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Participatory monitoring and evaluation for quality programs in higher education: What is the way for Uganda?

Christopher Samuel Mayanja

Uganda Management Institute, Uganda.

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Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) is an approach that higher education institutions should use to ensure achievement of objectives especially quality academic programs, research, consultancies, outreach services and administrative functions. Indeed, over the past 10 years PME has gained increased prominence over more conventional approaches to monitoring and evaluation in public management, corporate management, business management and project management. PME process can enhance participation, empowerment and governance, thus enhancing the performance, efficiency and sustainability of interventions. Uganda developed a National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy for the Public sector, which provides a framework for all public sector entities to follow up their performance. However, the policy is not well disseminated and public sector entities are not sufficiently compelled to undertake participatory monitoring and evaluation as an approach. This paper analyzes the role played by PME to ensure quality programs in higher education institutes in Uganda. It draws conclusions and proposes remedy on what is still hampering effective participatory monitoring and evaluation practices in Uganda's higher education institutes.

Key words: Participatory monitoring and evaluation, higher education, quality programs, effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The present wave of globalization is rapidly developing into a complex system of exchange, interactive dynamics, and structures that collectively interact to effect rapid changes in virtually all aspects of human life. The consequent changes in higher education relative to evaluation approaches and quality control have accordingly become an important issue for debate. UNESCO (2013) observes that globalization has brought with it an increased level of academic fraud, such as 'diploma mills', 'fly-by-night providers', and 'bogus institutions', or fake credentials. This poses a danger to employers since they end up recruiting substandard candidates for superior assignments leading to insufficient performance at work and thus, dwindling productivity and development (UNESCO, 2013). Recruiting lukewarm staff members also leads to non-achievement of the organizations' set targets, goals and objectives, which increases the demand for trustworthy organizations that can establish confidence using quality assurance methods.

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) is an approach that institutions of higher education should use

E-mail: chrismayanja@gmail.com. Tel: +256772465428/ 702465428.

to ensure close follow up on targets, goals and objectives so that these institutions maintain the quality standards in their academic programs, research, consultancies, outreach services and administrative functions. PME is a process through which stakeholders at various levels engage in monitoring and evaluating (Onyango, 2018). The process involves monitoring and evaluating particular project, program or policy intervention; share control over the content, the process and the results of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activity and engage in taking or identifying corrective action (World Bank, 2013). Indeed, over the past 10 years, PME has gained increased prominence over more conventional approaches to monitoring and evaluation in public management, corporate management, business management and project management (Coupal, 2001). Hilhorst and Guijt (2006) also posit that PME process can enhance participation, empowerment and governance, thus enhancing the performance, efficiency and sustainability of interventions. PME picks a lot of interest from a wide range of stakeholders; citizens, service providers, government agencies and projects, programs or partnerships. The paper investigates the role of PME in ensuring quality programs in the higher education sector.

Objectives

The aim of the paper is to analyse the role played by PME to ensure quality programs in higher education institutes of Uganda.

Specifically, the paper aims at:

(1) Identifying the best practices under PME.
(2) Finding out the benefits of deploying PME on quality higher education institutions' programs.
(3) Drawing conclusions on what is still hampering effective PME practices in Uganda's higher education institutes.
(4) Proposing remedy for the identified encumbrances towards effective implementation of PME.

METHODOLOGY

The paper was based on the interpretivist approach where the Uganda National Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation Policy was reviewed together with other scholarly articles especially on Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation in the Education Sector. The authors' experience in the governance arena, specifically as Head of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Department in a higher education Institute, also facilitated ease of interpreting the captured literature. A detailed review and analysis of literature and documents on participatory Monitoring and Evaluation; as well as reports on quality programs in the higher education sector, was undertaken. Legislation on PME as well as the legal framework for quality assurance in Uganda's higher education sector has also been reviewed to allow concluding on how participatory monitoring and evaluation may influence quality of programs in the higher education sector. Content analysis technique was used during data analysis, where the data was coded and categorized depending on arguments of different scholars and authorities (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This allowed identification of different patterns of arguments which informed interpretation and thus, deriving understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Conclusions on how PME approach may affect quality of programs in higher education sector of Uganda were then made from the analysis of the qualitative data that was generated.

Significance of the paper

Performance in higher education institutions has become a major point of focus for public educational institutions in Uganda, if they are to survive the ever-increasing competition coming from their private counterparts. PME has as such been embraced by several institutions with an aim of ensuring that stakeholders are involved during following up on performance. Nonetheless, amidst this institutional zeal, the capacity of stakeholders to undertake PME has not been well emphasised. It is therefore hoped that once this study is undertaken, Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government will make use of study findings to promote PME activities in their respective institutions as they embark on ensuring improved performance.

Study findings may also make a great contribution to the scholarly world by adding facts on the body of knowledge, on how the implementation of PME in higher educational institutions has been effected; and on the extent that roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders have been clarified. Finally, the study presents the various challenges affecting the implementation of PME approach in higher education sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The PME approach

According to SEWA (2005), the main reason to monitor and evaluate is to improve decision-making. Monitoring and evaluation present ways to engage people in active learning and reflection about their work and can be confidence-building and affirming for all involved.

Kananura et al. (2017) posit that PME is involving all relevant groups in designing the entire monitoring and evaluation approach. They singled out four core principles of PME to include participation, learning, negotiation, and flexibility. World Bank (2002) also defined PME as a process through which stakeholders at various levels; engage in monitoring and evaluation of a particular project, program or policy; share control over the content, process and results of the monitoring and evaluation activity; and engage in taking or identifying corrective actions. Participation in general is defined by World Bank (2002) as; *"process through which stakeholders including the poor and marginalized influence and share control over development initiatives and the resources and decisions that affect them"*. In the context of Uganda's higher education sector, Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation refers to the process of involving key stakeholders during the implementation of development initiatives. Such stakeholders include the students, teaching and non-teaching staff members, governing board/council

members, local leaders, local authorities, opinion leaders (who may include religious leaders, traditional leaders and retired public officers), Civil Society Organisations, funders/donors and community members.

Guijt et al. (1998) also posit that there are several factors that influence participation of stakeholders in PME. These include perceived benefits of PME, relevance of PME to priorities of the participating groups, quick and relevant feedback of findings and flexibility of the PME process to deal with diverse and changing information needs. Other factors include meeting expectations that arise from PME such as acting on any recommendations made and the degree of maturity, capabilities, leadership and identity of groups involved, including their openness to sharing power. There is need for local political history, as this influences society's openness to stakeholder initiatives. Experience from higher education service delivery indicates that the more stakeholders are involved during follow up of development initiatives, the more they own up the projects. For instance, if a classroom block is being constructed at an institution, chances are that the contractors will ensure quality works especially when they are in the know that stakeholders will undertake frequent monitoring of the structure under construction.

Literature has further indicated that Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation approach still faces a lot of challenges, when it comes to its implementation, yet in several instances there are clear roles and responsibilities. Most literature accessed focuses on participatory approaches in the ecological and natural resources sector like Siddappa, Kamal, Tamara and Made (2008), who investigated evaluation of participatory resource monitoring system for non-timber forest products, the case of Amla (phyllanthus supply) Fruit harvest by soligas in South India. There is therefore scanty literature on implementation of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation approach in higher education sector.

Role of PME to ensure quality programs in Uganda's higher education sector

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2014) indicates that quality control is the process for checking that the academic standards and quality of higher education provision meet agreed expectations. According to the European Standards and Guidelines [ESG] (2015), there is increasing interest in quality and standards all over the world, reflecting both the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the public and private purse. As higher education institutions in the developing world struggle to meet growing demand, the issue of quality assurance is in the spotlight (Kawachi, 2014). In Uganda, this is attested to by the fact that most higher education institutions endeavour to put in place policies on participation of key stakeholders in the follow up of initiatives. Some have established functional monitoring and evaluation systems, which have a major component on participation of key stakeholders during follow up of development initiatives.

Explosion of knowledge and technology is driving governments and higher institutions of learning to revisit their education systems, including their evaluation approaches, in order to realise appropriate quality that satisfies the needs of a global academic industry. Quality control in the East African region has also had a focus on increasing stakeholder involvement as a key part of quality enhancement (Mayunga et al., 2012). For instance, in Uganda, some higher education institutions at university level, like the Uganda Management Institute have established Joint Quality Assurance committees which closely scrutinize the process of ensuring quality during product development and service delivery.

According to Pavel (2012), quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. Pavel (2012, p. 124) asserts:

"Quality may thus take different, sometimes conflicting, meanings depending on: the understanding of various interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education (e.g. students; universities; disciplines; the labor market; society; a government); its references: inputs, processes, outputs, missions, objectives etc.; the attributes or characteristics of the academic world worth evaluating; and the historical period in the development of higher education".

Borrowing from the experience on Uganda's higher education sector, all higher education institutions in Uganda are regulated by the National Council for Higher Education, which makes emphasis on ensuring involvement of key stakeholders during educational service delivery. The Council also makes emphasis on ensuring that all these institutions are closely monitored for compliance to the set standards.

Hrnciar and Madzik (2013) also posit that the interest in improvement of quality of education, as declared by university managers, is a precondition for the success of such quality management systems, but it must be based on the principle of involvement of each individual teacher and university employee in the process of quality improvement. In general, it is possible to specify preconditions necessary for implementation of this approach in the university environment. This further highlights importance of involvement of key stakeholders in higher education sector, if there is to be improved quality programs. Bunoti (2011) asserts that the quality of higher education in developing countries is influenced by complex factors that have their roots in commercialization, general funding, and human population growth. Bunoti (2011) further reiterates that challenges in higher

education are influenced by several factors including, economic factors, political factors, quality of students and faculty, administrative factors and academic factors etc. In Uganda's higher education sector, challenges like unrealized resources are pronounced. Many forecast receipts from tuition fees, yet some students may drop out along the way, which tremendously affects educational service delivery.

Quality programs are a central management function in all institutions of higher learning the world over. However, studies have also indicated that if there is to be quality service delivery in the higher education sector, then key stakeholders should as much as possible be involved in the various processes. A study on quality improvement of higher education in Nigeria indicated that there are various stakeholders that have a key role to play in higher education, both internally and externally. Internal stakeholders include: University Administration Board, the Governing Council, students, government, academic and non-academic staff, and University administrators. External stakeholders include: National University Commission, NGOs/CBOs, firms/industries, private sector, development agencies and trade unions. These and more stakeholders are key if higher education Institutes are to perform to expectation (Asiyai, 2015). The situation is not any different for the Ugandan higher education sector, where, for instance, universities have different organs that play an oversight function. These include governing councils (boards), council committees, the senate, top management team, staff associations, among others. Externally, higher education institutions deploy external examiners to assess their students, external reviewers to assess quality of research proposals and dissertations, as well as guest speakers. These come with an independent eye so as to ensure quality products and services.

The Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has prioritized the concept of quality assurance in the sector across attainment of education at all levels (Uganda, 2004). In the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2004 – 2015, the MoES has one of its objectives as ensuring an effective and efficient education sector, through quality assurance and accountability. This is expected to be met through developing and maintaining a coherent and feasible system of standards and performance monitoring. The National Council for Higher Education [NCHE] (2018) further indicates that the increase in enrolments has created many problems; foremost among them is a drop in quality.

Quality assurance in higher education institutions has become a major point of focus for public educational institutions in Uganda and the world over, if they are to survive the ever-increasing competition coming from their private counterparts. PME has as such been embraced by several institutions with an aim of ensuring that stakeholders are involved during following up on performance. However, amidst the institutional zeal on participatory approaches, PME has not been well harnessed in the public sector in general and in the higher education sector specifically. Experience has shown that during the promotion of participatory monitoring and evaluation approach, several players initially contest the approach arguing that monitoring and evaluation specialists should undertake the activities as their mandate. It is usually after a long engagement that the PME approach may be harnessed in higher education institutions after realizing that it helps managers assess achievement of their own set targets and show their contribution towards institutional objectives achievements.

There has been a campaign over years to promote participatory approaches in all sectors in Uganda, and specifically the higher education sector. In the context of the Result Oriented Management [ROM] policy - presupposing participatory and team-based approaches to programme planning, monitoring and evaluation, PME endeavours to put emphasis on achievement of democratically defined and measurable impacts that should translate into enhanced programme delivery through democratic programming, decision making effectiveness and accountability (Onyango, 2018). Accordingly, this should have been reflected in targets, goals and objectives so as to enable higher education institutions maintain the quality standards in academic programs, research, consultancies, outreach services and administrative functions (Mamdani, 2007). Nonetheless, Mamdani's views on institutional planning, monitoring and evaluation issues appear not to be engrossed by Bloom et al. (2006), who instead hype praises on the relative growth and development of higher education institutions.

The National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation of Uganda (OPM,2011) reiterates that Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), where the Ministry of Education and Sports is one, and have different roles and responsibilities when it comes to monitoring and evaluation. Among the roles and responsibilities is to utilise the new Program Based System during following up on performance. The policy advocates for utilisation of participatory approaches during monitoring and evaluation undertakings of the respective MDAs and local governments. The higher education sector, therefore, is also required to ensure that there is sufficient involvement of stakeholders during monitoring and evaluation if quality programs are to be ensured.

Accordingly, NCHE (2018) promotes that a higher education institution must involve the Ministry of Education and Sports, which is the parent ministry, with different roles and responsibilities when it comes to monitoring and evaluation. Firstly, it is supposed to produce annual results-oriented, ministerial policy statements linked to the corresponding budget framework paper and Sector Strategic Investment Plan. Secondly, it

has to ensure that all planning units (within different sectors), assign one or more positions responsible for statistical production, monitoring and evaluation. Thirdly, it has to ensure that a management information system (MIS) for monitoring and evaluation is put in place. It has also to plan and budget for monitoring and statistics annually, while, the sector has to prepare quarterly performance review meetings to determine progress towards output targets. The sixth step is the provision, on a quarterly basis, of data and explanatory information on progress against performance indicators through the Program Budgeting System (PBS). Seventh, the sector has to ensure proper coordination and oversight of monitoring and evaluation activities, while at the same time, it has to plan and budget for evaluations (especially for large projects). The policy also indicates that the sector has to ensure utilization of monitoring and evaluation findings to inform program, policy and resource allocation decisions. It also has to maintain a Recommendation Implementation Tracking Plan to ensure that complete and approved monitoring and evaluation reports are made easily available to the public in a timely manner (OPM, 2011). All the indicated roles and responsibilities of the ministry are cascaded downwards to higher education institutions heads of monitoring and evaluation, a position that was also dictated to ensure that entities assign one or more positions to coordinate the function.

Literature has shown that if higher education institutions are to sustain quality service provision, students and staff should as much as possible participate in the various processes including monitoring and evaluation. According to Zuo and Ratsoy (1999), students as clients of the university have a right to participate in making decisions that influence them. They further argue that administrators and academic staff need student input in decision making. Students' motivation for participation in university governance is to improve university governance; gain experience; for social reasons; desire to serve other students; and due to influence from friends or parents. Zuo and Ratsoy (1999) further posit that student roles in decision making include presenting information and perspectives, sharing knowledge and understanding, and arguing strongly for student interests.

Challenges on PME implementation in the higher education sector

According to Obondoh (2003), decentralization of leadership accountability to faculty and associated departments or units has proved to be the greatest management challenge to campus administration in our times. Obondoh posits;

"as higher education expands, management of our universities continues to be characterised by: apparent mismatch between authority and responsibility of primary management units; limited authority at lower units; entrenched cultures giving rise to slow decision making processes and sluggish response to change; over reliance on the committee system; and diminishing institutional and group culture, among others".

When students are not involved in several processes of the higher education institutions, there may be several challenges. Obondoh (2003) further asserts;

"the current student unrest and staff disenchantment are often reflection of demands for their involvement in campus governance. Rejectionist tendencies of students and their negative reactions to policy statements from university authorities and/or decisions by their own leaders indicate ordinary students are not adequately involved in processing of decisions".

Literature and experience have as such shown several challenges that have hampered effective implementation of PME approach in Uganda's public sector, especially the higher education sector. Presented below are several of such challenges and issues on PME implementation in Uganda. Challenges are categorized into methodological issues, institutional issues, documentation issues, policy enforcement issues, participation issues and absence of incentives to participate.

Methodological issues

Among the challenges towards implementation of PME approach are the methodological issues, including what is needed for PME and when to use more conventional forms of PME (Guijt et al., 1998). World Bank (2002) also reiterates that major challenge towards PME implementation is methodological in nature, including how to find entry points, how to constructively engage stakeholders and how to creatively engage. Public institutions like the higher education sector are interfaced with a challenge of role ambiguity while undertaking participatory approaches like PME. This also justifies why managers in the higher education sector take long to appreciate the whole concept of PME with the argument that such activities should be undertaken by monitoring and evaluation experts.

World Bank (2002) further reiterates that the other challenge towards PME implementation is insufficient capacity of stakeholders to participate in monitoring and evaluation activities. Turnhout et al. (2010) also indicate that the PME tools and techniques present some challenges in their use to many stakeholders. Experience from Uganda's higher education sector is that there is a capacity gap among players in the field of monitoring and evaluation which hinders effective participation. Though any stakeholder can ably participate during monitoring

activities, they would at least require clear templates to enable them focus and report thereafter. On the other hand, not any stakeholder may easily participate during evaluation activities since these require some technical knowhow in the evaluation arena; either from evaluation experts or professionals in the field to be evaluated. This again may hinder effective PME approach implementation in the higher education sector.

Institutional issues

Guera-Lopez and Hicks (2015) posit that the other challenge towards PME implementation are the institutional arrangements for influencing decision making; as well as capacity development for civil society groups and other stakeholders are still a major challenge towards PME implementation. The other challenges have to do with institutional learning to adjust procedures, tools and attitudes in support of PME and the new challenge for PME on policy and macro level issues. Institutionalising PME approach in Uganda's higher education sector is also presented as a major challenge since it does not come easy to win stakeholder buy-in regarding processes. Experience shows that managers in the sector do not easily allot time towards follow-up of their own strategic actions and tasks with the argument that they would be so engaged in their own mainstream undertakings. This may pose a challenge since without close follow-up on one's strategic direction, objectives may not be easily met since there would be no data to inform decision making.

Documentation issues

The other challenge towards PME approach implementation as posited by Onyango (2018) has to do with documentation especially where there is little documentation to facilitate the PME processes. The higher education sector in Uganda is also faced by the challenge of insufficient documentation of performance among institutions. This makes it difficult to follow up on performance using the PME approach.

Policy enforcement issues

Uganda's National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (OPM, 2011) is a guiding framework for monitoring and evaluation in public sector of Uganda. The policy advocates for wide involvement of key stakeholders during monitoring and evaluation undertakings. However, this policy has not been widely disseminated to the players and actors in the public sector in general and in the higher education sector specifically. Neither does the policy come out to compel managers in the public sector and specifically in the higher education sector to deploy the PME approach. It does not indicate incentives and disincentives to utilize the PME approach.

Participation issues

Onyango (2018) presents several emerging issues on PME implementation including participation issues especially how to decide who gets to be involved, degree of involvement and sharing decision making power. This is another challenge observable in the higher education sector of Uganda since faculty members tend to prefer the traditional approach of leaving monitoring and evaluation to the experts other than participating fully and allowing their subordinates to participate during these undertakings.

Absence of incentives to participate

Absence of incentives for wide stakeholder engagement is another key challenge towards PME. Sectors, like the higher education sector find it difficult to stimulate civic engagement and public debate around results (Bassler et al., 2008). This makes it rather difficult for managers in the higher education sector of Uganda to prioritise deployment of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) approach.

Conclusion

Literature has shown that the higher education sector of Uganda has over the years attempted to practice participatory approaches. This paper has demonstrated how PME approach has faced a lot of challenges to implement at a time when the Government of Uganda has been promoting and advocating for participatory approaches across the development sphere. The Government launched the National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation of 2011, so as to guide monitoring and evaluation processes in the public sector, where the higher education sector is part. The policy laid down guidelines for effective monitoring and evaluation, including involvement of stakeholders during the processes. However, it has been observed that the said National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation has not been well disseminated among key players in the public sector. Thus, the policy has just been kept in the shelves of players in the public sector instead of making reference to it while undertaking monitoring and evaluation activities.

Therefore, PME as an approach, if emphasised in the higher education sector of Uganda would come with a lot of merits. There will be enhanced ownership of the sector's interventions among stakeholders, while still, constraints will be appreciated faster and this will easily guide decision making towards objectives achievement.

Also, though participatory approaches are being promoted in Uganda's higher education sector, they are not deliberately informed by the PME approach. People can still afford to ignore the approaches, if that is what would fulfil their desires and interests. There is still insufficient capacity of stakeholders to participate effectively during monitoring and evaluation processes, while there is also no clear incentives for participating in the monitoring and evaluation processes in the public sector, where higher education sector falls part.

What is the way for Uganda?

Various recommendations to remedy the prevailing challenges towards PME implementation in the higher education sector of Uganda are presented below:

(1) Complexity of such PME tools and techniques may lead to difficulty in use and thus, need for capacity enhancement of participants in monitoring and evaluation activities if such approaches are to serve their main intention, usually efficiency and effectiveness. The higher education sector may also focus on ensuring that participants have the requisite competencies for effective participation in PME activities. The higher education sector may also emphasise reference to data from PME activities during the decision-making process, if learning from performance is to be achieved.
(2) On issues to do with policy enforcement, insufficient capacity of participants and incentivizing PME approach, the Government of Uganda needs to ensure that the National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation of 2011is widely disseminated among key players in the public sector, including the higher education sector. The policy may also be reviewed to compel all Accounting Officers to implement the PME approach as a guiding framework for monitoring and evaluation undertakings.
(3) Participation of stakeholders during monitoring and evaluation may also be enhanced if there are incentives and disincentives. For instance, through timely feedback on their recommendations from the PME activities, making the undertakings as flexible as possible and building participant capacity in PME. Accounting Officers who do not comply with implementing the PME approach may be penalized by respective supervisors. Incentives like reference to performance of the PME approach during consideration for promotions in the public sector may be introduced to popularize the approach. Rewards and recognition schemes may also consider performance of public officials regarding PME undertakings.
(4) The Program Budgeting System (PBS) should also measure the process of capturing performance data at outcome and output levels to establish participation and involvement of stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation activities. This may also enhance accuracy of the data captured in the PBS. Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs), specifically higher education sector, as well as local governments should be compelled to keep all reports from various participants during monitoring and evaluation processes.
(5) Students and staff in higher education institutions need to be more involved in campus affairs so as to reduce the unrest and demonstrations that are a common occurrence in many public higher education institutions.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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