

The Theory of Desire for Quality Product: A Phenomenological Approach to Construction of Teaching Excellence

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to demonstrate the elemental constructs of an emergent theory of teaching excellence that was grounded in the everyday lifeworld and lived experiences of practitioners of quality assurance of education actors about Teaching Excellence (TE) in Higher Education Institutions within Zambia.

Design: Charmazian constructivist Grounded Theory Method was employed. Phenomenology as a philosophy and method guided this study and 29 participants were interviewed using criterion 'I' and maximum variation sampling. **Findings:** Two Theoretical thematic elements of Teaching Excellence emerged from the inquiry and these are Internal Related Teaching Excellence and External Related Teaching Excellence. The two were tied to one core category which is the desire for quality product. The core category "desire for quality product" entails producing a student with the attributes that make him or her fit to be granted the stated qualification to be accepted into the industry. This core category was the most proximal determinant of all behavioural teaching excellence acts. **Originality:** The theory linked to teaching excellence provides empirical contextual events and constructs of teaching excellence. **Conclusion:** The findings point to the fact that phenomenology is a potent research strategy that is well suited for quality assurance research and blends well with Charmazian Constructivist Grounded Theory Method. We seek to encourage quality assurance and teaching excellence scholars to think about the value of phenomenology when addressing their research questions by developing a better understanding of lived experiences.

Keywords: Substantive theory, teaching excellence, phenomenology, higher education institutions

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What Is Already Known?

There are multiple definitions of teaching excellence in the literature, but they all link to what renowned authors postulate. However, we do not know the contextual construction of teaching excellence in the Zambian higher education sector. In this article we endeavour to demonstrate using a substantive theory to present the constructs of the emergent theory and *empiria* to support it. Furthermore, methodological dispositions on the reflexive symbiosis with the substantive theory and other parts of the study we did are included to set the stage and show the emergent theory.

What this Article Adds?

This paper explores the lived experiences of practitioners in the higher education sector and then adds to the local literature a substantive theory on teaching excellence that voices the experiences of quality practitioners working in institutions of higher learning is generated. This article builds upon existing notions of the everyday life use of elements of teaching excellence. This modest work is balanced by the recognition that overreliance on the definitions of teaching excellence which are in extant literature (current publications) cannot be applied universally. We include the theory in form of a fishbone diagram as will be shown in Figure 1 to demonstrate and clarify the importance of the relationships of the constructs.

1. Introduction

Teaching excellence is at the centre of national and international higher education policy discourse. Not only is teaching excellence an internal issue for universities and colleges but as Lesley and Associates notes, teaching excellence is also a matter of concern for governments, employers, students, parents, and all stakeholders of higher education (Lesley Scott, 2019). Significant debate continues as to what is meant by 'good', 'quality' 'outstanding' or 'excellent teaching' in higher education. Consequently, teaching excellence is increasingly becoming part of the higher education's everyday discourse and practice. Many countries have implemented educational reforms as a result of debates surrounding excellence in higher education, informed by policies and ideologies linked with managerialism, the market, and performative education (Skelton, 2005). With all these developments, from the local front, Zambia is yet to profile its construction of teaching excellence.

2. Problem or issue

A cursory review of the extant literature posits that Teaching Excellence (TE) is an under researched area of study in this part of the world. There is limited evidence of studies on this subject matter within Zambia's Higher Education. This has created a gap in understanding and applying teaching excellence with a view to improve service delivery and quality of learner output for the industry in a localised context. Given this challenge, and the increasing importance and emphasis on teaching excellence within higher education, the researchers were keenly interested to uncover the constructions of teaching excellence from the teaching life world of practitioners of quality assurance and education actors in the HEIs and develop a theory of TE that would help to improve institutional quality frameworks.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to demonstrate the elemental constructs of an emergent theory of teaching excellence that was grounded in the everyday lifeworld and lived experiences of practitioners of quality assurance of education actors about Teaching Excellence (TE) in Higher Education Institutions within Zambia. This aim is aligned with Husserlian transcendental phenomenology as an appropriate methodological framework for inquiry.

3. Research project background

This article is based on the qualitative findings of a wider PhD exploratory research project that focused on teaching excellence in the Higher education sector setting.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Eligibility and recruitment

Using criterion 'I' sampling, we selected respondents from four institutions of higher learning. We predetermined the criteria that we used to conduct in-depth interviews. Senior academics with responsibility for teaching and quality control (a dean, a member of the senate or academic board, a senior lecturer, or the head of department) made up the sample frame. These were deemed suitable to offer commentary on the topic of the study. This particular purposive sampling method was appropriate because it ensured the validity of the results (Smith and Caddick, 2012). Potential respondents were identified by visiting the university websites. Limiting our criteria to those with expertise in quality assurance and education, we ensured that within criterion 'I' sampling technique, theoretical saturation was attained. In the end, saturation was attained after enlisting 29 participants.

4.2 Data collection

We sent out invitations to prospective participants who in principle consented to take part in the study. We issued an email invitation, together with an attachment including a participant information sheet detailing the scope of the research project and a consent form to record their agreement to participate in the study. Once participants had returned their signed consent forms indicating that they had read the participant information sheet, agreed to be audio recorded, and agreed that their comments could be used in the research project's outputs, a date and time that would be convenient for the participants to be interviewed was subsequently scheduled. We chose to use phenomenological interviewing, which encompasses descriptive phenomenology as a whole research approach, because we were aware that sharing lived experiences with participants is typical in descriptive phenomenology (Converse, 2012); (Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013). To investigate and explain the lived experiences or "life worlds" of participants as they pertain to clarifying the openness to the lifeworld, we used individual face-to-face interviews. We took an open mind set, putting an emphasis on teaching excellence while being sensitive to the significance of the lived experiences.

Participants were invited to comment on their observations, thoughts, insights, and experiences related to many facets of excellent teaching. We made sure the interview permitted candour. According to (Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nystrom, 2008), being open meant being perceptive, aware, and sensitive to how others expressed their experiences. It also involved challenging data interpretation (Dahlberg and Dahlberg, 2003). Since we were trying to grasp the phenomenon under study in a new way and make previously invisible components of the experience visible, we had to work hard to maintain an attitude that included the premise that we did not yet know the participants' experiences.

In order to accomplish the main aim of the study and gain greater insight into teaching excellence from the viewpoints of our participants, the interview questions used in this study were intensive and non-directive (Bweupe and Mwanza, 2022). Intensive interviewing permitted us to have an in-depth exploration of topical issues that emerged bordering on teaching excellence as these allow researchers to go beneath the surface of ordinary conversation (Charmaz, 2006). We permitted our participants to describe and reflect upon their experiences in ways that seldom occur in everyday life. We used exploratory broad introductory questions and were followed by relevant probing and follow-up questions when need arose. From the participants' point of view, understanding teaching excellence was mostly based on their perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and values.

The interviews focused more on how our participants constructed teaching excellence withstanding the paradigmatic assumptions of constructivism that there are multiple social realities simultaneously rather than the one and only “real reality”. In a constructivist grounded theory, it is stressed that data is constructed through an on-going interaction between researcher and participant. It is also assumed that action and meaning are dialectical; meaning shapes action and action affects meaning. As such we took a reflexive stance and got interested in the “whats”, (elements of teaching excellence) the “whys” of the constructions of meanings and motives of actions in specific situations and the “hows” of teaching excellence (actual doing).

We collectively decided not to share in experiencing Gadamer's fusion of horizons, or a state of harmony and understanding of teaching experience, throughout each interview with our participants. The fusion of horizons was ignored to prevent us from extending our thinking throughout the analysis and not to use our own lived experiences to create collaborated meanings, guaranteeing that we came very near to satisfying Edmund Husserl's assumptions of epoché.

5. Data Analysis

The study was anchored on grounded theory method. Grounded theory fits in with life world research, because the emphasis is on individuals as unique living wholes and the researcher focuses on the world as it is experienced by the individual. Of the grounded theory variants, we opted to employ Charmazian constructivist grounded theory (CCGT) (Charmaz, 2006); (Charmaz, 2005); (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007);. We chose CCGT because of a constructivist co-constructs experiences and meanings with participants (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011) We opted to use constructivist grounded theory because it places priority on the studied phenomenon over the methods of studying it. Further than this, CCGT allowed us to use it as a tool for understanding what was in the data and as an analytic lens, not as prescriptions. Charmazian constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the researcher's role in interpreting data and eventually in creating categories. We employed the three staged coding process as enunciated summarily below.

a) Initial coding

We fragmented all textual data with the objective of conceptualizing ideas and/or meanings expressed by the participants, thus transforming them into codes. We employed word-by-word, line-by-line or incident-by-incident. We emphasize the importance of microanalysis using in vivo concepts; analysis of a word and incidents in order to discover relevant dimensions of the categories and the relationship between these and the subcategories in a causal relationship (Charmaz, 2009); (Kenny and Fourie, 2015).

Four hundred and eighty-nine (489) codes in the first round were generated. We further compared the data and the categories to allow concepts to emerge through generation and construction from the data, categories were combined and recombined, and any associations and relationships to each were sought through a series of iterations.

b) Focused Coding

Focused coding is the second coding step in the constructivist perspective, and allows for separating, classifying and synthesizing large amounts of data. Focused coding uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate and organize a large amount of data.

At this stage, the elaborated codes are more targeted, selective and conceptual, as they should synthesize and explain larger data segments. In the coding process of the constructivist approach, we adhered to Charmaz guidelines by applying conjugating verbs in the gerund (-ing) form to represent the actions that we were coding. The purpose of using gerund form is to assist in developing the theoretical sensitivity, allowing identification of the concepts and processes being developed while we checked the linkage with the central category (Charmaz, 2009).

c) Theoretical coding

In theoretical coding, the categories we were developing during focused coding were integrated into a central code and their relationship was then specified. The central category as shown in Figure 1 represents the most potent central analytical organizing concept. The identification of the central category depends on the researcher's perception and it represents the most relevant process in the investigated area (Charmaz, 2009).

Due to its emphasis on the linguistic aspect of reality and the possibility of challenging any knowledge, constructivism fitted Charmazian grounded theory method (Gadamer, 1975); (Heidegger, 2010); (Howell, 2013). Such a viewpoint emphasises the idea that people build their own knowledge and understanding of the world by engaging in experiences and reflecting on those experiences (Cohen, Scribner and Farley, 2000); (Van Manen, 2016).

6. Findings

Through the process outlined in data analysis, an emergent substantive theory of teaching excellence was developed. The core category in the theory is “Desire for a Quality Product”. Therefore, the “Theory of Desire for Quality Product to Teaching Excellence” was an emergent theory that was the basis to an understanding of

teaching excellence for the higher education sector in the institutions that were under investigation. The core category “Desire for Quality Product” described the conditions that were constructed and what ought to be met in order to have a graduate whom both the higher education institution and the industry would accept. The core category “Desire for Quality Product” in essence was the determinant of what was to be done in attaining teaching excellence.

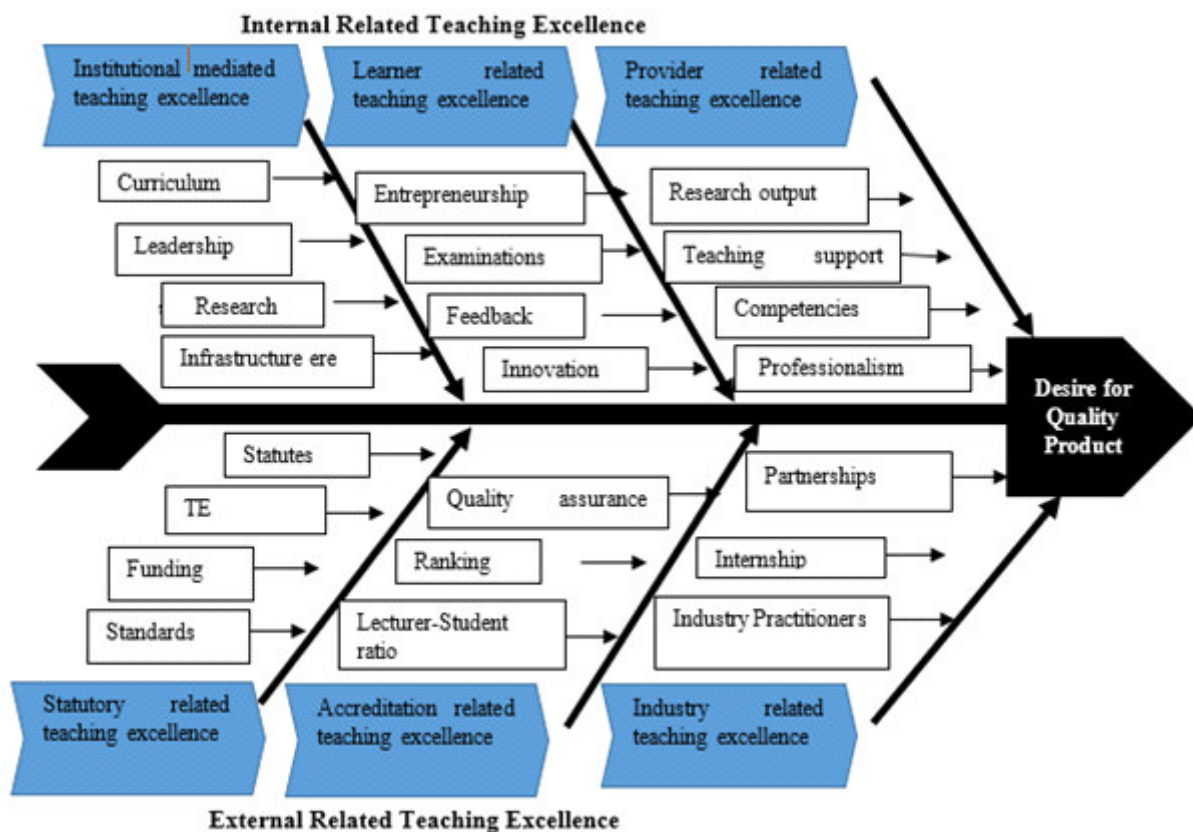


Figure 1: Theoretical Model of Desire for Quality Product to Teaching Excellence

While fishbone diagrams are used as graphical presentations in the following situations:

- 1) As a cause-and-effect diagram
- 2) As a problem-solving tool
- 3) As one of the seven basic tools of quality control;

in this study, the fishbone diagram is demonstrating a novel application. the fishbone diagram is being used as a descriptive structural model showing related theoretical construct material into containers called nodes (shown in blue). The containers are actually subthemes. When one opens a node in this fishbone diagram, it is evident one would see all the constructs in the project that are linked to the six nodes. The "fish head" which is depicted by the core category “Desire for Quality Product” is linked to the six nodes which are composed of a coding outcome of the analytic process. Theme nodes represent the themes or topics that the researcher found in the data. Sub thematic nodes exist 'underneath' the umbrella of a theme. They share the same central organising concept as the theme, but focuses on one notable specific element while they contain the elements. The subthemes themselves are mutually exclusive.

Although we acknowledge that these findings are based on local context constructions, the substantive theory “Desire for a Quality Product (DQPT)” accounts for much variance from the existing variables as well as constructions in extant literature. Thus, the theory (DQPT), is a very consistent framework with descriptive power of revelation of teaching excellence across the 29 cases that formed part of this study.

6.1 The substantive Theory

We have used language as a tool to demonstrate our participant’s understanding of teaching excellence as phenomenologists would expect researchers to do (Gadamer, Weinsheimer and Marshall, 2004); (McCaffrey, Raffin-Bouchal and Moules, 2012). In order to affirm the substantive theory, we use the hypothetical deductive approach to demonstrate theoretical linkages using excerpts as examples. In this way, we believe that we could provide an operative meaning to the categories and sub categories. These examples account for elicited meanings

and constructions. We select the two core categories and their sub categories to demonstrate the meanings and constructions of teaching excellence. Our substantive theory includes several of the explanatory elements and the article would be long if we were to include all the elements. We have opted to divide examples of our theoretical elements in two. We then use typical cases to show case the theoretical constructs at sub thematic level. Generally, the elements of our theory is a combination of various dimensions that relate to the quality, effectiveness, and impact of teaching and learning.

6.1.1 Theme 1: Internal Related Teaching Excellence

Within this theme, the study outcomes were that teaching excellence covered a higher institution's internal elements of structures as well as activities that determined the quality of the graduate. A wide range of elements were constructed stemming from managerial attention on the firm's internal resources in an effort to identify those assets, capabilities and competencies with the potential to deliver superior or quality competitive advantages over other institutions. These were critical for graduate acceptance by industry. Broadly three subthemes characterise Internal Related Teaching Excellence and these are (a) institutional mediated teaching excellence (b) learner related teaching excellence and provider related teaching excellence.

Subtheme 1: Institutional mediated teaching excellence

Higher education institutions put emphasis on an institutional climate that facilitated and guaranteed teaching excellence. This category covered human resources, decision-making practices, organization of work, job design, and goal emphasis. Institutional climate like recruitment of quality lecturers and non-lecturer or support staff, the presence of work groups with clear, consistent and high individual, group, and organisational standards and goals, linked through effective communications utilizing participatory decision-making techniques were all evidence of enough of good leadership management practice. The presence of approved senate curricula of all programs and responsible leadership to manage and conduct research were key in ensuring teaching excellence. The presence of adequate and modern infrastructure ought to be in place if quality graduates were to be produced. One aspect of teaching excellence was linked to leadership and played a substantial role in the desire to have quality product of a graduate.

"... if leadership is not committed to excellence there won't be excellence in an institution. So, leadership has to set the tone in terms of policies and processes that they put in place. They set the tone, map out the vision and mission of the institution of course with the input from everyone but at the end of the day the buck stops at management. There should be that belief in excellence down the line in the organizational hierarchy. So basically, that is what I meant that it has to start with leadership"

Infrastructure excellence was linked to leadership and played a substantial role in the desire to have quality product of a graduate:

"You could only have a good product if you have good infrastructure..... Teaching excellence also has to do with advancements in technologies and ever-growing innovations in teaching and learning culture. Today every education institution's ultimate goal is to remain relevant during the continually changing education market trends by creating value propositions for their clients. We have invested in making improvements.... we have modern seminar halls with, an excellent acoustics and a library."

Research

One of the measurements of excellence in higher education institutions is the amount of research done. There was a general agreement among participants that research was one attribute that feeds into teaching excellence. Research was shown to aide in teaching.

"...there should be this link between the teaching, or the curriculum and research otherwise there is a saying that "if there is no research happening you end up teaching your students a flat earth". Meaning that you will be teaching students old information when things have actually moved on so there is a very direct link between doing research and the quality of material that you are delivering to your students"

Curriculum

A curriculum framework, including the expected learning outcomes was considered to be critical in teaching excellence. Respondents emphasised its communicative role especially what teachers and learners should know and do. The importance of the curriculum is shown.

"We have lived to the expectation of having an evidenced-based curricular for all our programmes. Our curricular act as a road map for teachers and students to follow on the path to academic success. We are committed to developing our graduates for life long careers beyond the classroom and our curricula are future focused with clear links to industry through not just subject matter but direct learning experiences on courses"

Subtheme 2: Learner related teaching excellence

Entrepreneurship

Our Schools also directly engage with employers, through Employer Advisory Groups, to ensure the curriculum is aligned with real world applications, and to connect students with opportunities before they graduate.

Examinations

Nearly all institutions of higher learning were in agreement that the quality of formal assessments especially summative assessments – process of preparation, administration and marking played an important role in granting validity and reliability to assessments. As such examinations were an element of teaching excellence. Internal and external moderation of examinations were considered one area that was practiced though not very frequently. Despite the misgivings of not practicing moderation, participants in the study mentioned the need for moderation as stated below:

“Internal moderation ought to be undertaken by a “critical friend” and we could use the standard Moderation Proforma for Examination Papers. This “critical friend” whom we call a moderator is usually an academic colleague who has some knowledge of the subject area. He can go through the paper. It is important to ensure the assessment brief/exam paper has been systematically internally analysed and necessary revisions are made before being released.... It is also good practice to nominate an external examiner to ensure papers are sent out in a batch and in a timely manner, and not in a piece-meal fashion.”

At one college, moderation was in place:

The college has a robust internal and external moderation system, which we have for reasons of best practice and QA compliance. Our partner (meaning the University of Zambia) fosters it.

Feedback

Student feedback was one element of teaching excellence and one of the major concerns voiced out by senators and deans relates to the management of feedback. It was noted that students were not getting timely feedback of their works. Assessment of dissertations, case studies, audio visual submissions, assignments and projects need to be given within the set timelines except delays in circumstances like staff illness or work outside of town or large classes. In one instance where this was done, students got feedback timely as stated below:

Our students are assessed and we provide feedback within time frames except in cases where it is not appropriate to do so for exceptional and/ or pedagogic reasons.

Innovation

Higher education institutions were committed to innovative teaching and staff were encourage to consider new approaches to stretch and inspire their learners. Innovations tend to alter pedagogical systems by improving the teaching process and its results as exemplified an increased volume of material delivered and studied per lesson. Innovations have accelerated training, and more effective time management.

“We have been innovating the mode of delivery of our courses. Senate approved two years ago the establishment of an education team to provide teaching and learning support through professional development of evidence-based pedagogy. This has increased lecturer and student performance while serving on time.”

Subtheme 3: Provider related teaching excellence

This node looked at lecturers and support staff. Staff were expected to implement high-quality teaching, what was considered as ‘excellent teaching’, to conduct research not only for industry or the public but to improve teaching and institutional systems. The more complex conceptions show the need for long-term graduate development as well as a stronger connection between student learning, academics’ research, and the wider community. This node included, research outputs, competencies of lecturers and support staff, professionalism and professional development. We now present selected illustrations of the theory under provider related teaching excellence.

Research output

Research outputs from lecturers as outcomes of research were of many forms and included books, chapters in academic books, authored research journal articles, conference publications, original creative works and research reports for both an external body and the institution. The following constructions were noted.

“We are now emphasising research in that it is forming a major part of our curriculum at all levels and students can expect to directly benefit from the latest developments in enquiry from their lecturers.... research developments have also been informing curriculum...”

Competencies

Participants saw lecturer and support staff competencies as some of the requirements of teaching excellence.

Competency included more than just knowledge and skills but involved staff ability to meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. Competency as such is essential to the provider's pursuit of excellence. Higher institutions were concerned with enhancement of competencies by ensuring that educators demonstrated leadership, established a respectful environment for a diverse population of students and facilitated learning for their students. The excerpt below shows some aspects of teaching excellence which have a bearing on student quality.

"In our performance appraisal system, we focus on sustenance of teacher competencies. Our educators should demonstrate the following competencies 21st century teaching competencies (i) teachers demonstrating leadership, (ii) establishing a respectful environment for a diverse population of students and (ii) facilitating learning for their students".

Professionalism

In order to maximise student learning, some educators were noted to have less expertise in a wide-ranging array of competencies. This was true for demonstrators, tutors, staff development fellows and new entrants into teaching and research assistants. A wide array of strategies was employed by higher education institutions to ensure that professionalism added value to graduate quality. Mentoring stood out among the wide-ranging strategies.

"It is important to have mentorship programs in our institutions Mentorship programmes are handled by professors and aimed demonstrators, tutors, staff development fellows and new entrants into teaching and research assistants who are prone to errors.... As you know, the teaching profession has a long history of providing mentorship to mentees (budding lecturers) through focused, collaborative, and one-on-one relationships. We need this in our colleges and universities...mentoring individuals gives opportunities for career development."

Continuous Professional development (CPD)

Participants were all in agreement that educator professional development ought to be mandatory. It is believed that continuing education and career training after a person has entered the workforce in order to help them develop new skills, stay up-to-date on current trends, and advance their career was critical. What came out prominently is that educators needed to adapt to change in the teaching and learning environment and as such teaching excellence demanded professional development of all those who were involved in teaching and research. On the job and way from job development schemes were employed by higher education institutions as ways to help employees stay up to date with industry trends to keep skills sharp.

"We have professional development schemes to provide support to staff based upon their immediate concerns as well as deficits following a performance-based appraisal. We ensure that both our lecturers and managers engage in sustained professional learning that specifically focuses on the improvement of research, the teaching and learning process. We have a human resource strategy for improving faculty performance by arranging for in service training and away from job training. local and is really quite simple".

6.1.2 Theme II: External Related Teaching Excellence

The internal environment of an institution cannot sustain teaching excellence perse. Outside its walls, there are multiple elements at play. Within this second theme "External Related Teaching Excellence", the study outcomes were that a wide range of elements were constructed that shaped teaching excellence. Underneath the umbrella of this second theme three containers or subthemes were noted and these are statutory related teaching excellence, accreditation related teaching excellence and industry related teaching excellence.

Subtheme 4: Statutory related teaching excellence

With increasing demand for quality higher education, the Government of Zambia introduced legislations to involve the private sector in the provision of higher education, leading to the proliferation of private higher education institutions. To effectively manage the mushrooming of higher education institutions, the government established a national quality assurance agency, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), with the Higher Education Act of 2013. The enactment of the two pieces of legislation have changed the landscape of teaching excellence. Participants stated that one of the major drivers to ensuring teaching excellence was the two laws. One quality assurance manager spoke about control of the profession of teaching.

"The teaching council act has made it difficult for unqualified teachers to work.... Now every teacher has to be registered".

A dean spoke about the goodness of standards of excellence which the Higher Education Act espouses.

"In the past, Universities and colleges got away with poor quality. Now, the Authority may, where a private higher education institution fails to meet the standards of operating as a university or technical university, relegate that private higher education institution to a university college or technical university college"

Standards

In order to support educators, perform their role effectively and with excellence, there is need to develop standards like those obtaining in the general education sector. Participants see standards as one aspect of augmenting teaching excellence.

In one institution of higher learning, it was envisaged to have standards in the subsequent academic year.

“While it is envisaged that standards will be established, the draft document focuses specifically on standards for lecturers, mentors and managers”.

One university has an interesting standard where annual reviews count as aspects of teaching excellence and act as one of the predictors of graduate quality.

“We conduct annual academic reviews...these annual academic reviews require all our educators to reflect and report on their delivery and student outcomes. Educators take into account views from peers, students and external moderators”.

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

Participants opined that just as there is a qualifications framework, a teaching excellence framework would be a necessity to achieve the desired highest quality of processes and outputs. It was observed that there was no teaching excellence framework in the country and as such, there was no control of the environment within which higher education was provided. A participant had this to say.

“The government has allowed teaching colleges to be coming up like mushrooms and I remember right in Luanshya town itself there was a teaching college in Mpatamato...there was another teaching college in Roan Township. In town Centre there were about seven teaching colleges. In Masaiti there was one, in Mpongwe there was another one. And that is just one part of the country. What about the rest of the country? We need a Teaching Excellence Framework like our colleagues in the UK.”

Subtheme 5: Accreditation related teaching excellence

All participants expressed the benefits of accreditation in ensuring teaching excellence and providing guarantees to graduates of recognition of their qualifications and assurance of a job. This comes in two ways and the first is that their qualification is accredited by the Zambia Qualification Authority and the academic program they pursued is accredited by the Higher Education Authority.

“When one gets a higher education degree from an accredited institution, the importance is that it provides one with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the workforce and it will be recognized by employers and other educational institutions.”

Lecturer-Student ratio

One of the challenges in attaining teaching excellence in the institutions of higher learning is attaining optimal class sizes and student-teacher ratios. These have changed significantly with very few initiatives and solutions aimed at reducing large classes and promoting classes with fewer students per teacher. The lack of qualified staff on the market is a serious drawback. This is further constrained by rigid staff establishments. One manager lamented the imbalance.

“... but teaching excellence can only be realized if tasks and assignments are timely conducted. We have set targets for ourselves to ensure that all the planned activities, learning activities and research supervisions are timed. We have struggled to meet set time limits. This can be achieved if the teacher- student ratio is effectively implemented”

Ranking

Ranking of institutions is now being taken to mark teaching excellence and the industry is considering ranking when selecting graduates. Globally as well, participants believe that their graduates needed to have some reputation. Ranking was considered as a tool that allowed graduates to explore the higher education options that existed beyond their own countries' borders and to compare key aspects of schools' research missions and employment opportunities. However, there were contrasting positions on ranking.

One manager did not subscribe to ranking as an element worth considering and had this to say.

“I don't believe in ranking. It creates competition of unequal parties... Such kind of ranking is not beneficial especially for institutions in developing nations...”

Quality assurance

There was consensus among participants that the overarching enabler of teaching excellence was quality service delivery. They agreed that in order to produce a quality product, there was need to ensure there was excellence

demonstrated in teaching and not necessarily research. Without question, they all agreed that teaching was the fundamental mission of most higher education institutions in Zambia. The fact that all colleges and universities have submitted their programs to the Higher Education Authority for accreditation, shows that quality as an attribute of excellence is being pursued to ensure the graduate was of a required calibre. This is confirmed in the following excerpt.

“The college is striving to meet accreditation requirements of various professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. We have met ZQA standards and those of HEA”.

Subtheme 6: Industry related teaching excellence

This subtheme included three elements which are industry practitioners, internship and partnerships. These three were considered to be complementary elements of teaching excellence. There is increasing debate in institutions of higher learning about educational quality that is linked to experiential work in industry as well as the relevance of graduates in industry. It was evident from the field work that each institution and among programs there are different forms of linkages or alignment of programmes with industry. However, increasing emphasis is being put on learning outcomes, graduate attributes, life-sustaining skills and, crucially the quality of the graduate.

Industry practitioners

Despite some scepticism about the benefits of industry practitioners by some academics, that argued that industry practitioners did not have pedagogical skills and knowledge to be relied upon to render the required experiential education to trainees, others held a very strong belief that these practitioners were key in shaping the quality of graduates. This was true for practically oriented jobs like trade tested jobs, teaching, medicine and law among others. This is evident from the following.

“We are organising our training programmes to ensure that there are linkages with industry and that those in industry took some sessions in the University ... Students now have access to guest lectures from leaders in so many fields.”

Internship

For institutions that valued internship as an aspect that contributed to the quality of their graduate, they set the goal to create an environment where research, teaching and learning thrived, and where every student had hands on support and resources to succeed in their academic program. This is shown as follows.

“We arrange attachments for our students as a platform for technology transfer and knowledge sharing. There have been knowledge and skills transfer as well between industry and faculty. We have been getting support from industry to get resources for our programs as well as foster research.”

Partnerships

Partnering with industry provided new opportunities for universities to reconfigure the way some programs get funded, developed, marketed, delivered, and supported. Partnerships were identified to benefit universities more than industry. For universities, where partnerships exist, they provide numerous benefits including financial support for education, research, and service missions; broadening the experience of students and faculty; identifying significant, interesting, and relevant problems and increasing employment opportunities for students.

“...By working more closely with the industry, we have befitted in many ways our university has not only been able to produce graduates who are more appropriately skilled, but also professionals who are more likely to fit in the workforce in the industry. The placements have helped more than we expected...Our University has been considering engaging directly with employers, through Employer Advisory Partnership Groups, to ensure the curriculum is aligned with real world applications, and to connect students with opportunities before they graduate”.

7. Discussion

This study was premised on the problem that the construction of teaching excellence among Quality Assurance and Education Actors in higher education and that theory of teaching excellence within the Zambian context remained unknown. It was further premised that the development of a substantive theory of teaching excellence, from an emic perspective would help in identifying constructs as well as concepts that are common in every day parlance and practice.

The main outcome from this theoretical development is that teaching excellence should never be judged on fixed elements or one-size-fits-all concept. The construction and meaning of teaching excellence ontologically is driven by multiple realism. Teaching excellence is contextual and value-laden reflecting different perspectives, preferences, and expectations and its ultimate is to have a quality product – a graduate.

The concentration on the individual-level undermines generalization (Spencer and Schöner, 2003). In other

words, person-specific analyses provide detailed results that do not apply to other individuals or even to the same individual in a different situation. In this way, it is not possible to generalise these findings to persons and institutions that were not represented. Although this study is not about probability sampling as we selected respondents using maximum variation sampling, we acknowledge that the methodological choice was appropriate as it fits phenomenological non directive interviewing which was the bedrock for this study. We do not see the substantive theory to be tested within the study. We also believe that directed interviews cannot be problematic in generating a substantive theory as they do not ‘impose’ the researcher’s preferences. Instead, they provide for un controlled participant’s constructions and meanings from which what is relevant could be reduced. There is some credence in the substantive theory that we developed in that we had employed the Husserlian phenomenological *epoché* by bracketing our presumptions and all literature on teaching excellence by looking at the constructions and meanings of the participants. In this way, we refrained from judgement and bias opinions so that we could wholly understand teaching experience from the point of view of our participants (Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013); (Allen-Collinson, 2016); (Msusa, Chowa and Mwanza, 2022). Further than this, we have tried to elucidate theoretical elements with illustrations.

Finally, arguably and most importantly, transcendental phenomenological researchers need to become comfortable with the uncomfortable that of employing *epoché* setting aside their preconceptions as well as content of extant literature and for this reason the CCGT method which has been applied in this design is not for the faint-hearted see (Stephenson, Giles and Bissaker, 2018).

7.1 Implications for Practice

The implications of the study provide evidence that theory could be developed using idiographic methods as well. The research contributes to, and furthers, our understanding of teaching excellence in higher education pertaining to the local context in Zambia. The elements of the theory could be delineated further to show their attributes which could be the basis for extending the theory into positivist application. The theory could spur the development of context specific teaching excellence framework that could be used to improve teaching excellence. We have generated context specific theory of teaching excellence and the application of the theory need to be focused on rebalancing the relationship between internal related teaching excellence and external related teaching excellence in institutions of higher learning and putting all that relates to teaching and the learner at the heart of the higher education institution’s system.

The present paper stems from a study that addressed unknown issues regarding the development of teaching excellence theory in the higher education sector. The substantive theory that we have generated could be one source where policy makers and practitioners of quality assurance could consider when developing their teaching excellence policy instruments such as Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). They may use the theoretical model to improve their institutional quality framework. Such instruments if they exist, could support the enhancement of educational provision in a higher education institution. Therefore, rather than focusing on developing metrics of teaching excellence, it could be more effective first to focus also on how these institutions could enhance their educational provision with excellence. Metrics could be developed from the model while relying on extant literature. Generally, we have shown that teaching excellence is not a simple or straightforward concept, but rather a multidimensional and dynamic one that reflects different perspectives, values, and goals. In this article, we have outlined the constructed dimensions of teaching excellence, as well as some of the narratives to support the substantive theory.

8. Conclusion

The general ambition of practitioners of teaching excellence has been expressed as rebalancing the relationship between teaching and learning in institutions of higher learning and putting all that relates to teaching and the learner at the heart of the higher education institution’s system. We stated in the title “Theory of Desire for Quality product to Teaching Excellence”. Now we have developed the substantive theory of teaching excellence in which six main constructs of teaching excellence for the Higher education sector that were studied has been presented. By utilizing analytical lenses that highlight the key embodied experiences of teaching excellence, this allowed us to craft findings that appreciated both experiences as separate entities as well as assess the impact of experiences. The researchers posits that the rigor of this work allows us to claim that these six different ways of constructing teaching excellence be generalizable in terms of naturalistic generalizability, transferability, and generativity (Smith, 2018). That is, education actors in the Zambian Higher Education setting may find their own experiences which resonate with what this study states such that lived realities are validated (naturalistic generalizability), people who did not participate in the study befitting the respondents’ characteristics may also find ‘their truth’ within the experiences depicted within teaching experience constructs and thereby be moved to act upon what they have read (generativity). Thus, this foundational work highlights the complexity and nuance of the experiences of teaching excellence the current perspective on teaching excellence in the local context.

Finally, the implication of the findings is that phenomenology is a powerful research strategy that is well

suited for exploring challenging problems in quality assurance research. By building a better understanding of the nature of phenomenology and working to ensure proper alignment between the specific research question and the researcher's underlying philosophy, we hope to encourage quality assurance and teaching excellence scholars to consider the utility of phenomenology when addressing their research questions.

Statements by Authors

Ethical statement

Ethics approval was obtained from Humanities and Social Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) Review number HSSREC 2021 Jul 001.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

This research article contains our original work, has not received prior publication, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. The authors have seen and approved the manuscript being submitted. The views expressed are personal. The authors are solely responsible for the content and writing of the paper.

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