A Quest for Quality Examination Management and Processes in African Higher Education: The case of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT)

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Abstract

Using the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) as the case study, this paper focuses on how examination management and processes could contribute to a quality higher education in Tanzania. The paper is based on critical review of relevant literature including OUT examinations operational documents to examine examination management processes, highlight the challenges which hinder the attainment of quality, and suggests ways towards quality examination management and processes by focussing on examination aspects of: *standard* (setting, content, and steps), *objectives* (course objectives, education aims and individual), *management* and *utility* (how useful is the examination). This paper draws on the quality service model by Gronroos (1990) as its theoretical lens in which quality of service delivery is said to be a function of customer service satisfaction. It has been seen that the quality of examination may be affected by a number of factors including; unclear directions and inadequate consideration of Bloom's taxonomy. The paper argues that the management of examinations and its processes, including the assessment of students in Tanzanian higher education institutions is problematic and that aspects of standard, objectives, management and utility of examinations need improving to contribute to quality higher education in Tanzania.

Key concepts: Open University of Tanzania, examination management, African Higher Education, Quality

Introduction

While quality mechanisms are clearly set up in the Tanzanian higher education (Manyanga 2008), examination management and processes still require more attention in order to contribute to a quality higher education in Tanzania and eventually in Africa. In Africa, there have been a general concern on the lowering of quality in higher education (see Materu, 2007) and, while there are many facets to it, the quality of examination management and processes within the universities contributes to the lowering of quality. It is however, surprising that quality mechanisms seem to take little interest in examinations when engaging with quality in higher education. Given the challenges related to examinations at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT), this paper focuses on how examination management and processes could contribute to a quality higher education in Tanzania. The paper highlights the challenges, which hinder the attainment of quality, and suggests ways towards quality examination management and processes by focussing on examination aspects of: *standard* (setting, content, and steps), *objectives* (course objectives, education aims and individual), *management* and *utility* (how useful is the examination). The paper argues that the management of examinations and its processes, including the assessment of students in Tanzanian higher education institutions is problematic and that aspects of standard, objectives, management and utility of examinations need improving to contribute to quality higher education in Tanzania.

Tanzania, as elsewhere in the world has been striving to achieve quality education through higher education institutions for national development (Manyanga 2008). Through its development vision 2025 statement (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1999, p.5), Tanzania has declared its desire to have a "*nation with high level of education at all levels; a nation which produces the quantity and quality of educated people sufficiently equipped with the requisite knowledge to solve the society's problems, meet the challenges of development and attain competitiveness at regional and global levels*".The desire to have quality education is also noted by Machumu and Kisanga (2014) who argue that higher education institutions contribute to national development by producing highly skilled personnel in technology, teaching, medicine, law, engineering and management. Higher education institutions also produce academic personnel who through scientific research generate new knowledge and innovation to solve development problems (Faganel & Dolinšek, 2012; Ekundayo & Adedokun, 2009 in Machumu & Kisanga, 2014). Also as noted by Materu (2007, p. 29 quoting Bloom et al., 2006), "for developing countries, higher education can play a key 'catch-up' role in accelerating the rate of growth towards a county's productivity potential". Higher education institutions in Africa therefore are expected to take a driving seat in the African development agenda starting with the nations in which they belong. The quality of examinations in preparing African graduates should be of high quality and contribute to a quality African higher education that could eventually positively impact the development of the continent.

As noted by Machumu and Kisanga (2014), higher education institutions in Tanzania, just as in Africa as a whole, have been striving to achieve quality through quality assurance strategies and practices. One of the areas to which

higher institutions in Tanzania have directed their efforts to examination management and processes. The rationale for this move lies in the observation by some educationists, among them Sifuna and Sawamura (2010) that the best indicator of high quality education is high scores on examinations that are rigorously constructed. Passing well managed and constructed examinations could justify acquirement of a quality university education and the vice versa. Kitila (2013) for instance, in his research, showed that some of the graduates of the Tanzanian higher education institutions lacked competencies, failed to compete in the labour market and could not create self-employment, despite passing their final examinations. This means that to achieve a quality higher education in Tanzania universities, the rigour of examination management and processes needs to be analysed. Thus, the first indicator of the university quality output hinges on well-managed and crafted university examinations that connote quality of the assessment of knowledge, skills and intelligence acquired by learners (Osindeinde, 2000). Thus higher education institutions such as the OUT, should attend to the process (how examinations are composed and managed) to the destination (the quality of its products, the graduates).

This paper is organised in four sections. It opens with the introduction that provides the context of the arguments and background information. The second section provides the theoretical framework lens while the third reviews literature, which serves as the benchmark for a critical review of the state of the matter regarding the Tanzanian experience of examination quality. The fourth section draws conclusions.

Theoretical framework: The quality service model of Gronros

To analyse the quality of examination management and processes in the Tanzanian higher education institutions, this paper draws on the quality service model by Gronroos (1990) as its theoretical lens in which quality of service delivery is said to be a function of customer service satisfaction. The Gronroos model consists of three dimensions, the *technical quality* (outcome), the *functional quality* (process) and the *image quality* (Gi-Du Kang and James 2004). This model was basically designed be used in the field of marketing. Although the quality service model is mainly used in the field of marketing in assessing the service delivery processes, it is equally useful in analysing the quality of examination management and processes within the higher education sector in Tanzania given that the sector is also of a service nature. The dimensions of the quality service model are modified to suit quality dimensions discussed in this paper, whereby the *technical* aligns with *objectives of examinations and their outcomes,* the *functional* with *standards* and the *management processes of the examinations*, and the image with the *utility of the examinations*. The study specifically utilises experiences of examination management and processes at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) as a case study.

The concept of quality

Quality is a multi-dimensional concept, whose meaning cannot be summarised in a single definition. Crosby (1979) defines quality as "*conformance to requirements*", suggesting that there must exist a set of requirements to which something of quality should conform to those requirements and anything that does not conform is considered a defect. Juran (1998) defines quality as "*fitness for use*". The users, their requirements and expectations on the product and their use of it are taken

into account. According to Juran (1998), since different users may use the product in different ways, the product must possess multiple elements of fitness of use.

Moreover, stakeholders in different fields perceive quality differently owing to the orientation of their professional engagement. For example, what is the value of quality in the manufacturing sector may not be the same in the social sector or in the commercial sector (Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2003). This is why Lagrosen, Seyyed-Hashemi and Leitner (2004) advise that in understanding quality and its management, it is vital to study the meaning of quality in the situation that is under study. In the higher education context, quality may be defined along Materu's (2007) line that, it implies a relative measure of inputs, processes, outputs or learning outcomes. Further, that, institutions, funders, and the public need some methods for obtaining assurance that the institutions are keeping their promises to stakeholders. Quality then could be perceived as meeting or conforming to generally accepted standards as defined by an institution, quality assurance bodies and appropriate academic and professional communities (Materu 2007). The understanding of quality advanced in this paper is related to examination management and processes that could improve or contribute to quality within the Tanzanian and/or African context in which OUT operates.

The need for quality

It is noted that currently, there is a growing demand for quality from educationists, the general public, education funders and all beneficiaries of higher education institutions (Manyanga, 2008). According to Materu (2007) the demand for quality has come about as the direct consequence of the operational of several forces which, local and global, are shaping economic, social and technological landscapes. For instance, education is not just a

service but an economic enterprise which contributes to countries GDPs (Lagrosen, Seyyed-Hashemi and Leitner (2004).). In Australia, tuition fees contribute more than US$4 billion annually to GDP, surpassing the earnings of the country's main agricultural products (wool and wheat) (Materu, 2007).Since the late 1980s, the global market for tertiary education has been growing at an average rate of 7 percent per annum (Materu, 2007).Global annual spending on tertiary education amounts to about US$300 billion or 1 percent of global economic output (Materu, 2007). So far, the private sector has committed itself to providing higher education. There are more private institutions than public ones. For example, in South Korea about 77 percent of tertiary education is privately funded (Chan, 2007). In Tanzania, from 1961 the number of higher learning institutions increased from one public institutions to 200 by 2006 (Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology 2007). Out of 200 institutions 198 are privately owned.

Unfortunately to the public, doubts are cast on private institutions regarding the quality of the education they offer (Lagroses and Lagrosen 2003). The thinking is that they are profit oriented and that they may sacrifice quality for money. So far, the increase of public participation following the growing of participatory democracy and transparency has increased pressure on higher education providers to focus on quality (Sifuna and Sawamura, 2010). Moreover, higher education institutions are to compete for funding, qualified members of staff and students to enroll. Thus, for them to survive, going for quality is not an option but a necessity. Examinations, which as noted could ensure the quality input during enrollment and output upon graduation, should be of quality to portray a good image of institutions and enable them survive competition and criticism from interested parties.

Quality control

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (2009, p. 30) outlines important measures to ensure quality control in higher education, they include:

(a) Policy and procedures for quality assurance: According to (ENQA) (2009), higher education institutions need to have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programs and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognizes the importance of quality and quality assurance, in their teaching, research and consultancy.

(b) There should be an approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards: universities and other relevant institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

(c)Assessment of students: Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently. According to (ENQA) (2009), standardised examinations may be one of students' assessment methods.

(d) Quality assurance of teaching staff: Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students is qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, assessments and commented upon in reports for immediate decisions.

(e) Availability of instructional resources and student support services: higher education institutions should ensure that the resources available for

the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

(f) Information systems: Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities. This may also include having in place marketing strategy of institutional programmes to attract as many applicants as possible.

(g) Public information: Higher education institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information regarding the programmes and awards they are offering. This information may be in both qualitative and quantitative forms.

Considering these European based internal higher education quality standards guidelines, it appears logical to comment that besides universities globally to focus on quality in education provision, there must be some basic guidelines in place that are used as frameworks to guide the planning, provision and management of higher education for the realisation of quality practices. Students' assessment has also been seen to be one of the important considerations in the provision of quality education especially in higher education institutions. Examinations in higher education institutions are used as means for certification, employment selection and further educational advancement need to be effective enough to produce a well educated graduate who is cognitively, affectively and psychomotor competent (ENQA, 2009) – a graduate who is able to make sound decisions reflective of multiple options and contextual based. Apart from standards for internal quality assurance procedures, the ENQA (2009, p. 20) also presents some standards for the external quality assurance of higher education. They include:

(a) Use of internal quality assurance procedures: External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described herein.

(b) Development of external quality assurance processes whose aims and objectives should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible stakeholders including higher education institutions and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

(c) Criteria for decisions: Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently across institutions.

(d) Processes for purpose: All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure they are good enough to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

(f) Reporting: Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to locate..

(g) Follow-up procedures: Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

(h) Periodic reviews: External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined on the

basis of a particular institutional activity at a particular time such as during examinations sessions and published in advance.

(g) System-wide analyses: Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc. findings should be shared in a formal meetings and/or workshops to allow further reflections and discussion.

Quality dimensions in examinations

As already noted, quality has many dimensions in higher education. As there are different stakeholders from different departments in higher education sector, so are different dimensions of quality (Lagrosen et al., 2004). Examinations too have different quality perceptions. For example, students may regard a quality examination as that which does not frustrate their expectations or that which does not betray their efforts (Kitila 2013). To invigilators, a quality examination could be that which is easy to invigilate, whose instructions are clear, time is well allocated and does not task the invigilator to elaborate (Lagrosen et al., 2004). To administrators, a quality examination could be that which abides by the principles and procedures set to manage examinations (Kitila 2013). To academicians, quality examination could be that which conforms to the academic goals in terms of objectives, processes and outcomes (Kitila, 2013).

Therefore, an inquiry as to what is a quality examination should bear this diversity in perspective regarding the matter since a quality examination to a student may be of poor quality to examination assessors. In this chapter, quality examination management and processes are perceived as meeting

four aspects namely; *standard* (for example, adherence to Blooms taxonomy of classification in constructing examination items); the *course's objectives* (as well as individual student's and/ or national aims of education); *management* (proper supervision of examination by adhering to pre-set rules, regulations and general practices as set by a given institutions); and *utility* (the applicability and relevance of the assessment process through examinations).

Constructing examinations and the OUT case

The construction of good examination items is a science and an art. The skills it requires are the same as those found in effective teaching: There should be a thorough grasp of the subject matter; a psychological understanding of students/learners; persistence (perseverance, determination, diligence and pushiness);a touch of creativity, a clear conception of the desired learning objectives (as derived from Bloom's Taxonomy) (Mtitu 2014).The construction of quality examination items is highly facilitated by the use of a table of specifications(see Mtitu, 2014). Unfortunately, many scholars use their academic competencies and experience to construct examination items with no reference to the table of specification. As a result, the items constructed are not reflective to taxonomies of learning such as Blooms taxonomy, (which requires examinations items to consider among others, the five levels of cognitive domains including knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis and evaluation (Kitta, 2004) or the SOLO taxonomy, (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcomes), which focuses on general intellectual development (Biggs and Collis 2014) . Many of the university lecturers do not have teaching professionalism they are just academicians. This is contrary to the tenets of teaching which require that teachers need to go through quality pre-service and in-service teacher

education to understand and apply different pedagogical principles in their classrooms (Livingston et al., 2017).

At the OUT for example, of the total 304 teaching staff, only 20%, which is 61 teaching staff have received pre- service training on pedagogy (OUT Facts and Figures, 2017/18). They are teachers by profession. The rest (243) which is 80% of the entire teaching staff have not undergone pre- teaching training thus, are not teachers by profession. So far, only 20% of those who have no training on teaching (48) had attended in-service training in forms of short courses (OUT Facts and Figures, 2017/18). According to Livinston et al. (2017) without professional training one cannot find it easy to handle teaching and assessment matters among them, setting a quality exam. Lack of professional lecturers in teaching and learning has been adversely impact The OUT especially on examination preparation processes and management (Directorate of Examinations Syndicate (DQAC), 2017).

It is for this reason, university examination items do differ from subject to subject due to differences in the pedagogical and especially assessment techniques and skills. One can argue that, for quality examination items at higher education institutions, lecturers should be provided with periodical training about pedagogical aspects especially construction of examinations items. By so doing, examinations will be prepared to the qualities they deserve and thus facilitate the so called authentic assessment i.e. assessment which is comprehensive and inclusive by nature. It assesses learners in all levels of learning domains hence attainment of reliability and validity.

Classification of examinations and examination items

Examinations can be classified according to: the purpose they serve (for example, selection, placement, certification, and promotion); the way test

items are answered (for example supplying, selecting or filling in the blanks); the learning outcomes they measure (higher order thinking skills or lower order thinking skills) and the way they are administered (to individuals or groups) (Kitila, 2013).

For the purposes of assessment, according to Kitila (2013) most examinations fall into two general categories: Selection-type: those in which students select the correct response and supply type: those in which students must formulate their own answers. The cognitive capabilities required to answer selection items are different from those required by supply items, regardless of the content. Selection item types include: true false; matching and multiple choice while supply item types include: short answer items; completion items and essay items (Kitila, 2013). At the OUT however, the supply items are the most common examinations type which aim at assessing learners' acquisition of learning competencies of the subject matter including ability to demonstrate, use or apply, relate the learned aspects with other knowledge segments across disciplines (DQAC, 2017). In essence, classroom assessment at OUT just like in any other universities globally would (DQAC, 2017) requires a student to engage in higher order thinking to share his or her conception and understanding of the phenomenon taught. During this student's reflection of the phenomenon, the student gets chance to apply and connect different theories discussed in the classroom into real life context (Freire, 1973).

Factors that can affect the quality of examination

The quality of examination may be affected by a number of factors. Among these are; unclear directions whereby a candidate is not well instructed regarding the task and how to go about it, reading vocabulary and sentence structure too difficult to grasp the meaning (this blocks the communication

between the examiner and a candidate as such the candidate does not know what is required of him/her); Overemphasis of easy-to-assess aspects of domain at the expense of important but difficult-to-assess aspects (construct underrepresentation) (this cannot give a real picture of a candidate's masterly of what is being assessed); poorly constructed test items which are ambiguous, inappropriate for the outcomes being measured (Kafanabo 2006)). Other factors include; inadequate time limit, test too short, improper arrangement of items and identifiable pattern of answers (Kafanabo 2006). This informs university lecturers to ensure that the examinations they compose are of quality i.e. they are considerate of the many factors which may obstruct examinations' quality (Lagrosens *et al*. 2004).

Unfortunately however, constructing examinations has not been an easy task due to a number of factors (Livinston et al. 2017). First of all, not all lecturers are skilled in setting examinations. Examination setting and general management is a kill taught in Tanzania in education courses. This means it is only those lecturers who have education background that have skills required to compose examination items and administer them to the required standards. As the case of OUT shows in the discussion above, the number of members of academic staff with pedagogical skills is very few (61) which is only 20% of the entire academic staff (304) (Facts and Figures 2017/18).

According to a study by Andrew (2014) about administration of examinations in higher learning institutions in Tanzania, out of eighty two (82) examinations cheating cases, fifty five (55) of them involved lecturers found to assist students in writing examinations. When the scrutiny was undertaken, it was unfortunate to learn that fifty (50) out of fifty five (55) cases equals to 90 % were cases that involved lecturers who did not have pedagogical professionalism, they were just academicians specialised in

particular disciplines. Although no particular study has been conducted regarding the relationship between lack of pedagogical competence and dishonest in examination at OUT, it can be logical to posit that while academicians with teaching professionalism have developed in them educational ethics, those without pedagogical content knowledge have not. As a result they seem not to understand the impact of examinations cheating to themselves and particularly to students' learning. This may logically mean that mastery of both subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge is a critical requirement for any academician as it improves one's academic integrity and general ethics and standards in education (Anangisye, 2012). Nevertheless, a large number of lectures are employed based on their academic performance in their specialities of which education may not be the one (See Facts and Figures, 2017/18). Their best performance in undergraduate or post graduate as per the set recruitment criteria qualifies them to teach in higher learning institutions without undergoing any pedagogical training. As it is emphasised by Lagrosens *et al*. (2004) "*pre-service and in-service teacher education needs to be strengthened to support teachers' ongoing learning"* by equipping them with skills and knowledge to handle teaching and assessment in a technical and professional manner. The in-service pedagogical training to university academics have proved significant especially to those lecturers without teacher education background. The trained academics in pedagogy have proved to be competent not only in teaching, but also in examination processes and management as compared to those without training in pedagogy (Katarina, 2016).

Quality control in higher education, Tanzanian experience

While quality aspects from external control are applicable in African higher education, Ngunya (2017) establishes the need for internally based quality control and assurance agencies within the country, for example Commission for Universities (TCU) for the Tanzanian case. The TCU was formed following the increase of higher education institutions in Tanzania in both public and private sector, to oversee higher education institutions (Nkunya, 2009). Prior to the formation of TCU, each higher learning institution was under a specific governing body. The TCU is the statutory and regulatory organ established in 2005 by the Tanzanian Government to oversee and regulate university education in Tanzania (Nkunya, 2009). Before any university can start to operate, it needs to apply to TCU for recognition, approval and accreditation. This means that the TCU has in place quality assurance and control frameworks, which universities must comply for their legal operations. The main functions of the TCU include provision of guidelines on how universities should teaching; research and make consultancy effectively and efficiently (Nkunya, 2009). In term of quality, TCU guides higher learning institutions, right from establishing new courses, which should be tailored according to the society needs and those of the students (references). That means the objectives of the course, content, and mode of delivery and how it is assessed should be verified by TCU. However, TCU's guidelines on quality assurance limit themselves to programmes and course content rather than the output. The organ has no mechanism to track the performance of graduates once they are out to serve the society. As the result it becomes difficulty to relate students' examination performance and their input in the society where they serve. Unlike TCU, OUT undertakes periodical tracer studies to ascertain its graduate's employability and the quality of their work performance, the results of which

are used to improve on various aspects of the university curriculum including examination processes and management (OUT SAR, 2017).

So far, as noted by Materu (2007) quality assurance and control bodies meet the challenge of cost in fulfilling their duties. This is because accreditation is costly and involves large numbers of people and complex logistics. For universities with many programs, these costs could be unbearable if the exercise is to be done with quality. TCU charges the institutions for the accreditation services. That means, if the institutions are not well financially, it may affect their budgets and consequently their ability to discharge their duties. Thus, the quality of their programmes may be compromised which may result into watering down the quality of the examination.

According to Ngunya (2017), apart from programmes evaluation by the quality assurance agencies, students' assessment of their learning is crucial in ascertaining as to whether or not the universities missions and vision statements are effectively met., Universities in Tanzania, are required to ensure quality by adhering to internal and external quality controlling bodies (TCU, 2018). Regarding to examination processes and management OUT adheres to TCU guidelines through the use of external examiners, self-evaluation and academic audits which are the most common forms of quality assurance processes. Moreover, there are quality control bodies such as examination departmental organs made up of course experts within a particular department. This moderates examination questions to meet the specified objectives and standards before questions are sent to external examiners as the independent eye outside the University for Examination

Quality Assurance. Then there is quality assurance entity at a given faculty or school which ensures examination quality as per given university standards. At the University level, OUT has an independent directorate of quality assurance and control (DQAC) which is mandated to oversee the university operations on its entirety including examination processes and management (OUT SAR, 2017).

Quality assurance by the mentioned bodies is mainly focused on checking whether the set standards are adhered to. However, for these set standards to be meaningful, they should also ensure that the output (graduates) is of quality too. Otherwise the examinations which mark their graduation will be questioned. Assessing the output, (Kitila, 2013) observes that most of the graduates in Tanzania are incompetent, not creative and cannot compete in the competitive labour market. This is an indication that quality assurance regarding examinations in the higher learning institutions is far from being at the level; one would want it to be. This observation is in line with the experience from Ethiopia that,

> One of the major problems of African education is not as most think–universality; rather it is quality which is the problem. Africa needs thinkers, scientists, researchers, real educators who can potentially contribute to societal development. Most donors define African education success in terms of how many students are being graduated and how many students are in school. The quantity issue is of course one thing that should be addressed, but it shouldn't be the whole mark of any education intervention in Africa. How an African resource could be better utilized by an African child for an African development should be the issue (Materu, 2007, p. 30).

Quality assurance in examinations as it is the case in general quality in higher learning institutions faces a number of challenges, which in turn

compromise or threaten quality. According to Materu (2007) Challenges to quality include (i) insufficient numbers of adequately trained and credible professional staff at the agencies to manage QA processes with integrity and consistency across institutions/programs and over time; (ii) inadequate numbers of academic staff in higher learning institutions with knowledge and experience in conducting self-evaluations and peer review.

Thus the concern of quality issues in higher education should not be limited on the numbers of those who get enrolled or who graduate from higher learning institutions but rather on the significant contribution by graduates to the development agenda for themselves and the nation. It is against this background that every after five years, OUT conducts tracer studies to determine the quality of its graduates so that it may use that experience to maintain quality regarding processing and managing examinations (SAR,2017).

The Open University of Tanzania operates through a well established network of 32 established regional centres country wide. It also operates its activities in some centres abroad especially East Africa (SAR, 2017). The OUT is the first University in the whole of the East African region to offer educational programs through blended mode which include: Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Face to Face learning and the Online learning modes (SAR, 2017; RSP, 2018/19). Thus, the OUT is an ODL government institution with the mission of providing quality and affordable education for all aiming at meeting the needs of the disadvantaged as well as second chance learners (Bisanda, 2017), who for various reasons are not able to learn through the conventional system. OUT falls in the categories which according to UNESCO (2005) follows an approach that aims to broaden

access to education and training by enabling learners to overcome temporal and spatial obstacles and by providing flexible teaching modes that can be adapted for individuals and groups. In order to ensure the university produces competent professionals across fields of specializations, students' assessment through examinations has been placed at the centre of quality compliance in its service delivery. Relevant mechanisms have been put in place to ensure examinations management and processes are of high quality they deserve (SAR, 2017).

Ensuring quality of examinations management and processes in particular and delivery of high quality services in general, in its operations, OUT is guided by different qualifications frameworks and tools such as the Interuniversity Council for East Africa (IUCEA) qualification frame works, the Tanzania Commission for universities (TCU) guidelines, the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) Quality Assurance Policy Framework (2016) and the OUT Clients' Service Charter of 2010 and periodic rolling strategic plans (RSPs) (RSP, 2018/2019). It is also guided by OUT Charter and Rules of 2007, quality assurance and control policy, Risk identification and management policy as well as other relevant human resources and ICT policies (RSP, 2018/2019).. The OUT through its vision and mission is committed to providing quality and affordable teaching, learning and community services (ibid). The aim is not only to increase access and thus enrolment but also to ensure the education provided is competitive in the world market by ensuring among others, there exists a high quality level in examinations management and processes (SAR, 2017), consequently producing highly competent professionals across faculties and institutes under minimal risks.

This means that customer services satisfaction with OUT operation is largely dependent on quality and quantity of infrastructure at a particular regional centre as well as adequacy of staff and teaching and learning facilities (SAR, 2017). Other customer services satisfaction would depend on the improved services delivery, well established management systems at regional centres, the OUT image to the community as corporate organisation as well as the OUT admission and completion flexibility, which differs from those features in conventional universities. If not well planned, these OUT operational standards may impose limits, risks and threats, which may limit proper, effective and efficient operations of the university, particularly examinations management and processes (SAR, 2017). In order to ensure the OUT continually provides high quality examinations management and processes (ibid), it has put in place some mechanisms to regularly monitor the quality of services provided whereas examinations management and processes being inclusive. The OUT has established an independent Directorate of Examinations Syndicate (DES) solely responsible for examinations management and processes. On top, the university has the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Control (DQAC) which is mandated to oversee the quality of examinations and The OUT operation compliance to quality features in general (SAR, 2017).

Examinations' management at OUT

Examination management is one of the quality assurance and control mechanisms through which learners' instructional assessment and general university examinations practice is determined (SAR, 2017). Students' academic assessment at OUT involves a number of aspects/activities of which an individual learner MUST adhere too. Students' assessment procedures include:

➢ Attendance in face to face sessions,

➢ Doing either online assignments or main timed test once per every academic year,

➢ Engagement in field or science practicals and/or Teaching Practice of (TP) up to six (6) weeks,

➢ Writing annual examinations in every academic year, and

➢ Engaging in educational related research mainly for graduate candidates (SAR, 2017).

All these instructional activities form core aspects in students' examination processes and thus they are managed and provided adhering to quality parameters of examinations management and processes as guided by different qualifications frameworks and policies (SAR, 2017)

Attendance in face to face sessions

OUT has put in place a period of up to two weeks for each academic year whereby students in regional centres meet with their lecturers to discuss academic matters of concern (SAR, 2017). Traditionally, students are provided with reading modules for each subject in the programme and are instructed to identify areas of difficulties to be presented to the respective heads of departments across faculties and institutes for lecturers to prepare answers and/or solutions. During face to face session which is held two weeks before commencement of main timed tests (MTTs) and annual examinations (AEs), respective academicians from the headquarter and the regional centres discuss with students all difficulty areas and those instructional topics academicians would propose to be facilitated in preparation of students for the coming MTTs and AEs (SAR, 2017). It is

during this period when students' instructional portfolios are evaluated to see among other aspects how prepared are the students for the coming examinations and also to assess areas students have mastered and instructional difficulties students have been facing per each subject and their propositions for future improvements (ibid). After the lecturer is satisfied with the student's portfolio, the student is granted with examination hall ticket, which will allow him/her to writing examinations i.e. MTTs and AEs.

Assuring the quality of distance learning and new modes of delivery remain a challenge to OUT (DQAC, 2017). While effective face to face practices requires effective and efficient interaction between students and lecturers and among students themselves (DQAC, 2017), it has been noted that rarely do lecturers and students communicate and/or interact during semester period. They only do so during the actual face to face session where students' main concern is to let their portfolios signed off and cleared for annual examinations. Many complains (Rwejuna, 2016) have been directed to insufficient ICT knowledge to both lecturers and students and more critical is the prevalence of unstable internet connectivity across regional centres Although there is e-learning, ICT-facilitated cross-border provision of higher education have not been adequately factored into existing quality assurance systems. In most of the centres internet is either not available or the connectivity is poor. This makes it a challenge for delivery or examination administration. This observation is line with Materu's (2007) observation. One can thus make significant challenge that unless ICT services are improved as well as internet services is made available and stable the conduct of high quality face to face and general examinations processes and management will remain ruined and compromised. This means that quality sustenance of examination management practice at OUT will depend on

among other factors, the stable internet availability across its regional and coordination centres.

Engagement in field/science practicals and/or Teaching Practice

OUT students are expected to complete their studies in three up to eight years (3-8) years for undergraduates and from two years up to five and six years for Masters and Doctor of philosophy respectively (SAR, 2017). During this period, each student is expected to undertake a field practical or teaching practice in order to experience real life career, academic and professional practice. Lecturers and school management team will regularly audit the students and assign open grades in the respective student to indicate A, B, C, D, E and F. (ibid)

For teaching practice for example, each student teacher is supposed to have 6 assessments in total whereas he/she gets 3 assessments during the 2nd year and the remaining 3 assessments during the 3rd year (SAR, 2017). This is different from a post graduate diploma student especially in education whose programme ends in a year and thus the student teaching practice requirements is three (3) assessments in total. For Masters in Education students, their field work begins with the development of research proposal followed by data collection then dissertation writing under the supervision of one PhD and above supervisor who upon his/her satisfaction of the proposal and thus the report he/she sign off for field work and external examinations respectively (ibid). It is important to note that the directorate of quality assurance is responsible for ensuring quality assurance and control of ALL students' examinations types and general operation of the university. For example, during face to face examinations, field/science practicals and/or teaching practice; the DQAC and other top university management officials

will move around the sampled regional centres to determine the quality practice of the session i.e. examinations in place. Dissertations and theses are scrutinised by the DQAC just before they are approved for graduations (DQAC, 2017). As challenged by Materu and others in this chapter that despite having an outline of well structured examinations composition and administration procedures, what we need to question ourselves is how committed and ethically is the staff working in the examinations departments. How well universities can compose and administer examinations and /or undertake competency based learners' assessment? It is when these questions are thoughtfully responded and corresponding measurers are timely undertaken by respective bodies and departments, then the quality aspects in students' assessment would be adequately taken care off (Mtitu, 2014). Unlike other scholars, Mtitu seems to be satisfied with the students' assessment in terms of content and quality of examinations as for face to face sessions but not its management and processes. Mtitu's doubt on the integrity during examinations management and processes seems to enlighten the OUT practices in examinations management whose management chain despite its quality, yet it suffers from persistent examinations irregularities (DQAC, 2018). The repeatedly occurrences of examinations malpractices at OUT would mean the need to consider benchmarking best practices in examinations management and processes from other competent universities in Africa and beyond whose education delivery modes are similar. According to Mtitu, ensuring quality students assessment should not be left to an individual such as a teacher or lecturer alone, authentic assessment including examinations composition and administration but rather it should be the work of all who are involved in the provision of education i.e. at school and at home. At OUT, students are actively involved in assessment in different capacities and forms. Students

are assessed theoretically by doing groups or individualised examinations and assignments whereas at some point they are placed in fieldwork where they are partly assessed by the management of the host institutions other than the OUT (SAR, 2017). The aim being, linking theories and practice while developing talents and intellectual faculties among students. Intellectual faculties according to Mtitu (2014) include the powers of: reasoning, argumentation, debating, analysis, decision making, communication and adapting to different environment just to mention a few. Similarly, at OUT, examinations or students' assessment are geared to promote students' critical, creative and innovative thinking skills. Many of the examinations questions items prepared require students to involve in to higher order thinking just like they are required to fully engage in doing individualised online assignments as well as active participation in the face to face sessions (SAR,2017).

Management of annual examinations at OUT: the roadmap to quality assurance and control in higher education in Tanzania and beyond

Examination management at OUT starts at the lecturer/professor's level of composing examinations items and submission to the Directorate of Examination Syndicate (DES) for storage and security processes (DES, 2018). As pointed earlier in this chapter, the OUT like any other African higher education institutions suffers from understaffing (SAR,2017). African universities particularly OUT lack mainly academically and professionally competent academics who are able to construct not only examinations items as per guiding taxonomies but also those who can develop questions according to the course or programme objectives (ibid). They are unable to

construct questions wishing to evaluate students' acquisition of divergent thinking i.e. thinking beyond the limit of classroom instruction for examinations purposes (DQAC, 2018). Despite this challenge, the OUT has been striving to ensure its students get the knowledge and experiences required for a well-informed citizen who can fully and effectively participate in the productive activities for the wellbeing of the nation. Thus through the DES, which is responsible for the management and administration of all issues relating to examinations, the examinations are well administered and marked without or with very minimal errors (DQAC, 2018)). The DES according to DQAC, among its other activities is to maintain Examinations Data Bank (EDB) and using automated devices to prepare and print examinations scripts according to the number of students of the respective subjects (DQAC, 2018). The EDB and automation of devices during examinations period is important in two aspects. One, examination data bank helps to secure and prevent examinations from leakage before examinations dates. Instructors, lecturers and professors will only see their questions during administration of examinations and preparations of marking schemes. Two, the EDB and automation save time, which would have otherwise been lost if the university with more than eight hundred courses (800) will be allowing lecturers and professors to compose test/examinations items during the commencement of examinations sessions. Furthermore, mechanical handling of examinations may engender unnecessary examination insecurity (DQAC, 2018).

Management of examinations at OUT also includes safe printing, packing and transporting examinations from the headquarters to the regional centres under the escort of police officers, national security officers and invigilators. At the regional centre, examinations are received by the regional centre director who may also be the chief examinations invigilator, national security

officer who will oversee the general administration of examinations during the whole examinations session (DQAC, 2018). During this period, the DQAC staff will also sample some regional centres to monitor the administration of examination whereby at the end they write report on the general conduct of examinations and provide some recommendations for smooth examinations management for the university management decision making (DQAC, 2018). DQAC uses some examinations monitoring tools such as: in-depth interview guide questions, questionnaires, focused group discussion questions and an observation check list.

The following are some elements which the university management through DQAC use during monitoring process.

They include: Time set for commencing the examination, suitability of the sitting plan, transparency in opening and closing of the examination envelopes before candidates, adherence/enforcement of the rule "no entry 30 minutes after starting of examinations and no exit before the lapse of 30 minutes" adequacy of invigilators - number of invigilators in relation to number of candidates, incidence of unauthorised materials in the examination room, Evidence of registration of candidates, extent to which identity cards (IDs) are demanded prior to entry into examination, extent to which Examination Hall Tickets (EHTs) are demanded prior to entry into examination, evidence that examination time table was available and used before the start of examination, evidence that "a candidate appears per one examination", extent to which invigilators verify master list of registered students against EHT, Extent to which the rule of "examination room should not be used for study is observed and candidates' signatures at submission of the examination papers (DQAC, 2018). These attributes are apart from the

fact that during moderation of examination items, monitoring of examination conduct and external examiners scrutiny of the quality of examinations, many quality aspects of questions items are looked at (DQAC, 2018). They include whether questions items are spread according to the table of specification and also if the questions items reflect the subject or course instructional objectives and more importantly of setting of examinations items considered other related factors including syllabus completion and mastery by the lecturers and students. According to the OUT quality assurance and risk management policies, in order for the OUT to provide high quality education which is competitive globally, the quality of teaching and learning as well as students' assessment need not to be compromised at any cost (Mbwette, 2015). It is important to note that each aspect or procedure a student or lecturer need to comply is also looked at from the quality point of view and the logic for its use during making of tests/examinations items, administration, management and issuance of examinations results. The quality of the involved academics in each activity is supposed to be critically discussed if examination quality in African higher education should not be jeopardised.

After the completion of examinations session (DES, 2018), the police officers will come to collect the examinations from each regional centre while accompanied by the HQ invigilator (s) and the security officer back to the OUT headquarters ready for marking. Examination marking normally takes a month and a half of which external examiners are involved in evaluating the quality of examinations items and marking and eventually produce report for the university management decision making (DES, 2018). During marking session, specific rooms are prepared to serve the purposes which are facilitated by surveillance cameras in case of staff examinations misconducts. Academic staff is not allowed to get out of these rooms with

examinations scripts and the rooms are out of bound from students and staffs who are not assigned with examinations activities (ibid). Marking of examinations scripts are under the heads of departments who compile the grades in examinations results sheets/forms dully signed before they are submitted to DES where after the marking deadline, results are released through students' academic report information system (SARIS) where only the student and designated officials may gain access to the results (DES, 2018). There is an integrity committee established in order to among other disciplinary matters to resolve examinations cases occurred during administration of examinations. Decisions reached by integrity committee are submitted to the university management for discussion and action. There is also an established organ for students' appeals about unsatisfied decision made by the integrity committee. After hearings are made by the appeals organ, the decisions made are taken to be correct and final (DQAC, 2018). Scrutiny of examinations management and processes at OUT could logically inform stakeholders on how well are the services provided by the respective university. While the examinations management and processes at OUT suggest without doubt its adherence to quality features and standards as guided by different frameworks and policies, it remains complex to extrapolate the level of its quality compliance. This complexity is due to the limited information about examinations management and processes at OUT as compared to other similar higher education institutions. Unless the OUT has enough comparative information regarding examination management and processes in particular and general provision of services to the community one, cannot stand firmly to state the degree of quality that OUT has in the examinations management and processes as compared to other universities in Africa.

Conclusion

Following the discussion about examinations management and processes at OUT as an ingredient of quality in African higher education, the paper has presented very clearly that Examinations management and processes is one of the many elements of quality services provision at any university including the OUT. Examinations reflect the quality of teaching and learning taking place at the university. Examinations form the common assessment form used to determine the level of students' acquisition of the predetermined instructional objectives. Based on the discussion, the quality of an examination should be judged by the following features: clarity of what is assessed; relevance of assessment technique or procedure against the performance to be measured; type of assessment i.e. objective or comprehensive and an awareness of assessment limitations. The quality of examinations of higher learning institution need also to focus on promoting students' critical thinking and argumentation as well as developing students' powers of decision making; debating and detailed analysis of information and above all, examinations should enhance learners acquisition and development of multiple life skills to facilitate them to be adaptable to different contexts globally. However, regarding the nature and practice of examinations in Tanzania, particularly at the OUT, the author is pessimistic that examination management and general students' assessment suffer from dramatic quality deterioration especially during composition of examinations items and observance of guiding tables of specifications such as that of Bloom. Therefore, in order for universities in Tanzania and elsewhere to effectively manage the examinations, lecturers preferably with teaching professionalism should adequately be involved in examinations management and processes including composition of examinations questions items, moderation, administration, marking, evaluation and feedback provision. External examiners should as well be fully engaged in the whole

examination process as watch dogs whereas examiners' reports should form important tools for future examinations improvements.

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