Standards, Benchmarks, and Qualitative Indicators to Enhance the Institutions’ Activities and Performance: Surveys and Data Analysis

Zuhair A. Al-Hemyari, Ministry of Higher Education, Oman
Abdullah M Alsarmi, Ministry of Higher Education, Oman

ABSTRACT

The problem of setting standards and benchmarking the quality of educational activities of HEIs in Oman is described. In order to do so, twenty one qualitative performance indicators (activities) were selected, defined, computed and considered as standards for HEIs in Oman. Two surveys were designed to collect the data from private HEIs for the activities/indicators. The methodology, validity of the surveys and data collection was discussed. A sample of 3689 students and 882 academic staff members were chosen from across the country and from all private HEIs and demonstrated the surveys. The internal consistency of the scale and some other measures were examined. The proposed qualitative indicators were computed. The relation between academic staff and student opinions, as well as the tests of the significance between academic staff and students' opinions and the difference of the results in each activity, were also examined. The findings have shown that the proposed indicators have a considerable gain in all statistical measures applied. Conclusions, recommendations and limitations were reported and discussed.

Keywords: Data Analyses, Data Collection, Knowledge-Based Processes, Performance Measurements, Precision and Robustness, Qualitative Indicators, Standards

INTRODUCTION

Most of HEIs and educational sectors in the developing countries have been affected by many structural changes. This is due to many serious factors such as economic regression, inflation, extension of population size, “unsatisfied demand of people in higher education”, and limited financial resources. The above factors have changed the HEIs and caused new challenges to them (Alsarmi and Al-Hemyari, 2014; a, b, c).

DOI: 10.4018/IJKBO.2015100103
In addition, HEIs in developing countries are to be more concentrated on satisfying students’ different needs, reinforcing their reputation and attractiveness in the market, enhancing employment rate of graduates, ensuring social equity, developing a culture of academic excellence and achievement among undergraduate and graduate students, creating the highest standard center of excellence in research, enhancing institutional internationalization and promoting community engagement (Alsarmi & Al-Hemyari, 2014b, p.2).

Furthermore, HEIs are also required to be more responsible and focused on institutional education activities. They should improve institutional performance, control the variations, improve attending to the quality and system outputs, demonstrate institutional accountability and contribute to socio-economic growth.

The concepts of transparency, accountability (Fielden & Abercromby, 2001) and quality assessment/assurance in HEIs constitute international phenomenon nowadays. In addition, “a common criticism of quality assurance is that it pays little attention to educational processes, student learning and as a result, improvement or enhancement is only incidental” (Nicholson, 2011, p.8). According to Nicholson (2011, p.8) “accountability is the main driving force behind quality assurance in higher education, the primary goals of quality assurance processes are to monitor and maintain quality”. Despite the above criticisms, Harvey & Knight (1996, p.68) have concluded that “this emphasis on accountability is the primary reason why there has been very little linkage between quality policy and the encouragement of innovative approaches to teaching and learning”.

In order to focus and fulfill the principles of transparency and accountability and to measure the progress towards defining national and international goals of HEIs and to provide different needs of stakeholders, new measurement techniques need to be set within educational activities to assess the progress, provide HEIs quality output and satisfy other requirements.

In addition, “obtaining valid information on higher education within and across national borders is critical in this regard, yet higher education and research systems are becoming more complex and – at first sight – less intelligible for many stakeholders” (Vaught & Ziegele, 2011, p.17). A required tool/procedure should clearly identified to enhance the development of HEIs and have to shed lights on their performance.

In fact “terms such as metric, performance measure and performance indicator are usually used as synonyms for quality indicator” (Franceschini, Galetto & Maisano, 2006, p.259). In addition, qualitative and quantitative indicators/statistical indicators are two of the main tools and functions for the use in enhancing the institutions’ activities and performance and particularly in formalizing a very sophisticated topic in relation to quality audit of HEIs.

Moreover, the outcomes of applying statistical indicators and benchmarks (standard values) to any HEI are very important. They are quite decisive in many areas of priority; such as “to enable HEIs benchmark their own performance”, “to provide reliable information to the government”, “to contribute to the public the accountability”, “for continued advancement of institutional performance” and “reinforcing the quality of teaching and learning” (Alsarmi and Al-Hemyari, 2014c, p.286).

The purpose of this paper is to study the performance of private HEIs, propose and apply some selected a small but sufficiently rich, robust and transparent subsets of qualitative measures/indicators that inundated with some priority educational activities.

In the following sections, literature is reviewed, the research objectives are discussed and the methodology of data collection of qualitative measures from the respondents (students and academic staff) of all private HEIs in Oman is clarified. In addition, testing the survey instruments is explained, the sample size of the project is determined and the research results are discussed. Two versions of t-test and the significance, strength and direction of the relationships between...
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