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Internal Educational Processes Leading to Improved Student Performance

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Abstract:

Purpose - This study investigated how day-to-day departmental/faculty educational processes relate to students' performance in three generic courses.

Design/Methodology/Approach - A qualitative approach was utilized. Data was collected from four academic Deans and two Heads of Departments (HoD) selected purposively. Structured face-to-face interviews based on Scheerens, Glas and Thomas' (2003) Framework for Effectiveness Enhancing Conditions was used. The data was analysed using Lacey and Luff's (2001) five stages of thematic analysis.

Findings - In all, the following process factors were identified as having potentially influenced the students' performance: student/teacher commitment, whether students/ teachers feel valued, evaluative potential, student support, order and discipline, curriculum assessment and the leadership of the HoD.

Research implications/limitations - A new study investigating other factors identified by previous studies such as: student motivation, physical facilities, teaching/learning materials, teacher salaries etc. is recommended.

Practical implication - Standardization of acceptable student behaviour and early remedial support/counselling for all students regardless of their level of performance is necessary.

Social implications - The study is expected to improve internal quality assurance mechanisms and in still confidence in the academic certificates issued by the institution despite the increases in enrollment.

Originality/value - Evidences such as these are expected to facilitate the development of in-house self-evaluation frameworks for monitoring and promoting quality assurance. The study is also expected to contribute to local debates about internal quality assurance mechanisms as enrollment continues to sour.

Keywords: *Student/teacher commitment, order and discipline, curriculum assessment, evaluative potential, and leadership*

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the number of tertiary institutions in Ghana has steadily grown. The same is true of enrollment into tertiary institutions. For example, enrollment at the Polytechnic level increased from about 1,900 in 1990/1991 to about 51,169 in 2013 due to various government policies designed to enhance access into tertiary education in Ghana (NCTE, 2015; Effah, 2011). The key question has been "what is the quality of the graduates produced subsequently?" Central to this question is the argument that: (1) increases in access means giving greater weight to broadening the access criteria and (2) increased access may mean content and process 'dilution'; as increased class sizes make providing individual attention difficult (Green 1994, Boateng and Ofori Sarpong, 2002). Hence, the interest of this article is to find out how individual institutions are ensuring that quality is still maintained despite the increases. In other words the study is interested in finding out how the internal processes of an institution specifically, at the department and faculty levels relates to the quality of students' performance so as suggest best strategies, approaches and practices for in-house quality improvement purposes.

The study paid particular attention to educational processes at the lower units – departments and faculties because "it is at these lower levels that people have concrete things to do or to tell one another and it is at these levels that the contexts of instruction actually overlap" (Huberman, 1990, p.11). Sammons (2007) similarly highlights the important contributions lower units within an institution make toward institution-wide effectiveness. The importance of institutional context and uniqueness has also been highlighted (Yu and Thomas, 2008; Fertig, 2000). Hence, the study focused on departments and faculties in just one institution. Evidences such as these are expected to facilitate the development of in-house self-evaluation frameworks for monitoring and promoting quality assurance and subsequently, student performance within an institution. The study is also expected to contribute to local debates about internal quality assurance mechanisms as enrollment continues to sour.

The selection of appropriate variables for the study was guided by the literature review and Scheerens, Glas and Thomas' (2003) Framework for Effectiveness Enhancing Conditions. The process variables examined included

student/teacher commitment, whether students/ teachers feel valued, evaluative potential, student support, order and discipline, curriculum assessment and the leadership of the HoD.

The objective of the study was to find out internal educational processes potentially leading to improved student performance in the context of the study. Hence the study specifically addressed the research question:

What internal educational processes possibly lead to improved student performance in the context of the study?

2. Literature Review

Educational process assessments are designed to isolate the direct effect of factors within the control institution on student performance and so are important to consider (Raudenbush, 2004). Process factors identified in this regard by previous studies include evaluative potential, curriculum assessment, order and discipline, teacher commitment, the leadership of the head, consistency in approach, cooperation among staff, opportunity for teacher professional development etc. As early as 1979, Edmonds (1979) found the following five process factors as affecting students' performance positively: high expectations of children's achievement, an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, an emphasis on basic-skill acquisition and frequent monitoring of pupils' progress. The importance of school ethos culture was later found by Sammons, Mortimer and Thomas (1997).

Schereens, Glas & Thomas (2003) latter compiled another list including: good internal relationship, job appraisal in terms of facilities, conditions of labour, task load and general satisfaction. The importance of the clear leadership of the head and the creation and maintenance of a positive school/classroom climate has also emphasized. A number of common processes and characteristics of more effective schools based on studies conducted during the last 30 years was summarized by Sammons (2007, p.6). they include

- High expectation of student performances
- Sound educational leadership
- Good consensus and cohesion within the school team
- High quality curriculum
- A favourable, orderly and safe school climate
- Considerable evaluative potential in the school
- A favourable class climate
- High effective learning time through excellent class management
- structured instruction
- The encouragement of autonomous learning
- Frequent feedback to students about their work etc.

Most recently, Stronge (2018), in his book *Qualities of effective teachers* argued that effective teachers use a variety of formal and informal measures to monitor and assess their students' mastery of a concept or skill. When a student is having difficulty, they provide remediation by targeting the knowledge or skill that is troubling the student. An effective teacher further observes and works with individual students with their potential in mind and encourages him/her to excel or even make a sustained effort when needed. Another important process factor proposed to be affecting student performance is classroom discipline (Lopes and Oliveira, 2017; Simón and Tapia, 2016).

3. Methodology

The study employed MET university (a pseudo name) as a case study because the focus of the study was on understanding the dynamics present within this single setting (Yin, 2009). Hence, the findings of the study may idiosyncratic. Contextualized interpretation and use of the findings is emphasized is therefore recommended.

The main study (after piloting the instrument) involved all 4 academic Deans and two service HoDs. The academic Deans and the service HoDs were selected purposively because they shared in the formulation and implementation of policies that influenced the day-to-day running of their respective faculties and departments. The Deans further influenced department/faculty culture and ethos, to a large extent. The HoDs on the other hand played a major role in the translation and implementation of institutional/faculty/department policies and oversaw day-to-day teaching and learning processes in the classroom.

Structured face-to-face interviews were employed in gathering data for the study. Face-to-face interviews are the golden standard in qualitative research in recent times given the rich data they additionally generate from the observed mannerisms and emotional reactions of the respondents. Also, when conducted at the convenience of the respondent face-to-face interviews could lead respondents to recollect, allowing further exploration and clarification of issues (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006). This notwithstanding, focusing on relevant issues during face-to-face-interviews could be difficult due to the high propensity of drifting away from the main issues (Rubin and Babbie, 2001).

The selection of appropriate variables for the study was guided by the Scheerens, Glas and Thomas' (2003) Framework for Effectiveness Enhancing Conditions because the elementary design of this framework appropriately associates hypothetical effectiveness enhancing conditions of schooling with output measures (Schereens, 2004). The interviews accordingly elicited information on the following effectiveness enhancing conditions: student/teacher commitment, whether students/teachers feel valued, evaluative potential, student support, order and discipline, curriculum assessment and the leadership of the HoD.

Thematic analysis was employed in summarizing the interview data and in identifying the relationships between the various themes and the research question. The technique allowed the qualitative data to be analyzed in a more systematic manner so that the accuracy and the understanding of the information gathered was increased (Rice & Ezzy,

1999). The following five stages of thematic analysis recommended by Lacey and Luff's (2001) were adapted: transcription, organization of the data, familiarization, coding and creation of themes. Lacey and Luff's approach was chosen for the study because it falls under the general heading of thematic analysis and shares many common features with other qualitative data analysis techniques. Most importantly, it allows the inclusion of a priori and emergent concepts in the analysis and is quite flexible to use (Sullivan, 2009). The technique has also been used by other educational researchers (Mei, et al., 2007; Ibrahimipour et al., 2011). The details of each stage as applied in this study are as follows:

3.1. Transcription

The recorded audio data was listened to and transcribed verbatim according to the order of the questions asked interview questions. The transcription was done immediately after the data was collected so that both verbal and nonverbal information (smiles, frowns, moods etc.) could be accurately recorded to retain the richness and quality of the data collected.

3.2. Organization of the Data

After the transcription, the data was organized according to the positions of the interviewees (Dean/service HoD) while their responses were further organized according to the questions on the interview guide. The hard copy of the data was secured under lock and key while the soft copy was protected with a password, making it accessible to only the researcher (both copies were destroyed after the study).

3.3. Familiarization

The audio and transcribed data were repeatedly listened to and read through to ensure familiarization with the data before the actual coding.

3.4. Coding

After familiarization, data from each interviewee was given a code easily traceable to the interviewee – name, department, faculty, gender etc. In other words, the identity (e.g. academic Deans/HoD, faculty/department) and characteristics (age, qualification) of the respondents were assigned codes. Major themes determined a priori from Scheerens, Glas and Thomas' (2003) Framework for Effectiveness Enhancing Conditions (used in developing the interview guide) were also assigned codes (numbers). Overall, nine major themes (seven from the interviews with the Deans and three from the interviews with the service HoDs) emerged. These included: students/teacher commitment, whether students/teachers felt valued, student support, order and discipline, curriculum assessment, the leadership of the HoD and evaluative potential.

3.5. Creating the Themes

Major ideas/themes emerging from each major theme were further coded to develop more refined categories (sub-themes). These coded responses were then compared, contrasted and reported.

The focus of the analysis was on similarities and differences in teaching and learning processes as reported by: (1) the HoDs and the Deans. The two HoDs supervised the teaching of the AFS, CS and CL in 16 different academic departments. HoD1 had oversight responsibility over department1 - responsible for AFS and CS while HoD2 supervised department2 responsible for CL.

The unit of analysis was essentially faculty (interviews with Deans) and HoD (interviews with HoDs). The interviews with the Deans provided an overview of overall faculty policy guidelines and practices that directly or indirectly influenced the activities and the environment/conditions in which the faculties and the associated departments, including the servicing departments, operated. The interviews with the HoDs on the other hand highlighted the relevance of specific day-to-day service department processes and practices that potentially explained the differences in the performance of students in the different academic departments and faculties.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

"Validity and reliability are two criteria upon which the veracity and creditability of research findings are judged." (Carter and Porter 2000, p.29) These two concepts are especially important in qualitative research because of the common criticism that qualitative results are anecdotal (Lacey and Luff, 2001). As argued by Guba & Lincoln (1995), validity (trustworthiness) in qualitative research comes through credibility, transferability, conformability and triangulation.

Regarding validity, Schereens, Glas and Thomas' (2003) Framework was used as a guide. This guide provided a clear trail of evidence for the credibility of the analysis. Validity was further ensured by carrying out the following: (a) piloting of the interview schedules using participants similar (e.g. gender, age, position etc.) to those used in the main study; (b) engaging the interviewees for an adequate period of time to ensure that all relevant information were collected and (c) ensuring that the findings accurately represented the data collected. This was achieved in two ways: (1) respondent validation through cross-checking of interpretations between the analyses with the interviewees and (2) adequate and systematic use of original interview data in the text (e.g. quotations from different interviewees in this article). These processes ensured that the conclusions drawn were appropriate and consistent.

Dependability (reliability) in qualitative research refers to the replicability or repeatability of results obtained (Joppe, 2000). Dependability in this study was first pursued through the proper documentation of the entire research process, particularly from the pilot stage where ideas and difficulties encountered were documented and used to improve

the main study. The study further shows evidence of the data analysis procedures, justifies why they were appropriate within the context of the study and demonstrates the process of generating themes. Comparable external evidence including previous findings is also used throughout this article (see findings and discussion sections for example).

3.7. Ethical Issues

According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004) dimensions of ethics in research include: (a) procedural ethics, which usually involve seeking approval to undertake research, (b) "ethics in practice" or everyday ethics that arise in carrying out research and (c) ethics as articulated in professional/organizational institutions. Ethical issues considered in this study include data access, informed consent, power relations, confidentiality and anonymity.

3.7.1. Data Access

First of all, permission to carry out the research in the university was sought from the Vice Chancellor. After an approval letter was received, a personal followed up to have verbal agreements with all concerned were made.

3.7.2. Informed Consent

Informed consent is meant to guarantee the voluntary nature of participation, i.e. research participants must receive adequate information concerning the research aims, expected benefits etc. before participating in a study (Lynoe et al., 1991). In line with this, the front cover of the interview schedule had a letter stating the title of the study, the purpose and the use of the data to be collected as well as an assurance of confidentiality for any information given within the confines of the study. The letter also indicated the interviewees' right to withdraw from the study at any point in time without prejudice, where to channel concerns (the contact details of the researcher - telephone number, emailaddress etc. were provided) and a section where interviewees could sign to indicate voluntary participation. Also, each interview was conducted at the convenience of the interviewee (e.g., date, time, venue etc.).

3.7.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality in research means not disclosing any information gained from a research participant deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify individuals or the institution. In other words, the researcher: (1) must not discuss information provided by individuals with others and (2) should present the findings in ways that ensure that individual participants/institutions cannot be identified chiefly through anonymity (British Education Research Association, 2003). Hence, a pseudo name (MET University) is consistently used in in this article to hide the real identify of the University. The same was done for the interviewees (e.g. HoD1, Dean1). The responses collected were also kept highly confidential using anonymity. Codes were used to protect the real identity of the participants. Other identifiable data such as participants' gender, age were all hidden using numbers. These were done throughout the research – data collection and analysis, presentation of findings and discussions to avoid any potential harm (defamation) to the participants/institution.

3.7.4. Power Relations

In qualitative research, emphasis is placed on both the researcher's responsibility of constructing knowledge and his ability to create the needed balance between his friendships with the participants while maintaining the distance that would ensure professional judgment (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002). To this end, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and were involved throughout the study (e.g. their feedback was sought between the analyses and reporting phases of this study). By so doing their views were incorporated into the final work). On the question of how the researcher was perceived by the interviewees, care was taken to ensure that leading questions were not asked and answers were not rendered correct or wrong when unexpected things were said. Instead, further clarification was sought through probing. This prevented the researcher from assuming a superior position.

4. Findings

Major themes highlighting the potential differences between departments/faculties in terms of effectiveness included students/teacher commitment, whether students/teachers felt valued, evaluative potential, student support, order and discipline, curriculum assessment and the leadership of the HoD. Details are discussed below:

4.1. Students Commitment

Students were said to be more committed to some courses than others. According to Deans 1 and 3, students in faculties 1 and 3 were more committed to Computer Literacy than the other generic courses (African Studies and Communication Skills) because of its relatedness to some of their subject specific courses. Besides, CL was seen as useful in all courses. Deans 2 and 4 further mentioned that some of their students actually pursued computer related courses/programmes outside the University to boast their competences. Tentatively, it could be argued that students in all four faculties were committed to CL.

The interest of the students in Communication Skills however, was varied. According to Deans 2 and 3 their students were not only highly committed to CS but were also very particular about it. Dean1 on the other hand rated the students' commitment to CS "medium". Dean4 in contrast indicated the students feel CS is not for them. They only need to pass it and so may not be committed to it.

The commitment of the students to African Studies was similarly mixed. In the view of Dean4, students in the faculty did not like AFS that much. The same was true of students in faculty1. The reason is was because of the reading nature of the course. Dean1 commented:

"I will leave that to the students themselves because I know most students [in this faculty] do not want reading courses but for relevance, I will say yes, they know it is relevant. In my own view, I think they need it to broaden their view of the social set up and to see how what happened in the past could be put in perspective"

Dean3 in contrast mentioned that students in faculty3 took interest AFS because it was something extra they could add to their knowledge. Dean2 on the other hand, had a different view. In his view, the commitment of the students to AFS was dependent on the commitment of the teachers teaching the course. He commented:

"Yes, the students are committed but their commitment may depend on how the course is taught - how the lecturers introduce the course and their teaching approach".

In summary, it could be argued that a student' perception about a generic course and its relatedness to his/her subject specific area could influence his/her overall academic performance given that perceptions to an extent, affect effort/attitude toward learning.

4.2. Teachers Commitment

According to Dean1, teachers teaching CL were more committed compared to the AFS and CS teachers. Dean1 commented:

"To me the CL teachers are much more committed to their job. Sixty percent of the lecturers for the other two courses [AFS and CS] are only committed because they feel if they don't, the student may perceive their courses as not important compared to their main courses. As such, the lecturers do their best to push their courses to the level of the main courses".

This view however, was not shared by the remaining three Deans who felt all the servicing teachers were committed. For example Dean 4, stated:

"All the teachers are committed because "any time you call on them for marked scripts and results or any other thing, they are cooperative and so far we have not had any complaints"

Whatever the case may be, teacher commitment may be an important process factor to consider in terms of effectiveness. For instance, assuming that one group of course teachers were more committed to their teaching job than another group; then this may imply that students' performance in that course may be better than their performance in the other course. As argued by Shann, (1998), teacher commitment influences teacher priority and effort at improving overall student performance.

4.3. Academic Support for Student

Regarding academic support, the study showed that while some faculties acted to prevent poor academic performance, others waited for it to happen before acting. For instance, faculty1 tried to prevent poor academic performance by asking all HoDs in the faculty to identify and find out more about students underperforming in initial assessments (e.g. class assignment, quizzes, tests and mid-semester examination) so as to help them. Underachieving students at the end of each semester were also identified using their Grade Point Aggregate (GPA). Detailed information about such students was then communicated to the teachers concerned so that their specific needs could be met (e.g. by offering tutorials or counseling).

Dean1 further mentioned that the faculty has established what he called "student-teacher relationship groups"(each teacher acts as an academic counselor to about twenty students) where an assigned teacher examines the performance of students in his group. This gives the assigned teacher the opportunity to look at the results of those in his/her group and offer individualized guidance and support. The teacher also makes regular reports and recommendations to the faculty as to how those in his/her group could be helped. The strategies adopted by faculty4 were quite similar to those adopted by faculty1 except that faculty4 focused on only underperforming students (students whose GPA averaged the minimum or went below expectation).

Faculties 2 and 3 on the other hand, did little relatively to support students academically. For example, Dean3 mentioned that the faculty met regularly with students at least three times in a semester to listen to their views, problems, suggestions and ideas sometimes without the presence of other faculty members so that the students could talk freely about academic issues or problems. Dean2 further commented:

"If a student is not performing, we normally ask him if he has problems and if this [poor performance] persists, we withdraw the student but if we realize that the problem is from the lecturer, we ask the lecturer to improve his delivery".

General strategies adopted by the various faculties to support students academically include regular monitoring of students' performance, individualized academic support and attention to students' concerns.

4.4. Order and Discipline

The focus in this area was on student/teacher behaviour problems in the classroom. The different faculties faced different problems. For example, in the area of teacher misbehavior, Deans 1 and 2 mentioned that they were confronted with the problem of teacher lateness- which caused teachers to rush through planned material or leave some aspects uncovered. Dean1 commented:

"One would normally expect a teacher to be punctual in class but sometimes some teachers are late and much time is taken to settle the students before lessons start"

The problem of teacher absenteeism however, confronted all faculties. The difference however, was how effective the individual faculties were in identifying teachers who were absent. According to Dean2, the faculty relied on teacher attendance books signed by all teachers going to the classroom to teach (teachers signed the time they were in and out of the classroom). Dean1 on the other hand, relied on chancing on a group of students idling about and probing to find out what was happening. Deans 3 and 4 on the other hand expected students to report absent teachers to them. Teacher absenteeism possibly affected the students' performances because it could for example; reduce the quality and quantity of students' educational experience as well as reduce opportunity to learn for students.

Student behaviour problems identified by the Deans include student lateness, absenteeism and class disturbances. Each faculty experienced a different set of these with the exception of faculty4 which did not state any problem, probably because of its small student population. For instance, student lateness and class disturbances in the form of ringing mobile phones, students talking, students going in and out of the classroom etc. was experienced by faculties 1, 2 and 3. Regarding student lateness Dean1 explained:

"When a teacher goes to class he may meet few students but as he continues to teach he may realize that the class is becoming full. He may therefore decide to either go back or move ahead with what he has been teaching – a situation that may affect teaching and learning in either ways"

4.5. Curriculum Assessment

One key issue emerging from the study in this area was the averaging of marks across student groups. As explained by Dean1, some servicing teachers especially those assigned to different groups within the same programme because of the large numbers (e.g. A, B and C classes of Accountancy) combine the groups and give them group assignments as part of their continuous assessment. The same awarded mark is given across the group. This made some students appear academically 'good' even though their performance was actually the performance of one/two "good" students in the group (possibly very few "academically good" students in the group did the work). Dean2 further explained that such teachers only looked for points when marking students' scripts because of the student numbers. These 'tactics' employed by some teachers might have unfairly given some students 'advantage academically. Tentatively it could be argued that, differences in fairness in the area of curriculum assessment may affect the performance of individual students.

4.6. Whether or Not the Students/Teachers Felt Valued

Regarding the students, different approaches were used in making them feel valued. For instance, the students were made to see the value of the programmes they were pursuing. Dean3 on the additionally engaged the students in some of its activities, allowed them to take some decisions, organize events, make suggestions to the faculty etc. Dean4 similarly involved the students in some of its commercial activities inside and outside the university. To Dean2, the students were their clients and so their concerns were their priority. Accordingly, the faculty tried to address whatever complaint the students brought to their attention through conversations and suggestion boxes. The faculty also communicated management decisions to student representatives for onward communication to the students. The key issue here is whether the specific measure(s) employed by each faculty was effective in making the students feel valued. This is important because students are more likely to engage in classroom activities and improve their performance if they feel supported and valued by their teachers and the school as a whole (Wentzel, 1997).

Focusing on how the teachers were made to feel valued, Deans 1 and 4 indicated that their faculties did this by making the servicing teacher's part of their faculty and departmental meetings. Faculty2 in contrast reasoned that the servicing teachers were no part of the faculty and so there was no need to make them feel valued. Faculty3 on the other hand indicated that the majority of the teachers were from the faculty and so no extra mile was needed to make them feel valued. Whether the teachers felt valued or not was important because it could possibly affect students' performance, given that teachers who feel valued do their best to help students academically (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

4.7. Evaluative Potential

The focus in this respect was on department self-evaluation and the monitoring of student performance. Regarding department self-evaluation, it was evident that neither the whole institution nor its faculties/academic departments had a policy document on self-evaluation. The comments of the two HoDs similarly showed that none of them monitored the performance of the students they taught in the 16 departments of the institution. In fact, there was no official record or knowledge of how the students in the various departments were comparatively performing in the three courses. For instance, the HoDs commented:

HoD1 (AFS and CS)

"My department may not be abreast with some of the changes in the students' performances although I know student performance in some of the departments is abysmal while others are improving."

HoD2 (CL)

"Because the department is a servicing department, it does not monitor the performance of the students it handles unless a complaint is received".

Evidently, it was some academic departments, for instance, those in faculties 1 and 4 that monitored the students' performance and supported them academically not the servicing departments. Of course, the importance of regular

monitoring of student performance to improved student performance cannot be has been emphasized by many previous studies (Bohn et al., 2004; Hall & Harding, 2003).

4.8. *The Leadership of the Service HoDs*

The study focused on leadership at the department level because leadership at this level is closer to the classroom and could facilitate changes more likely to be embraced by those having the greatest impact on students - teachers. In line with the responsibilities of formal leaders in schools (Gronn, 2008) the interview focused on the following: information management, decision making, coordination of activities for teachers teaching the same course and teacher professional development.

Focusing on information management, HoD1 indicated that he personally ensured that all relevant information (e.g. on meetings, events, management decisions, policies) got to all through different media such as: notice boards, letters, phones calls, text messages and sometimes through 'man to man talks'. HoD2 in contrast assigned that responsibility to the department administrator.

With respect to decision making, both HoDs indicated democratic interactions. However, the willingness of the teachers to implement decisions in the classroom was seen to be largely dependent on when they were involved in the decision making process. In other words, the teachers were not willing to implement decisions that they were not directly involved from the beginning.

Concerning coordination of activities for teachers teaching the same course HoD1 mentioned that, that responsibility has been delegated to appointed course coordinators. According to him, the different courses under the jurisdiction of the department have been running effectively with assistance from the course coordinators. The course coordinators worked hand in hand with their colleagues teaching the same course while the HoD kept in touch by providing relevant timely information. He also listened with the intent of understanding; negotiating and persuading the course teachers to reach the desired decision (HoD1 was not necessarily an expert in some of the courses). HoD2 on the other hand personally coordinated all course activities although roles were sometimes delegated to members when necessary (at the time of this research the department provided services in only one course - CL).

Another interesting finding was that internal relationships between teachers were not the best because of occasional conflicts between teachers. For example HoD 1 commented:

"I think it [the relationship between teachers] is not bad with AFS teachers, but it is cordial with Communication Skills teachers. There is no serious problems between lecturers as of now even though there have been some problems in the past"

Such occasional conflicts between teachers as explained by HoD1 affect student performance. His comment was as follows:

"Assuming we are handling the same course and there is friction, we would not cooperate and instead of sharing ideas we would be having conflicts. This actually affects us a lot though it does not occur often. So normally we call them and advise them but if it persists then a query is supposed to be given but I have personally not done that before".

With respect to teacher professional development, HoD1 mentioned that teacher professional development may be related to students' performance because professional teachers are able to effectively communicate basic knowledge to students and develop their thinking abilities/problem-solving skills (Marx et al., 2004). Although both HoDs encouraged teachers to engage in peer coaching and mentoring, the difference between the two HoDs was how teacher got the opportunity to develop themselves professionally. According to HoD2, he personally identified and recommended relevant workshops and other in-service training for teachers. HoD1 on the other hand, only supported teachers who took the initiative. Overall, it could be argued that the personal effort put into teacher professional development by the head could contribute to teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

5. Discussion

Further discussed in this article are the following because of their importance in the context of the study: (a) regular monitoring of students' performance and academic support, (b) classroom discipline, (c) whether or not students/teachers feel valued, and (d) cooperation among teachers teaching the same course.

Regular monitoring of students' performance and academic support were identified as important process factors affecting students' performance. Of course, continuous monitoring and interpretation of students' performance is necessary if students at the greatest risk of not meeting standards are to be identified and supported (Tuckman, 1999). As earlier indicated the performances of students in some faculties were monitored for individualized academic support in the form of tutorials and counselling. Academic counsellors (teachers) were further used to support underachieving students. The counselling provision gave teachers the opportunity to: listen, talk, understand, relate, praise, establish and foster good relationships between them and the students. This further facilitated a bond of loyalty between the students and the teachers so that, the students were motivated as it were, to 'do well' for the teacher. The teachers also became aware of the problems confronting individual students so that they could be available to encourage and support them in their learning effort. As argued by Roderick and Engel (2001) such individualized support makes low-achieving students feel supported to improve their performance.

Further discussed in this article is classroom discipline. Classroom discipline is a complex issue that all including teachers, administrators, students and parents are interested (Lopes and Oliveira, 2017). This is because some studies have shown that it is an important predictor of teacher retention, commitment and satisfaction given that, teachers may often feel exhausted after addressing classroom disruption. Teaching time or opportunity to learn may also be significantly

affected as a result (Sun, 2015; Rinke, 2008). Thus, it is an important factor to consider when looking at student performance.

Interestingly, all four academic Deans indicated that they experienced some form of student/teacher indiscipline in the classroom. Unfortunately, the management of this was left to the discretion of individual teachers. This for example, implied that, whether lessons were disrupted by student misbehaviour or not to a large extent depended on the effectiveness of individual teachers in managing such on occasion. Thus, differences in the performance of students in the same course could be due to differences in the effectiveness of individual teachers teaching the same course in handling such issues. This is not the best as it could affect how much students gain academically in the classroom. As found by Emmer & Stough (2001) students get greater academic gains when teachers have better classroom management skills including spending less time on dealing with disciplinary issues. To that end, teachers may need to implement individualized disciplinary plans for some who do not respond to traditional group-based approaches (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Luiselli et al., 2005).

Whether or not students and teachers felt valued also apparently influenced the students' performance. Indeed, previous studies provide strong evidence in support of the notion that students are more likely to engage in classroom activities if they feel valued (Wentzel, 1997). Yet the question is what makes students and teachers feel valued? Regarding the students, factors such as democratic interactions and teachers who are supportive in specific ways such as those who: give one on one academic assistance, are caring, tolerant, patient, humorous, appreciative, draw students into the learning process and are ready to listen etc. have been found (e.g. Goode now, 1993; Ryan & Powel son, 1991). Evidence from this study though speculative, further point to other ways of making students feel valued including promoting students' independence (e.g. allowing students to take some decisions, organise events), welcoming students' ideas/inputs (e.g. through suggestion boxes or an open door policy), addressing students complaints, informing students of management decisions, interacting informally to discuss student problems and involving student in faculty activities. Focusing on what makes teachers feel valued, previous studies have indicated initiatives such as: involving teachers in decision making, delegation, encouraging teacher autonomy, respectful exchanges marked by genuine listening during meetings, offering moral support and showing appreciation for teacher inputs and effort (Bryk and Schneider 2003; Silins, and Mulford, 2002). The only factor added to the list by this study was affiliation.

Another key factor found to be influencing the students' performance was cooperation among teachers teaching the same course. This factor is especially important because a critical way of ensuring that all students receive quality instructions is to regulate what happens in different classroom for the same course. This inevitably requires that teachers teaching the same course work together. However, evidence from the interviews showed that some form of conflict was experienced. Although such conflicts could lead to new ways of thinking (Achinste in, 2002); it could also affect students' performance negatively. For example, it could cause some teachers not to cooperate in teaching related areas such as: the selection of course materials, lesson planning, setting of common standards in curriculum assessment, bringing about innovations in the course etc. Improvement efforts for students may also fail as teachers may begin to see themselves as competitors with no shared responsibility towards each other, instead of as individuals working together for the common good of students. Overall, this finding point to the fact that cordial relationship between teachers is necessary if teachers teaching a common course are to achieve the desired goal of high academic performance for all students.

Related to this is the effectiveness of the head in facilitating the process of teachers working together. This could be done through personnel management skills critically including the planning and direction of activities for teachers while at the same time allowing them to make the necessary decisions. For example, the provision of timely information by the head is necessary for clarity and understanding of work activities (Vanderstraeten and Biesta, 2006). It follows therefore that, if one HoD is weak in effectively facilitating the process for teachers to work together or takes decisions on their behalf, then the teachers may not be willing to work together in critical teaching related areas and this to an extent may influence student performance.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated how day-to-day processes specifically at the department and faculty levels relate to students' performance and how these could be used to improve internal quality assurance mechanisms. A case study design and a qualitative approach were employed using four academic Deans and two departmental heads. Overall, the following factors within the control of the institution were identified as potentially influencing the performances of the students: students/teacher commitment, whether students/students felt valued, evaluative potential, student support, order and discipline, curriculum assessment and the leadership of the head.

Interestingly, most of these factors mapped up onto Scheerens, Glas and Thomas' (2003) Framework for Effectiveness Enhancing Conditions. However, student academic support in the form tutorials and counselling appeared not to have fitted well in to the Framework; thereby demonstrating the originality of this work. The study also demonstrated that Scheerens, Glas and Thomas' (2003) Framework though mostly used at the pre-tertiary level, could be utilized in examining quality issues at the tertiary level in Ghana if its principles, paradigms, conceptual models etc. are applied and replicated carefully and in context.

8. Recommendation

Based on the finding that regular monitoring of students' performance and academic support could influence students' performance, it is recommended that these (monitoring and academic support) be streamlined for all students within the institution. Regular monitoring of students' performance for example, is expected to teachers ascertain whether

students are progressing at acceptable levels or not so that those performing below satisfactory levels could be targeted, tracked and provided with the necessary academic support. By so doing, teachers may also be helped to plan and make instructional decisions that promote students' academic gains.

Standardization of acceptable student and teacher behaviour across all faculties and departments is further recommended.

Early remedial support for all students identified to be underperforming in initial examinations as well as counselling for all students regardless of whether they are low or high attainers is recommended.

Obviously, there are other factors influencing students' performance that this study could not explore. Such factors include: student motivation, physical facilities, teaching/learning materials, curriculum issues, teacher salaries etc. Hence, a new study investigating these at the tertiary level in the Ghanaian context is recommended.

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