities shaped students’ perceptions about the reputation and image of a university or college (Ivy, 2001). Several researches revealed that a university image have a strong impact on the preference of students’ university choice (Mazzarol, 1998; Bourke, 2000; Gutman and Miaoulis, 2003).

4.13. Nature of Programmes

Hooley and Lynch (1981), asserted that the nature of programmes offered by a university significantly affect the students’ decision in making a choice of study destination. According to them the programmes suitability depict the most important consideration in students’ make while making a decision regarding a college choice.

4.14. Facilities

Litten, (1980); Tierney, (1983); Seneca and Taussig, (1987) observed that facilities provided by the college plays a major role in students decision-making when it comes to choice educational institution. They further revealed that average students and academically sound students lay emphasis on different institutional attributes.

4.15. Geographical Location

According to Jackson (1982) the geographic location of a university, or its closeness to domicile, plays a significant factor on students’ university choice. He advocates that most students tend to consider only universities which have more proximity with their places of domicile which do not in any way present financial or academic obstacles.

4.16. Family

As revealed Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) family members especially parent weld a great deal of influence either motivationally or proactively in chosen university by their children. Motivationally, the parents inculcate high expectations of education on their children; while proactively, they become directly involved in discussion of college plans and study matters.

4.17. Peer

Falsey and Haynes (1984); Joseph and Joseph (2000); Shanka et al., (2005) revealed that student interaction with other college-bound students influence their choice of higher education institution.

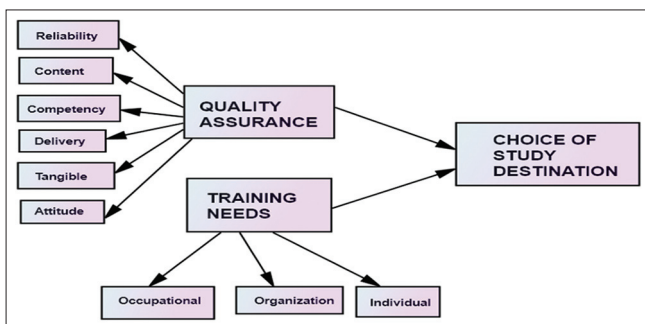
5. METHODOLOGY

In this cross-sectional survey, the data will be collected from Nigerian students in university Utara Malaysia through the distribution of questionnaires, the data will therefore be analyzed and interpreted through Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 19.0 to determine the relationship involved. In the context of this study, researcher using simple random sampling to identify and select the respondents based on Krejcie and Morgan, (1970), a total of 200 respondents will be selected to become the sample in this study to answer the questionnaires given. The researcher is going to identify the relationship between variables by using Pearson correlation. Besides that, the most influential factor influencing choice of study destination by the Nigerian post-graduate students will be analyze based on the multiple regression analysis. In addition, the researchers also aim to identify the level of the employers of the post-graduate student’s involvement in such decision based descriptive analysis.

6. CONCLUSION

Figure 1 shows the relationship between quality assurance, training needs and choice of study destination. In this diagram quality assurance practice consists of six factors (i.e., reliability, content, competency, delivery, tangibles and attitude). Thus, this model will describe the relationship existing among three variables hence the proposed model will provide better insight as to whether the relationship existing between education quality and training need can have a direct impact on study choice destination. In order to understand the effect of quality and training need on university, this conceptual framework provides factors that entails quality in higher education such as tangibility, competency, reliability, delivery, content and attitude which could be used in assessing the extent to which quality practices influence choice of study destination, the model also identified three types of training needs i.e., occupational, organizational and individual needs which could also be used to measure the extent to which training needs influence the decision in selecting a university, the model can also try to assess the relationship between quality assurance and training needs. To this end, the conceptual framework, provide two independent variables comprising of quality assurance and training needs. The dependable variable on the other hand is the choice of study destination.

Figure 1: The proposed framework



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