Research Article
Strengthening Quality Assurance: The Role of University Administrators

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Abstract: Modern-day university administrators, in Ghana, seem to have found themselves in a changed environment, with increased and increasing challenges, to operate and achieve success. Several calls have been made on university administrators as important stakeholders in the effective and efficient management of the system in that regard. Roles of administrators are often overlooked when discussing the quality assurance issues in higher education. Administrators have pivotal influence on university policies, faculty morale and general functioning of the system. Considering the role of the university administrator, in the management of the higher education systems in Ghana, this study examines university administrators' role in ensuring quality of administration in the universities.

Keywords: Administration, administrator, higher education, quality, quality assurance, universities

INTRODUCTION

The subject of quality assurance has been on the agenda of universities across the globe for quite some time. Higher Education (HE) for the masses and a growing climate of increased accountability are frequently cited as rationales for a greater emphasis on quality (Eriksen, 1995; Oldfield and Baron, 1998; Becket and Brookes, 2008). Reasons for the growing concern for quality assurance within the expanding global higher education system are rapid expansion of student numbers, growing public expenditure on higher education, the demand for better public services, increasing competition within the educational market for resources and students, the tensions between efficiency and quality, increasing public demand for the accountability of higher education (Becket and Brookes, 2006). Rapid changes in Universities in Ghana and rising tertiary enrolment amidst declining budget requires concerted action by stakeholders through quality assurance mechanisms and to enhance performance by strengthening administrative systems. In Ghana, there has been a rapid expansion in the number of universities within a very short span of time. Currently available data from the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) indicates that presently, there are 10 public universities and 49 accredited private universities in Ghana.

THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

According to Wahlen (1998) quality assurance in higher education is the activity that aims at maintaining and raising quality, e.g., research, analysis, assessing acceptability, recruitment, appointment procedures and different mechanisms and systems. The aim of the quality assurance in higher education is to guarantee the improvement of standards and quality in higher education in order to make higher education meet the needs of students, employers and financiers (Lomas, 2002). Quality assurance in higher education is not an end in itself, but an inherent task of honoring the principle of quality in all aspects of Endeavour in higher education institutions (Adu-Oppong, 2012). It involves a systematic procedure of verifying that education is meeting the specified conditions requisite to the actualization of its goals (Archibong, 2013).

According to Brennan and Shah (2000), quality assurance in higher education is increasingly used to denote the practices whereby academic standards, i.e., the level of academic achievement attained by higher education graduates, are maintained and improved. Stand (2008) looks at quality assurance as a continuous process by which an institution can guarantee that standards and quality of its educational provisions are being maintained or enhanced. Kisilowska (2002) states that quality assurance principles are a certain form of naming and ordering the actions that are necessary for assuring the quality, for instance of teaching, that later is internally measured and evaluated at a given university and also externally, during an accreditation process. As such, quality assurance principles are to be used as indicators to ensure compliance. Quality assurance processes in higher education can be either external or internal to the university. The main objective here is to ascertain if standards are being maintained and improved upon. External quality assurance entails an assessment by an authorized agency or expert body to authenticate if institutions are

working in line with laid down minimum academic standards or predetermined professional standards of the programmed. According to IIEP (2006) internal quality assurance on the other hand refers to the internal policies and mechanisms of a university or programme for ensuring that it is fulfilling its purposes as well as the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular.

Individual universities have always had policies and practices designed to assure the quality of education, but academic institutions have also always paid particularly attention to maintaining quality standards in administrative functions. This has in recent times become evident in reviews of new forms of quality assurance that have accompanied recent reforms in national policies and the issues developed for higher education.

Since Quality assurance issues concern all institutional responsibilities and activities by considering the specific characteristics of each area, universities must therefore maintain the highest international quality standards as benchmarks and apply them to all areas of university activities, in research, teaching and as well as in university administration (Adu-Oppong, 2012). This is not only comprised of special evaluation processes and procedures, but performance processes themselves include elements of quality assurance, such as reflecting on the current level of performance and potentials for improvement. It also entails the periodic assessment of academic departments; service units, stakeholder interest, the further development of processes for evaluating research and publication activities, as well as quality assurance in staffing decisions (Adu-Oppong, 2012).

According to Harvey (1999) quality assurance *is* based on three main principles: control, accountability and improvement.

- **Accountability** usually requires meeting the preferences of stakeholders.
- **Control** means that the institution does not merely control the expenditure of resources but also shows how high quality is achievable with the existing resources.
- **Improvement** enables the institution to get necessary input, refine the process and raise the standards of output in order to meet the goals set.

In this regard, quality is achieved when the expectations of stakeholders are met with available resources through the attainment of set standards.

ROLE OF ADMINISTRATORS IN ASSURING QUALITY IN UNIVERSITIES

Universities abound with career opportunities beyond teaching and academic research. Administration is also an important career area in higher education institutions. University administration, as career area, involves a wide range of professional areas made up of people with different backgrounds, skills; talents and professional competencies required to work in an academic workplace. An administrator is any person appointed or assigned full-time to an administrative position. The roles of administrators range from administrative to professional. Professional administrators in universities include the vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors, registrars, librarians and directors of health services and the directors of finance audit and physical planning, while the academic administrators were the provosts of colleges, the deans of schools faculties, the heads of departments and the heads of academic units of public universities (Duze, 2012). University administration therefore provides the matrix which binds together various integral and important parts of the university. It also lubricates the machinery of governance to sustain a smooth and effective operation (Duze, 2012). Higher education would therefore not function without committed, hardworking administrators who take a broad view of the institution's interests.

The degree of complexity attendant in university administration is hardly to be encountered in any other situation with peculiarities which distinguish it from others. Among these are examinations and high degree of concentration of brains (Duze, 2012). Administrators in universities are primarily concerned with how to manage resources allocated to them. Administrators manage budgets, personnel and policy; shape institutional priorities and practices; coordinate and communicate. Administration requires constant teamwork and communication. Faculty members set their own schedules and are used to working alone but administrators do not; meetings and one-on-one conversations are not an interruption of an administrators work; they are an administrator's work. In universities, the need for quality in the operation of the system must be given priority and as a result, an administrator needs to always possess skills to focus on the job and to ensure quality standards in job performance.

The administrator's function for quality assurance is crucial to the effective management of higher education institutions. According to Ogunsaju (2006), these functions are:

- **Planning:** This is an essential aspect of good management. It requires the ability of the administrator to look ahead and be able to formulate and select appropriate objectives and procedures to be followed within the administrative system. To ensure quality administrative management, administrators should take active roles in planning and managing activities.
- **Organising:** This is the ability of the administrator to create structural work. It involves focusing attention on the structure and process of allocating tasks to achieve common objectives.
- **Staffing:** This requires the administrator's ability to search for the right people and to place them on

the right job both in quality and quantity which would reflect their experience and capability for achieving objectives.

- **Motivating:** This is important for achieving objectives. Administrators should be motivators in ensuring the quality of work output. They should know how to boost the morale of their workers in order to obtain maximum efficiency and effectiveness from them. Administrators can motivate staff in many ways. This includes constant payment of salaries and other emoluments needed for their welfare. Administrators should also provide and arrange administrative and technical support for staff to perform effectively.

- **Evaluating:** This involves the administrator's ability to review and review performance and outcomes of activities in consonance with the aims and objectives to ensure that, set down goals and objectives are achieved through quality control system.

Aside these functions, Ogunsaju (2001) asserts that, an administrator should possess specific skills to be effective. He maintains that an administrator should be a good listener, an encourager, dissuader, reporter, watcher, judge, critic and a decision taker in order to perform his/her roles effectively in assuring quality of performance.

ENHANCING QUALITY

University administration places a high value on the integrity; effectiveness and efficiency particularly as embodied in the stewardship role of administrators who have the challenging task of managing resources within a complex environment of university policies and national regulations and should be held accountable and recognized for performance. Today, university administrators in Ghana are faced with challenges of managing increasing student enrollments, growing educational opportunities, implementing new technologies, responding to workplace demands and at the same time, maintaining standards. It has therefore become important for university administrators to accept their responsibilities and understand that they are to be held accountable for following sound business practices. As such, for university administration to be effective, best practices and standards must be followed.

The performance of critical administrative business activities of universities lies with administrators. In ensuring quality, this study addresses two key components of administrative excellence:

- Development of resources and expertise, to assist administrators in planning, promoting, motivating and monitoring the university's overall administrative performance

- Clearer communication of institutional expectations

Regardless of the department or section administrators are placed, they have responsibilities for ensuring that best practices and standards are followed and upheld in all areas of Endeavour. These responsibilities include staffing, management, funding, resourcing, auditing, supervising, monitoring and evaluation of service quality standards.

A major key area for which administrators' effectiveness is evaluated is departmental administration. This encapsulates the full range of responsibilities held by administrators, including responsibilities for general administrative functions as well as technical functions in respect of the area of specialization. The nature of many departmental business operations makes delegation a necessary strategy for administrators. This allows an administrator to plan, promote, support, motivate, monitor and as well consult other administrators with technical knowledge and expertise regarding several aspect of work, fostering teamwork for achieving common goals and ensuring the maintenance of quality.

Administrators should be motivators in ensuring the quality of teaching, research and administrative management of universities. According to Giannoni and Tesone (2003), intrinsic or personal rewards, such as promotion, workload adjustment, or reduction in duties and increase in pay approaches could be used. Administrators should understand stakeholder needs and concerns in order to motivate. Stakeholder concerns are mostly centered on heavy workload, lack of institutional support, inadequate compensation, incentive structures, loss of autonomy and control of the curriculum, lack of technical training and support, time requirement and time taken from research (Robinson, 2000).Administrators should also be responsive to stakeholder support needs. Support needs of stakeholder may differ from one stakeholder to another. Simonson and Bauck (2003) observes that student support needs include support for academic counseling, library services, training on equipment and software, financial aid, access to instructional resources and technology requirements.

Another area of importance in maintaining quality in administration is communication. Standa (2007) observes that quality management involves effective communication and engagement with relevant stakeholders. Lack of effective communication with stakeholders is an obstacle to effective implementation of plans and projects; it also impacts negatively on provision of quality of services. University administrators must therefore realise that communication is essential for effective functioning in every section/department of the university. Although all departments may receive direction from corporate goals and objectives, communication links them together and facilitates organizational success. The importance of

effective communication for administrators cannot be overemphasized for one specific reason: everything an administrator does, involves communicating. Communication is needed to increase efficiency, satisfy stakeholders, improve quality and create innovative programmes. The university administrative system should therefore emphasise communication of the strategic goals and objectives in the workplace to the people involved in making sure they happen. When all members of a team, department, or unit are able to communicate effectively with each other and with people outside their group, they are much more likely to perform well. These facts have an important implication for administrators. A quality administrative system requires accountability and responsiveness and quality assurance in many aspects in this regard, administrators need to rise to the occasion to ensure the quality of administrative performance.

CONCLUSION

The development of effective administrative system is a key component which greatly enhances quality assurance. The roles of university administrators can never be underestimated in this light. Administrators are the most important factors in success of quality assurance maintenance in universities. Quality assurance is strengthened when administrators realise their roles in the quality assurance process. Beyond doubt, to ensure quality, administrators must be planners, motivators, supervisors and effective communicators. When administrators understand clearly what their roles are and the impact their contribution has on the quality of university management and administration, they can begin to take major steps toward achieving quality standards. Therefore, it is crucial for administrators to realize the roles they play in ensuring the quality of programmers and services to their stakeholders.

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