

The Effect of Management Core Competencies on Universities & Higher Education Institutions' Quality Assurance: Zahedan University Case Study

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of management core competencies on universities and higher education institutions' quality assurance. The population of the study was all faculty members of the Zahedan University in 2014-2015 academic year. Based on the Cochran formula, 160 out of 300 faculty members were selected using stratified random sampling method. Two researcher-made questionnaires were employed for this study. The reliability coefficient values for the questionnaire of management core competencies and the questionnaire of quality assurance were 0.79 and 0.72, respectively. The results of the study showed that management core competencies had a positive effect on universities and higher education institutions' quality assurance.

Keywords: Management core competencies; Quality assurance; Higher education; Zahedan University.



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1. Introduction

Universities and higher education institutions have gained critical functions and missions in societies during the 21st century. Universities play important roles in determining the direction of society moving towards the future and as the motivating force for sustainable development and improvement of society in different fields. However, there is a lack of the study to examine the factors of universities efficiency.

The university administrator's capabilities are one of the most effective factors. Management weakness has changed the role of the universities and higher education institutions to some centres just to meet the student needs of credit instead of being responsive to the needs of society. It is not enough to pay attention to scientific and experimental validity of university administrators. The university administrators require a wide range of knowledge, ability, behaviour and skills which are called competency.

McClelland (1973) described "competency" as the characteristics underlying superior performance. He believed that competency is a combination of motivations, features, self-concepts, attitudes or values, content knowledge, or cognitive - behavioural skills and every individual feature that is measurable and distinguishable.

Many studies attempted to identify the key competencies that defined effective leadership. American Management Association, 2005. Key or core competencies give the organisation a competitive ability. The core competencies of Zahedan University management that were detected in this research were classified into nine groups that are professional competency, leadership skills, personal effectiveness, communication skills, managerial skills, ethical features, changeability, insight and social responsibility.

The developments in the age of communication, information and globalisation have made higher education more competitive. The pervasive higher education system and public spending restrictions have increased the sensitivity of the stakeholders to the quality of higher education and its added value. On the other hand, the process of decentralisation and authorisation caused the governments to expect the higher education system to be publicly accountable. Also, issues such as international development, especially structural development, increasing cooperation (Kettunen, 2008), increasing competition, demand for lifelong learning (Danjuma and Rasli, 2012) and national, regional and global dynamic developments (De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2010), have been combined in such a way that they provide a mass of opportunities and threats to higher education institutions and exposed them to unprecedented levels of external scrutiny (Mok and Wai Lo, 2005).

On the other hand, increasingly, quality as a component of service delivery dominates as one of the prime aspects impacting student decision making for selecting an institution of higher education (McBurnie and Ziguras, 2007). Quality assurance is very important as a systematic management of methods and evaluation procedures for controlling the performance of higher education institutions. In other words, the term "quality assurance in higher education" specifies university standards for the necessary actions.

Quality assurance processes are formal processes performed by independent and external evaluators to match the quality system management of educational institutions with predefined criteria and standards. Woodhouse (2006). As a distinct approach to processes, the International Organization for Standardization (2005) regards quality

assurance as part of quality management which is focused on the certainty of the fulfillment of quality requirements. Harman and Meek (2000) define quality assurance as the systematic procedures of management and measurement to ensure achievement to quality outcomes and improved quality. It should also be noted that the development of quality is a continuous effort that continues throughout the organisation. The term "quality assurance in higher education" includes both internal and external aspects. Internal quality assurance refers to the policies and practices by which academic institutions monitor and improve the quality of their own educational outlook. Meanwhile, external quality assurance refers to extra-organisational policies and practices that ensure the quality of higher education institutions and programmes. In other words, the term "quality assurance in higher education" is increasingly being used to identify university standards and actions. In order to develop opportunities for the organisation, an effective methodology is to identify, deploy, and continuously improve the organisation's core competencies. Campos (2015).

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the study of core competencies and quality assurance of higher education institutions have gained more and more interest and attention. Numerous attempts have been made by scholars to study competency (Qiao and Wang, 2009).

Salimi *et al.* (2017) carried out a case study titled, "The case study of ethical competencies of higher education managers towards a conceptual framework (case study of the state universities of Fars Province). Based on the findings, the network of ethical competencies themes of university administrators (comprehensive theme) include five dimensions of managerial-leadership competencies, communicative -interactive, personality-behavioral, value-belief, and knowledge-analytical (organizing themes). The results of this study can be considered seriously in policy making, selecting good managers and heads of universities and higher education institutions and academic - ethical improvement programmes for academic managers.

O'Sullivan (2017) in a case study titled "Evolution of internal quality assurance at one university – a case study", believes that quality assurance is part of a tripartite approach that links quality, strategy and performance together, with quality focusing on assuring an appropriate standard of excellence, strategy guiding faculty towards a vision of the future and performance providing evidence of quality enhancement and strategy execution. The research findings showed that there are early indications that the university's internal QA has migrated towards a more responsive culture and is increasingly endorsed by the various internal and external stakeholder groups.

Waheed and Pillay (2012) in a study titled "A higher education quality assurance model for small states: The Maldives case study," presented a comprehensive model for ensuring the quality of higher education. The results of the study showed that monitoring mechanisms, independence, guidelines and standards, academic accountability transparency, accreditation, and collaboration are critical areas for the quality assurance system of higher education in the small states. It may seem unclear that some of the mechanisms that have been used by large countries are suitable for small states as well.

Mohd Noor and Dola (2009) conducted a research titled "Job Competencies for Malaysian Managers in Higher Education Institution." The purpose of this research was to identify the competencies and qualifications required for the managers of higher education institutions. The results of this study showed that 14 critical and important elements of qualification for high job performance of managers and strategic implementation are necessary. These elements include: management and leadership skills (4 elements), personal effectiveness (5 elements), specialty and professional competence (5 elements). The results showed that the practice of these competencies should be constant and day-to-day in the business process and performance management within the organisation.

Nwokah and Ahiauzu (2008) have researched on "Managerial competencies and Marketing effectiveness in corporate organisations in Nigeria." The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of managerial competencies on the effectiveness of marketing managers in business organizations. The results of this study showed that there is a strong relationship between managerial competencies and marketing effectiveness and managerial competencies lead to effective marketing in business organisations.

Ng (2008) in an article titled "The Phases and Paradoxes of Educational Quality Assurance: The Case of the Singapore Education System", outlined the fuzzy quality assurance model in Singapore's educational system. He believes that this model can help policymakers to understand phases and paradoxes in assuring quality education and better quality management.

In addition, Farasatkah *et al.* (2007) conducted a study titled "The Study of the Relationship between Quality Assurance Systems of Higher Education with Cultural and Social Contexts", a "Cognitive Map", with an Emphasis on the Case of Iran." The research showed that the analysis of the relationships between the cultural and social contexts of societies with the components of higher education quality assurance by providing a "cognitive map" enables actors with more cognition at three levels of community, university, and government to decide and act on the characteristics of the appropriate model of evaluation and validation of higher education.

3. Methodology

This research has been classified as applied research in terms of the purpose, and is a descriptive survey in terms of collecting data. The population of the study include all faculty members of the Zahedan University during the 2014-2015 academic year that was 300. Based on the Cochran formula, 160 faculty members were selected by stratified random sampling method. The research instrument is two researcher-made questionnaires. The reliability

coefficient of the management core competency questionnaire is 0.79 and the reliability coefficient of the quality assurance questionnaire is 0.72.

4. Results and Findings

As mentioned earlier, in this research, core competencies of management in the University of Zahedan were classified into nine categories. The first research question indicates, "What is the status of the University of Zahedan in relation to the core competencies of management that are classified into nine categories in this study? ". In order to answer this research question t-test was employed as statistical test. The results of the study are shown in the following tables:

Table-1. T-test for professional competency skills

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Professional competency	33	34.000	9.000	0.000

According to the table, the professional competency skills in Zahedan University is statistically significant as it is above average and in a favourable condition.

Table-2. T-test for leadership skills

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Leadership skill	18	15.000	-15.000	0.000

According to the table, the statistics showed that the University of Zahedan, in terms of leadership skills, is below the average and is in a bad situation.

Table-3. T-test for personal effectiveness

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Personal effectiveness	33	37.000	27.000	0.000

According to the above table, this skill is statistically significant. On this basis, it can be said that the University of Zahedan, in relation to personal effectiveness skill, is above the average and is in a favourable situation.

Table-4. T test for communication skills

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Communication skills	12	12.000	11.000	0.000

This skill is statistically significant. On the basis of the table, it can be said that the University of Zahedan, in relation to communication skills, is in a favourable situation.

Table-5. T test for managerial skills

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Managerial skills	15	13.000	-16.000	0.000

As shown in the above table, this skill is statistically significant. On this basis, it can be said that the University of Zahedan, in terms of managerial skills, is below the average and is in an unfavourable situation.

Table-6. T-test for ethical features

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Ethical features	33	38.000	31.000	0.000

As shown in the above table, this skill is statistically significant. On this basis, it can be said that the University of Zahedan, in relation to ethical features, is above the average and is in a favourable situation.

Table-7. T-test for changeability

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Changeability	15	16.000	11.000	0.000

As shown in the above table, this skill is statistically significant. On this basis, it can be said that the University of Zahedan, in relation to changeability skills, is above the average and is in a favourable situation.

Table-8. T-test for insight

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Insight	15	20.000	73.000	0.000

As shown in the above table, this skill is statistically significant. On this basis, it can be said that the University of Zahedan, in relation to insight is above the average and is in a favourable situation.

Table-9. T-test for social responsibility

Competency	Theoretical average	Experimental average	T test	Significance level
Social Responsibility	30	40.000	77.000	0.000

As shown in the above table, this skill is statistically significant. On this basis, it can be said that the University of Zahedan, in relation to social responsibility is above the average and is in a favourable situation.

The second research question is: "Do management core competencies have a positive and meaningful impact on Zahedan University's quality assurance?" and in order to examine this research question regression analysis was employed.

Table-10. Descriptive statistics and Regression analysis between management core competencies and university quality assurance

Variables	Number	Average	Standard deviation	r	level of Significance
core competencies	160	3.33	0.09	0.449	0.000
quality assurance	160	4.21	0.13	0.499	0.000

According to the table, the management core competencies have 3.33 average and standard deviation has 0.09 and also the average of quality assurance of Zahedan University is 4.21 and its standard deviation is 0.13. In addition, the above table says that the correlation coefficient between management core competencies and university quality assurance equals with $r = 0.449$ which is significant at 99% confidence level $P > 1\%$, also statistically $\text{sig} = 0.000$ at confidence level 5% ($p < 0.05$) show direct and meaningful relationship between two variables of management core competencies and university quality assurance.

5. Conclusion

Recently, the issue of the quality in higher education has become important and critical factor in higher education institutions. The quality in higher education is affected by many factors, one of them is the university administrators' competencies and skills. The skills ensure more success of universities as well as to develop individual skills and improve the quality of the university staff.

The results of this study showed that the level of the six management core competencies (professional skills, personal effectiveness, ethical features, changeability, insight and social responsibility) in Zahedan University was above the average and in a favourable situation. In addition, in the communication skills factor the level was in a favorable situation; However, in terms of managerial and leadership competencies, the level of competencies was below the average and in an unfavourable situation. Hence, the University of Zahedan should focus on strengthening them to further enhance the quality of the university.

Also, professional skills and personal effectiveness of core competencies had a significant relationship with quality in higher education. These results were compatible with Mohd Noor and Dola (2009) study. Therefore, the reinforcement of core competencies of management would increase the quality assurance of the higher education institutions and universities, the results were consistent with the previous researches.

According to the results of the study, it is recommended that the university managers conduct training courses, including skills training and core competencies based on accurate measurement requirements. It is expected that these training courses will be implemented for administrators at all levels, including higher, intermediate and senior university levels. Obviously, the implementation of such courses helps to increase the quality assurance of the universities and any other higher education institutions.

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