

## INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: BEST PRACTICES AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN UGANDA UNIVERSITIES

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### ABSTRACT

The study is on institutional effectiveness and it x-rays some assessment practices and strategies in Uganda's universities. According to Kasenene (2013), the quality and accessibility of higher education has continued to fall short of stakeholders expectations. This assertion needs to be supported by more empirical evidence either in qualitative terms or quantitative terms. This study therefore delved into the measures of effectiveness of higher education namely; using data to measure students learning outcomes, and institutional support services in terms of teaching, research and community support services. Higher education in Uganda should rely on useful data in decision making and this cannot be achieved without establishing Institutional Research Departments (IRD) in all private and public universities in Uganda. Findings revealed that Uganda's universities relegate data usage to a very minimal relevance in terms of support in teaching, research, community services and in many areas that contribute to effectiveness of higher education. It is recommended that Uganda's universities refocus on measures of effectiveness by ensuring that the quality assurance departments extend their functions by embracing a strong data -base, enforce the measures of institutional effectiveness in their institutions in order to improve the quality of education for greater achievement of student learning outcomes. This will consequently impact on country's economic growth and development, having established that education is a major vehicle for a country's growth.

**KEYWORDS:** Institutional Effectiveness, Teaching, Research, Learning Outcomes, Higher Education, Quality of Higher Education

### INTRODUCTION

Institutional effectiveness is the systematic, explicit and documented process of measuring performance against mission in all aspects of an institution (Emory Resource Manual 2013). Institutions of higher learning are measured in terms of purpose, objectives consistent with mission, documentation of students achievement, intended outcomes and regular evaluation of students achievement and its use in improvement of educational programmes (Nichols and Nichols 2010). All elements of the system may not be taken simultaneously or even annually but can be done at periodic intervals that make sense for the institution and its mission.

Assessment of students learning is a systematic collection of information about students' learning, using time, knowledge, expertise and resource availability to inform decisions about how to improve learning (Walvoord. 2004). The unit of analysis may be at student level, programs level or institutional level. The course instructor assesses students' work using rubric and uses such to improve course for next semester. Program assessment involves group assessment to see how educational programme is contributing to learning and development of student in programs or faculty. Institutional assessment involve assessing the goals for student learning and this is done by analyzing data from survey (for example institutions engagement in community development).

Measuring quality of institutions of higher learning involved the three aspects of assessment which takes into account the following areas;

- Student learning outcomes
- Administrative support services.
- Research support level
- Community development

A planned assessment process that are purposely linked to institutional goals promote attention to those goals and plans and it will ensure that outcomes are sound and not disappointing (Middle States Commission on Higher Education 2005) The following research questions formed the basis of assessment of institutional effectiveness in universities in Uganda.

- Do you use data and other findings to improve the quality of your educational and operational responsibilities?
- Do you use findings to analyze resource requirements (enrollment, staff, curricular, co-curricular) and enhance desired outcomes?
- Do you have strong support services (not quality assurance department) in your university?

### **Literature Review**

Faculty involves themselves in students assessment. Good teaching, according to Walvoord (2004), requires more than simple transmission of information. It requires the faculty who are successful in their teaching and continually strive to become more reflective in their practice to improve. According to Astin (1993a), institutional assessment is a dancer's mirror and the dancer is to critique and correct her own dancing steps. It involves making better use of students grades in order to improve programs and test blue -prints or rubrics are very ideals (Walvoord and Anderson, 1998). Students surveys can also be used to make management decision if the survey is done with best practices.

It is also understood that student learning is a fundamental component of the mission of most institutions of higher education and that means it is an essential component of institutional effectiveness.

Institutional research is urgently needed in order to support the data collected by National Council on Higher Education (NCHE) on institutional assessment for improvement of institutional outcomes. In America and Europe, institutions of higher education are increasingly called upon to provide evidence that they are accomplishing their goals and objectives (Rogers and Gentheman 1989). In a recent survey by Boyer et al (1987), reports show that two thirds of all a states have formal assessment initiatives for their public institutions of higher learning. In recent years also, in East Africa, accountability in higher education has become a regional issue.

This is attributed to the fact that cross-border students' number is growing exponentially. There were a total of 45677 foreign students in private universities in Uganda by 2012. The National Council on Higher Education (NCHE) noted that there is increase in enrollment but the quality of higher education is dropping (NCHE 2004). In 2006, NCHE also supported a claim that higher education standards are lowered as enrollment increase in all the institutions. The reason for this could be deduced from failure of higher institutions to become more effective in measuring what matters most in institutional efficiency.

Institutional assessment is perceived as part of the usual and ongoing business and normal activities embedded within normal university operations rather than add-on (Sheldon et al 2008). In line with what Sheldon et al (2008) has said, Klein and Knight (2005) asserts that integration of institutional effectiveness activities into the normal operations of the institution will take resources (example time, training, and technical support). This is when one views effectiveness as an extra assignment for any university when it should be in the mind of the university management that to be relevant as an institutions, effectiveness is implied.

There is no quality without effectiveness. Welsh and Metcalf (2003) argued that institutional effectiveness efforts are compromised when faculty administrative and staff have differing definition of quality. Institutional effectiveness efforts are compromised, when faculty administrators and staff have differing definitions of quality. Institutional effectiveness efforts are more meaningful if resources, inputs, in structional and operational processes and outcomes are assessed in an environment of common understanding and shared purpose (Sheldon et al 2008). Involvement of faculty, staff and administrators is a critical under pinning of meaningful institutional effectiveness. Much of literature addresses the need to garner more faculty involvement in institutional effectiveness activities (Klein and Dunlap, 1994; Welsh and Metcalf,2003).

Most of our institutions agree that students learning outcomes should be assessed. But this has remained the work of faculty only and in all universities in East Africa, that seems to be the model. Historically, students learning and assessment of students learning are the responsibility of the entire institutional community. Banta (1996) has pointed out the importance of collaborative assessment of students outcomes. Serban (2004) asserted that the challenge of students assessment is attributed to lack of knowledge and use of assessment tools and processes. Non-cognitive methods can be used where the institutional researchers know exactly what to assess.

From the foregoing, literature supports the view that institutional effectiveness is a developmental process which allows measures. (Kosh, Cairns and Brunk, 2000).From all indications, there is weak institutional support for outcome assessment in Uganda and this is why effectiveness is a big hurdle to scale. Many institutions continue to struggle with integration of institutional effectiveness activities into their routine practice. The expertise and tools are not available in most of the universities. However to substantiate these findings the data analysis is expected to agree or disagree with these facts. Variables which are directly involved in institutional effectiveness will form the basis of analysis.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Survey was done between November 12 to 19, 2013 and a random sample of 441 mixed faculty members were randomly selected from 5 universities in Uganda. 3 private university and 2 public universities were involved in the survey. The researcher relied on qualitative data more than the quantitative data because, the focus was on obtaining a first hand information on the spot without allowing the participants time to reflect on the implication of the answers. This strategy eliminated adjustment of response or false information .The interview was both structured and unstructured, recorded and later transcribed. The research questions, formulated around the central themes were a guide to the main objective of this study.

The structured part of the interview was analyzed using percentages of aggregate of responses of YES and NO, while the unstructured part was coded to fit into the questions drawn from the study objectives. In the analysis, also included are some excerpts from oral interviews to substantiate the structured survey questions. Analyses were done with simple frequency and percentages of aggregate of responses on YES and NO were used to analyze the structured questions.

## FINDINGS

**Questions 1:** Do you use data to improve quality of instructions and operations

**Table 1: Percentage Responses on Use of Data to Improve Quality and Operation**

	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1	We have a well articulated process for critical function	43.3	56.7
2	We have clear written line of accountability rubrics	49.4	50.6
3	Well written down importance functions of staff and budget	48.7	51.3
4	Budget staff-training adequately	24.5	75.5
5	We have evidence of institutional-wide knowledge of critical functions and processes	31.2	68.8
6	We publish students data for faculties every semester	42.5	57.5
7	We spent time studying student learning difficulties in semesters	22	88
8	Average percentage	37.31	62.69

Table 1 shows the percentage responses of responses to ascertain if universities use data to inform decisions on quality and operations. 56.7% of respondents said their university has no well articulated process. 50.6% claimed they have no clear line of accountability rubrics, 51.3% claimed that their decisions for budget and staffing do not rely on data most of the time for budget and staffing: it's alarming that 75.5% said their university do not budget for staff training, most alarming is the level of negative (88%), on the fact that universities do not spend time studying student learning difficulties in semesters. This result was confirmed by a lecture who said that universities find it difficult to vote money on staff-training, sabbatical or annual leave. The quality assurance department do not involve themselves into rigorous research in order to obtain data on students for future operations. This implies that the universities do not train their staff adequately, and do not use data to inform decision making and that also depict the low level of institutional effectiveness.

**Question 2:** Do you use findings on data on enrollment, finance, admission, residence life, curricular and co-curricular to enhance outcome?

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of use of Findings on Enrollment, Finance, Admission, Curricular and Co-Curricular**

	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1.	Enrollment	59.6	40.4
2	Admission	70.4	29.6
3	finance	88.4	11.6
5	Residence	25.7	73.3
6	Curricular	13	87.0
7	Co-curricular	5	95.0
	<b>Total Average</b>	<b>50.67</b>	<b>49.33</b>

From table 2, we observe that enrollment, admission, finance show that universities use data to make decisions on such issues (59.6%, 70.4% & 88.4% respectively), while residence, curricular and co-curricular have lower response for "yes" and higher response for "No". Co-curricular activities are not considered as a measure of institutional efficiency and was given only 5% attention. This implies that universities pay more attention on admissions, finance, enrollments, and less attention on students residence, and curricular and co-curricular activities. Institutions of higher learning are actually self oriented as their interest is on finance, admission and enrollment, especially the private universities. Data from

co-curricular activities may give an insight into students participation the pursuit of goals and missions of higher education, yet the universities are quite ignorant of the fact that a holistic education involves students activities outside the classrooms.

**Question 3:** Do you have strong support services in your institution in terms of teaching and research and community service?

**Table 3: Percentage Distribution on Support Services for Teaching, Research and Community Service)**

	Services	Yes	No	Total
1	Teaching	31.9	68.1	100
2	Research	22.5	77.5	100
3	Community service	45.5	54.5	100
	<b>Average percentage</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>66.7</b>	<b>100</b>

The researcher asked questions on institutional services to ascertain the extent universities support each of these services. Quality of teaching has 31.9%, Research; 22.5% and community service 45.5%. These indicators of level of institutional effectiveness fail to be utilized to the fullest as the universities do not offer teaching support and the resources are very scanty. Darling-Hammond (1997) argued that the highest quality teachers are those most capable of helping their students learn, not only by having deep mastery of their subjects but following modern pedagogic and androgenic principles. But this cannot be possible if the institutions are not procuring the necessary teaching materials and the support needed in this area. Quality of teaching, according to Trigwell and Prosser (1991), is also related to the environment in which a lecturer gives adequate and helpful feedback on students learning. In a situation where a lecture is overloaded with teaching and the facilities are not commiserate with the number of students population, effectiveness of teaching and learning feedback indeed should be queried in such institution. Researches have revealed that the universities are not measuring up to date in modern teaching facilities. In support of the findings on research support is an earlier work done by Kyaligonza(2009) cited in Sutherland's report that the decline of research in higher education institutions in Uganda started in 1971 when General Idi Amin plunged Uganda into dictatorship, economic ruin and degradation. He claimed that the expulsion of expatriates in 1972 from the universities has really contributed to the decline in research. It could be that this has affected the quantity of research project supported by the streaming number universities in the country even many years after this incidence. Community services is also affected as the companies and organizations that would benefit through research are deprived of the benefit of knowledge-creation and knowledge-transfer generated in higher institutions of learning through support in research activities. In some of the interviews most of the lecturers claimed that they are not collaborating with any organizations in terms of research. Most proposals for such collaboration are not considered by the Boards or Council of these universities as they fear the financial implications. An interview excerpts from one of the lectures states;

"Our university does not engage in integrated institution-wide research-based services that result in continued improvement nor does it demonstrate effectiveness through institutional research, I think the major reason is the financial implication"

This has actually confirmed the analyzed data in the table 3, which indicated poor support of teaching and research.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutional effectiveness process is implemented campus -wide and supported by effectiveness officers, research and assessment specialists. But the institutions covered in this study do not have such provisions in their structure. Findings

of this study have thrown light into the reasons why our institutions fall short in effectiveness and rank low in rating of efficiency and effectiveness when compared regionally or globally. Providing everyone with right information they need for decision making should be refocused in higher institutions. Students should be given information on their goals and the roles the institution has played in achieving these goals as perhaps another direct way of evaluating institutional effectiveness.

Institutions of higher learning should be able to develop curricular or programs that align department and university goals. Use data to discover areas of strengths and weakness on students learning. It is also important that data-based feedback be given to faculty to create a culture of excellence in institutions. There is need to create a cohesive strategic plans to support institutional goals which will in turn generate higher student academic success. Data is needed to inform decisions on institution support services and active budget that make higher education more economically productive. Institutional effectiveness should be viewed very seriously by higher institutions in any country struggling to achieve a level of economic freedom and that means Uganda universities and colleges should create Departments of Institutional Researcher (IR) to achieve and sustain effectiveness. The quality assurance department should be expanded to accommodate this as it is done in countries of the west. Every semester, the data from student assessment, institutions assessment and program assessment should be submitted to the management of the institutions for proper decision making on how to achieve greater level of effectiveness.

Using the result of research is very vital and records have shown that research results are underutilized in institutions of higher learning especially in developing countries.

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