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Title-Quality in higher education: conceptions of quality by students and staff (do they have same conception?) And indicators of quality, challenges for quality and recommendations.

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Introduction

Quality in higher education is the most essential topic to rise and discus in our country. The reason for this concern is that education is the backbone for any country's development. The effectiveness of education will create a visible improvement on the development of countries like Ethiopia.

The purpose of this report is about quality in higher education, student and academic staff conception about quality, indicators, and challenges of quality in higher education institutes. We start by defining the term quality and goes on it.

What is quality?

As we think by the term quality, it is vague. Regardless of the different definitions given to quality, we can agree by the definition excellent and of being good. When we come to quality education it is the term given to excellent and good education offered by teaching institutes. Therefore quality education in higher education means the act of education being offered in excellence and of good quality.

Therefore quality education in higher educational institutes can be defined in many ways. According to Hénard and Roseveare (2012) it is defined as "Quality teaching is the use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students. It involves several dimensions, including the effective design of curriculum and course content, a variety of learning contexts (including guided independent study, project-based learning, collaborative learning, experimentation, etc.), soliciting and using feedback, and effective assessment of learning outcomes. It also involves well-adapted learning environments and student support services."

Elassy, N. (2015), has revised from many literatures that quality can be defined in these five approaches. We can see the definitions of each as follows:

1. **<u>Quality as the conformance to standards</u>**: This approach is usually used in the public services, and it has its origins in the notions of quality control in manufacturing industry. In this sense, the quality of a product is measured in terms of its conformance to the specifications, to see if it meets the standards set (Green, 1994). In the HE sector, the concept of "standards" means the level of conditions that must be met by institutions or programs to be accredited by an accreditation agency (Chea, 2002). This indicates that if quality is the answer to the question "is it good?", then standards give the answer to the question "is it good enough?" (Brink, 2010). Quality is about process, and standards are about outcomes, so the job of quality assurance is to check that the educational process will ensure high standards. In HE, attempts have been made to "benchmark" academic standards such as by using externally set examinations, specification of the content of syllabus and external examiners to ensure inter-institutional comparability of awards (Harvey and Newton, 2004). In a study that aimed to show how to understand quality from the perceptions of students and academics, it was stated that some academics 'interpreted quality as relating to academic standards (Cheng, 2011), which confirmed the importance of this approach of definition. Green (1994) believed that this approach to quality had an advantage, as it gave all HEIs an opportunity to aspire to quality, as different standards can be set for different types of institutions, but the disadvantage with this approach was that it implied that the quality of a service could be defined in terms of standards that could be easily measured, and this may not be the case in HE.

2. **<u>Quality as fitness for purpose:</u>** The problem with the fitness for purpose approach is that it is not easy to define what the purposes of HE should be, as their purposes differ greatly depending on who defines these purposes. Also, this definition focused on "a threshold judgment", which referred to the minimum requirements to fit standards; so, if the purposes are met by an institution, this means it has quality, which arguably was

not always the case. Therefore we can see this definition relates with the first definition.

3. **<u>Quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals:</u>** According to Green, "quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals" was one version of the "fitness for purpose" model that focused on evaluation, as quality in this approach concentrated on evaluating quality in the HEIs. This considered a high-quality institution, as one that had a clear mission and knew how to meet its goals (Green, 1994).

4. **<u>Quality as meeting customers' stated needs</u>**: This definition deals with the customers' needs and highlights the importance of knowing who the customers are, what their needs are and how to satisfy them. Generally we can see this definition as market oriented on the outcome of quality education.

Quality in higher education

The issue of quality in education is a concern everywhere around the world. Especially in our country everybody is claiming that our education strategy focuses on higher education institute's quantity rather on ensuring quality education. Kahsay (2012) stated in his doctoral dissertation about the temptations of quality in Ethiopia's HEIs. Kahsay was inspired to do his PHD research on quality because of the presentation he had "The Quality versus Quantity Dilemma in the Expansion of Higher Education in Ethiopia: Implications for Future Direction," in a national conference held in 2006 at Addis Ababa was a turning point.

When we come to quality teaching in higher education, it matters for student learning outcomes. But fostering quality teaching presents higher education institutions with a range of challenges at a time when the higher education sector is coming under pressure from many different directions. Institutions need to ensure that the education they offer meets the expectations of students and the requirements of employers, both today and for the future. Yet higher education institutions are complex organizations where the institution-wide vision and strategy needs to be well-aligned with bottom-up practices

and innovations in teaching and learning. Developing institutions as effective learning communities where excellent pedagogical practices are developed and shared also requires leadership, collaboration and ways to address tensions between innovators and those reluctant to change.

Conception of quality by academic staffs

In this sub section we will see the conception of quality from perspective of academic staffs. It is believed that meeting quality from academic staffs is achieving the three competencies of education. According to weinert's definition (Pozarnik & Lavric, 2015) we have three competencies that need to be achieved through education. These are the cognitive capabilities, skills and attitude/value changes. Quality education could be achieved by implementing and assuring the competencies required after the education.

Dicker et.al (2018) had done a research on the perception of quality by academic staffs, students, and employers. They interviewed 340 students, 32 staffs and 17 employers. Here I summarized the results of staff's conception about quality using the metrics and the degree at which they consider them as quality indicators.

Metrics	Degree of the metric
Teaching and learning	Very high
Support	High
Facilities	Very high
Student- teacher relationship	Low
Feedback	Medium
Co-curricular activities	Low
Institutional factors	Low

Generally speaking quality from teacher's perspective is making students achieve what is listed on the learning outcomes and watching students working with what is given to them. Therefore quality education can be termed as Bain said "helping their students to learn in ways that made a sustained, substantial and positive influence on how those students think, act and feel" Bain(2011).

Characteristics of quality education from teacher perspective:

- Ability of students to act actively on the tasks delegated to them
- Full-fledged facility and learning equipment fulfillment

Conception of quality by students

From the perspective of students, the most important elements of quality in university operations are good education and learning condition, a good learning environment, smooth and flexible study opportunities, and well-being during studies. On the part of faculties and the university, particularly important quality management methods include annual planning, utilization of feedback and statistics, and continuous curriculum design.

According to Joseph and Joseph (1997) which is a research done on New Zealand's tertiary educational institute quality of education from students perspective elaborated as follows.

- Program factors i.e. (options available, flexible entry requirement, specialist programs provided)
- Academic reputation (excellent instructors, excellent academic facilities, reputable degree)
- Cost (reasonable cost for education that is comparable to the service provided)
- Career opportunities (graduates easily get job)
- Time of completion of degree

According to Dicker et.al (2018) I summarized the results of student's conception about quality using the metrics and the degree at which they consider them as quality indicators.

Metrics	Degree of the metric
Teaching and learning	Very high
Support	Very High
Facilities	Very high
Student- teacher relationship	Medium
Feedback	High
Co-curricular activities	High
Institutional factors	High

In addition to the above conception of quality, some students assume quality of education enables them to achieve the course objectives in which at the end of the course they are what they expected to be. I personally consider quality education as the ability to cause an impact (difference) on the way how peoples work or think. In addition to that a student expects to get good job after receiving quality education.

Do we have the same conception about quality by instructors and students?
The answer to this question is not necessarily they have the same conception. Student's view of quality is from their perspective to convenience to the education as a whole. Teacher's point of view is to deliver quality education that enables the students that causes a positive impact according to their expectation on the learning competencies. But they have common understanding of quality partially this will not be denied.

Dicker et.al (2018) claimed Clear differences in perceptions of what is quality in higher education between staff and students were shown. For staff and students, their relationships are highly rated, unsurprising given the importance of the learning

partnership between staff and students. From this we can say there is no agreement on conception of quality among students and staffs.

In addition, quality monitoring institutions like HERQA's conception is not also the same with the conceptions of students and teachers. Mostly as I investigated personally, the main focus of these institutions is in assuring quantity rather quality. And it is mainly not involved in building school of excellences.

Indicators of quality

Quality can be seen with its fruits. When different conditions are set with the respective expectations of staff and student, we can say quality education is met. Some of the general indicators are as follows.

- Since students are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skill and attitude change we can say quality is met.
- If the students after receiving quality education engage themselves in different research and entrepreneurial works.
- If the industry or the employers of that university's graduates give their testimony on capability of students.
- In addition to this if effective quality audit confirms that there is established a balanced genuine target achieving educational system.
- If the government's educational philosophy meets its target.
- If the economic sector receive a skilled manpower from the universities.
- If educational institutes engage themselves with academic excellence.
  If the above conditions are met we can generally say quality has established. In addition to this if strong quality audit which is followed by quality assurance and improvement we can definitely say quality has established.

Ghulam (2017) compared the indicators of quality in education between Germany and Pakistan. He presented that in Pakistan quality education can be effectively indicated by using the policies. In Pakistan National Educational Policy in 1979 had been decided that the universities would be facilitated with adequate educational scientific equipment and laboratories facilities, libraries with update equipment. A national System for admission in a university has been developed and launched Pre- and In-service teacher training programs had been organized by the national academy of Higher Education. And the standard amendment in university act has been made for the betterment of the university management. While in German Higher Education, research and teaching are being considered among others as main indicators for the quality of Higher Education, while in Pakistan although teaching is considered as an indicator for the quality of Higher education.

Challenges for quality

Reisberg & Rumbley (2011) wrote an article "challenges facing Ethiopian higher education" that mentioned different aspects. Here I summarized the key challenges as follows:

1. The number of instructors has not kept pace with enrollment growth. This makes hiring non Ethiopians in order to fill the gap.

2. Quality is also constrained by infrastructure. During the past two years, the country has
   suffered from regular rolling blackouts, and few universities have generators to keep
   technical infrastructure operational during power cuts. The construction of
   classroom space, expansion of library collections, addition of computer
   labs, and the development of electronic networks lag behind enrollment expansion.
   International agencies are helping the government to develop new facilities and
   infrastructure. However, these eworts are largely uncoordinated and will take time.

Generally speaking the following points can be raised for the unqualifiedness of our education system in Ethiopia.

- Lack of academic materials and necessary facilities
- Economic instability on the side of academic staffs
- The outcome after graduation is not amusing that everybody on higher education targets on getting the degree not encapsulating themselves on necessary skills and hard work.
- Criterions that are established to audit quality are not effective. I interviewed a university instructor from **Wello University** and he was a quality manager of the department of computer science once. He said that, "nowadays almost all Ethiopian universities are following harmonized curriculum and this will make uniform education system across the country. This creates crosschecking of any staff to examine according to the module prepared". He also mentioned he always collect attendance of each teacher every day and the students that they taught in order to make sure he attended each class. But this mechanism creates a problem with most of the staff, because they need not to be controlled and finally this mechanism failed in that campus.
- I personally see another challenge for quality is that, in case of political instability every institution starts lately at the academic year and also finishes early or overload the students with tasks so that they are not engaged on some uprising activity. They receive unqualified education, then assessed with easy exams they will pass and graduate. Therefore the political instability also contributed for the unqualifiedness of our education system.

Recommendations

Quality ensuring in higher education is the responsibility of the institutions, the students and also the academic staffs. The reason why most academic staffs lack motivation and dedication on their work is that their income is not enough for living, so that they engage in other activities. They will work in more than one institution. Imagine the time and the energy they wasted by travelling here and there. If financial stability is accompanied, in

addition to that their pedagogical skill increased through training it is satisfactory by the staff side. In my opinion most of the academic staffs are working as university instructors because they don't have any job opportunities. They take as a work which will reward them with money not in enthusiastic feeling on teaching itself. Having a good grade on their academic performance is not a guarantee on being a qualified teacher. Therefore every academic instructor should take pedagogical training and courses before engaging themselves on teaching in higher educations. Because the results they produce will be the next leaders of the country.

If necessary flexibility and freedom is established from the student's perspective, it will add some contribution for the quality of education. Students will be motivated and overwhelmed through the learning system so that they will do what is expected from them.

Facility and learning materials are also the bases for the quality; therefore our education policy must concentrate on quality rather on quantity. We can achieve a quality education scheme if Albert Einstein's quote meet our country's condition ," teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not as a hard duty"[4].

Also one of the methods for assuring quality in governmental higher education universities is implementing harmonized curriculum. This strategy will guarantee uniform educational flow and it is suitable for examining standard exit exam across all the institutes.

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