THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHING PRACTICES ON QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN UGANDA

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Abstract:

The effort to enhance formal quality assurance mechanisms in the Ugandan universities started with the creation of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in 2003. Teaching practices are critical in the maintenance of quality assurance mechanisms in university education. The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of teaching practices on quality assurance mechanisms in selected universities in Uganda. The specific areas of interest were content delivered, methods of delivery and the adequacy of infrastructure for quality teaching. The study is based on systems theory where the inputs in a university to improve quality assurance mechanisms are the faculty and infrastructure used to implement the curricula in order to produce graduates. The study is based on the pragmatic paradigm with a cross-sectional survey design. A disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to sample 300 faculty and students who expressed their opinions on questionnaires. With convenience sampling 47 students participated in focus group discussions and 20 managers were purposefully sampled for individual interviews. Frequencies, percentages and chi-square were used to analyze the quantitative data and corroborated with qualitative data. The findings revealed a positive contribution of teaching practices to quality assurance mechanisms. The study concluded that there is a moderate influence of teaching practices on quality assurance mechanisms. Therefore, the study recommends that the universities should adopt modern practices of teaching that involve the use of ICT accompanied with training and adequate provision of infrastructure.

Keywords: teaching practices, quality assurance mechanisms, selected universities, Uganda

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1. Introduction

Globally, quality assurance has been a traditional indicator and actual feature of university education, as well as the professional duty of the academic staff (Harvey & Askling, 2003) Van der Bank and Popoola (2014), assert that Quality Assurance (QA) in African Higher Education (HE) is as old as the first universities established. However, in the last two decades of the 20th century, African universities experienced a decline in quality due to among others rising enrollment and falling finances (Mamdani, 2007 and Materu, 2007). In East Africa, Kuria et al., (2012) reported poor funding, lack of senior academic staffs and infrastructure as well large classes as challenges facing universities in the region. This led to the establishment of QA agencies to among others promote QA mechanisms (Shabani, et al., 2014). For example, in Uganda, the NCHE was established by the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (UOTIA) 2001 (as amended 2006) with the major activity of accreditation of universities, especially private universities. However, QA mechanisms in Ugandan universities started with the opening of Makerere Technical College in 1922 as the first Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the country and by 1949 it became a university college of the University of London and accordingly subjected to the QA mechanisms of the institution.

The study is based on the systems theory. From a systems perspective, QA refers to the institutions' sum of activities which assures the quality of products and services (Coetzee, 2002). As a provider of Higher Education (HE) to its clients, Coetzee (OP, cit) argues that a university should develop QA mechanisms that clarify the needs and expectations of the participants. From a systems point of view universities are organizations that receive certain inputs from their environment, transform them and discharge the outputs to the external environment in form of graduates and services. The educational inputs in a university to improve QA mechanisms include among others the teaching staff and infrastructure that affect the quality of both teaching and learning. Kansay (2012) discovered that the qualifications and competency of teaching staff (as rated by students) are significantly related to the perceived good practices of teaching and learning, assessment and student engagement. Accessibility to infrastructure in the form of lecture rooms, libraries and laboratories are critical to maintaining and improving QA mechanisms.

It is believed that educational inputs are necessary but not sufficient to bring about high QA mechanisms in universities. According to Kansay (Op, cit) the core of QA mechanisms is found in the educational processes of curriculum development and implementation. The relevance of courses offered, the level of student engagement by assigning activities and the presentation of lectures are some of the key parameters of the teaching process. Student assessment is considered one of the aspects of assuring there is a mechanism in place to maintain and improve quality (Kansay, 2012).

Teaching holds a strategic position in QA mechanisms in universities in terms of teaching efficacy and methods (Wilger, 1997). Wilger adds that QA is well sustained if the study for it is established within the practices of teaching and learning. Good teaching

practices in HEIs contribute to high-quality student learning (Prosser, 2013). Henard and Roseveare (2012) note that quality teaching practices involve the use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students. Quality teaching practices involve the effective design of curriculum and course content plus the use of a variety of learning contexts that among others include guided independent study, project-based learning as well as effective assessment practices and a good teaching and learning environment (OECD, 2014). According to the NCHE (2014) quality teaching is the process of transmitting knowledge based on prescribed pedagogical techniques in a good environment that will help students acquire the knowledge and skills that will enable them to be productive in the working environment. According to Nabaho, et al., (2017), in practice, good teaching involves adequate preparation before teaching, vivid delivery of lectures and effective assessment of the expected feedback.

In the opinion of Kadhila (2012), QA mechanisms are the procedures and strategies for efficient and effective implementation of internal measures with the intention of maintaining and improving the quality of university education that reflects value for money, development of various competencies by learners and the achievement of institutional missions. By practice, the effort to enhance formal QA mechanisms in Ugandan universities started a few decades ago with the creation of the NCHE to regulate, monitor and evaluate HEIs as well as accreditation of all their academic and professional programs. It started operating in 2003 and by 2006 the council developed the National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) to ensure that the NCHE and HEIs work together to achieve and enhance the quality of HE (NCHE, 2008).

The NQAF comprises two parts; the regulatory component at the national level and the institutional component at the individual HEI level. The second component of the NQAF makes individual HEIs primarily responsible for the quality and quality management. Accordingly, section 3.0 of the framework requires every HEI to have an independent QA unit/directorate with the mandate to set quality control guidelines and to continuously review all programs, teaching and assessment. The section outlines the following as the key mechanisms for QA at the institutional level; i) institutional governance, ii) the quality of teaching and learning, iii) the quality of academic staff, iv) sufficiency of educational facilities, v) research and publications, vi) the quality of outputs, vii) institutional financial management and viii) the university and community. This implies that quality and QA mechanisms fundamentally are the responsibility of individual universities. This paper focuses on aspects of measures (ii) and (iv).

Almost all the universities in Uganda would close if the NCHE benchmarks were followed to the letter. According to Kwesiga (2013), several universities in Uganda were characterized by over-crowded lecture rooms and high student-lecturer ratios. In a study by Acanga (2013), it was reported that university lecture room space dropped from an average of $0.78m^2$ to $0.34m^2$ and library space dropped from an average of $0.28m^2$ to $0.13m^2$ both falling below the standards set by NCHE. Acanga further revealed that many universities did not have laboratories and where there were laboratories spaces available, they did not match the increasing student numbers.

2. Statement of the Problem

The development and implementation of formal QA mechanisms is a requirement for universities to ensure high academic standards (Kadhila, 2012). Commercialization of university education in Uganda seems to have compromised the steps universities took to the full implementation of QA mechanisms set by the NCHE, particularly in the area of teaching practices. Although section 119 of the UOTIA (2001) as contained in statutory instrument No. 50 (2010) of the NCHE states that "*no university shall employ a lecturer for the purpose of teaching to students whose qualifications do not conform to the standards set by NCHE*", reports show that some universities have employed under qualified faculty members to teach. Nabaho, et al., (2017) observed that quality HE is one where students have gone through the right curriculum in terms of content, the curriculum must have been implemented by the qualified academic staff and supported by good literature in the library and equipment for courses with a practical component. In a study done by Atweibembire and Malunda (2019), there were reports of poor pedagogic skills among the faculty in some Ugandan universities. They further discovered that there were cases of missed and shortened lectures that partly contributed to poorly-prepared graduates. All these seemed to show a gap between the benchmarks set in the NQAF and the actual implementation of teaching practices for effective QA mechanisms. There appeared to be low-level teaching practices with an unclear contribution to QA mechanisms. This study, therefore, set out to establish the influence of teaching practices on QA mechanisms in selected universities in Uganda.

2.1 Study Objectives

The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which teaching practices influenced quality assurance mechanisms in selected universities in Uganda with a specific focus on pedagogical practices and the sufficiency of teaching infrastructure.

3. Literature Review

Quality assurance in HEIs is a matter of sufficient teaching that can improve the level of learning among students, especially at universities. For instance, according to quality from the transformative standpoint, Harvey and Green, (1993) noted that quality teaching is about transforming students' understanding and the means through which they utilize the competencies gained to address global challenges. Quality assurance in teaching at HEIs is about the continuous process of minimizing and getting rid of any hindrance factors. Kreber (2002) describes teaching as a scholarly activity that requires sound knowledge of one's discipline as well as a good understanding of how to help students. Henard and Roseveare (2012) argue that quality teaching involves the use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students. Pedagogical practices involve the designing of the university curriculum as well as interactions in lecture rooms during teaching and learning activities which support the delivery of content,

engagement of learners and assessments. In a study in Uganda Nabaho et al., (2017) discovered that students perceived good teachers as being student-centred, demonstrating strong subject and pedagogical knowledge, approachable, responsive, organized and having good communication. Teaching methods have evolved over time. Pew (2007) contends that teachers should be able to adopt new methods of teaching, facilitated by new technology. But not all the academic staff members in universities in Uganda are adequately prepared to meet the diverse requirements of today's teaching. Some universities in Uganda lack enough physical infrastructure and facilities to teach (Kwesiga, 2013). Matovu (2017) argues that this affects the use of ICT in teaching due to limited facilities to keep technological gadgets such as computers. This has fixed some teaching staff to continue using the traditional methods of teaching their students of 'talk and chalk' (Kruijer, 2010).

Although policy documents in some universities state the need to implement learner-centered instruction, the practice in the universities is widely teacher-dominated and content-oriented, especially in the humanities and education. In Uganda Nabaho et al., (2017) observed that student-centered learning is a policy matter at Makerere University that is being implemented. Good teaching practice is about creating opportunities for students to be engaged actively in the learning process. Mc Dowell et al., (2010) argue that students learn better when they are actively engaged in the process of learning. In learner-centered classes, the faculty designs courses that engage students in the process of learning, reading materials are provided in advance and regular evaluations are conducted with regular feedback (Zenawi, 2012). According to Nabaho, et al., (Op, cit) in Uganda, student-centered teaching is one of the approaches to facilitating student engagement where lecturers give clues to the learners to read from and find out more information. However, where the lecture method still dominates in university teaching in the country, there is an indication of limited engagement of students in their learning.

One of the most important activities of the faculty in HEIs is the assessment of the teaching and learning processes. Assessment in HEIs is understood as a means of sharing information among the key stakeholders on the inputs, educational processes and outputs (McAlphine, 2002). It informs members of the faculty on whether teaching has been sufficient, adequate learning has taken place and there was the development of appropriate programs. For members of the faculty who develop programs, well-formulated assessment techniques are useful to establish the extent to which stated goals are achieved. However, oftentimes teachers' information on assessment is only for accountability rather than to diagnose the needs of individual students and improve their learning achievement. Jacques (as cited in Rust, 2002) gave a checklist of good practices in student assessment. He observed that if feedback is to contribute to learning, should, inter-alia, be prompt, include a brief summary of the teacher's views of the assignment, make general suggestions on how to go about the next assignment, ask questions that encourage reflection about the work, suggest specific ways to improve the assignment, explain the mark or grade and why it is not better and offer to discuss the assignment

along with the comments. But many times, some members of the faculty have poorly planned and executed assessment practices with less professionalism and ethical responsibility. As part of a QA mechanism, assessment rules, guidelines and processes need to be streamlined for clarity to all the stakeholders prior to the assessment (Matovu, 2017).

4. Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design was used to conduct the study. A combination of management, academic staff and students from public and private universities as well as the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) and NCHE in Uganda provided the target and accessible population for this study. To capture cross-sectional data, a disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to sample 300 (180 students & 120 members of faculty) participants who responded to pre-tested questionnaires. The convenience sampling technique was used to sample 47 willing students for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). By virtue of their position, knowledge and experience 20 members of management from the selected universities, NCHE and MOES were purposively sampled as key informants for individual interviews. Descriptive statistics showing frequencies and percentages were presented in tables and inferential statistics in form of chi-square were used to test the null hypothesis in order to establish the influence of teaching practices on QA mechanisms in the selected universities in Uganda. The test of significance was done at a probability level of less than 0.05 (P < 0.05). The interview data was conveniently used to corroborate the quantitative data from questionnaires.

5. Results

The results focused on the respondents' views on the influence of teaching practices on quality assurance mechanisms. Presentation, analyses and interpretation of the data collected were based on both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Participants	Academic staff	120	40
	Students	180	60
Gender	Male	188	62.7
	Female	112	37.3
Education qualification of the academic staff	Diploma	3	2.5
	Bachelor's degree	20	16.7
	PGD	3	2.5
	Master's degree	77	64.2
	PhD	17	14.2
Academic rank of teaching staff	Teaching assistant	20	16.7
	Assistant lecturer	30	25

	Lecturer	51	42.5
	Senior lecturer	17	14.2
	Associate professor	1	0.8
	Professor	1	0.8
Length of service at the university in years	1-5	40	33.3
	6-10	19	15.8
	11-15	18	15
	16-20	21	17.5
	20+	22	18.3
Academic year of study of students	2nd	71	39.4
	3rd	45	25
	4th	36	20
	5th	28	15.6
Age of students	20-25	65	36.1
	26-30	67	37.2
	31+	48	26.7

Source: Primary data.

The quantitative data on opinions and perceptions of 300 respondents sampled from the six universities were analyzed using SPSS 18 computer software. The response rate on quantitative data was 100% since all the 300 targeted questionnaires were returned. Students formed 60% of the respondents and 40% were members of the faculty. This reflects the use of the disproportionate stratified random sampling technique employed in the inquiry. Only 58.8% and 78.3% of the targeted managers and students responded to individual interviews and FGDs respectively. Over 62% of the respondents were male and 37.3% were female suggesting a gender imbalance in the selected universities. The findings showed that only 14.2% of the lecturer respondents had PhDs. This explains why only 14.2% of them were at the higher rank of senior lecturer and only 0.8% each at the ranks of associate professor and professor respectively. Thus, the universities were dominated by teaching staffs of lower ranks with serious implications in undertaking QA mechanisms during their teaching practices. On the length of service, the majority (33.3%) of the academic staff had served between 1-5 years in the selected universities. This suggests less experience in a lot of activities in the universities such as assuring the quality of teaching practices. The majority (39.4%) of the students were in the second year, 25% were in 3rd year, 20% were in 4th year and 15.6% were in 5th year. This suggests that they had some experience with how teaching practices influenced QA mechanisms in university education. Most of the students were in the age bracket of 26-30 suggesting that they were mature enough to respond to the items in order to express their views on the influence of teaching practices on QA mechanisms in the respective universities.

5.1 Descriptive statistics on pedagogical practices to enhance QA mechanisms
Effective pedagogical practices involve alignment of curriculum, delivery of content and assessment of learning. The study sought the views of respondents on how pedagogical

practices influenced QA mechanisms in the selected universities and their responses are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 1: Responses from the academic staff and students
regarding pedagogical practices to enhance QA mechanisms

Pedagogical Practices	Responses from academic staff					
	Dissatisfied		Not sure		Satisfied	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Needs assessment for curriculum/program design	24	20	13	10.8	83	69.2
Regular curriculum/program Evaluation/review	27	22.5	11	9.2	82	68.1
Conducting meetings between management and academic staff to discuss the quality of teaching	28	23.3	8	6.7	84	70
Variety of teaching methods employed	22	18.3	19	15.8	79	65.9
Competence of academic staff in the use of ICT in their teachings activities	32	26.7	19	15.8	69	57.5
Evaluation of teaching by colleagues	30	25	23	19.2	67	55.8
Preparation of a detailed course outline by the faculty	15	12.5	14	11.7	91	75.9
Coverage of course content shown on the course outline	17	14.2	10	8.3	93	77.5
Teaching Practices	Responses from students					
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Competence of the academic staff in the use of ICT in their teaching activities	52	28.9	4	2.2	124	68.9
Evaluation of teaching by students	44	24.5	14	7.8	122	67.8
Preparation of detailed course outlines by the faculty	37	20.6	4	2.2	139	77.2
Coverage of course content shown on the course outline	42	23.4	1	0.6	137	76.1
Meetings between the administration and students to discuss about the quality of teaching	48	26.7	9	5	123	68.3
Meetings among students to discuss on quality of teaching	50	27.7	23	12.8	107	59.4
Completing questionnaires on the relevance of courses taught	44	24.4	13	7.2	123	68.3
Interactive teaching	57	31.7	20	11.1	103	57.2
Professional competence of academic staff during teaching	40	22.2	5	2.8	135	75.2
Appropriateness of workload given to students	70	38.9	7	3.9	103	57.2

Source: Primary data.

From Table 2 a large percentage (69.2%) of the academic staff members were satisfied with the level of needs assessment for program design. Needs assessment involves the preparation before teaching to ascertain the relevance of what is taught. Similarly, a large percentage (68.3%) of the academic staff members were satisfied with regular curriculum reviews. In this regard one of the managers from PR3 said; *"the regular review of academic programs has helped the institution to streamline quality assurance mechanisms"*. This indicates

that after launching their programs, the practice of curriculum review is important for universities to remain current on what is taught in light of the constant changes in knowledge. The results show that 70% of the academic staff were satisfied with meetings among themselves to discuss the quality of teaching. It is a common practice for the faculty to address issues of QA mechanisms in teaching during the evaluation of results meetings in order to improve teaching practices in the next phase of teaching.

From this study, it was found that 65.9% of lecturers were satisfied with the variety of teaching methods used. However, an official from the NCHE, expressed his dissatisfaction with the teaching practices in Ugandan universities. He observed: *"the move to student-centered teaching is still a challenge among lecturers, some have a lot of knowledge but do not know how to give it to students"*. The multi-dimensional nature of knowledge, skills and many other competences required in the job sector needs the hiring of staff with the ability to adopt multi-dimensional approaches to teaching in universities. The results revealed 57.8% and 68.9% of the academic staff and students respectively were satisfied with the competence of the academic staff in using ICT in their teaching. However, an interviewee from NHCE expressed dissatisfaction with the ICT skills of some teaching staff members in universities by saying *"although many students are involved in distance learning today many lecturers still have low ICT skills such as uploading notes"*. This indicates that many members of the teaching staff still find the efficient use of ICT in teaching a big challenge. This hinders QA mechanisms to some extent.

The findings further indicated that slightly more than half of the academic staff members and a higher percentage (67.8%) of students were satisfied with the evaluation of teaching by colleagues and students respectively. The opinions of students on QA mechanisms during the process of teaching are important for good teaching practices. Although students' evaluation of teaching practices received considerable attention in universities; a lot of students tend to blame the teaching staff for the failures to deliver yet some universities have poor teaching facilities.

From the data, 75.9% and 77.2% of lecturers and students respectively were satisfied with the preparation of detailed course outlines by the faculty. In this regard one of my student interviewees from PU1 said; *"as one of the best practices of quality teaching, lecturers give detailed course outlines to students at the start of every semester"*. Availing course outlines to students is a good teaching practice because it enables them to know what the course is about, why the course is taught and what will be required for them to be successful in the course. Similarly, 77.5% and 76.1% of the faculty and learners respectively were satisfied with the coverage of the course content. However, information from the discussions with some interviewees shows that some course contents were not adequately covered in the universities visited. In this regard, QA mechanisms cannot adequately be maintained. For example, a student interviewee from PR1 said *"some lecturers who come towards the end of the semester select some topics to be taught without covering the whole course content"*. The incomplete coverage of course content compromises QA mechanisms during teaching. The results show that 68.3% and 59.4% of the students subscribed to the view that there were meetings between the

administration and learners and among the students themselves to share issues on the quality of teaching. This is important for the effective implementation of good teaching practices.

The study findings also indicated 58% of the students were of the view that completing questionnaires on the effectiveness of teaching has always been done. Filling of questionnaires to evaluate the quality of teaching has been a common practice among students of the sampled universities. A student interviewee from PR1 said, *"filling out the questionnaire gives a mandate to students to quietly evaluate the performance of lecturers at the end of every semester"*. With the questionnaires, students have a chance to evaluate the academic staff and QA mechanisms in their teaching practices in areas such as punctuality, audibility and clarity, guidance on relevant materials to read and their sources and use of teaching aids. The results revealed that 68.3% of the students were of the opinion that completing questionnaires on the relevance of courses taught was good. By evaluating courses students assure themselves that their opinions about programs in the university are being considered in a systematic way by those responsible for both their delivery and administration. The feedback helps the faculty and management to improve the quality of courses taught to students.

The results in Table 2 show that 57.2% of the students were of the view that the level of interactive teaching in the sampled universities was good. The results indicate that many lecturers were able to engage students during their teaching practices. In this regard a respondent from the MOES had this say; *"all the medical-related courses are practical, small group works are given, lecturer-student relationship is very good, the curriculum and numbers aid this well"*. But he added that: *"humanities and education are mostly lecture-based due to large numbers, building small groups is difficult, a lot of handouts are given and some go unexplained and tutorials are rare"*. Under such circumstances, quality teaching is quite difficult to achieve. Three-quarters of the students felt that the professional competence of the academic staff recruited was good. However, interview data revealed a lot of unprofessional practices of the teaching staff; favoritism in awarding of marks, absenteeism and some lecturers forcing themselves to teach areas where they are not qualified in order to get more money, especially where payments are done per hours taught. Such unprofessional practices compromise QA mechanisms during teaching. A higher percentage (57.2%) of students were of the view that the workload given to students was good. The results suggest that students are assigned an adequate workload by the teaching staff. During interviews with some students, they acknowledged receiving an adequate amount of individual and group assignments. However, according to a manager from NCHE students in Ugandan universities are being overwhelmed by information overload so identifying the right information is not easy. In the context of HE, quality teaching is about creating opportunities for students to be actively occupied in the teaching and learning processes.

5.2 Descriptive statistics on the adequacy of teaching infrastructure to enhance QA mechanisms during the teaching process

The researcher also sought the opinion of the respondents on the adequacy of physical facilities to enhance QA mechanisms during the process of teaching and the findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Responses from the academic staff and students on the
adequacy of teaching infrastructure to enhance QA mechanisms

Teaching infrastructure	Types of respondents and their views on the condition of facilities					
	Academic staff			Students		
	Adequate	Insufficient	Not available	Adequate	Insufficient	Not available
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Computers	40 (33.3)	78 (65)	2 (1.7)	62 (34.4)	68 (37.8)	50 (27.8)
Internet	46 (38.3)	68 (56.7)	6 (5)	61 (33.9)	75 (41.7)	44 (24.4)
Number and size of lecture rooms	33 (27.5)	85 (70.8)	2 (1.7)	62 (34.4)	82 (45.6)	36 (20)
Laboratory facilities	44 (36.7)	67 (55.8)	9 (7.5)	56 (31.1)	101 (56.1)	23 (12.8)
Hostels/halls of residence	52 (43.3)	60 (50)	8 (6.7)	58 (32.2)	80 (44.4)	42 (23.3)
Library facilities	40 (33.3)	77 (64.2)	3 (2.5)	56 (31.1)	88 (48.9)	36 (20)
Number of books in the library	32 (26.7)	86 (71.7)	2 (1.7)	80 (44.4)	50 (27.8)	50 (27.8)
Projectors	49 (40.8)	12 (10)	59 (49.1)			
Blackboard/whiteboard	74 (61.7)	9 (7.5)	37 (30.9)			
Number of chairs in lecture rooms				139 (77.2)	5 (2.8)	36 (20)

Source: Primary data.

From Table 3 most of the respondents (65% & 37.8% respectively) were of the opinion that computers are insufficient. The lack of investment in computers may prove to be a significant barrier to the ability of the universities to adopt modern techniques of teaching, thus, a hindrance to QA mechanisms. On internet services, the majority of the respondents (56.7% & 41.7% respectively) observed that it is insufficient. The general trend of insufficient internet services raises questions on QA mechanisms in the two core activities of gaining knowledge and delivering knowledge in the universities visited. The notion that a good lecturer should be knowledgeable will not be fully achieved in the universities yet knowledge of subject content is a pre-requisite to good teaching practice.

The majority of the respondents (70.5% & 45.6% respectively) subscribed to the view there is insufficiency in the number and size of lecture rooms. This forces the faculty to conduct lectures in ungazetted places such as under trees which at times are disrupted by weather changes. In addition, the use of facilities such as projectors as well as the display of some teaching aids becomes difficult. All these are indicators of compromised QA mechanisms.

The study findings showed that almost an equal percentage of the respondents (55.8% & 56.1% respectively) were of the view that the availability of laboratory facilities in the sampled universities is insufficient. The lack of laboratories in some universities is an indication that they may be producing scientists/technologists with little practical experience and it is quite difficult to expect QA mechanisms in programs with a lot of a practical component. The results show that the majority of the respondents (50% & 44.4% respectively) were of the view halls of residence/hostels are insufficient. This makes it difficult to efficiently achieve the core activities of teaching and learning that are beneficial to all students because the absence of such facilities is associated with student absentees. A greater number of respondents (64.2% & 48.9% respectively) reported the insufficiency of library facilities. Libraries are required catalysts for the provision of quality teaching. Therefore, limited library facilities could be a big challenge to QA mechanisms in the process of teaching.

The results further show that while the majority (71.7%) of the academic staff reported that the number of books in the library is insufficient, more students (44.4%) noted that the number of books is adequate. These findings suggest a general trend of an inadequate number of books in the libraries of the universities visited. Members of academic staff with limited access to relevant and necessary books of reference hardly prepare enough to do quality teaching. Universities that are not well equipped and facilitated with useful textbooks get difficulties in improving QA mechanisms in teaching. The study findings showed that about half of the academic staff members were dissatisfied with the availability of projectors in the universities of this study. This means that some of the teaching staff members may have difficulties in adopting emerging technology to enhance QA mechanisms in teaching. The majority (61.7%) of the academic staff members were satisfied with the adequacy of black/white boards for quality teaching. The indication here is that some of the teaching staff members in the selected universities in Uganda are still using traditional approaches to deliver lectures. This does not reflect improvement in QA mechanisms during the process of teaching. The data also shows the majority (77.2%) of the students were of the opinion that the number of chairs in the lecture rooms was adequate. The indication here is that most students are able to sit comfortably to attend lectures. This makes it easy to control the class and for the faculty to conduct quality lectures.

During discussions with members of the management and students in the selected universities, the views expressed by the respondents generally indicated that the physical facilities to enhance quality teaching were inadequate. In this connection, one of my manager interviewee from PU2 said that *"the teaching materials are always not adequate since delays are done at procurement level"*. He added that *"like this semester these materials have not*

been secured". Yet another manager from PU2 revealed that due to the inadequate number of chairs in the lecture rooms some students attend lectures while standing during weekends. Another manager interviewee from PU3 said, *"there is inadequate space and furniture in lecture rooms, a limited number of computers and power facilities as well as collusion of classes due to few lecture theaters".* She added that *"the library is still inadequate, though newly built but is inadequately stocked".* It was also revealed in the universities visited particularly in PR1 that the university is opening branches and adopting e-learning yet some of these centers do not have internet services. It was further revealed by my student interviewee from PU2 that *"despite the absence of the key books in the library internet facilities were inadequate".* Under such circumstances, QA mechanisms are threatened in the process of teaching.

Testing the Hypothesis: Teaching Practices do not Influence Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Selected Universities in Uganda.

A chi-square test for the academic staff produced statistically significant results i.e., the chi-square p-value of 0.006 is less than the critical p-value of 0.05. This means that teaching practices influence quality assurance mechanisms in the selected universities in Uganda; thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. However, the chi-square test results for students were not statistically significant i.e., the chi-square p-value of 0.102 is greater than the critical p-value of 0.05. This shows that there is no significant association between teaching practices and quality assurance mechanisms; hence the null hypothesis is upheld.

6. Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to establish how the existing teaching practices have influenced QA mechanisms. Needs assessment played a key role among the academic staff members in their program designing practices. Richards (2001) notes that the end users of needs assessment for program design are teachers who will teach from the new programs and learners who will be taught from the program. With regard to regular curricula reviews to improve the quality of teaching, most of the academic staff members were satisfied. This is in fulfillment of the requirements of the NQAF, university visions and missions as they operate curricula that facilitate a balanced learning process that provides both knowledge and skills. Section 3.2.2 of the NQAF lists a number of strategies to be embraced in teaching and learning in order to assure quality, among them is adherence to improving the minimum requirements of courses of study issued by the NCHE.

In the current age of computers, the use of ICT provides an efficient way of promoting student-centered learning since ICT avails students of a library beyond physical space. Consequently, many universities in Uganda have adopted ICT in teaching. According to Bhniyan et al., (2009) ICT as a pedagogical instrument enhances and diversifies the outcome of teaching and thereby brings efficiency to the learning process. However, the challenge is that many members of the faculty still have low ICT

skills. The common practice in Ugandan universities is that students have to sit in the lecture rooms to take notes from their lecturers as the only way of learning (Fry, et al., 2009). But due to the rapid adoption of ICT in teaching many universities in the country have been forced to adopt the new methods without adequate preparation leading to inefficiencies which are a threat to QA mechanisms in teaching.

Good quality assurance practices require that universities recruit competent teaching staff in delivering content to the students. The results indicated the general satisfaction of the respondents with the evaluation of the academic staff members. Bhniyan et al., (2009) argue that a constructive faculty evaluation system provides positive feedback by providing the right information about the achievement and deviation of performance from the pre-designed standard to the faculty members. Section 2.8 of the NQAF demands that all the teaching staff at the university level are evaluated by the students in a standard format at the end of each course to help address weaknesses and improve QA mechanisms in teaching through the improvement of content, professional development and general openness to criticism. However, Madu and Kuei (1993) assert that the use of questionnaires to evaluate the performance of the teaching staff drives some students to blame teachers for all the problems, forgetting their own roles, the role of the institutional infrastructure or that of the management in enabling quality teaching/learning to happen.

According to Chalmers (2008) with adequate facilities to support the faculty and students, teachers teach better and students learn better. In Uganda in regard to classroom management, section 2.9 (c) of the NQAF demands that the total and average space for lecture and seminar rooms, libraries, laboratories/workshop(s) and computer/ICT should be adequate enough if the quality is to see. However, the findings showed that the inadequacy of the listed facilities was a threat to assuring the quality of teaching practices in the visited universities. This is in line with Bunoti (2012) who argued that physical facilities such as lecture rooms are not adequate in Ugandan universities. Some universities in Uganda lack enough physical infrastructure especially office space for their full-time staff, lecture rooms and cafeterias for the students (Kwesiga, 2013). This has worsened the challenges of QA mechanisms in universities with large enrollment such as overcrowding of students in lecture rooms, attendance of lectures through windows and students who miss seats keep standing throughout lectures (Nyangau, 2014).

The results showed that the management across the universities visited could not establish sufficient facilities critical to enhancing QA mechanisms during the process of teaching. The number of computers, availability of internet, laboratory facilities, halls of residence/hostels, library facilities and the number of books in the library were all found to be insufficient. This demonstrates that the universities have not adequately met the standards set by NCHE in the NQAF. There is a gap in QA between the planned and the level of implementing QA mechanisms. This clearly shows a divergence between institutional practices for quality teaching and the external environment set by the NCHE to maintain QA mechanisms. This again indicates that without serious enforcement,

regulations set by the NCHE are necessary but not sufficient conditions to enhance QA in the respective universities. It is quite hard to see increased QA mechanisms in universities that do not have sufficient physical facilities to enhance the quality of teaching at their disposal. In Uganda, Tibarimbasa (2010) discovered that libraries in many universities did not have sufficient space for all students to fit in at once. He further discovered that there were limited computer facilities, especially for students studying computer science with high computer-student ratios. According to Tibarimbasa this forced some universities to be more theoretical in teaching course units that needed to be more practical. Kavulya (2004) observed that most universities in Uganda have inadequate books in their libraries. He noted that even those which are there are outdated.

7. Conclusion

In light of the study findings, it was concluded that there is a moderate influence of teaching practices on quality assurance mechanisms in the sampled universities. This was revealed by the mixed picture of the chi-square test results. The chi-square test result for the academic staff was statistically significant indicating that members of the academic staff were of the opinion that teaching practices influenced quality assurance mechanisms in the selected universities. But the chi-square test result for students was statistically insignificant meaning that students were of the view that teaching practices have not significantly influenced quality assurance mechanisms in the universities of this study. This means the teaching practices in the sampled universities are not sufficient to have the required positive influence on quality assurance. For example, management in the respective universities was not able to provide sufficient facilities to enhance QA mechanisms during teaching. Some faculty members still had difficulties in adopting ICT in teaching.

8. Recommendation

The student body is changing and teaching methods are also changing. This requires universities to adopt new pedagogical strategies that have aspects of e-learning and can offer student-centered approaches to teaching. All the universities should formulate ICT policies that are gradually and continuously implemented since integrating e-learning in university education involves several stakeholders such as students, the academic staff, and technicians among others. This requires the expansion of both hardware and software ICT infrastructure that should be frequently upgraded to match the changes in technology. For the successful implementation of e-learning, both students and the teaching staff have to be trained and motivated to embrace ICT which is fast taking root in university education globally. Diverse examples of student-centered learning have emerged in HE such as problem-based learning and design projects which Ugandan universities should adopt in teaching. In summary, there is a need for qualifications in

pedagogy for all academic staff. This will add value to their capabilities and ultimately empower their teaching. In addition, management in the sampled universities should avail adequate and quality physical facilities in all departments. Most universities in Uganda are teaching intensive and this requires the adequate provision of the needed infrastructure for quality teaching.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors of the article have no conflicts of interest to report. The paper is formulated on the findings of a PhD Thesis with the co-authors as the research supervisors. I confirm that the information presented are based on facts and the co-authors have seen and agreed with the contents of the manuscript and is not under review of any publication.

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