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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effect of High Expectations for Student Through put on Academic Quality: In a Selected Higher Institution

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	In the academic world, the term throughput is essential for researchers, line managers, and educators. Every institution is working towards increasing the student's persistence and graduation rate. However, in the process of increasing graduate rates, there is a concern about the academic quality produced by higher institutions. The study used expectancy theory as the foundation of the study. In light of this, the study sought to assess the effects of academic throughput on students' academic quality. The qualitative research approach was embraced. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with eight participants through a purposive sampling technique, and collected data was analysed using the thematic approach. The findings revealed that the system applied by the university to achieve high graduate rates compromises academic quality. The study further revealed that students are granted many assessments to ensure that all students pass so the institution can achieve high graduation rates. Furthermore, the study indicates that the system passes one pass all, and no one cares about the quality. The study recommends that there is a need for the re-evaluation of the system employed. Finally, the study recommends prioritizing quality rather than throughput to ensure that institutions produce quality graduates.

INTRODUCTION

It is universally acknowledged that incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into higher education institutions is deemed essential and mutually advantageous. Various justifications support this assertion based on SDG number four (quality education). The SDGs provide universities and colleges with a readily understandable framework for sustainability that highlights the necessary elements of education, awareness, and behavioural adjustments needed to thrive in a world grappling with persistent global challenges such as human exploitation, disparities, excessive depletion of limited resources, and extensive pollution (Wang, 2020). Moreover, they respond to emerging obstacles like the imminent climate emergency and its resulting severe weather phenomena. These objectives hold significance for all individuals worldwide, with a particular emphasis on students poised to bear the repercussions of inaction regarding these pressing (Yajid & KKhatibi, 2020).

Educating the succeeding cohort with superior quality education to be accessed via survey outcomes, like the employability of students and the National Student Survey results. Formulate a Strategy for Diversity and Inclusion with periodic assessments and integrate Education for Sustainable Development into the educational syllabus (Wu, 2015). Establish continuous learning prospects for the populace and establish collaborations with educational institutions. Advocate for research on Sustainable Development by involving scholars and advocating for scholars to incorporate citations to the Sustainable Development Goals. Advocate for online learning and digitalizing the educational syllabus to guarantee inclusivity (Iqbal, Ashfaq & Moosa, 2022). To achieve the SDGs, South African universities are allocated government funding directly through subsidies, which are contingent upon various factors such as research output, student enrolment numbers, and student graduation rates (Motova & Navodnov, 2020).

The correlation between throughput and quality within the realm of higher education is intricate and paramount for upholding the efficiency of educational establishments. Quality within the domain of higher education transcends mere educational prowess, encompassing broadening student opportunities, fostering administrative success for faculty members, and advancing institutional achievements (Amir, Sharf & Khan, 2020). In light of this, it is paramount for this study to investigate the long-term consequences of prioritizing student throughput on the academic quality of the institution.

Quality education is pivotal in enriching students' employability, particularly amidst escalating enrolment figures and the imperative for graduates to secure gainful employment. Integration of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education can yield graduates who actively contribute to societal welfare and national progress, aligning to facilitate accessible and high-caliber education (Murtaza & Hui, 2021). Moreover, the significance of quality in higher education is foundational for economic and societal advancement, underscoring the necessity of comprehensive development that addresses physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Wang, 2020).

However, the researcher believes that higher education tends to prioritize students' throughputs as Motova and Navodnov (2020) defined student throughput, which is how students' progress through their academic programs, impacted by various elements such as attendance, financial constraints, and support services. Conversely, academic quality encompasses the efficacy of instruction, learning environments, and student involvement, all essential for student achievement. It appears that institutions of higher education face numerous challenges related to academic quality and throughput targets, it is therefore the interest of this paper to investigate the challenges that academic staff have experienced between throughput targets and academic quality.

Throughput systems are distinguished by factors like enrolment numbers and completed credits, with efficiency gauged by the proportion of completed credits to enrolment numbers (Herminingsih, Arijanto, Ralmafatma & Yamin,2020). Comprehending these principles is crucial for enhancing graduation rates and overall educational achievements, underscoring the significance of class attendance, support systems, and effective communication in promoting student advancement and academic triumph in higher education environments (Paz, Fernandes, Carneiro & Melo, 2020).

Nonetheless, a considerable portion of the existing research on graduation rates and academic quality is quantitative, with many studies failings to provide conclusive proof of the linkage between graduation rates and academic quality in higher education. Consequently, discernible theoretical and empirical voids in the extant literature spur the initiation of this inquiry. Given the pivotal influence of throughput rates and academic quality within the higher education domain, this investigation evaluates the effect of high expectations for student throughput on academic quality in a selected higher institution. The rationale underpinning this study stems from the persisting disconcerting emphasis of the higher institution on amplifying throughput rates without checking its effect on academic standards.

Aim of the Study

The study examines the effect of high expectations for student throughput on academic quality in a selected higher institution.

Theoretical Framework

The study used expectancy theory as the foundation of the study. The theory was proposed and developed by Victor Vroom in 1964, known as the expectancy theory. This theory shifts its focus towards outcomes rather than needs, contrasting with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, highlighting the motivation driven by needs. In the expectancy theory, individuals might be driven by specific expectations based on their own aspirations. This theory is about choice; it outlines the steps that an individual takes to make decisions. Vroom defines motivation as the decision of how much effort is required to apply to a certain task scenario. According to the expectancy theory, the intensity of work effort exhibited by individuals is dependent on their perception of the desired outcome resulting from their efforts (Vroom, 1964).

Consequently, individuals will exert more effort if they believe it will enhance their performance and lead to rewards. This assertion implies that organizations can boost performance by implementing reward systems(Nsofor, 2009). Human resource managers play a crucial role in aligning rewards with values and fostering a supportive work environment to motivate employees and improve organizational performance, as some employees may consider leaving if their reward expectations are unmet(Blotnicky, Mann, & Joy, 2015).According to Tahmincioglu (2004), managers' focus should be directed towards the three components of the expectancy theory. These components are illustrated in Figure 1, which is provided below.
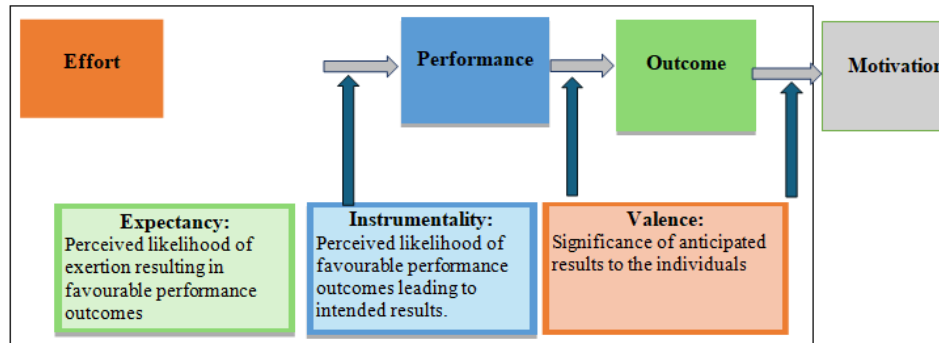
Figure 1. Elements of the expectancy theory

Source. (Tahmincioglu, 2004).

Figure 1 illustrates the primary components of the expectancy theory, proposing that motivation can be calculated as the aggregate result of expectancy, instrumentality, and valence.As per the expectancy theory, the motivation of individuals is contingent upon valence, instrumentality, and expectancy (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2017). Expectancy, which is the confidence in the correlation between effort exerted and performance achieved, is a key component.

This theory posits that motivating employees is achievable when they perceive that exerting additional effort will enhance performance outcomes (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). The study by Cui, Wang, Chen, Wen, and Han (2021) suggests that managers should establish an environment conducive to goal achievement and cultivate a positive workplace atmosphere. Conversely, instrumentality refers to the belief that improved performance will yield desired rewards (Agi & Jha, 2022). The theory suggests that rewards incentivize individuals and will motivate them if they anticipate desirable outcomes from enhanced performance levels (Chen, Moretto, Jia, Caniato & Xiong, 2021).

Kouhizadeh, Saberi, and Sarkis (2021) state that it is crucial for organizations to link rewards with performance and ensure that rewards are granted upon reaching specific performance benchmarks, as employees are motivated by the expectation of being rewarded for achieving certain performance standards. Lastly, valence represents the significance employees attribute to rewards linked to their performance (Olan, Arakpogun, Jayawickrama, Suklan & Liu, 2022).

This aspect underscores the importance of the value employees place on company-provided rewards. According to the expectancy theory, employees are more likely to be motivated when they value the rewards offered by their organizations (Raddatz, Coyne, Menard& Crossler, 2021). Conversely, a lack of motivation may arise if employees do not find the performance outcomes rewarding (Senyo, Karanasios, Gozman & Baba, 2021). Therefore, organizations should guarantee that the rewards offered satisfy their employees(Xiong, Lam, Kumar, Ngai, Xiu & Wang, 2021).

The researchers used the theory since it posits the notion that an individual's exertion will result in the attainment of desired levels of performance. In higher education, elevated anticipations emanating from educators and academic establishments can bolster students' confidence in the correlation between their endeavours and favourable academic achievements. When students hold the conviction that their diligence will yield positive outcomes, they are more inclined to dedicate the requisite labour towards attaining elevated academic benchmarks. This theory revolves around the conviction that excelling academically will lead to specific consequences or incentives.

Elevated expectations regarding academic output frequently accompany well-defined pathways to success, such as improved employment prospects, financial grants, or rankings. As students perceive a direct correlation between their academic accomplishments and these coveted rewards, their impetus to fulfil lofty expectations is heightened. This theory underscores individuals' significance to the benefits linked with superior performance. Ina higher education environment, the perceived value of a higher graduation rate secures esteemed positions for subsidy, giving the institution status and prestige.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the early 1950s, merely four funding formulas have been utilized for the allocation of public funds to institutions of higher education in South Africa. Commencing with the inception of the Holloway formula in 1953 and culminating in the contemporary New Funding Formula (NFF) established in 2004, the fundamental determinants governing the foundational basis of financial support for higher education have remained consistent (Yaakub & Mohamed,2020). While certain principles, such as the consideration of weighted student numbers, have influenced the computation of student figures, the allocation of funds continues to be contingent upon student enrolment, student achievements, and research productivity.

Despite minimal alterations to the underlying funding framework, there have been substantial variations in the monetary allocations per unit, notably post-2001 (Kumar, Shukla & Passey, 2020). Certain academic institutions have focused on research endeavours, whereas others have augmented student enrolment figures to optimize revenue generation from governmental subsidies. The NFF is a dynamic framework that is continuously evolving, necessitating that administrative personnel fully understand subsidy fundamentals to facilitate well-informed decision-making processes. Particularly with the recent enrolment planning cycle spanning from 2014 to 2019, proficiency in the intricacies of the NFF has acquired heightened significance in higher education funding (Herminingsih, Arijanto, Ralmafatma & Yamin, 2020).

Studies underscore that student retention and throughput are fundamental global concerns, with variables such as financial constraints and personal obstacles influencing throughput rates. Higher academic throughput plays a pivotal role in influencing or determining the subsidy of higher education institutions. Enhancing academic throughput is imperative for the upkeep and enhancing financial standards within higher education institutions (Acevedo-De-los-Rıos, & Rondinel-Oviedo, 2022). It is in light of this that this paper sought to investigate how the high expectations for student throughput have influenced academic quality.

Today's contemporary global competitive landscape presents myriad obstacles to the sustainability of higher education institutions (HEIs) (Kinanti, Ritchi, Handoyo,2020). Alshaikh mubarak, Camara and Baruch (2020) contended that processes such as globalization, internationalization, and the ranking systems applied to HEIs have elicited apprehensions regarding academic standards. Numerous HEIs in developing nations are excluded from rankings due to substandard academic performance and inadequate graduation rates (Javed, Ahmad & Khahro, 2020). It is amidst these arguments that this paper sought to investigate how the selected institution of higher learning guarantees that academic quality is not compromised in pursuing a high throughput rate.

In response to this competitive milieu, university leaders are compelled to implement proactive measures, including augmenting graduation rates and institutions' credibility and academic offerings through increased finances (backin-Jalal, Buzdar & Naoreen, 2020). These arguments clearly show that increasing graduation throughputs proves to be lucrative for universities, in terms of finances and prestige, it is in this regard that the paper sought to investigatehow increasing throughput objectives have impacted academic quality and assessment strategies.

Arrieta and Avolio (2020), posit that financial resources are crucial in addressing these challenges, suggesting that universities can leverage subsidies or funding schemes to cultivate enduring reputations and enhance academic excellence. Adequate funding bolsters the international standing and credibility of institutions, scholarly endeavors, pedagogy, innovation, and students' employability, thereby persuading students and the general populace of the esteem and value of these institutions, programs, and degrees (Herminingsih, & Sadikin, 2021).

Various prior studies have demonstrated favourable outcomes, with some indicating that funding positively impacts graduation rates across various facets of higher education, encompassing teaching, learning, academic caliber, and research. Conversely, a paucity of studiesDo, Le and Giang (2020) have detected an inconsequential or adverse correlation between graduation rates and the academic standards of HEIs. This premise finds support in a recent scholarly Yaakub and Mohamed (2020) exploration unveiling the deficiency in the quality of academic programs in public universities despite a surge in throughput rates. Arrieta and Avolio (2020) have pinpointed three areas that are lacking in higher education institutions: quality, teaching, and research. Increasing graduation throughputs appears to put academic quality at a great risk, so this paper sought to investigate the support mechanisms that are put in place by the universities to help students achieve the high expectations of throughput.

METHODOLOGY

The paper used a qualitative research approach, Tavory and Timmermans (2014) defined qualitative research approach as the examination of the essence of phenomena, encompassing their quality, various manifestations, the context of emergence, or the viewpoints from which they can be apprehended. This form of research is distinguished by its adaptability, openness, and responsiveness to the context, with data collection and analysis processes being more intertwined and fluid than those in quantitative research (Bhandari, 2022).

The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and Lochmiller (2021) described qualitative interviews as informal exchanges to foster dialogue. The researchers used these interviews are employed to uncover an individual's subjective experiences, opinions, and motivations.Campbell, Orr, Durepos, Nguyen, Li, Whitmore, Gehrke, Graham, and Jack (2021) state that semi-structured interviews are marked by the use of open-ended inquiries and the employment of an interview guide containing overarching areas of interest and interviews offer the benefit of interactivity, facilitating the researcher's emergence and exploration of unforeseen topics. The researcher's interview edeight participants: six lecturers, one quality assurance officer, and one committee member teaching and learning.

Table1. Sample frame

Participants	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Working Experience
Participant A	Male	18-29 years	Masters	Lecturer	3 years
Participant B	Female	40-49 years	Doctorate	Lecturer	11 years
Participant C	Male	30-39 years	Masters	Quality assurance officer	6 years
Participant D	Male	30-39 years	Masters	Lecturer	7 years
Participant E	Male	50-59 years	Doctorate	Lecturer	20 years
Participant F	Female	40-49 years	Doctorate	Lecturer	15 years
Participant G	Male	30-39 years	Masters	Lecturer	5 years
Participant H	Female	40-49 years	Doctorate	Chairperson: Teaching and learning	12 years

Source: Authors own

The interview edparticipants were approached through a purposive sampling technique. The rationale behind using purposive sampling lies in its ability to align the sample with the research's aims and objectives, thereby enhancing the study's rigor and the credibility of its data and findings. Purposive sampling concentrates solely on the particular population of interest, ensuring homogeneity within the sample (which in turn reduces inter-subject variability and enhances the likelihood of achieving statistical significance), or excludes individuals susceptible to severe adverse incidents. A purposive sample is characterized by specific attributes that are relevant to the study (Delve & Limpaecher, 2022). All aspects of ethical consideration were followed by the researcher's permission to conduct the study, informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

The collected data was analysed using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis is a technique used to recognize, arrange, and provide insights into patterns of significance (themes) within a dataset. The researcher used this method since it enables the researcher to perceive and comprehend collective or shared significances and encounters. The thematic analysisis a gateway to conducting research that may otherwise appear nebulous, enigmatic, conceptually demanding, and excessively intricate. It presents an avenue into qualitative research that educates on categorizing and systematically examining qualitative data, which can subsequently be associated with broader theoretical or conceptual concerns (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To the question, in what manner have high expectations for student throughput influenced academic policies and practices here? Programmed streamlining pressure results in courses covering less material in greater depth, which lowers educational quality. To guarantee that more students pass and graduate on time, academic requirements are being lowered. Stress on finishing tasks quickly causes students to cheat to satisfy expectations, increasing academic dishonesty. To increase graduation rates, higher institutions inflate grades, which diminish the value of academic qualifications. Excessive throughput demands cause lecturers to become more stressed and burned out, which is bad for their mental health. In the words of participant E:

"*As lecturers, we pay less attention to the course subject and prioritize passing over helping students learn and comprehend the course material. We end up being more responsible for guaranteeing student achievement, which increases workloads and lowers our job satisfaction*".

Academic autonomy is jeopardized as faculty members are compelled to embrace instructional approaches and evaluation strategies that favor quantity over quality. Placing excessive importance on high throughput rates diverts attention from the overarching educational objective of nurturing well-rounded, analytical individuals to merely churning out degree holders. Higher institutions pursue immediate enhancements in throughput rates while sacrificing long-term educational outcomes and institutional reputation. Lecturers encounter constraints in exploring novel or hands-on teaching techniques that do not directly contribute to expedited student advancement. A potential development is the move towards standardized syllabi and assessments prioritizing effectiveness over personalized, significant learning experiences.

Curricula are frequently reduced to guarantee that students graduate on time, which lowers the scope of content covered. This results in an insufficient understanding of the subjects. Major subjects that directly contribute to graduation requirements are frequently prioritised and substituted elective subjects, even those that offer depth and enrichment on the qualification.

The throughput rates make institutions use standardized programs and courses, which hinder academic innovation and flexibility to increase graduation rates. Standardized curricula make it more difficult to adapt instruction to each student's unique needs and interests, affecting their enrolment purposes on the qualification. While higher institutions ensure more students graduate on time to increase throughput rates, this automatically compromises the quality of academic work. The participants were responding to the question, could you describe how increasing throughput objectives have impacted academic quality and assessment strategies? Participant B commented that:

"*To guarantee that students pass and graduate on record time, as lecturers, we feel pressure to inflate grades or undercut academic standards, which could compromise the qualification standard. It is not a lie that pushing for higher throughput rates dilutes academic course quality*".

The emphasis on throughput ratesleads to more workload, such as reporting and student progress tracking, which results in more administrative work. This makes lecturers take on extra duties, such as mentoring and advising, which take time away from their duties as educators and researchers. Participant A added that:

"*This thing of focusing throughout rates for the sake of getting funding is not only compromising the academic quality but also adding more workload to us as lecturers. For instance, this year, I do not know how many assessments I was requested to give students to ensure they qualify for the examination. After qualifying for the examination, they failed, and I was asked to provide an alternative assessment again*

to boost the pass rates. All these assessments have to be marked by me and are not part of my Subject Module Guide (SMG)." Participant Dindicated that:

"To ensure higher pass rates, our courses become less difficult and have easier assessments and tests, reducing the quality of the qualifications we offer. However, we have to make the content easier to avoid giving many assessments to students. We are no longer setting questions requiring critical thinking because if students fail, I will have to provide alternative assessments or a third examination. To avoid too many assessments, I just set the paper for them to pass without quality".

Higher education institutions have put support measures in place to assist students in meeting the high throughput expectations. These procedures are designed to guarantee that students can finish their degrees on record time. Some of these measures are not much in favour of the lectures, but the institution's management is forcing these measures to get more funding from DHET for a high throughput rate. To the question: What support mechanisms are in place to help students achieve high throughput expectations?

The study revealed the institution makes positive interventions to increase throughput rates even though they are not properly measured. The peer tutoring programs use peer tutors who can effectively assist students by relating to their experiences. The tutorial programme offers assistance for particular courses or subjects to help students understand challenging content. To answer the question, participants H stated:

"Tutors assist in clarifying complex ideas and reinforce learning, improving students' academic performance on tests and examinations. With the use of tutorials, high-risk students can be easily identified and given support before they fall behind. This can be an early intervention method for me as a lecturer in my modules. Tutors frequently impart time management and productive study techniques, which enhance students' overall academic achievement".

Furthermore, the institution has an academic advising and counselling office for each faculty member. Academic advisors play a crucial role in assisting students with scheduling time management for the courses and ensuring that they get assistance with graduation criteria. Counselling services offer assistance for individual, psychological, and cognitive health concerns that may influence academic achievement. The writing centre office was mentioned as one of the support mechanisms for achieving students' high throughput expectations. Writing centers play an essential role in enhancing students' academic success by offering services to improve their writing skills. Participant Gad this to say:

"This center offers customized sessions with highly skilled tutors who provide personalized feedback and guidance on writing assignments. Students receive support at every step of the writing journey, beginning from idea generation to final proofreading. Workshops for training are focused on specific aspects of writing, such as developing a thesis, following citation styles, mastering grammar, and adhering to academic writing standards. Through these workshops, students acquire specialized skills within a collaborative environment".

Writing centre tutors help students assess and perfect their written work, concentrating on organization, lucidity, cohesion, and argumentation. They play a key role in pinpointing areas requiring enhancements and proposing effective revising strategies. Participant F added that:

"There are various supportive mechanisms that assist students in achieving their academic objectives and managing the demands of their course, which are aimed at increasing the student's throughput rate. There are many of these mechanisms; let me mention a few for you: library resources, online resources and tools, learning and teaching with a technology office, peer mentoring programs, academic workshops, seminars, and student support services. but there are many".

The study of Bond, Buntins, Bedenlier, Zawacki-Richter, and Kerres (2020) proposed a comprehensive framework for quality assurance strategies. Additionally, in the study of Yus off, Baba, Ariffin, and Embong (2020) the framework consists of essential components like a mission and vision statement, program and curriculum design, skilled faculty, efficient teaching and learning techniques, infrastructure and facilities, innovation and research, and ongoing evaluation and improvement (Cheng 2016). The institution needs to make sure thatthe curriculum is current and fits the demands of the industry; it is crucial to evaluate and update it on a regular basis (Ndamase& Lukman, 2024).

It can be quite helpful to accomplish this goal by combining interdisciplinary approaches, real-world applications, and opportunities for experiential learning (Rensburg, Mayers & Roets, 2016).

This can be achieved through the institution's support services (Abad-Segura & González-Zamar, 2021).It is necessary to offer comprehensive support services that cater to the various needs of students in order to encourage their achievement. These support services include academic advising, counseling, career guidance, and mentorship (Liu, Geertshuis & Grainger, 2020). By providing these services, universities can better prepare their students to meet the obstacles of postsecondary education and realize their academic and professional ambitions (Elumalai, Sankar, Kalaichelvi, John, Menon, Alqahtani & Abumelha, 2021).

To respond to the question, how does the institution guarantee that academic quality is not compromised in pursuing a high throughput rate? To achieve a high throughput rate without sacrificing academic quality, the institution usually employs multiple tactics and procedures. The study shows that academic standards are strictly adhered to by institutions' course content, exams, and grading. By doing this, it guarantees that every student meets the necessary learning objectives to progress to another level or graduate. To ensure the institution meets quality norms and standards, academic bodies and professional associations conduct outside evaluations and regular accreditation processes. Participant C commented that:

"Some frameworks include external and internal review as a key element. Its primary goals are to protect the higher education's award standards and delivery quality, recognize best practices, support ongoing quality improvement, and in still a quality culture throughout the institution's system. The institution is consciously working to rectify any inadequacies found in question papers, memorandum, course content, and style of the setting of the questions through internal and external reviews; these reviewers put any further advice and recommendations into practice".

The qualities of the academic staff quality, dedication, drive, professionalism, integrity, and self-reflection were mentioned again (Garcia-Rodriguez & Gutierrez-Tano, 2024). With constant compliments to rules, procedures, and documentation, the Quality Standards in place were also seen as a special asset (Elumalai, Sankar, Kalaichelvi, John, Menon, Alqahtani & Abumelha, 2021). One benefit of a higher education quality system that has been mentioned is the availability of external examiners and reviews (Bengtsen & Barnett, 2020). Investing in resources and infrastructure is crucial for guaranteeing efficient teaching and learning. Sufficient labs, libraries, classrooms, and technology are required to facilitate the teaching and learning process (Bygstad, Øvrelid, Ludvigsen, & Dæhlen, 2022). Participant C stated:

"There are various committees that are formed in this institution to ensure that academic quality is not compromised. The curriculum is reviewed and updated by faculty committees on a regular basis to make sure it is up-to-date and still academic standard and labour market. Formative and summative assessments are two types of continuous evaluation techniques that we use in tracking student development. Students can improve on their strengths and resolve their weaknesses when they receive regular feedback". This view was supported by participant H *stating that:*

"The faculty attracts highly qualified staff members, and the institution offers competitive salaries and other incentives. It also provides opportunities for staff members to engage in research, attend conferences, and participate in professional development programs. Professional development programs are an excellent way to enhance staff members' teaching skills, research abilities, and pedagogical approaches. Investing in the professional development of staff members guarantees high throughput rates without compromising academic quality".

The study conducted by De Wit and Altbach (2021) states that to maintain high standards and find opportunities for development, academic programs should be regularly monitored and evaluated. This includes reviewing programs and evaluating courses. Identifying and resolving any concerns that can jeopardize academic quality is made easier by gathering and acting upon student input regarding courses, instruction, and academic support services (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020). Radianti, Majchrzak, Fromm and Wohlgenannt (2020) mentioned that maintaining competitive and outstanding academic offerings is made possible by comparing performance and standards with rival educational institutions through benchmarking against other institutions. The study conducted by Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos, Matarranz, Casado-Aranda, and Otto (2022) concludes that encouraging a

culture of ethical behaviour and academic integrity among instructors and students contributes to the preservation of academic standards and quality.

It is frequently necessary to allocate more resources to increase student throughput (e.g., lecturers, conducive lecture halls, support services). Scarce resources put undue demand on current systems, which affect academic quality. Large classes result in poor attention from students, which lowers academic quality and reduces graduation rates. Participant Gindicated that:

"It can be difficult to guarantee the quality and uniformity of assessment for a large number of students, which results in differences in the quality of feedback and grading of students. It is a big problem to make sure that throughput increases do not unfairly disadvantage some student groups more than others, especially those who might need more time or help to succeed". Participant A was responding to the question; Can you describe any challenges you have experienced between throughput targets and academic quality?

Putting student throughput before academic quality has a number of long-term negative effects on an institution. The constant pressure to graduate students' faster results in a progressive lowering of standards, which would compromise the integrity and rigor of academic institutions. A university's reputation, could be harmed if it is known for putting through putrate over academic quality, which would make it harder for the institution to attract top professors, students, and funding. Institutions may encounter difficulties during accreditation reviews as they face the danger of losing their accreditation and their ability to award degrees if academic quality is below acceptable levels. The question was: In your perspective, what are the long-term consequences of prioritizing student throughput on the academic quality of the institution? Participant Estated that:

"Graduates may demonstrate a lack of the fundamental skills and knowledge expected within their respective fields, potentially leading to higher levels of unemployment among former students and dissatisfaction among employers. Throughout time, placing emphasis on throughput rather than quality has the potential to undermine the institution's core sustainability, as alumni may show a reduced willingness to offer support and partnerships with institutions".

Students may encounter dissatisfaction with the quality of education, leading to a decrease in retention rates, an increase in dropout rates, and a reduction in student morale and engagement (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020).The role of the institution in the advancement of society may be impacted by institutions that place a higher priority on output than quality by producing graduates who are less equipped to make meaningful contributions to their communities and society (Cheng, 2016).

Recommendations

Academic advising should be strengthened to assist students in properly planning their courses, staying on pace for graduation, and making sound decisions regarding their academic journeys. Determine which students are most likely to fall behind and provide them with early intervention services. Timely assistance can be provided with regular monitoring and assessments.Provide students with a variety of flexible learning alternatives to suit their needs and schedules, including evening sessions, online courses, and accelerated programs through employing academic assistance. Academic support services such as writing centre, tutoring, and other programs must be mandatory to guarantee that students have the tools they need to achieve without compromising standards. The institution needs to use innovative pedagogies and active learning strategies to engage students, such as debates, presentations, and discussion forums, and improve their understanding and recall of the subject.

CONCLUSION

Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in higher education is imperative to advance quality education and tackle global challenges. The incorporation of SDG number four, which centers on quality education, offers a comprehensive framework that universities can embrace to promote sustainability, consciousness, and changes in behavior. This encompasses the development of strategies for diversity, the assurance of ongoing learning opportunities, and the promotion of research on sustainable development.

Nevertheless, there exist notable obstacles in managing student throughput while upholding academic excellence. Heightened throughput requirements frequently result in diminished academic benchmarks, heightened workloads for educators, and compromised educational material. Institutions must navigate these pressures while upholding academic honesty and nurturing well-rounded graduates. Efficient support systems like peer tutoring, academic counselling, and writing centres play a vital role in aiding students in meeting throughput expectations without compromising quality. Furthermore, institutions ought to invest in staff professional development, adopt innovative teaching techniques, and ensure consistent curriculum enhancements to align with industry requisites.

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