

QUALIFICATIONS OF LECTURERS AS INDICATOR OF QUALITY TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

As the higher education landscape continues to change, the quality of teaching is becoming an issue of focus. Changes such as high international competition, geographical and social diversity of the body of students, information technology introduction, and increased demand for value for money have led to the higher education teaching quality to become an important issue. However, the whole issue of quality of teaching in higher education has confused the stakeholders. The term 'quality' in this context lacks a definition that is clear and can be referred to as a property, or an outcome, or even a process and thus it has become a dilemma of this research. Additionally, it lacks a definition that is clear as the stakeholders have a relative say in the teaching quality conceptions. Measuring teaching quality has become very complex as it involves, among other factors, Lecturers knowledge, experience and pedagogical skills. This paper delves into the quality of teaching of Lecturers with a PhD in comparison with those who don't have PhD, but do have teaching experience, and/or professional training.

Keywords: lecturer, quality education, teaching, teaching quality, teaching experience, teaching qualifications, professional development

1. QUALITY OF TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Lecturers are the individuals that are responsible for improving the mindsets and thus the lives of students. In order to accomplish or achieve this, the Lecturers must have the most advanced and informed level of education so that they do not misinform students. Theories and best practices change regularly, and without constant updates of information on the subject, there could be the spreading of wrong information. Without having the highest level of education and constant updating of the knowledge base, it is difficult for Lecturers to know about the most practical theories and best practices in the market today.

Lecturers face challenges that are unique and interlinked and have the ability to enhance the quality of education. When it is clear what the role and competencies of Lecturers are, then it will be possible to know the best and most convenient way of improving the professional competencies of Lecturers.

Initiatives of good teaching are broad both in function and in nature. However, it has proved to be a challenge in choosing quantifiable and reliable indicators to measure the teaching quality of individual Lecturers and teaching efficiency. Teaching experience is, on average, positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a Lecturer's career (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

The significant, positive correlations between teaching quality and student achievement, and between in-service training and student outcomes, are consistently borne out by research (Angrist & Lavy, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Rivkin, Hanushek, Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004).

Measuring teaching quality has become very complex as it involves teaching preparation and confidence (Darling-Hammond, 2000), experience and knowledge (Goe, 2007; Schmidt & Hunter, 1983), pedagogical skills, positive attitude, as well as organized and managed classroom skills (Waxman et al., 2003; Hamid et al., 2012).

There are many institutions that do have or are developing competence requirements for the lecturers. However, in most cases, these requirements are only for a group of Lecturers and not the entire industry (Hellison, 1995). Today these requirements come from individual and institutional initiatives which mean there is little or no consistency. According to Evertson (1985), the presence of a system-wide consensus mentioning the minimum requirements and competencies of Lecturers makes it difficult to safeguard and assure quality education.

This article will focus on discussing the higher education's quality of teaching and will weigh the probability, and generally accepted norm, that teaching being offered by Lecturers with a Ph.D., is of better quality than teaching of Lecturers with Masters degree and professional experience, and/or Lecturers with professional development training.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem of this study is the qualifications of Lecturers as indicator of quality teaching in Higher Education. There has been a growing attention surrounding the teaching quality which has been triggered by debates. The knowledge and experience that comes with a Ph.D. have been viewed as a solution to the deficient quality teaching in the institutions of higher learning. Thus, the primary concern has been on the qualification of Lecturers, where the Ph.D. is viewed as a must for all Lecturers in Higher Education, as a way of guarantying the quality in teaching and teaching efficiency. At the same time, more and more researcher are focused on experience and professional development training as a defining factor in increasing the teaching quality and teaching effectiveness.

3. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to find out the indicators of good teaching, with the focus on qualifications of the Lecturers. The research will seek to offer a discussion as what should be considered to be the best qualification, that prepares the Lecturers to offer the quality teaching. However, since the Education Industry considers that Lecturers with Ph.D. provide best quality in teaching, in this research, we will

provide discussion arguments as to why Lecturers with a Master's degree should not be sidelined having the required experience and proper professional development. At the same time, we will explore the impact of experience and professional development on quality teaching, after the Lecturers have obtained the Ph.D.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the continuous shift being experienced in the higher education landscape, the quality of teaching had become an issue to be discussed from different perspectives by the concerned stakeholders (Skelton 2005). The body of students has diversified and expanded considerably, both geographically and socially. New methods are required by new students. The nature of the interaction between the lecturers and the students has been modified by modern technologies that have found their way into the classrooms. The stakeholders, that is, the employers, the students, families of the students, the government, and the sponsors demand value for the money. They desire teaching to be efficient. In institutions of higher learning, the quality culture and quality debate remain controversial (Taylor 2003). While some regard quality as a property, others view it as an outcome. Another section believes that quality cannot be grasped in higher education as it involves a series of processes reducing defects that can never come to an end. Therefore, all these uncertainties on the issue of quality teaching have left the public with a little clue of what really quality is from a higher-education teaching perspective. However, the provision that Lecturers who are well equipped with the relevant knowledge in their line of specialization is what determines the quality of teaching. In this, other factors can be put in such as moral of the Lecturer and their relation to the world (Harvey, 2007).

Literature has always stressed that good Lecturers have priority for students (Angrist & Lavy, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Rivkin, Hanushek, Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Good Lecturers means experienced and organized Lecturers. On the other hand, Lecturers that can be defined as excellent are those that have learning and teaching passion. However, other researchers have shown that good teaching is dependent on the teaching received and other several situational factors (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goe, 2007; Schmidt & Hunter, 1983; Waxman et al., 2003; Hamid et al., 2012). Quality teaching is mostly centered on the students. Not only should the focus be concentrated on the pedagogical skills of the Lecturer, but also it should be concentrated to the learning environment. The learning environment addresses the personal needs of the student's (OECD, 2008). The students should be able to comprehend the reason as to why they are working and should be able to receive help if needed. The learning outcomes are also improved by the adequate support from the staff to students. This includes academic and social support, financial support, counseling services, and supporting minority students.

5. QUALITY OF TEACHING OF LECTURERS WITH PH.D. IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The question of quality of teaching escalates to whether Lecturers with a Ph.D. offer better quality teaching than lecturers without Ph.D. First and foremost, it is good to acknowledge that a Lecturer with Ph.D. is one who has acquired much knowledge and has gone a step further to research and provide new knowledge on a given area. Therefore, any Ph.D. holder is sufficiently knowledgeable. However, drawing back to the initial discussion on the quality of education, it was evident that some factors should be put into consideration before concluding that the teaching is of high quality. Therefore, being a Ph.D. holder does not directly imply that the Lecturer will provide quality teaching. Same can be said for the experienced Lecturers and Lecturers with extensive professional development training. Other factors most of which rely on the relationship between the students and the Lecturer and also the environment will come into effect.

For instance, experience is one key factor that determines how a Lecturer is conversant with a specific area of study. This implies that a Lecturer ought to be not merely a holder of Master's degree in a certain field but have ample experience to provide quality teaching while a Lecturer that may have acquired a Ph.D., but has no experience in teaching, will not be able to provide quality teaching to the students. Therefore, analyzing the issue, all these factors must be considered.

Apart from attaining the Ph.D. alone, the individual should also be able to continue learning so as to always stay abreast with information. It is, therefore, necessary for the education system to provide a system through which teachers with initial teacher education could continue developing their competencies throughout their careers (Petty, 2016). The higher a lecturer's education level and his consistency in learning new things are, the better his or her teaching quality will be.

However, with the rising demand for education and a majority of the graduates seeking to do their Masters, the quality has diminished. The result has therefore been the companies and other agencies complaining that they are indignant with half backed graduates from the higher education institutions. It has made higher education institutions to respond by recommending that Lecturers are to be Ph.D. holders or have many years of experience in a certain field so that they can be considered for a teaching job. It, therefore, poses the question of what the quality of teaching of Lecturers with a Ph.D. is.

Due to the knowledge that a Ph.D. holder bear, they are found more suitable to offer higher education teaching. This has been triggered by the economic competitiveness that is being witnessed across the globe. Today's economy is more knowledge driven, and therefore to equip students with the relevant knowledge, many higher learning institutions rely mostly on Lecturers with Ph.D. Quality has been the main agenda of the institutions of higher education putting into consideration that competition is coming from different quarters (Chalmers, 2007, p. 110). For instance, state-owned institutions are in constant rivalry with private owned institutions to outdo each other in the competitive market. Each seeks to offer quality by hiring knowledgeable Lecturers. Many Institutions utilize the broad knowledge that a Ph.D. holder bears, believing that all the knowledge will be passed to the students. However, it is critical to note that although the level of education of the Lecturers will be a boost to the students, the contribution of relevant departments, members of the faculties, and the state will also determine the measure of quality in the institution.

6. IDEAS FOR RESEARCH METHODS

The sample of the study comprised 10 institutions of higher education ranging from business to vocational and technological institutions; from postgraduate specialized institutions to those that offer undergraduate teaching. The Higher Education Institutions that will be used in the study will vary in size, degree structure, autonomous level, disciplinary orientation, and typology of the institutions. The study will utilize primary research method of Focus Groups Interviews. There will be organized three focus group interviews; Student's Focus Group, Lecturer's Focus Group, and Education Administrator's Focus Group. Each of the focus groups will be compromised from representative of each Institution of Higher Education. Each Focus Group will identify indicators of quality teaching and prioritize them, based on their experience and knowledge. To analyze the outcomes, nVivo software package will be utilized.

Interviews with student's focus group will be focused on factors students considered when deciding where to apply to; what is considered the quality teaching; what is the expected qualifications of their Lecturers; to what extent the quality of teaching has met students' expectations; to what extent the experience of Lecturers reflects into quality teaching; to what extent the professional development of Lecturers reflects into quality teaching; does the lecturers with Ph.D. deliver best quality in teaching.

Interviews with Lecturer's focus group will be focused on their qualifications and the quality teaching; what is considered the quality teaching; to what extent has Ph.D. helped them to deliver quality teaching; to what extent has the experience help them to deliver quality teaching; to what extent has professional development help them to deliver quality teaching; to what extent has student centered activities help them deliver quality teaching.

Interviews with Administrator's focus group will be focused on Institutional commitment to quality teaching; what is considered the quality teaching; which are the entry qualifications for new Lecturers; to what extent are students assessment source of information on quality teaching; to what extent are the qualifications of Lecturers considered as guaranty for quality teaching.

7. RESEARCH DILEMMA FOR THIS SPECIFIC TOPIC AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

The dilemmas we expect to experience during the research mainly stem from the undefined meaning of “quality teaching” in institutions of higher education (Altbach, 2015). The debates and drivers that generate the concern on the quality of teaching are also confusing. The institutions aim when offering quality and the approach that guides their philosophy is a dilemma too (Telford, 2005, pp. 109-112). Other dilemmas that are expected to be presented themselves in the study includes coming up with the monitoring and measurements of the progress, the impact of teaching on institutional, teaching, and research culture.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

There are expected several limitations in the process of the research. One of the key limitations of the study might be the time needed to complete a proper and extended research might not be adequate, and therefore, some of the questionnaires could be collected in haste so as to beat the deadlines. Another limitation of the study might be the sources. How far back we want to go in order to have wider information. Relying only on present day sources might not be sufficient. Since the problem statement of the study touches on the teaching quality that is offered by Lecturers with a Ph.D. in higher education institutions, the study should consider other relevant problems that relate to the issue. The study will focus specifically on Lecturers with Ph.D. and on the input in teaching, but not the outcomes of learning.

It is a difficult thing to generalize the issue being touched on, especially from the point of the study that it might be of small-scale. Therefore, due to the limitations that are aforementioned, the study might not be able to cover the issue of quality teaching in full. However, the areas that the reader feel have not been touched on, leaves space for future researching as the issue of quality teaching is broad.

9. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it is clear that the issue of quality teaching in institutions of higher learning remains a dilemma. Many factors that have affect in quality teaching, whereas qualifications of the Lecturer remains the major one. Resources available and the environment also play a part in determining the quality of teaching and teaching effectiveness. Additionally, the cooperation of the Lecturer contributes to quality teaching as well. However, it is good to note that the Lecturers with Ph.D. bring in a lot of knowledge that will impact the quality of teaching positively; we should consider the professional development and the experience that many Lecturers with Master degree bring in, as influencing factor in quality teaching and teaching effectiveness.

It continues to be a challenge in choosing quantifiable and reliable indicators to measure the teaching quality of individual Lecturers and teaching efficiency. More research is needed to demonstrate that the teaching being offered by Lecturers with a Ph.D. is of better quality than teaching of Lecturers without Ph.D.

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