

TEACHER'S VIEWS ON ACADEMIC QUALITY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the teacher's views on academic quality in a sample of Filipino teachers in North Cotabato. A qualitative research design using the phenomenological approach was utilized in this study. The data were gathered from 10 senior faculty with 10 years of experience in higher education institution. Meanwhile, the thematic analysis was performed to analyze the data. The results showed that there are three themes that emerge from interview with the participants that put emphasis on community exposure, faculty competence, and quality assurance mechanisms

Keywords: *teacher's views on academic quality. Qualitative Inquiry, North Cotabato, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Academic quality has been a common issue and one of the most critical tasks facing every educational institution. Hence, several studies reveal that many practices fail to theorize what quality means (Harvey & Newton, 2007; Deem et al., 2008). While quality-oriented practices have become more frequently and intentionally pursued in new contexts among schools, conceptualizations of quality have not advanced at the same rate (Harvey & Newton, 2007). Even in developed countries such as Europe, the United Kingdom, and Australia have demand more quality assurance measures and expecting modification of their existing quality standards. One factor that has encouraged this transformation is the urge of increasing productivity through a well-educated workforce (Harvey & Newton, 2007).

In order to address issues on quality, the school many schools even in developed countries like US and Europe seek educational accreditation from independent bodies based on the criteria for accreditation, and found out that they have still something to improve in their standards (The Higher Learning Commission, 2007). In order to deal with quality issues, the European countries even joined forces to develop the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EAQAHE), 2005).

In Southeast Asia, the release of ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance Guidelines and Indicators (AUNQAI) echoed identical movements. Thus, based on their assessment, most schools are not yet ready to compete when it comes to academic quality when compared to western standards (Umemiya,

2008). In the Philippines, the study of Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) as cited by Gonzales (2012) noted that lower spending on state-run colleges and universities have contributed to deterioration in the quality of higher education. The PIDS reported that many higher education institutions in the country have not met international, or even local, quality standards. In 2007, the Philippines spent less than 10% of gross domestic product per capita on higher education. This compares to Indonesia, which spent 20%, and Malaysia, which spent 50%.

Over the past decade, Asian nations have developed their own quality assurance system, by setting up a national accreditor whose principal role is to accredit local tertiary education institutions and academic programs. Even before the establishment of national accreditor, the local accreditors, including professional accreditors, had emerged in Asian countries (Jung et al., 2011). In order to ensure the quality of these quality assurance agencies, some nations have developed a recognition system for them. Take the Philippines for example. It has two recognition bodies certified by the Commission on Higher Education of the Philippines (CHED). All accrediting agencies operate under the umbrella of the National Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (NNQAA) and of the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines. However, there are no specific standards for recognition.

Nevertheless, there is no clear idea of how to define the term quality as it pertains to education, stakeholders seek and, pursue a quality education. A commonly accepted definition of quality, as it specifically applies to higher education is nonexistent (Tsinidou et al., 2010). Thus, there is a dearth of data that gives light on the teachers' views on academic quality in Higher Education Institutions as viewed by Filipino teachers. With this scenario, this study attempts to explore the concepts of academic quality as viewed by Filipino Teachers.

FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the proposition of Barrett et al. (2006) that educational quality is a multidimensional construct. The relevant dimension takes into consideration the purpose of education. It includes subsistence, security, trust, livelihood, lifelong learning, and sustainability (McDowell, 2002; Michaelowa, 2001; Akkari, 2005; Romano, 2002; Kagia, 2005). These components essentially implies that all of our considerations in relation to the other elements must bring in thoughts not just of the present but of the future.

METHOD

Research Design

This qualitative research utilized the phenomenological approach. The purpose of this design is to explore a phenomenon in which this is commonly useful

when developing a questionnaire (Plano Clark, 2005). This design explored the views of participants regarding academic quality based from their experiences as teachers in higher education institution.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Private Higher Education Institutions in Region 12 and officially labelled as “SOCCSKSARGEN” (see Figure 1). The name is an acronym that stands for the region’s four provinces (South Cotabato , Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani) and one of its cities (General Santos).

Research Respondents

A total of 10 Faculty from higher education institutions were invited for in-depth interview. The results of which were used to identify the emerging themes about their views on academic quality. The participants were determined using the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability method of survey sample selection that is commonly used to locate hidden populations. This method relies on referrals from initially sampled respondents to other persons believed to have the characteristic of interest (Johnson, 2014). In this study, the informants were senior Faculty with 10 years of experience were purposely chosen so that the information needed to attain the study goal would be achieved.

Research Instrument

The researcher formulated an interview guide that asked questions about their definition of academic quality. The interview provided an insight into how a group of teachers thinks about academic quality, about the range of opinion and ideas about academic quality, and the similarities and variation that exists in their beliefs, their experiences, and practices at school.

Data Gathering Procedure

Letters requesting to conduct the research study were sent to the school presidents of private higher education institutions in Region 12. After the approval was obtained, the researcher with the help of the representatives have contacted the teachers of the target schools and request for the dates of data gathering without disrupting classes and also to give enough time to facilitate the giving of instruction in answering the questionnaire.

At the day of data collection, the respondents were requested to sign the letter of consent which is specified in the instrument for their voluntary participation of the study. Only those who signed the consent letter were considered as part of this study. Respondents were assured that their responses were kept confidential and that their names did not appear in any part of this study. After the data were retrieved, encoding of the data with proper label was carried out.

Data Analysis

The notes that were obtained from in-depth interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within data. Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to a specific research question (Boyatzis, 1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Emerging Themes of Filipino Teacher's Concepts on Academic Quality

There are three themes that emerge from in-depth interview with HEI Faculty that put emphasis on community exposure, faculty competence, and quality assurance mechanisms.

Towards community exposure. Many teachers believe that community linkages provide a very important role for learner's growth and at the same time improve student's experiences. In fact, many are devoted to establish community partnerships so that they can provide off-campus exposure to their students and implement programs related to the field. This community exposure is a way for the students to improve further their skills related to their profession. The Faculty explain these ideas as follows:

Academic Quality involves partnership with the community to provide more students' exposures related to their field. The exposure can provide them experiences that can be used in their field/course that they are enrolled in. The more relevant community exposures, the more that they can best experience the application of their selected career.

(P1)

Academic Quality can be attained based on how the institution contributes to the community. It is a core responsibility of the institution to serve the community aligned to the expertise or programs offered. This is the reason why it is important to expose the students to off campus activities.

(P7)

Academic quality is when the College provides a venue for the students develop their potential through experiential learning particularly in the community. There's a need to connect the curriculum beyond the classroom and learn more through exposure and applications in the community.

(P3)

The quotes below provide emphasis on the relevance of well-established community extension office and its role in establishing academic quality. Moreover, most of the participants agree that being in the provincial region their only way to enhance the skills of the students is through community exposure. The Faculty explain these ideas as follows:

Being in the province where there are fewer opportunities for the students to develop their experiences, we opt to let them understand their field through community activities and apply their skills and learnings based on the community needs.

(P6)

I am concerned about what will happen to the career of the students if they don't have actual exposure to the course that they are studying. With this, we always encourage our CES office to find linkages that can give exposure to our students.

(P2)

Our community extension office provides a very important role particularly in collaboration with different stakeholders such as businesses, government and non-government organizations. In this way, we are able to send our students to different organizations for on-the-job training.

(P4)

This result on the relevance of community exposure of students is supported by Kolb (2005) that community exposures can provide experiential learning to the students and promote development of knowledge, skills, and cognitive capacities necessary for students to deal effectively with the complex issues related to their course.

Towards Faculty competence. Most of the participants suggest that academic quality can be achieved if there are qualified faculty who are experts in their field. Many of them considered Faculty as the core component of the academe that's why hiring the best faculty is a must among higher education institutions. Nevertheless, it is necessary to engage those teachers who have great desire to teach. These views are presented by the quotes of the participants as discussed below:

It is necessary to employ qualified and competent faculty to ensure academic quality. As higher education institution, the vertical alignment is very important to guarantee that they are teaching based on their expertise.

(P2)

There's a need to engage teachers who have the determination and passion in teaching and select teachers with expertise in the course content
(P4)

The human resource department must hire qualified and competent teachers.
(P1)

Meanwhile, the participants acknowledge that in order to have a positive student's outcomes, the Faculty must have continued professional development and training. They believed that institutions must provide a wide range of services, opportunities, and resources to enhance the potential of the Faculty. The participants believe that Faculty members need to be prepared enough by through trainings and capacity building in order to deal with the rapid changes in the educational system and new trends in education. The Faculty explain these ideas as follows:

The school must provide Faculty development programs to develop the teaching skills of the teachers and grow the key areas of their expertise.
(P7)

There's a need to train and develop their Faculty
(P3)

The findings imply that Faculty competence is considered as a factor of academic quality. This is supported by Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) that Faculty expertise and qualifications are important quality measures in the academe.

Towards quality assurance mechanisms. For some teachers, quality is not only on the aspect of instruction but with the services that the school have rendered to the clients. This quality services can be establish through quality assurance mechanisms. Many believe that processes and procedures must be establish to have a smooth flow operations both in academics, human resource, and utilization of facilities, all for the purpose of client satisfaction. These are presented in the narratives of participants below:

To ensure academic quality, there should feedback mechanisms to improve services performance. Moreover, the a quality management system shall be employed to ensure customer satisfaction (P5)

Academic quality can be established if the school provides complete facilities in curricular and extra-curricular activities, and also continuously put in place the support to students (P3)

In case of human resource process, the school needs to adopt competitive selections and recruitment procedures to prospective instructors or professors (P7)

Adopt accreditation and quality assurance certifications and put standard mechanisms and processes in place (P4)

The result denotes that quality assurance mechanism provides a critical role in students' satisfaction. It involves processes and procedure that will make operations easier and effective. This is congruent to the findings of Dill (2000) that quality assurance focuses on those processes implemented by HEIs in order to assure and improve the quality teaching and learning.

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