

Theorising Student Class Representatives' Engagement in Quality Assurance to Enhance Academic Performance: The Case of Private Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

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Keywords

Student engagement;
Quality assurance;
Class representative;
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Abstract

Class representative is increasingly being repositioned as a quality assurance mechanism to engage students and enhance their academic performance with little theoretical conception. This paper provides a critical and theoretical exploration into student class representatives' engagement in quality assurance dispositions. The paper explores research literature on various approaches to quality assurance including TQM approach and people centred approach.

Data for this study were collected from a single PHEI located in Johannesburg, with a sample size of 120 respondents. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings indicate a strong correlation between the role of student class representatives and quality assurance in PHEIs. Notably, the study highlights the importance of valuing student class representatives' inputs in decision-making processes to improve academic performance in PHEIs. Merely engaging with class representatives is insufficient; their contributions must be valued and integrated into the decision-making process for effective quality assurance.

1. Introduction

Engaging class representatives is a significant aspect of improving quality standards in university education. Class representatives act as intermediaries between students and the university

administration, allowing for effective communication and exchange of feedback on academic and non-academic issues. By providing students with a voice in academic affairs, class representatives play a crucial role in promoting a student-centered approach to education.

The engagement of class representatives can lead to enhanced academic performance by encouraging students to take ownership of their learning experience. Studies have shown that students who are actively involved in academic decision-making and feel heard and supported are more likely to achieve academic success (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Harris, 2012). By engaging class representatives, universities can create a more inclusive and participatory learning environment that promotes academic achievement.

Moreover, involving class representatives in quality assurance mechanisms can help universities identify areas that need improvement and implement targeted interventions. Class representatives can provide valuable feedback on course content, teaching methodologies, and assessment methods. This feedback can then be used to make necessary changes to the curriculum and teaching strategies to enhance the quality of education.

In recent years, quality assurance has become a crucial aspect of higher education, especially in private higher education institutes (PHEIs) in South Africa. The role of class representatives in enhancing academic performance and ensuring quality standards has been widely acknowledged, but there is a need for additional quality assurance mechanisms to complement their efforts. The South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) conducts regular audits of PHEIs to ensure that they are meeting the necessary quality standards.

It is also important for PHEIs to have clear policies and procedures in place for handling academic grievances and complaints. This helps to ensure that issues are addressed in a timely and effective manner, and that students feel heard and supported. Additionally, PHEIs can benefit from engaging in benchmarking activities, where they compare their performance with other similar institutions. This can help identify areas of strength and weakness and inform strategies for improvement.

Overall, while the role of class representatives is important, it is essential for PHEIs to have a range of quality assurance mechanisms in place to ensure that they are providing high-quality education to their students.

However, little literature is available on the Class representatives' engagement in quality assurance. This paper provides a critical and theoretical exploration into student class representatives' engagement in quality assurance dispositions. The research study is an attempt to illuminate theoretical framework relevant to class representative and conscientize quality assurance practitioners and policymakers about the moral and ethical importance of a person-centred approach to enhance academic performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Total Quality Management (TQM) & other approaches

One of the widely used theoretical frameworks for quality assurance in academics is the Total Quality Management (TQM) model. The TQM model aims to provide continuous improvement in all aspects of an organization, including education and academic activities (Deming, 1986). According to the TQM model, quality assurance in academics involves a systematic approach that includes planning, implementation, and evaluation of academic activities to ensure continuous improvement (Baldwin & Quigley, 1994).

Another framework is the ISO 9000 model, which provides a set of guidelines for quality management in various organizations, including academic institutions (ISO, 2015). The ISO 9000 model emphasizes the importance of establishing a quality management system that involves the entire organization, including faculty, staff, and students, to achieve the desired quality standards (Lohmöller & Pettersson, 2017).

The Quality Matters (QM) framework is another widely used model for quality assurance in online learning and academic activities (Quality Matters, 2022). The QM framework involves a peer-review process that evaluates the quality of online courses and academic activities based on a set of standards and criteria. The QM framework provides a comprehensive approach to quality assurance that focuses on all aspects of online learning, including course design, faculty support, and student engagement (Conrad & Crosby, 2017).

Overall, these frameworks provide a systematic approach to quality assurance in academics that emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement and involvement of all stakeholders in the process. They offer a set of guidelines and standards that help academic institutions to achieve their quality goals and ensure a high-quality learning experience for students.

2.2 Person Centred Approach

A person-centred approach in education emphasises the importance of focusing on individual students' needs, interests, and goals to enhance academic performance (Barton & Drake, 2017). This approach aligns with ethical and moral principles in education, such as promoting equity, social justice, and inclusivity (Cornish, 2015).

A person-centred approach also acknowledges the moral obligation of educators to provide a safe and supportive learning environment that fosters students' personal and academic growth (Barton & Drake, 2017). According to Kantian ethics, treating students as autonomous individuals with their own goals and interests is morally and ethically imperative (Cornish, 2015).

Moreover, a person-centred approach promotes values such as empathy, respect, and trust, which are essential for building positive relationships between educators and students (Cornish, 2015). This approach also values collaboration and shared decision-making, which can enhance students' motivation and engagement in their learning (Barton & Drake, 2017).

In conclusion, adopting a person-centred approach in education not only enhances academic performance but also aligns with moral and ethical principles in education, such as promoting equity, social justice, and inclusivity, and treating students as autonomous individuals with their own goals and interests

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A PHEI in Johannesburg, South Africa was identified as a representative sample of PHEIs in South Africa. The next step was to conduct a primary research, which involved a structured, and specifically designed questionnaire, which was administered using Google forms in the month of June 2023 to 140 management students of under 25 and above 40 years age group. 20 responses were not considered as they had incomplete information. The questionnaire was based on 5-point Likert Scale. Respondents were randomly selected based on the convenience of the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions which were divided into two sections- A, & B. The first section (Section-A) consisted of questions, which sought to obtain the respondents' demographic information. The second section (Section-B) consisted of questions related to the objectives of the study. An ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant authorities and respondents' consent was taken to get the information.

After collecting the data, the data were prepared for further analysis. Descriptive statistics and Correlation analysis was used to analyse the data collected.

From the above, the following hypotheses were developed and tested-

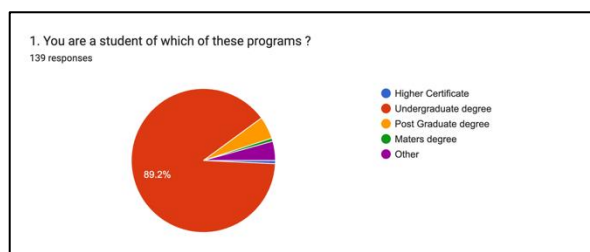
H₀: Student class representatives have no significant role in ensuring quality assurance in PHEIs in South Africa

H_a: Student class representatives have a significant positive role in ensuring quality assurance In PHEIs in South Africa

The hypotheses were tested using regression analysis which also suggested the correlation between student class representatives role and quality assurance.

4. DATA PRESENTATION

**FIGURE 1 –STATUS OF RESPONDENTS
RESPONDENTS**



**FIGURE 2 – GENDER OF
RESPONDENTS**

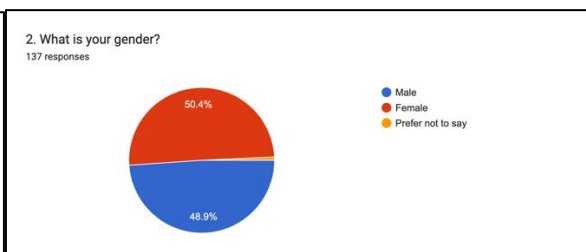


Figure 1 above suggests that maximum respondents are under graduate students. Similarly, Figure 2 suggests that respondents are almost equally divided between male & female genders.

FIGURE 3 – AGE GROUP OF RESPONDENTS

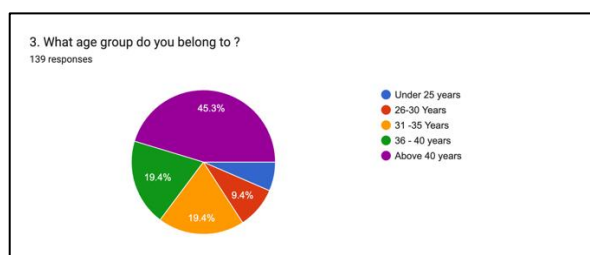


Figure 3 above suggests that maximum respondents are above 40 years and only a few belong to the age group less than 25 years

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Nunnally (1978) emphasized the significance of Cronbach's α (alpha) as a crucial psychometric tool for assessing data reliability. The computed alpha value of 0.93 suggests a high level of data reliability, allowing for the application and testing of various statistical tools.

TABLE 1. Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	0.9375597
Split-Half (odd-even) Correlation	0.89957361
Split-Half with Spearman-Brown Adjustment	0.94713214
Mean for Test	69.15

Standard Deviation for Test	16.1444779
KR21 (use only 0 and 1 to enter data for this)	1.79472262
KR20 (use only 0 and 1 to enter data for this)	1.80205603

An alpha value of 0.60 and above is commonly considered as the benchmark for indicating internal consistency in data. As a result, researchers have the flexibility to use different statistical tools to evaluate and confirm this. The computed Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the data reveals a robust level of internal consistency among the measurement items, signifying high reliability

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

To describe the data collected, descriptive statistics is calculated as under in Table 2 –

TABLE 2 - Descriptive Statistics

	<i>I am satisfied with the quality of education provided by the university?"</i>	<i>How well do you feel the university listens to the concerns and suggestions of class representatives?</i>	<i>How effective do you think is the role of representative in improving the quality of education?</i>	<i>How far do you communicate with your fellow classmates regarding academic concerns?</i>	<i>How satisfied are you with the level of support provided by the university for class representatives?</i>	<i>How well do you feel the university incorporates the feedback provided by class representatives into academic decision-making?</i>	<i>How likely are you to recommend becoming a class representative to future students?</i>	<i>How important do you believe the role of class representatives is in ensuring academic quality?</i>
Mean	4.03	3.72	3.87	3.65	3.71	3.55	3.35	4.1
Standard Error	0.103	0.112	0.111	0.128	0.112	0.111	0.124	0.102
Median	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	5
Mode	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
Standard Deviation	1.12	1.22	1.22	1.41	1.23	1.22	1.36	1.11
Sample Variance	1.27	1.51	1.50	1.99	1.51	1.49	1.85	1.25
Kurtosis	0.75	-0.21	-0.31	-0.81	-0.34	-0.75	-1.01	-0.14
Skewness	-1.20	-0.80	-0.84	-0.68	-0.78	-0.42	-0.35	-1.00
Range	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	484	447	465	438	446	426	402	492
Count	120	120	120	120	120	120	120	120

The descriptive statistics suggests a high level of mean ,above 3 for all the constructs which suggests that respondents in general have an above average agreement with all the statements and they are satisfied with the quality of education provided by the University; the support of University for class representatives; role of class representatives in improving the quality of education and ; a mutual relationship between University and class representatives in taking the student concerns further.

Mean, mode & median have varying values suggesting a skewed distribution. The standard deviation for all the constructs is above 1, suggesting a high degree of variation in the response of the respondents. Hence, it can be reasonably suggested that respondents vary with their responses despite an above average mean.

5.2 Hypothesis Testing Using Regression analysis

SUMMARY OUTPUT

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.648
R Square	0.420
Adjusted R Square	0.400
Standard Error	0.874
Observations	120

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	4	63.83	15.95	20.84805	6.072E-13
Residual	115	88.03	0.76		
Total	119	151.86			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	1.63	0.337	4.84	3.9865E-06	0.96645483	2.30	0.96	2.30
How effective do you think is the role of a class representative in improving the quality of education?	0.471	0.08	5.33	4.8562E-07	0.29637213	0.64	0.29	0.64
How important do you believe the role of class representatives is in ensuring academic quality?	0.094	0.10	0.94	0.34523972	-0.103328	0.29	-0.10	0.29
The role of class representatives is important in improving the quality	-0.157	0.09	-1.62	0.10711556	-0.3499161	0.03	-0.34	0.03

of education in our institution.								
I believe that the management of our institution values the input of class representatives in decision-making processes	0.230	0.07	2.88	0.00471501	0.07197455	0.38	0.07	0.38

The regression analysis above suggests a high degree of correlation (.64) between quality assurance and role of class representatives. This suggests a positive linear relationship between these two variables. The value of R Square according to analysis is 0.42, which suggests that 42 % of Quality assurance is explained by the role of student class representatives.

The null hypothesis is rejected if $p < 0.05$. The analysis above suggests the following –

Intercept	p-value
How effective do you think is the role of a class representative in improving the quality of education?	4.8562E-07
How important do you believe the role of class representatives is in ensuring academic quality?	0.34523972
The role of class representatives is important in improving the quality of education in our institution.	0.10711556
I believe that the management of our institution values the input of class representatives in decision-making processes	0.00471501

The null hypothesis is accepted for first 3 constructs of the variable (role of class representatives) and rejected for the last construct. Hence, we can suggest that the fourth construct “ I believe that the management of our institution values the input of class representatives in decision-making processes” is rejected.

We can suggest that the inputs of class representatives in decision making processes have a significant positive role in ensuring quality assurance In PHEIs in South Africa.

6. DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study's results indicate a correlation between the role of student class representatives and quality assurance. However, it's important to note that correlation does not imply causation. The significance of the student class representatives' role hinges on whether the management values their inputs in decision-making processes.

While there is a correlation between students' role and quality assurance in PHEIs, not all constructs of students' role are significantly correlated. Although most of the constructs show some correlation with quality assurance, this relationship may be coincidental. Only one aspect of students' role is found to be significantly linked to quality assurance in PHEIs, as mentioned above.

7. LIMITATIONS

The researchers encountered two primary limitations: time constraints and resource limitations. Additionally, the sample size and research population were also limited. Due to limited resources, the study was conducted only at one PHEI in South Africa, and a relatively small sample size was used. This implies that there is scope for future research with a more comprehensive research population and a sample size that better represents the broader context.

8. CONCLUSION

To improve academic performance, PHEIs in South Africa should actively involve student class representatives in quality assurance processes. The valuable inputs provided by these representatives carry significant importance, and if integrated into the decision-making by PHEI management, they can positively impact academic performance. Emphasizing the engagement of student class representatives and valuing their inputs is crucial in achieving the desired quality assurance in academic performance. As the voice of students, their contributions hold the potential to greatly enhance academic performance.

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