



Raising the Bar: Institutional Self-Assessment of Teaching and Learning Quality in Universities

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of an Action Research conducted in the Kenya Assemblies of God EAST (EAST) with the aim of establishing the impediments of teaching and learning. The end game of the Action Research was to raise the quality of teaching and learning in the University. This cannot be effectively done without self-assessment by EAST. Self-assessment is a pivotal component in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning within higher education institutions. The self-assessment of the current status of teaching and learning at EAST is essential for maintaining academic quality, promoting continuous improvement, and aligning institutional practices with educational goals. The study adopted a **descriptive research design** with both **qualitative** and **quantitative** approaches. A total sample of 75 was found sufficient considering that the study tool was one questionnaire for all the categories of respondents; 20 faculty members, 30 students, 13 administrators and 12 alumni were expected to participate in the study. However, 19 faculty members, 27 students, 13 administrators and 8 others including alumni and those who did not indicate their roles at EAST. Convenience sampling, also known as availability or accidental sampling was employed in the selection of study participants. The researcher found out that on the overall, EAST exhibits a solid foundation in some aspects of teaching and learning. However, focused efforts are needed to enhance pedagogical practices, improve infrastructure, and strengthen academic support services to create a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Keywords: Action Research, EAST, Kenya Assemblies of God University, Teaching and Learning

Introduction

This article is part of an Action Research conducted in Kenya Assemblies of God EAST (EAST) with the aim of establishing the impediments of teaching and learning. The end game of the Action Research is to raise the quality of teaching and learning in the University. This is because EAST aims to provide relevant and quality education that produces Spirit-empowered servant leaders for the global marketplace. The University approaches the total educational program from best practice, as commended by Commission for University Education (CUE), serving the Nation of Kenya and humanity, guided by intrinsic principles of Christian charity and servant hood without undue discrimination occasioned by biases of gender, nationality or inner convictions. This vision aligns with the guidance from the CUE, which emphasizes the need for institutions to offer quality education that meets the global demand for skilled professionals while also promoting core values of social responsibility and ethical leadership (Republic of Kenya, 2014). The Commission advocates for a holistic educational approach that not only cultivates academic excellence but also nurtures moral and social responsibility among students, (Commission for University Education, 2013); which EAST has diligently embraced. The University's educational framework is therefore designed to harmonize rigorous academic training with the development of character and servant leadership, which, it is believed, will address the emerging challenges in both local and global communities. One of the most pressing concerns for any institution of higher learning is the need to refine its teaching and learning strategies in order to adapt to the rapidly evolving demands of the global education sector (Biggs & Tang, 2011). According to Biggs and Tang (2011) this calls for a strategic review of the current state of teaching practices, curriculum delivery, and the overall

student experience, with a focus on identifying areas that require enhancement. Additionally, Biggs and Tang (2011) indicate that a review of pedagogical strategies is essential to improving educational outcomes and fostering deeper learning among students. This cannot be effectively done without continuous self-assessment by institutions of higher learning. Self-assessment is a pivotal component in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning within higher education institutions. This is due to its ability to empower both educators and students to engage in reflective practices that foster continuous improvement (Adachi et al., 2017; McIver & Murphy, 2023; Craig & Kay, 2021).

Literature Review

The quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions plays a pivotal role in determining student outcomes and academic success. The quality of university education is supposed to equip learners the relevant knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities needed to succeed in their professional and personal lives; besides fostering innovation, encourage lifelong learning, and contribute to the development of a knowledgeable and capable workforce (Altbach, et al 2009. & Teichler, 2014). Also, high-quality education should promote social mobility and economic development within their communities. Further, high quality education should be geared toward enhancing student satisfaction, the institutional image and keeping pace with international standards Kalam, 2023; Nason, 2023). Consequently, it is imperative that a comprehensive understanding of the current state of teaching and learning in a university be evidence-based by examining various elements of education such as curriculum delivery, faculty engagement, student participation, and the institutional environment among other important aspects. Studies have shown that effective teaching hinges on multiple factors, including the alignment of curriculum with industry standards, the use of innovative teaching strategies, and the availability of resources (Biggs & Tang, 2011). At EAST, assessing the current state of teaching and learning would in part involve an exploration of how well faculty members integrate best practices into their teaching and how the students engage with the content.

A study conducted by Okebukola (2012) emphasized that universities must regularly assess their teaching practices and curriculum to ensure that they meet contemporary educational standards and address the needs of both students and the broader society. Similarly, a report by the National Commission for Higher Education (2013) highlighted the importance of continually evaluating teaching strategies, noting that institutions should adopt student-centered teaching methodologies that promote critical thinking and deep learning. Technology integration into instruction is also very key for effectiveness. One of the benefits is fostering of the development of essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving; coupled with improving academic achievement and motivation (Ramaila & Molwele, 2023). Moreover, it improves classroom collaboration, broadening academic horizons while supporting remote learning (Mdhlalose & Mlambo, 2023). Many universities in Kenya traditionally employ lecturing as the predominant method of teaching and learning. However, effective pedagogy for university students in 2023 emphasizes active engagement, relational dynamics, and adaptability to technological advancements. Kozanitis and Nenciovici (2023) in their meta-analysis of 104 studies they established that active engagement favoured the learning achievement of college students in

humanities and social sciences more than traditional lecturing. The effect size was 0.489 standard deviations, indicating a moderate to large impact. Smaller class sizes and upper-level courses showed even greater benefits. In recent times there has been an emphasis at EAST on Faculty applying pedagogy that allows more student engagement and participation; in alignment with Competency Based Education (CBE). In assessing the current state of teaching and learning, the current study aims to find out the extent to which this strategic direction has been adhered to.

It is common knowledge that the availability and effectiveness of student academic support services is crucial to the success of teaching and learning. Their practice and extent of availability and effectiveness nevertheless, differ across institutions of higher learning. Obi and Okeke (2013) examined the availability and utilization of support services in Nigerian universities and their impact on students' academic and social development. The research stresses the importance of these services in fostering a conducive learning environment. Omondi (2008) in his investigation of how various learner support services, including tutoring and counseling, affect the academic performance of distance learners at the University of Nairobi, he underscored the significance of these services in enhancing student outcomes. A quantitative analysis of the effect of student support services on graduation rates and academic performance in higher education indicated that the accessibility and quality of these services are crucial factors influencing student success and retention (Channa, 2023).

The self-assessment of the current status of teaching and learning at EAST is essential for maintaining academic quality, promoting continuous improvement, and aligning institutional practices with educational goals. Such assessments provide critical insights for strategic planning, help refine teaching methods, and enhance student learning outcomes. They also support accreditation processes and demonstrate institutional accountability. As Bailey and Jaggars (2023) emphasize, evidence-based evaluation contributes significantly to improving student success. Moreover, as noted by Leibowitz and Bozalek (2023) assessment practices are influenced by and can shape institutional culture, making them a powerful tool for educational transformation. Tight (2023) further highlights the global importance of regularly examining teaching and learning to ensure universities remain responsive to evolving educational needs. These reasons make the current Action Research very timely.

Materials and Methods

The main Study from which this article is drawn was an Action Research aimed at determining factors impeding the quality of teaching and learning at EAST. The first task of the study was to establish the current state of teaching and learning in the University. The study adopted a descriptive research design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kothari, 2014). This mixed-methods design is chosen because it would allow for the collection of both numerical data (quantitative) and in-depth insights (qualitative) regarding the teaching and learning practices at EAST (Creswell & Plano, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010). The Quantitative Approach was used to collect data related to the current state of teaching and learning, faculty development, and technology integration through structured questions/items. On the other hand, the Qualitative Approach involved collecting views and discourses using open ended questions in the questionnaire from faculty members, administrators, Alumni and students

to glean detailed insights into the barriers and opportunities for improving educational quality (Amberscript, 2023; Xiao et al, 2019).

A total sample of 75 was found sufficient considering that the study tool was one questionnaire for all the categories of respondents; 20 faculty members, 30 students, 13 administrators and 12 alumni were expected to participate in the study. However, 19 faculty members, 27 students, 13 administrators and 8 others including alumni and those who did not indicate their roles at EAST. The return rate of 67 out of 75 is 89%. Convenience sampling, also known as availability or accidental sampling McLeod (2023) which is a non-probability sampling method was employed in collecting data from members of the EAST Fraternity who were willing to participate in the study. The age groups were categorized into 6: Under 20, 21–25, 26–30, 31–35, 36–40, and Over 40. Out of the 66 respondents of the study, the majority were aged over 40 years (47.7%), followed by the age bracket made up of respondents between the age of 21 and 25 (20%). Those aged 26–30 were third (15.4%) and 7.7% were respondents aged 35–40. The under 20s and those aged 31–35 combined composed of 9.2% of the study sample. As indicated by the Study participants 52.3% were male, 46.2% female while 1.5% were other. The analysis was done using the Google form utilized for data collection.

Research Results and Discussions

Teaching and Learning refer to the interactive process through which knowledge, skills, and values are transferred from educators (teachers) to students at East. This process involves various methods, strategies, and techniques aimed at facilitating students' understanding and application of subject matter (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions plays a pivotal role in determining student outcomes and academic success. A comprehensive understanding of the current state of teaching and learning requires examining various elements such as curriculum delivery, faculty engagement, student participation, and the institutional environment. Studies have shown that effective teaching hinges on multiple factors, including the alignment of curriculum with industry standards, the use of innovative teaching strategies, and the availability of resources (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

In a study by Okebukola (2012), it was emphasized that universities must regularly assess their teaching practices and curriculum to ensure that they meet contemporary educational standards and address the needs of both students and the broader society. Similarly, a report by the National Commission for Higher Education (2013) highlighted the importance of continually evaluating teaching strategies, noting that institutions should adopt student-centered teaching methodologies that promote critical thinking and deep learning. Technology integration into instruction is also very key for effectiveness. One of the benefits is fostering of the development of essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving; also improving academic achievement and motivation (Ramaila & Molwele, 2023). It also improves classroom collaboration, broadening academic horizons, and supporting remote learning (Mdhlalose & Mlambo, 2023).

At EAST, assessing the current state of teaching and learning involved an exploration of how well faculty members integrate best practices into their teaching and how the students engage with the content. Data on the current state of teaching and learning at EAST was collected by evaluating the conduciveness of the teaching and learning environment; the methods used most for teaching and learning; effectiveness of the current teaching and learning methods are in engaging students and fostering active learning in various discipline; the level of engagement and participation from students in the learning process; Integration of technology into the teaching and learning process; availability and effectiveness of academic support services to students; and the effectiveness of teaching methods used at EAST.

Conduciveness of the Teaching and Learning Environment

In responding to the rating of the conduciveness of the teaching and learning environment at EAST, 50.8% considered it conducive. Those who rated the environment as highly or moderately conducive were 23% and 20% respectively. The rest indicated the environment as either not conducive or just conducive. Those respondents who found the EAST environment favourable cited the environment being quiet and there being no disturbance of noise in the environment. The classes being spacious and adequate was another reason given for the favourable rating. The faculty being present and using relevant material for teaching were also held as positive aspects of the environment; though the respondents felt the University could do better. Only 23% of the Study Participants found the EAST environment highly conducive for teaching and learning. The rest (77%), cited various reasons for their unfavourable rating of the environment. These whys and wherefores included poor internet performance, lack of adequate facilities and dissatisfaction with the way exams were marked; leading to failure even though a student had attended classes, submitted all their assignments and sat the final exam. For the teaching and learning environment to be considered highly conducive therefore, there has to be high connectivity of internet, adequate teaching and learning facilities and student assessment needs to be relooked at and any gaps closed. This might include retooling faculty on assessment and creating exam policy awareness for students.

Teaching and Learning Methods at EAST and their Effectiveness

Lectures (83.1%), Blended Learning (75.4%), Discussions (69.2%), Project-based Learning (35.4%), Demonstrations (33.8%), Problem-solving learning (30.8%), and Cooperative Learning (30.8%) were the methods used most for teaching and learning at EAST. However, Flipped Classes, Community Projects and Personal Studies do not seem emphasized.

Effective pedagogy for university students in 2023 emphasizes active engagement, relational dynamics, and adaptability to technological advancements (Kozanitis & Nenciovici, 2023). In recent times there has been an emphasis at EAST on Faculty applying pedagogy that allows more student participation. From this study though, it seems that there is little compliance with this strategic direction.

Respondents were given an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the current teaching and learning methods are in engaging students and fostering active learning in various discipline. Out of the 65 responses, 47.7% thought the methods were effective, 25.6% viewed them as very

effective; and 23.1% regarded the methods as moderately effective. A small percentage conversely did not find the methods effective. Considering that effective pedagogy for university students in 2023 emphasizes active engagement, relational dynamics, and adaptability to technological advancements. As per Kozanitis and Nenciovici (2023), it may be no wonder that the evaluation of teaching and learning that is predominantly based on lecturing is evaluated as very effective by only 25.6 % of the respondents while 74.6% found the pedagogy wanting in one way or another.

Level of Engagement and Participation from Students in the Learning Process

The respondents were then required to assess the level of engagement and participation from students in the learning process. The study participants assessed the level of engagement and participation from students in the learning process variously as: Very High, High, Relatively High, Somewhat Low and Very Low. Respondents who rated the level of engagement and participation from students in the learning process as Relatively High were the highest percentage at 43.1%; with those who viewed them as High being the second highest (32.3%); Very high at 15.4% and somewhat low was 9.2%. Encouraging was that none viewed the level of engagement and participation from students in the learning process as being Very Low. From the study findings, only 15.4% of the 64 respondents found EAST pedagogy very high in learner engagement and participation. The rest (84.6%) indicated need for improvement. Considering that effective pedagogy for university students in 2023 emphasizes active engagement, relational dynamics, and adaptability to technological advancements according to Kozanitis and Nenciovici (2023) there is need for great improvement at EAST.

Technology Integration into the Teaching and Learning Process at EAST

Technology is integrated into the teaching and learning process at EAST University. Five of the most popular technologies included Learning Management System (LMS) at 78.5%, Computers (60%), TV Screens (52.3%), Student – Centered Active Learning (47%) and Interactive Whiteboards (43.1%). Overhead Projectors (32.3%, Audio Equipment (24.6%) and Virtual Reality and Augment Reality (18.5%) were not as frequently used. Technology integration into instruction is also very key for effectiveness. One of the benefits is fostering of the development of essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving; also improving academic achievement and motivation (Ramaila & Molwele, 2023). It also improves classroom collaboration, broadening academic horizons, and supporting remote learning (Mdhlalose & Mlambo, 2023). There is technology integration in instruction but more needs to be done especially in Computers (60%), TV Screens (52.3%), Student – Centered Active Learning (47%) and Interactive Whiteboards (43.1%). Overhead Projectors (32.3%, Audio Equipment (24.6%) and Virtual Reality and Augment Reality (18.5%). EAST needs to enhance the utilization of the Learning Management System (LMS) which is currently at 78.5% to 100% so that both faculty and learners at EAST are integrating the technology effectively in teaching and learning.

The Availability and Effectiveness of Student Academic Support Services

The available Student academic support services comprised of Study groups (31.3%), Mentorship (25%), Tutorials (17.2%) and Guidance (14.1%). Asked however the extent to which the academic support services were effective, the majority of the study respondents (45.3%) rated them as only moderately effective, 31.3% as effective to a large extent, 10.9% to some extent while only 7.8% thought that they were effective to a very large extent. Omondi (2008) in his investigation of how various learner support services, including tutoring and counseling, affect the academic performance of distance learners at the University of Nairobi, highlighted the significance of these services in enhancing student outcomes. This Study singles out tutoring and counseling; two of some of the services offered to EAST learners for academic support and personal growth. However, EAST offers a myriad of other support services as well including Study Groups, mentorship and guidance among others. A quantitative analysis of the effect of student support services on graduation rates and academic performance in higher education indicated that the accessibility and quality of these services are crucial factors influencing student success and retention Channa, (2023). Obi and Okeke (2013) examined the availability and utilization of support services in Nigerian universities and their impact on students' academic and social development. The research stresses the importance of these services in fostering a conducive learning environment. It is common knowledge that the availability and effectiveness of student academic support services is crucial to the success of teaching and learning. Their practice, extent of availability and effectiveness differs across institutions of higher learning. The current Study identified EAST Study groups (31.3%), Mentorship (25%), Tutorials (17.2%) and Guidance (14.1%) as prominently used at EAST. Nevertheless, a paltry 31.3% rated these services as effective to a large extent. That places the majority (69.3%) at a place where the services could achieve better. With the strategic direction that EAST is taking of reposition the University to increase the education offering to more relevance and excellence locally and globally, increasing the variety, accessibility and effectiveness could aid in creating a conducive learning environment; enhance student outcomes, graduation rates, academic performance; influencing student success and retention ((Omondi, 2008; Obi & Okeke, 2013; Channa, 2023).

Summary

Data on the current state of teaching and learning at EAST was collected to evaluate the conduciveness of the teaching and learning environment; the methods used most for teaching and learning; effectiveness of the current teaching and learning methods are in engaging students and fostering active learning in various discipline; the level of engagement and participation from students in the learning process; Integration of technology into the teaching and learning process; availability and effectiveness of academic support services to students; and the effectiveness of teaching methods used at EAST. Those who rated the environment as highly or moderately conducive were 23% and 20% respectively. They found the EAST environment quiet and therefore conducive for instruction. The classes being spacious and adequate was another reason given for the favourable rating. The faculty being present and using relevant material for teaching were also held as positive aspects of the environment. The general opinion however was that the University could do better. The negative aspects of the environment comprised of poor internet performance,

lack of adequate facilities and dissatisfaction with the way exams were marked; leading to failure even though a student had attended classes, submitted all their assignments and sat the final exam. Lectures seemed the most utilized method of instruction (83.1%), Blended Learning, Discussions, Project-based Learning, Demonstrations, Problem-solving Learning, and Cooperative Learning were also frequently used. However, Flipped Classes, Community Projects and Personal Studies do not seem emphasized. This may be probably the reason why 74.6% found the pedagogy wanting in one way or another. Respondents who rated the level of engagement and participation from students in the learning process as Relatively High were the highest percentage at 43.1%; while 25.6% viewed them as very effective; and 23.1% regarded the methods as moderately effective. Encouraging was that none viewed the level of engagement and participation from students in the learning process as being Very Low. From the study findings, only 15.4% of the 64 respondents found EAST pedagogy very high in learner engagement and participation. The available Student academic support services comprised of Study groups (31.3%), Mentorship (25%), Tutorials (17.2%) and Guidance (14.1%). The majority of the study respondents conversely, (45.3%) rated them as only moderately effective, 31.3% as effective to a large extent, 10.9% to some extent while only 7.8% thought that they were effective to a very large extent.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study on the state of teaching and learning at EAST, recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and conduciveness of the learning environment. Implementing these recommendations can lead to a more dynamic, fair, and engaging learning environment in the University, ultimately improving student outcomes and satisfaction. The proposals included to:

1. Enhance Infrastructure and Internet Connectivity

- a) Improve the reliability and speed of internet access across campuses to support digital learning and academic research.
- b) Invest in upgrading learning facilities, including lecture halls, laboratories, and libraries, to meet growing academic demands.

2. Diversify and Modernize Teaching Methods

- a) Encourage the adoption of learner-centered pedagogies such as flipped classrooms, community-based learning, and independent study strategies.
- b) Provide faculty training in active learning and instructional design to help improve delivery and student engagement.

3. Strengthen Academic Support Services

- a) Expand and promote mentorship programs and academic tutorials to reach a broader student population.
- b) Monitor the effectiveness of support services regularly and adjust resources based on student needs and feedback.

4. Foster Student Engagement and Participation

- a) Enhance participatory learning techniques such as cooperative learning, problem-solving tasks, and project-based learning across more disciplines.
- b) Create platforms for students to give regular feedback on classroom dynamics and instructional approaches.

5. Promote the Use of Technology in Teaching

- a) Increase the integration of digital tools and platforms for blended learning, content delivery, and assessment.
- b) Intensification training and support for faculty to effectively use educational technology.

6. Review and Improve Assessment Practices

- a) Create more awareness of assessment marking criteria to reduce dissatisfaction related to exam outcomes.
- b) Introduce regular assessment audits and student feedback mechanisms to ensure fairness and clarity.

7. Continuous Monitoring and Quality Assurance

- a) Establish a dedicated committee or unit to oversee the quality of teaching and learning, including regular surveys and performance evaluations.
- b) Use data-driven insights to inform decisions and strategic planning in academic development.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the teaching and learning environment at EAST reveals a mixed picture, highlighting both strengths and significant areas for improvement. While nearly half of the respondents found the environment to be moderately or highly conducive—citing factors such as a quiet atmosphere, spacious classrooms, and faculty preparedness—there remains a general consensus that EAST can improve its academic environment. Key concerns include inadequate internet connectivity, insufficient facilities, and perceived unfairness in exam marking practices.

Lectures dominate as the primary instructional method, though a range of other techniques such as blended learning, discussions, and project-based learning are also in use. However, limited emphasis on more learner-centered approaches like flipped classrooms and community projects may explain why a significant portion (74.6%) of respondents found the current pedagogy lacking. Although student engagement levels were generally not viewed as poor, with none rating them as very low and 43.1% seeing them as relatively high, only a small proportion (15.4%) felt that EAST's teaching methods achieved a high level of learner engagement and participation.

Academic support services are in place, including study groups, mentorship, and tutorials, but their effectiveness is perceived as moderate by most students. Only a small fraction found them to be highly effective.

Overall, while EAST exhibits a solid foundation in some aspects of teaching and learning, focused efforts are needed to enhance pedagogical practices, improve infrastructure, and strengthen academic support services to create a more engaging and effective learning environment.

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