

A Critical Analysis of the Challenges Facing Namibian Higher Education Institutions in Implementing Quality Management Practices



Esther Nuuyoma¹, Elock Emvula Shikalepo²

¹Directorate of Quality Assurance and Management, The International University of Management (IUM), Windhoek, Namibia

²Directorate of Postgraduate Studies, Research and Consultancy, The International University of Management (IUM), Windhoek, Namibia

ABSTRACT: Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Namibia place a strong emphasis on quality assurance and standards in their operations. This is evident through the establishment of quality assurance units dedicated to the maintenance of high standards of education. Even though the significance of Quality Management Practices (QMPs) is acknowledged, Namibian HEIs encounter numerous challenges in hindering an effective implementation of QMPs. This study focused on identifying the challenges associated with the implementation of QMPs at HEIs in Namibia, with the aim of exploring how the implementation of QMPs can be improved for Namibian HEIs to produce quality graduates suited for market demand. A mixed-methods research methodology was employed for the study, where a total of 23 staff members and 74 final-year students from one public HEI in Namibia were selected as participants for the study. Questionnaires were distributed to both staff members and students, while staff members were also interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges related to the implementation of QMPs. Key findings revealed that the implementation of QMPs was faced by challenges related to inadequate human and financial resources, limited awareness about the benefits of quality management, poor communication and lack of collaborations within departments of HEIs, ineffective decision-making processes and inadequate training for staff members on QMPs. To mitigate these challenges, HEIs in Namibia should enhance their communication efforts with all stakeholders, increase staffing, and maximise training opportunities on QMPs. This will ensure an effective implementation of QMPs among HEIs, resulting in the production of graduates who are suited for the labour market.

KEYWORDS: higher education, higher education institutions, public higher education institutions, quality management practices, quality practices, total quality management

INTRODUCTION

Organisations have historically faced difficulties in maintaining and improving their quality standards to stay ahead of their competitors. To address this gap, researchers have turned to Total Quality Management (TQM) and benchmarking as effective strategies for enhancing performance in both manufacturing and service industries (Jaafreh & Al-abedallat, 2012; Talib & Rahman, 2012). The application of TQM principles to service organisations began following the success of TQM application in manufacturing sectors, influenced by the Deming philosophy (Prajogo, 2005). However, there are notable differences in the nature of operations between manufacturing and service industries that may present challenges in the adoption of TQM (Prajogo, 2005). Furthermore, Michael, Sower and Motwani (1997) are of the opinion that a customised TQM model that takes into account the distinct features of the education sector can be effectively implemented in HEIs.

Magutu et al. (2010) contend that while higher education has the capacity to implement numerous quality management practices, it is reasonable to anticipate challenges when implementing them in a different organisational structure, such as that of the commercial sector. This notion is supported by Becket and Brookes (2008), who explained that academics have expressed apprehensions about the effective implementation of quality management systems (QMS) as a result of negative reviews that indicate that it primarily concentrates on administrative and service processes, while neglecting the student learning experience. In a separate study conducted by Brookes and Becket (2007), which concentrated on a review of literature on quality management in higher education, it was discovered that the testing or implementation of quality management models developed by industry are more effective in evaluating administrative or service functions within higher education institutions than the quality of research,

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instruction, and knowledge transfer. Thus, its efficacy and suitability in meeting the requirements of higher education are subject to debate (Mizikaci, 2006).

Even so, a variety of factors are motivating HEIs to implement quality management practices. These factors encompass the necessity for cost-efficiency, accountability, service orientations and increased competition. Consequently, higher education is increasingly emphasising a performance-based or value-added approach to excellence, in which the quality of the programme is determined by its outcomes, such as the production of graduates who are highly satisfied and employable (Koslowski, 2006). Anderson (2006) concurs that the quality revolution in higher education has emphasised the necessity for universities to demonstrate that they are consistently seeking to enhance both the quality of their education and research. This is the reason why quality management issues have captivated the attention of both academicians and education practitioners in an effort to establish a sustainable competitive advantage in the context of economic recession (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009).

The adoption of quality management practices in Namibian HEIs has prompted scholars into conducting studies in an effort to establish the effectiveness of quality systems in place. Matengu, Likando and Kangumu (2014) confirmed that Namibian HEIs have put in place both internal and external mechanisms for quality assurance, which are in line with the institutions' mandates. The authors also emphasised that while this is good practice and should be encouraged, it also points to some level of doubt in the Namibian policy system, which in itself is in its infancy. Congruent with this revelation, Kadhila (2012) points out that in Namibia, as in many countries around the world, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of quality in higher education for national development. He further emphasises that this relationship is premised on the assumption that higher education will provide the necessary quality inputs and the expected quality outputs, which is quality graduates fit for the labour market.

Recent changes in the structure, governance and policy of HEIs globally reflect a push towards enhancing quality in education and research (Nicolescu, 2009). Therefore, this study investigated the challenges encountered during the implementation of QMPs at Namibian HEIs. It also explored how the implementation processes were to be improved for Namibian HEIs to produce quality and employable graduates. The findings of the study may be used by academics and researchers to broaden their quality management curriculum on continual improvement, even if theoretical analysis may not offer apparent solutions. The study was guided by the following questions:

- a) What challenges are faced in the implementation of quality management practices at HEIs in Namibia?
- b) How can the implementation of QMPs be improved for HEIs in Namibia to produce quality and employable graduates?

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the potential for improving the quality of graduates from HEIs in Namibia and worldwide exists, there are numerous challenges that prevent the effective implementation of QMPs. A review of literature provides insight into the concept of quality, leadership and management in higher education and the challenges attributed to improving quality in HEIs.

The Concept of Quality

Defining quality in higher education is a complex task, as different stakeholders have different perspectives on what constitutes quality. Despite the challenges in defining quality, various scholars have attempted to provide frameworks for understanding the concept. Reynolds (1990) suggests that quality can be defined in various ways, depending on the stakeholder's interests. For students, quality may mean access to proper facilities for knowledge advancement, while government and industrialists may prioritize producing highly trained graduates with adaptable minds. For Avram and Avram (2011), quality in academia is a mirror of acceptable academic performance, which in the knowledge-based society, means compatibility with the educational standards worldwide and is gauged by transferability of credits – an indicator of international recognition of quality. Most HEIs strive to become globally recognised on the basis of the perceived quality of education they offer, which is dependent on the quality of faculties, administrative structure, and quality of graduates; and this can only be achieved if the processes of teaching, learning and research are properly managed (Ebiringa, 2012).

In addition, Harvey and Green (1993) propose a comprehensive definition of quality in higher education that encompasses five dimensions. These include seeing quality as exceptional, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation. Schindler et al. (2015) further break down quality indicators into specific categories, such as administrative, student support, instructional and student performance indicators, to assess desired inputs and outputs in higher education. The administrative, student support and instructional categories primarily address the desired inputs, such as educational resources available to students. The student performance category focuses more on outputs, such as gains in learning, which reflects the trends in assessing student outcomes to assure quality.

In the Namibian context, Kadhila (2012) provides a definition of quality in higher education that emphasises meeting the expectations of both internal and external stakeholders through various elements, including input, process and output. This definition highlights the connection between producing high-quality work and ensuring the satisfaction of all parties involved. Assessing Kadhila's notion of quality, it is apparent that effective leadership is essential for maintaining quality in higher education, as it

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promotes collaboration, excellence and successful implementation of QMPs, thereby ensuring a smooth operation of a higher education institution.

Leadership and Management in Higher Education

Extant literature highlights the significance of leadership and top-management roles in influencing quality in higher education and service delivery. Even though these leadership practices have been identified, numerous organisations continue to face challenges in ensuring that their leaders successfully involve stakeholders in the planning and implementation processes. In order to guarantee the success of higher education initiatives and maintain sustainable organisational success, effective leadership is crucial.

Transformational and transactional leadership styles have been identified as key in higher education (Burns, 1978; Middlehurst, Goreham and Woodfield, 2009), with the former emphasizing engagement with followers to achieve shared goals and the latter focusing on the exchange of resources. The balance between these two styles is crucial for effective leadership. In support of this, Martin et al. (2003) attest that transformational leadership in a higher education context is linked to high quality student learning processes and outcomes. According to Burns' transformational leadership is where leaders focus on the beliefs, needs and values of their followers, leaders who transform their followers and engage with them to achieve set goals. Similarly, transactional (ordinary leaders) leaders focus on the relationship between the leader and follower by adopting a punishment and reward style of leadership.

Leaders must foster a culture of constant improvement, innovation, and excellence within the organisation, and ensure that all members are dedicated to achieving top-notch quality in their work. According to Anyemele (2004), leadership plays a crucial role in managing institutions effectively. Effective leadership in academic institutions, such as universities, can lead to benefits like achieving excellence and fostering collaboration among employees and partnership with other institutions. Anyemele emphasizes that management establishes the framework, policies, and guidelines necessary for an organization to perform at its best. Dahlgaard et al. (1995), Lakshman (2006), and Spanbauer (1995) also support this viewpoint, highlighting that strong leadership is essential for successfully implementing quality systems in education.

In addition, Parrish (2010) suggests that the success or failure of higher education initiatives ultimately rests on the leader, despite the involvement of others in achieving project goals. Leaders' actions and behaviors are shaped by the values and systems they establish for sustainable success. Effective leaders in higher education are identified by their ability to provide clear direction, build trust, and implement forward-thinking policies and practices. In higher education, successful leadership is a complex endeavour that necessitates a seamless collaboration between administrative and academic departments and an unwavering commitment to enhancing quality. Successful leaders are those who can easily adjust to evolving environments, encourage teamwork, thus guaranteeing longevity and success.

Quality-Improvement Challenges facing Higher Education

The issue of declining quality in the global higher education sector is a widespread concern. For example, in India, an influx of new institutions has been established to meet the growing demand for higher education. However, the employability of graduates from these institutions, particularly the newly established ones, is under scrutiny by the corporate sector (Jagadeesh, 2000). Similarly, a survey conducted by the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) found that between 51% and 63% of graduates from institutions in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda were deemed unprepared for the job market according to employers. In South Africa, many law firms discovered that Bachelor of Laws (LLB) graduates lacked essential skills like numeracy and literacy.

The challenge of declining quality, increased competition, and demands for accountability have pushed HEI to prioritise quality (Ariff, Zaidin & Sulong, 2007). Despite efforts to enhance quality management, the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education identified eight new challenges including rising demand, diversification of providers, private provisions, quality assurance, teacher education and academic progression (UNESCO, 2003). In Nigeria, Asiyai's study highlighted factors such as inadequate funding, teaching staff, poor policy implementation and lack of resources affecting the quality of higher education.

Research, like that of Csizmadia et al. (2008), has focused on how HEIs respond to quality management implementation. The study found that HEIs faced challenges due to the lack of national quality policies and unstable strategic plans. Other scholars, like Altbach et al. (2009) noted resistance to QMPs in HEIs due to factors like academic culture, lack of agreement on quality implications and limited administrative control.

In developing countries, the implementation of quality management systems faces obstacles such as staff resistance, lack of innovation and unclear communication (Altbach et al. 2009). Studies have also shown challenges in maintaining quality beyond minimum requirements and key challenges include weak leadership, declining quality of education and research and lack of quality assurance mechanisms (Engelkemeyer, 1993 in Redmond, 2008).

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Conceptual Framework

One of the aims of the literature review was to identify quality management conceptual framework, which may be suitable for analysing challenges associated with the effective implementation of QMPs in Namibian HEIs. The following conceptual framework identifies QMPs, which were deemed effective in investigating the phenomenon under study. The concepts which have been identified as deserving consideration in quality management in higher education are presented in the schematic diagram as shown in Figure 1 below.

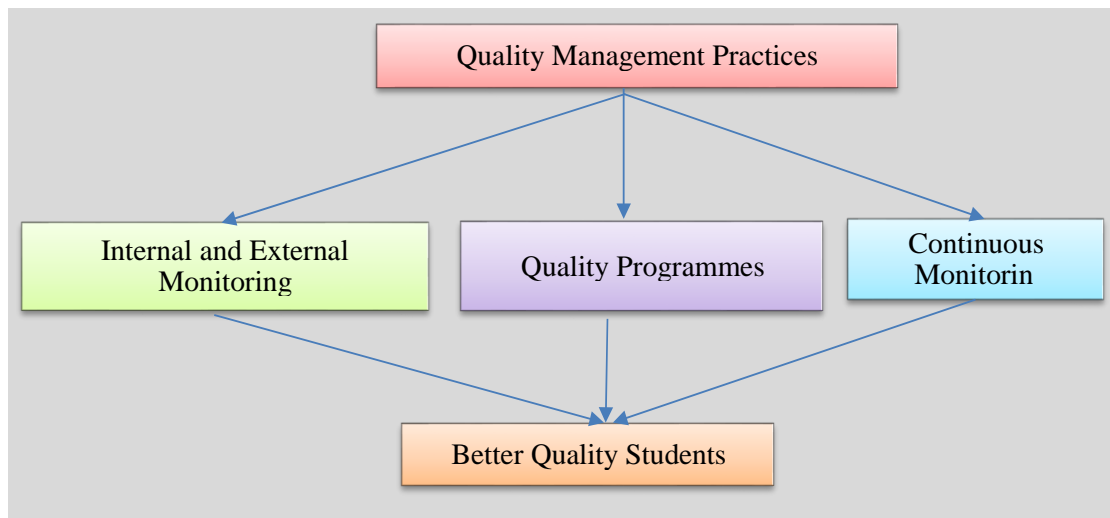


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Quality Management in Higher Education
Source: Nuuyoma (2016)

Figure 1 above gives an illustration of a quality management model in HEIs, which covers the two research questions for this study. The study focused on analysing the challenges associated with implementation of QMPs within HEIs and explored how the implementation processes be improved for Namibian HEIs to produce better-quality graduates. The four dimensions of the conceptual framework are discussed below.

Internal and External Monitoring of Teaching and Learning

Quality in the administration of HEIs is one of the vital tasks, which cannot be overlooked. According to Parnell (1990), quality standards in academic administration, teaching, and research are essential to higher education and of prime importance in satisfying goals. Lomas (2004) also emphasises that effective teaching and learning is essential if we are to promote excellence and opportunity in higher education. Lomas continues by stressing that high quality teaching must be recognised and rewarded, and best practice shared. Most institutional evaluations focus on procedures and rely on internal quality assurance mechanisms, yet they fail to appraise the effectiveness of quality teaching support and the impact on the quality of learning (Costes, et al., 2008), leaving this to the institution. Internal monitoring of QMPs ensures that institutional goals are met at the departmental and institutional levels.

Constant internal monitoring ensures that problems are detected early and thus solved before external stakeholders pick them up and inadvertently develop a negative perception of the institution because of that. The guiding principles which should apply include daily monitoring of academic and non-academic activities, immediate remedial action where there are deviations from the QMPs and clear course of action in case of deviations.

Quality Programmes

Quality education is a primary goal of traditional HEIs and activities related to teaching, assessments, and academic processes must align with institutional QMPs. As such, the academic processes that underlie educational activities must ensure that these activities meet the quality management expectations of existing policies. Asiyai (2013) argues that high quality delivery is a prerequisite for achieving high productivity in the education industry – a requirement for high quality graduates.

When teaching and assessment activities are aligned with the QMPs of the institution, then the chances that one academic unit would handle issues concerning assessment or teaching differently from another unit or department are minimised. Alignment to QMPs across departments/units creates a level playing field where all departments/units play on the same field with the same goals in mind and, hopefully, with similar outputs.

Continuous Monitoring

Monitoring at institutional level needs to be a continuous process, only then can deviations from set policies be detected and corrected in time for the benefit of the institutions stakeholders. Ebiringa (2012) states that quality is rarely achieved spontaneously

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but needs to be managed into the organisation and should be based on continuous improvement. Monitoring needs to be guided officially, with findings and action recorded and shared with stakeholders. These form part of quality programmes which can be created by the institution for better monitoring process. Implementing quality programmes encourages HEIs to collect data, which will enable them to measure progress in key areas and establish benchmarks (Sohail, et al., 2003). Every document concerning quality management needs to be stored to allow for future reference to the actions taken to remedy deviations from existing policies. The following are some guiding principles: documenting monitoring exercises; sharing monitoring results with stakeholders; documenting interventions; and following up to ensure that interventions have achieved the necessary results (i.e. evaluation).

Better Quality Students

A focus on quality education delivery ensures that students are prepared for real-world success. Student satisfaction is vital, and their wellbeing, participation in institutional planning, and feedback on educational experiences are key considerations for effective QMPs. Students need to be actively involved in discussions on their wellbeing and understand how their inputs contribute to maintaining quality in the learning environment. Existing literature proved that students are the most important stakeholders in HEIs and their participation in the institutional planning should be valued. An experiment conducted by Izadi, Kashef and Stadt (1996), showed that students are considered customers and that they participate in the planning of courses, determining what is taught, designing syllabi and assigning grades. He further goes on to explain that the TQM motto in education is to learn what the students need and constantly improve the educational processes to deliver it consistently. Sutcliffe and Pollock (1992) as in Izadi, Kashef and Stadt (1996), concluded that student perceptions of an institute should be sought actively by all levels to ensure that as much as possible is being done to enhance educational experiences within available resources. This means that students need to understand the procedures that are in place to manage quality and how their inputs assist in maintaining such quality. Students also need to know that they can contribute to making the learning environment better by raising issues of poor service delivery and engaging educators and managers in instances where they feel short-changed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the study is described next.

Research Strategy

A mixed methods design was preferred for this research to gain deep insight into the phenomenon under study. This methodology has helped in identifying challenges associated with the implementation QMPs in Namibian HEIs and how may the implementation processes be improved for the institution to produce better – quality graduates. The mixed research design also facilitated exploring the social world of stakeholders of HEIs for their social and material circumstances, their experiences and their perspectives in the higher education environment to be included in the effort at finding ways of improving the quality of graduates from the HEIs in the country.

Research Instruments

Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection for this study. The questionnaires required mainly Likert-scale-type of answers for quantitative analysis, though each had a few open-ended questions that provided answers for some qualitative analysis to aid with a holistic understanding of the subject being studied. The open-ended questions focused on the issues that needed to be explored to greater depth in the interviews that could not be scheduled.

Open-ended questions allow respondents the opportunity to express their views thoroughly and therefore have full participation in the conversation (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Saunders et al., 2009). In addition, open-ended questions allow time and space for participants to share their understanding, experiences, opinions and interpretations of, as well as their reactions to, the quality issue in Namibia's HEIs (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2005).

Participants and Data collection

This study confined itself to one public HEI in Namibia and so the population comprised students, academic staff and administrative staff of this institution. Fifty-six (56) academic and 15 administrative staff members were included in the study. The researchers obtained a list of all academic and administrative staff members in all the faculties and questionnaires were emailed to staff members selected and sent through Google Docs. Eleven (11) academic and twelve (12) administrative staff members completed and returned the questionnaires. The researchers then sifted to systematic sampling by selecting every eighth student in the list, for which questionnaires were e-mailed to all 240 selected final-year students through Google Docs. Seventy-four (74) students completed and returned the questionnaire. The semi-structured interviews with all staff members who completed the questionnaires allowed respondents opportunity to express their views thoroughly and therefore have fuller participation in the conversation (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Saunders et al., 2009).

Data Analysis

The collected quantitative and qualitative data were analysed and interpreted in line with the objectives of the study. For the quantitative data, this study used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse the quantitative data. With the

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qualitative data, the following eight steps approach of Tesch (1990), reproduced in Creswell (2003), was adopted for analysing the qualitative data:

- a) Read all the transcriptions carefully.
- b) Pick one document (i.e., one interview)—the most interesting one, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, “What is this about?”
- c) Cluster together similar topics.
- d) Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text.
- e) Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories.
- f) Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetise these codes.
- g) Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
- h) If necessary, recode your existing data.

This approach was adopted to allow the discussion of the results in the context of the literature, and to allow for conclusions to be drawn and recommendations made for improving quality management at HEIs.

Quality Criteria of the Study

The measuring instruments used for any research must be both reliable and valid for the findings of the study to be credible. According to Flynn, Schroeder and Sakakibara (1994), reliability is broadly defined as the degree to which scales are free from error and, therefore, consistent. The two questionnaires, which were answered by both groups, staff members and students showed consistency in responses. The Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was used to determine the internal reliability of the instruments and the results indicated how well the items are correlated with each other.

Validity, on the other hand, involves the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure. This may indicate the extent to which the researcher and the respondents understand questions asked during a study in the same way. To ensure that questions were relevant and easily understood by respondents, a pilot study was conducted with 10 staff members and 20 students randomly selected from the selected institution. Even though the sample identified for this study was picked in the hope that the respondents had extensive knowledge in the area of QMPs, the pilot showed that this assumption was not correct; that some of the questions were difficult for respondents to comprehend. As a result, terminologies were simplified into a lay-men language, which made it easier for respondents to understand the questions in the same way as the researcher and ensure that no question was misinterpreted by the participants.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that this research was conducted following ethically acceptable procedure, a letter to the institution was written seeking permission to conduct the research. The letter explained the purpose of the study and how it would be conducted. Participants were also informed that they have the right to agree or refuse to participate, and were requested to sign consent forms indicating voluntary participation in the research. In addition, participants were assured that all the information they provided would remain confidential and would be used anonymously only for the purpose of this study.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on challenges associated with the effective implementation of QMPs at HEIs in Namibia. The scope of this study was therefore limited to one public university. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) observe that every study has a set of limitations. This study too has its limitations, which need to be acknowledged. Firstly, because of limited literature in the Namibian context, literature from other studies conducted from other countries has been extensively applied in this study. Secondly, the busy work schedules made it difficult for some respondents to complete questionnaires and/or make time for interviews, which eliminated some respondents who would have given useful responses. This denied the study some of the richness it could have had. Thirdly, some of the students in the sample had no clue on the research topic at hand and so made very little contribution. The findings, however, present an overall, challenges faced in the implementation of QMPs in Namibian HEIs and what can be done to improve the quality of students the institution produces.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenges faced in the Implementation of Quality Management

Students identified four major challenges faced in the implementation of quality management practices at the selected institution as shown in Figure 2 below.

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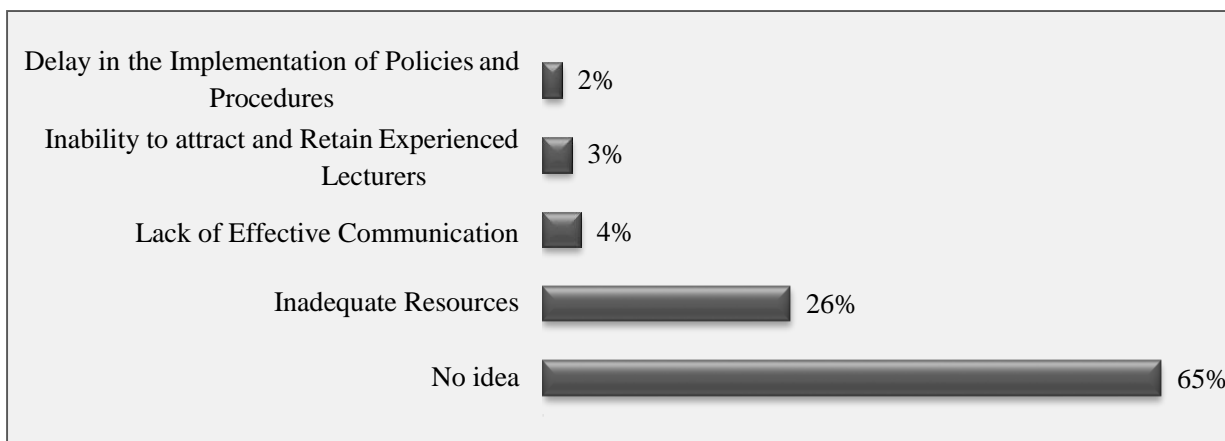


Figure 2: Quality Management Implementation Challenges faced by Students

The responses of the 65% of the students surveyed, as show in Figure 2 above, could not identify challenges faced in the implementation of quality institution at the institution because they were not quite familiar with the QMPs in place. Yet a small percentage of students were able to list a number of challenges hindering the effective implementation of quality management systems at the institution. From Figure 2 above, 26% of the students identified lack of inadequate resources – both human and financial resources – as an obstacle to implementation of quality management practices at the institution. Secondly, lack of effective communication with students on issues of quality management is mentioned by 4% of the respondents as a challenge; and this may explain why most of the students are not aware of what quality management entails – hence their difficulty in explaining the concept and identifying challenges. Thirdly, the institution’s inability to attract and retain experienced lecturers is mentioned by 3% of the respondents. Lastly, 2% of the respondents mentioned that new policies and procedures unusually take long time to implement and when they are finally implemented, they have lost relevance and do not benefit students as was envisaged.

The above challenges correlate with the views of staff members that lack of funds and understaffing were challenges to the implementation of QMPs. The views expressed by staff members are illustrated in Figure 3. Because a staff member could identify more than one challenge, the percentages in Figure 3 do not add up to 100%.

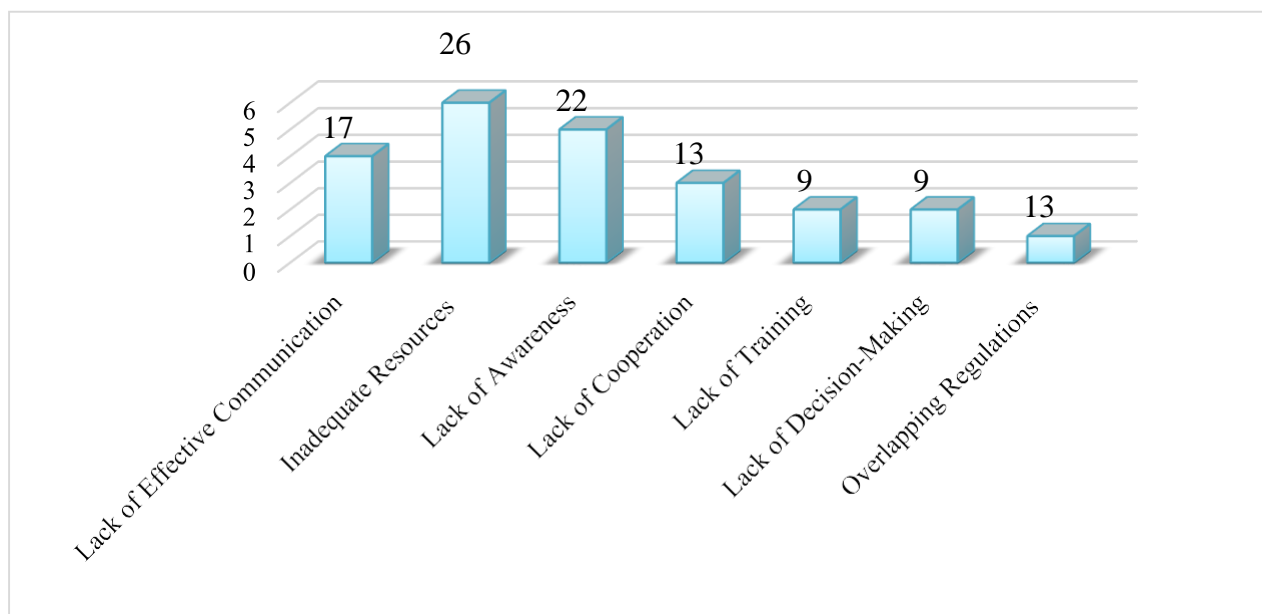


Figure 3: Challenges faced by staff in implementing quality management practices

Figure 3 above presents the seven challenges faced by staff members in the implementation of quality management are elaborated herein under. The challenges and discussed next.

Lack of Effective Communication

The third most cited challenge by staff members in the implementation of quality management is lack of communication – 17% of the respondents mentioned this. Respondents pointed out that there was lack of communication within various faculties, between

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management and staff members, and between the institution and the students. Even though communication is considered to be of great importance in quality management, respondents, both staff members and students, were of the opinion that it was not being done effectively, as they were not given important information regarding quality management. In their study on the role of effective communication in TQM, Choudhary and Rathore (2013) found a strong relationship between good communication and successful implementation of quality management practices. They also state that although communication has always been a key requirement of good management, it is even more important in the implementation of total quality management. Similarly, Saraiva, Novas and Gomes (2015), who examined whether organisational communication and quality management are related, found that in various sectors communication among employees of was satisfactory in organisations that organisations that performance well – that is, delivered quality service.

Inadequate Resources

The first challenge identified by majority of staff members (26%) in the implementation of quality management practices was inadequate resources – both human and financial resources. In this context, the constraining human resources was academic staff. This result of this situation was that departments dealing with quality management for the institution were not fully able to carry out their responsibilities and enhance quality management activities and expand it to include all the stakeholders for them to be aware of the quality objectives that are to be achieved – when, how and by whom. Ariff, Zaidin and Sulong (2007) draw attention to the fact that for HEIs, academic staff members are critical human resources, without whom academic programmes could not run, and thus are of utmost importance to faculties and university as whole. Shortage of academic staff members should therefore be avoided is quality is to be maintained.

Lack of Awareness

The second challenge identified by staff members was lack of awareness of the quality management practices in place, which was mentioned by 22% of the respondents. This includes staff members not sure of the role they were required to play to contribute towards the quality of the institution. Even though the analysis produced a high Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .849$) for the components of this construct of awareness of policies and procedures in relation to staff members, which gives an impression that staff members were well informed, both staff members and students indicated that the policies and procedures were not given the necessary circulation.

The literature on TQM suggests that employees at all levels need to become very familiar with the TQM policies and procedures of the organisation for them to use TQM to improve their institution's processes and functions (McMillan, 1998; cited in Altahayneh, 2014). This lack of awareness is, as shown by the responses, because of lack of communication on quality issues within the institution, in spite of the importance of communication in all organisations.

Lack of Co-operation

The challenge that ranked fourth in terms of the percentage of the respondents that cited it (13%) was lack of co-operation between various departments. The results of the study indicated that Departments did not cooperate on QMPs; each Department tended to have its own arrangement, and, therefore, seemingly unaware of the fact that the ultimate goal of providing quality service to every student of the institution required cooperation among Departments and Faculties. This is the point made by Choudhary and Rathore (2013) that TQM is a principle, which requires the mutual cooperation of everyone that is involved in the operations of an organisation and all the stakeholders. In fact, the conceptual framework for this study indicated that the alignment of QPMs with all departments creates a level playing field for all the departments to generate synergy in achieving quality.

Lack of Training

Another 9% of the respondents indicated that lack of training was a challenge in the implementation of quality management. It is difficult for employees to achieve the goals set for them if their knowledge base and level of understanding of the situations they are to deal with are shallow. Training is necessary for improving performance and for helping employees discover innovative ways to contribute to the organisation. Employees are able to identify opportunities for improvement when trained on a regular basis, which empower them to contribute to ongoing quality improvement processes of the organisation. Stahl (1995) had also argued that training and development programmes should not be seen as a once-off event, but as a lifelong process. Total quality training material and support (whether internal from a quality director and team or from external consultants) will be of real value only if the employees are motivated to respond positively to them (Choudhary & Rathore, 2013). So motivation for training to improve quality should be on-going.

Because the selected institution has evolved from a Polytechnic, which did not put much emphasis on higher qualifications for staff member, many members of both the academic and administrative staff need to obtain higher degrees, especially PhDs for academic staff. It would be difficult for employees to achieve the quality goals of the institution if they do not have the qualifications required under the new work arrangements. Opportunities for training are, therefore, necessary for improving teaching and learning processes and helping staff members discover innovative ways to improve the institution. This argument is supported by Osseo-

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Asare and Longbottom (2002), cited in Cullen, Joyce, Hassall and Broadbent (2003), who emphasised that effective implementation of any quality-oriented change programme involves proper education and training of those who would be involved on the implementation process.

Lack of Decision-Making

The slow pace of decision-making was listed by 9% of the staff respondents as a challenge in the implementation of quality management. This was a particularly important area of TQM. Visionary leaders in higher education bear the responsibility of setting up quality management units. However, for such units to function effectively, they should be allowed to function independently yet under the supervision and with the support of senior management and be able to make informative decisions. Individual Departments will, in some instances, only comply with the recommendations of a quality management unit if that unit not only receives the full and uncompromising support of senior management, but also the independence and uncompromising guidance given by senior managers.

Top management can only make informed decision when they are aware of and understand that quality management activities are of vital to the operation of the organisation. However, the results of this study show that even though top management is aware of the problems that hinder the smooth implementation of quality management, they have not been keen on seeing them solved. This is because there is little or no communication from senior management on efforts to strengthen quality management practices at the institution. Hamidi and Zamanparvar (2008), cited in Altaheyneh (2014), observe that lack of top management involvement in and commitment to TQM change are common reasons for TQM failure. Vora (2002), cited in O'Mahony and Gravan (2012), argues that the successful implementation of quality management in higher education is difficult without the involvement, commitment and sponsorship of senior higher education leaders. This commitment needs to be communicated to the staff members and the students.

Overlapping of Regulations on Quality Management

Another challenge that ranked joint fourth (13% of staff respondents) was overlapping of regulations on quality management. This challenge was not common to the selected institution; the report of the external audit conducted in 2011 at another public institution in Namibia, reports that there are overlapping of regulations on quality management. The report revealed that there was too much overlap between departments and suggests that the university considers bringing the office of the Director of Academic Affairs, the Quality Unit, and the TLI Unit together into one overarching entity. This entity will provide a more cohesive and less fragmented focal point for strategy and management in academic affairs, quality assurance, and learning and teaching enhancement. As explained above, the selected public institution has two divisions responsible for quality assurance. These divisions are the Programme Development and Registration Unit responsible for organizing and managing programme (curriculum) development activities in the institution and ensuring the registration of qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Quality Assurance Unit which ensures that the quality of education and services offered by the institution are of high standard and that the students receive the best possible education available.

Similar overlaps have been observed in the implementation of quality management systems in other sectors and they have been identified as a challenge that needs to be addressed for the goals of quality management to be achieved.

Role of Senior Faculty Members in dealing with Quality Management Challenges

The study further intended to find out about the views of staff members on how senior faculty leaders deal with quality management challenges of the institution. The views of the respondents are presented in Figure 4 below:

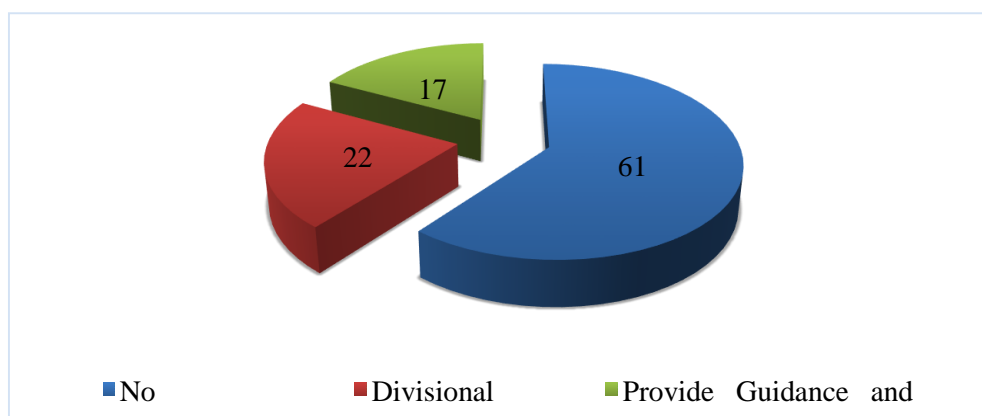


Figure 3: Role of Senior Faculty Members in Quality Management

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From Figure 4 above, the majority of respondents (61%) indicated that in as much as they wanted to tackle quality management issues in the institution, there was no communication from top management that addressed quality management issues. This helps to identify an important role that top management of the institution could play in dealing with the challenges in implementing quality management – making sure that quality management objectives are clearly communicated for all staff members to see their role in achieving those objectives. The results of this study show that there is little or no communication from senior staff members on effort to strengthen quality management practices at the institution. The study identified several challenges, yet there is no evidence that whatever is being done to address these challenges is being communicated to staff members. Vora (2002), cited in O’Mahony and Gravan (2012), argues that though the successful implementation of quality management in higher education institutions is difficult without the involvement, commitment and sponsorship of senior management, success comes only when this commitment is communicated to the staff members and the students. In support of this view, Osseo-Asare et al. (2007), cited in O’Mahony and Gravan (2012), also found that the role of leadership in TQM include the communication of a clear statement of mission, successful implementation of quality processes, and utilising an empowerment approach.

The discussion above shows that the leaders of selected institution must begin to communicate issues related to quality to both staff and students, as non-communication has the potential to derail the process of managing quality. According to Trivellas et al., (2012), the lack of a participative culture, stimulating discussions, and analyses of existing and impending quality improvement actions may all be the consequence of lack of communication, which could lead to disappointment and alienation of staff member or even to resistance to quality-inducing change. Successful leadership that contributes to the effective implementation of quality management systems should, therefore, embrace regular communication of quality issues. Quality management practices such as top management commitment, communication of such commitment, teamwork, continuous improvement through benchmarking, etc., have a positive influence on academic results (Nderitu & Nyaoga, 2013).

The view of 22% of the respondents was that Divisions hold meetings to address issues of quality, whilst 17% indicated that top management did not provide guidance and support to uplift the institution’s performance in terms of adhering to quality standards set for the institution. This is an indication that not all senior faculty staff members ignore making sure that the institution works towards the successful implementation of quality management. This is important for, as Choudhary and Rathore (2013) have observed, when senior management ensures that each team sees TQM as useful to the organisation, synergy is built up to improve quality of delivery. This implies that effective leadership contributes to effective implementation of a quality management system. According Nderitu and Nyaoga (2013), QMPs which involve top management commitment, teamwork, continuous improvement, and benchmarking have a positive influence on academic results. Csizmadia et al. (2008) emphasised that the higher the commitment of higher education leaders in an institution, the faster the pace of quality management implementation and the wider its scope.

Moreover, Osseo-Asare et al. (2007), cited in O’Mahony and Gravan (2012), investigated the role of leadership in TQM and identified three important leadership characteristics: the communication of a clear statement of mission, successful implementation of quality processes, utilising an empowerment approach and the use of timely data, information and knowledge of best practices. These findings are also in line with Horine and Hailey (1995) who emphasise that there are five key challenges that affect the successful implementation of QMPs and these are: organisation culture, senior leadership commitment, faculty support, implementation time and training.

Improving the Formulation and Implementation of Quality Management

Both academic and administrative staff members were asked to suggest ways in which improvements in the formulation and implementation of QMPs would make graduates from the institution market ready in terms of quality. Respondents proposed the following to be in place regarding the success of the implementation of quality management within the institution as presented in figure 5 below.

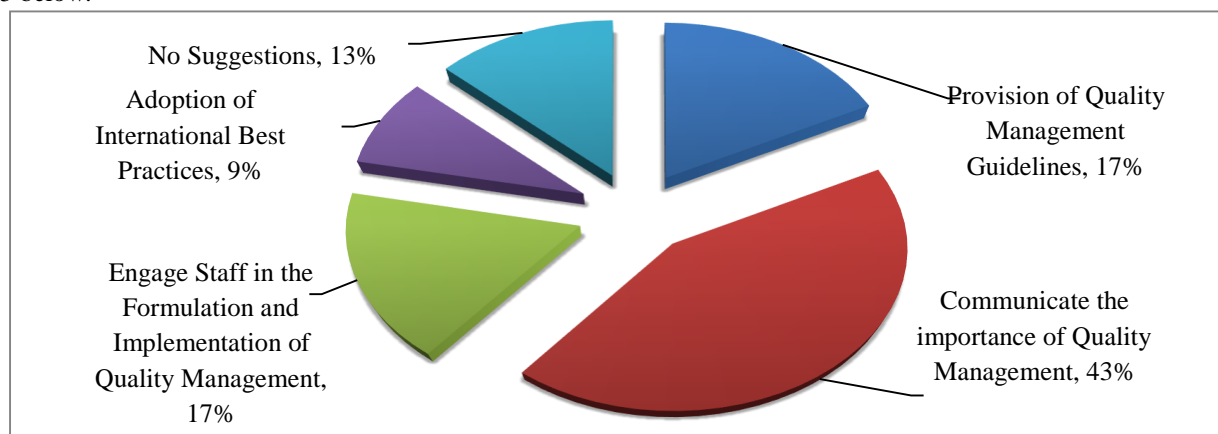


Figure 5: Views on Improving Quality Management

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Figure 5 above, shows that the majority of respondents (43%) suggested that there should be effective communication from the institution to all the institution's stakeholders regarding information on quality management. This will make everyone feel included in decision-making on QMPs in the institution.

Seventeen percent (17%) of the respondents suggested that all staff members be engaged in the formulation and implementation of quality management as this will encourage ownership and commitment. They further stressed that it is of vital importance to inform staff about the approach to implementing quality management and its benefits; and also to assign responsibilities to as many as possible for broader involvement.

Another 17% of the respondents proposed that the institution should provide information to all stakeholders so that they are informed of what is expected from them. Quality guidelines can be distributed to students annually. This will also give students assurance that the institution strives towards quality and have students' interest at heart.

The view that the institution should benchmark and adopt international best practices by learning from the quality standards that other reputable universities have adopted is expressed by 9% of the respondents. Many researchers consider benchmarking to be a key tool for effective implementation of quality management (Sinclair and Zairi, 2001). This suggestion assumes that since industrialised countries have more advanced educational institutions, collaboration through benchmarking would provide solutions to some of the quality management problems being experienced by HEIs in developing countries, including Namibia. Jagadeesh (2000) has, however, drawn attention to the fact that opinions regarding collaborative programmes seem to be divided. Jagadeesh explains that programmes modelled after foreign degree programmes may not be able to satisfy the needs of local business or industry. On the other hand, it could be argued that since such 'borrowed' programmes include more advanced materials and cover the latest developments, students trained in them can adapt and meet the challenges of the local industry, both at present and in the future, more effectively.

In the discussion on concerns about communication in connection with quality management above, some 13% had no suggestions, as they indicated that they were not familiar with the QMPs in place in the institution. A culture of regular communication on quality issues may have prevented this. Also, when students were asked to suggest improvements that could be made in the formulation and implementation of quality management practices in the institution to enhance the quality of its graduates, most of the respondents (47%) indicated that they had no suggestions since they were not aware of the current quality management practices in place. As though offering a suggestion on how to deal with this situation, 23% indicated that there should be effective communication from the institution to the students on the policies and procedures that are in place. This will put all the institution's stakeholders on the same page on quality; and suggestions for improvements should be welcome from all, which will make students feel included in decision-making on QMPs in the institution.

On measures to improve quality, a small proportion of the respondents (9%) indicated that, as a priority, the institution should consider increasing facilities and resources for studying, such as the numbers and quality of books in the library and internet facilities at the institution. This may be difficult to implement because at the moment budget cuts have reduced government subvention to HEIs in Namibia. Another 8% indicated that the institution should consider benchmarking with other reputable institutions for best practices in the formulation and implementation of quality management practices with the ultimate aim of producing quality, market-ready graduates. A further 4% each suggested that the institution educates students on issues pertaining to quality management practices and that the leadership of the institution should be seen to be driving the quality management movement. Finally, another 4% of the respondents indicated that once policies and procedures are developed, all stakeholders in the institution should be urged to be involved in the implementation.

CONCLUSION

Given the above research findings, one can conclude that HEIs in Namibia face challenges in the implementation of QMPs. This includes limitations in staff training, infrastructure, and technology, which are crucial for ensuring quality education. Additionally, there is a lack of consensus on what constitutes quality in higher education, leading to inconsistencies in the implementation of QMPs across institutions. Another significant challenge is the resistance to change from various stakeholders within HEIs. Faculty members, administrators and students may be resistant to implementing QMPs due to a lack of understanding, fear of change, or a belief that current practices are sufficient. This resistance can hinder the successful integration of QMPs and limit the overall quality of education provided.

Furthermore, the lack of a comprehensive framework or guidelines for implementing QMPs in Namibian HEIs poses a significant challenge. Without clear direction and guidance on how to adopt and sustain QMPs, higher education institutions may struggle to effectively implement quality improvement initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the challenges identified, the study recommends that HEIs in Namibia must prioritise the development of a clear quality management framework that is aligned with international best practices. This includes investing in staff training and

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development, providing adequate resources for quality improvement initiatives, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within the institution.

Additionally, effective communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing among HEIs, as well as with industry partners and other stakeholders, can help to identify best practices and address common challenges in implementing QMPs. By working together and learning from each other, institutions can strengthen their QMPs and ultimately improve the calibre of graduates entering the workforce, who can contribute to the development of the country and beyond.

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