Number 2

53 Editorial board
54 Quality assurance and the battle for legitimacy – discourses, disputes and dependencies
   Bjørn Stensaker
63 A literature review on the student evaluation of teaching: an examination of the search, experience, and credence qualities of SET
   Gregory Ching
85 “Parents just don’t understand” – generational perceptions of education and work
   Kee-Cheok Cheong, Christopher Hill, Yin-Ching Looi, Chen Zhang and Zheng Zhang
99 Induction of junior faculty members of higher education institutions in Eritrea
   Zecarias Zemichael
115 Book review
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Quality assurance and the battle for legitimacy – discourses, disputes and dependencies

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to address how issues of legitimacy are influencing the functioning and shaping of the field. The paper identifies key global agendas currently linked to the role of QA in the governance of higher education, the dependencies among key actors within the field and the possible directions of QA in the years to come.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on existing studies on external quality assurance (EQA) and provides a meta-reflection on current trends and dynamics within the field.

Findings – The paper argues that the field of EQA is facing a rather turbulent future, both due to increasing competition from other actors that also claim ownership to issues related to quality, and from national authorities which are looking for ways to increase the efficiency and the effectiveness of how the higher education sector is governed.

Research limitations/implications – Studies on EQA need to be strongly linked to studies of governance in higher education as such a link will broaden the understanding of how the field of quality assurance is developing.

Practical implications – The paper provides some hints as to how agencies may position themselves in a more insecure future.

Originality/value – An original contribution is made by linking theories of how legitimacy is developed and shaped to the field of quality assurance.

Keywords – Legitimacy, External quality assurance, Global trends

Paper type – Research paper

1. Introduction

External quality assurance (EQA) can be seen as one of the most visible results of the ongoing internationalization and globalization of higher education. As part of this development, the rationale, uses and role of EQA have transformed. This paper identifies some global agendas currently linked to EQA, the interrelationships and dependencies between actors involved in the EQA process, and indicates possible directions EQA might take in the years to come. It argues that the battle for legitimacy will be a key factor determining the fate of EQA in the decades to come.

One of the success factors of EQA is related to the capability for taking on various functions and need within higher education (see Westerheijden et al., 1994), including that of system effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. Hence, the popularity of EQA is not dependent on whether the higher education system is mostly public or private, it is a tool that is easily linked to a number of governance issues, for example, relating to the entrance of new providers into higher education. Furthermore, EQA has provided useful information about quality to different stakeholders in the sector, including governments and students, and EQA has played a key role in stimulating to quality improvement in education and training in general (Brennan and Shah, 2000). As such the roles EQA has fulfilled have been hugely different, ranging from strict control and efficiency purposes to more developmental and...
enhancement-led purposes, and where the specific role of EQA is often related to distinct governmental traditions and policy modes in individual countries (Dill and Beerkens, 2010). In some regions and countries, EQA has played an important role as a regulative tool ensuring quality in deregulated and more market-driven systems. In other regions and countries, perhaps where institutions have already established their own systems of quality assurance, EQA has played a role more related to the development of these systems. In some regions, such as in Europe, a key ambition has been that EQA should be conducted in a way that would make regional and national differences less important, preferable to stimulate trust and mutual recognition within Europe (Westerheijden, 2007).

Given the intermediate positioning of EQA, balancing the expectations of governments and ministries, which tend to want advice on policy actions, and the expectations from higher education institutions often in need of constructive advice on how to boost quality further, it is perhaps not surprising that a key debate within QA is related to whether EQA should be improvement and accountability focused. While this issue is still important in some countries and regions, current debates about the EQA suggest that there are other issues coming on to the EQA agenda which will be more important in the years to come.

The current paper offers a reflection on the developments of current EQA systems and procedures globally, and on the critique directed at this activity. Conceptually, the paper demonstrates how legitimacy is a key issue for the functioning and role of EQA, but that such legitimacy may be obtained in different ways and forms. The key argument is that while EQA and the agencies responsible for this activity are facing a future implying potential dramatic changes in their set-up and responsibilities, the future also offers quite different scenarios as to how the tasks associated with EQA will be organized.

2. Global discourses and disputes on external quality assurance

If we understand EQA as a policy tool – an instrument for solving problems related to “quality” – certain tensions and questions tend to emerge as a consequence (Dill and Beerkens, 2010). As national authorities themselves are accountable for how public resources are used effectively, three issues can be identified as being crucial: whether EQA can be trusted as an instrument; whether EQA is efficient as a governmental tool; and, partly related to the previous issue, whether public authorities are the most relevant actors for being responsible for EQA. In the following, the three issues are discussed in more detail.

2.1 Can external quality assurance be trusted?

Regardless of whether the aim of EQA has been that of improvement, accountability or a combination of the two purposes, the methods applied in EQA are relatively similar involving the collection and analysis of data, often in combination with self-evaluations and an external review. If the purpose is control, the EQA process tends to be accreditation. If the purpose is improvement oriented, audits or evaluations are typical EQA activities. However, the data used for these exercises are often not directly related to teaching and learning activities as such, but to the existence of plans, procedures, staff numbers and qualifications, the student–staff ratio, or various output data addressing employment rates for graduates, salary levels, etc. With the recent interest in learning outcomes, EQA has thus been increasingly criticized for providing assurance of the less important aspects of higher education while paying less attention to issues that matter – whether and what students learn.

Hence, while accreditation still is a dominant method in EQA in various parts of the world (Stensaker, 2011), recent developments suggest that a number of governments are in the process of re-thinking their approach to EQA, not least by trying to dig deeper into the core of the teaching and learning processes. The backdrop driving this agenda is the interest in student learning outcomes and in the effectiveness of higher education in general (Contes, 2014). While increased professionalization of higher education can be witnessed as
an important side-effect of EQA, the skills and competencies of those working with EQA are usually not considered sufficient evidence of improved student learning, or better results regarding teaching and learning (see e.g. Newton, 2002). As national qualification frameworks are spreading rapidly to different corners of the world, and while countries are investigating much in their implementation, there are signs that qualification frameworks are becoming the dominant standards in EQA arrangements (Stensaker and Sweetman, 2014). The idea is of course that learning outcomes should be used as the new standards used for assessing, evaluating and accrediting higher education institutions. How the learning outcomes agenda will change EQA is still an open issue, and far from determined. In some countries, such as in the USA, the accreditation system has been targeted for a number of years without radical changes being implemented (Zemsky, 2011), although those having key responsibilities of the system still dispute the criticism voiced, while they at the same time also acknowledge the need for more innovation (Eaton, 2018).

For national governments, EQA can be conceived as an instrument that is invented to solve particular quality problems. These problems may be related to a variety of issues, privatization, massification, de-regulation, etc. (Dill and Beerkens, 2010). Nevertheless, whether EQA has been able to deliver with respect to solving “quality problems” is still an open issue. While there is much evidence that EQA has had an effect on the professionalization of institutions, to provide the public with more information on higher education, and that EQA has fostered a more institutional focus on quality management (Manatos et al., 2015), there are fewer studies showing a clear link between EQA and improvement in teaching and learning (Stensaker, 2008). As such, the unresolved dispute is whether EQA in its current form really is a trustworthy governmental tool.

2.2 Is external quality assurance efficient?
A second discourse – at least in countries that can be characterized as having considerable experience with EQA – is related to the need to save costs and make EQA systems and procedures leaner. These political initiatives come in various ways and means but two initiatives are noticeable in several countries. The first initiative is to rethink one of the traditional characteristics of national EQA systems, the need for standardization across the system. This initial focus on standards was rather obvious as many higher education systems expanded, but is seen as less relevant when the same systems have reached the stage of maturation and even downsizing. Establishing EQA systems that can handle a more diverse higher education landscape has consequently become an important issue, especially as some institutions have started to complain about the diminishing value of being exposed to EQA activities (Rosa and Amaral, 2014). Thus, going for more “risk-based” approaches to EQA has become more widespread where the basic idea is to establish a procedure for identifying study programs or institutions with “quality risks.” The original aim of a risk-based approach to EQA was related to ambitions of developing “lighter touch” EQA systems – Australia is a good example here – although this thinking currently incorporates the “risks” institutions of higher educations should face if they display performance not in accordance to expectations. The rankings of English institutions into gold, silver or bronze status following the introduction of the teaching excellence framework is one example. Other countries have tried out a range of other cost-saving alternatives where – as in England – the development of national student surveys is quite common, although also other indicator-based EQA systems are evolving (see e.g. Brenemann, 2010). Using indicators – reported by the institutions themselves – perhaps with links to funding can be quite cost-effective, and can be linked to various governmental purposes beyond EQA. The shift from a EQA orientation toward programs toward an audit approach in China can be interpreted as another example of policy initiatives aimed at making EQA more efficient (Liu, 2016a, b).
The latter example is also of relevance for another ongoing discourse – especially in Europe, but also elsewhere – regarding the importance of the “independence” of EQA. The independence of EQA was originally closely linked to the Bologna process and the notion that EQA should operate in a way that secured the autonomy from both governmental and institutional interference, paving the way for transparency and mutual recognition. However, over time, many governments have created rules and regulations that provide them substantial influence on agency activities, and in some cases transforming the agencies as such. For national governments, EQA is also a matter of efficient governance, and identifying the optimal uses of available resources, time and energy in dealing with various political issues (Dill and Beerkens, 2010). From a governmental point of view, the issue at stake is whether there are leaner and smarter instruments available.

2.3 Who should conduct external quality assurance?

The two former discourses then pave the way for the third big debate witnessed in EQA – the question concerning ownership and responsibility. In many countries, EQA started out and still is a national responsibility (Stensaker and Harvey, 2011). Thus, the public ownership of EQA and the public engagement in this activity is still considerable in most countries. However, as information addressing “quality issues” tends to be produced by a larger number of stakeholders in higher education, and where this information is attracting considerable interest, it may become more difficult, alternatively, quite attractive, for governments to argue for public responsibility for EQA. There are several drivers behind this development. One driver is found in the many national and global rankings that have appeared in the higher education sector providing the public with easy accessible and user-friendly consumer information about the best, and the not so good study programs and institutions. Another driver is the development of a global market for EQA, where quality assurance agencies increasingly are allowed to, and sometimes even invited into other countries to conduct evaluations. In Europe, a number of countries (e.g. Austria) have opened up for institutions to select their own EQA agency. As many of the “new” actors in this emerging market are private or non-public agencies, this change can be seen as a form of “privatization” of EQA, where national governments no longer see this activity as a public responsibility. A related driver that can be identified is linked to ideology, and the need for governments to reduce public spending, allowing for more “user involvement,” or demonstrating political potency (Westerheijden et al., 2014).

For the EQA community, this development is also an issue about the role of expertise and professionalism as more user-driven approaches are more inclined to give weight to dimensions addressing consumer satisfaction. As quality is a relative construct, voicing opinions about quality then also becomes a democratic issue where everyone should have a say, and where all voices should be given equal weight. Hence, the increasingly heated dispute is whether EQA necessarily has to be a governmental responsibility, and why this activity should not be left to the market altogether.

3. Perspectives on legitimacy and external quality assurance

All the discourses addressed in the previous section are more or less related to the legitimacy of EQA. While the legitimacy of EQA in the past was often linked to its legal mandate where legitimacy rested on some sort of governmental backing, or at least acceptance, the changing landscape of higher education brings in other dimensions of legitimacy, i.e., the validity of the methods and data collected as part of EQA, the efficiency of the current EQA system, and the issue of who should be responsible for conducting EQA. While issues related to the legitimacy of EQA have been part of the discussions surrounding this activity since its initiation, there is still a limited understanding of how and in what way
legitimacy is related to EQA. In this section, three different perspectives of legitimacy are outlined offering insights as to the future positioning of EQA in higher education.

Deephouse and Suchman (2008, p. 50) defined legitimacy as cultural support for a given organization or a practice in its environment, and that the existence, functioning and actions taken are desirable and appropriate. As such, legitimacy is a relational concept – a product of an interaction between two or more actors. Still, legitimacy is normally seen as something that is given – not taken – and is in general controlled by the environment although organizations may attempt to manipulate or influence the perceptions of the environment (Scherer et al., 2013).

However, Suchman (1995) has in an influential article also suggested that the concept of legitimacy is multidimensional and that it is based on pragmatic, moral and cognitive assumptions and expectations. In the pragmatic form, legitimacy is obtained by the actual knowledge the environment has about an organization or a specific practice. This form of legitimacy tends to be historically determined and a result of established practices and organizational behavior that fosters trust in the society. To put it simply, to achieve pragmatic legitimacy EQA needs to adopt to established governance routines and practices. Since actual knowledge is dependent of some kind of involvement or engagement with the organization or the practice, pragmatic legitimacy tends to emerge within specific and rather limited geographically areas. For EQA, a challenge might be that national practices and routines may not always be in line with regional and emerging global standards.

Moral legitimacy is based on other assumptions, not related to proven outcomes or results, but rather on stated ambitions or socially accepted roles in society (Marginson, 2011). In many countries and societies, the church and the police enjoy this form of legitimacy taking on roles that are seen to be contributing to the public good and that are accepted as important for the functioning of the society. Moral legitimacy may be embedded in particular contexts as social norms and values can differ from country to country, for example, if higher education is seen as a way to foster economic growth, prosperity, etc. However, it is also possible to identify some emerging global norms related to transparency, fighting corruption and poverty, etc., that are becoming more influential. The UN’s sustainable development goals, where “quality education” is one important priority, is perhaps one example of how moral legitimacy could be enhanced within EQA.

Cognitive legitimacy is based on yet another set of assumptions, often related to taken-for-granted ideas about rationality and functionality. The key difference between moral and cognitive legitimacy is that while moral legitimacy is mainly based on ethical norms, cognitive legitimacy is mainly created by what is socially acceptable or fashionable (Hazelkorn, 2015). In higher education, one could argue that the spread of the “world-class universities” idea (Salmi, 2009) is an example of how cognitive legitimacy might influence the society. As indicated through the idea of world-class universities, cognitive legitimacy is based on fluid assumptions, easily transportable from one region to another.

The three forms of legitimacy are not mutual exclusive (Scherer et al., 2013), and it can be argued that the generic legitimacy of any organization or practice is higher if all three forms are accounted for. However, the different forms of legitimacy may also suggest that EQA may base its legitimacy on differentiated arguments, at the same time as EQA also may be vulnerable to critique if some aspects of legitimacy are ignored. In general, it can be argued that EQA in many countries has gained pragmatic and moral legitimacy, either as a result of historical practices that have proven sustainable over time, or as a result of EQA actors being established by governments enjoying through public regulation and recognition.

While it could be argued that the emergence of EQA as a global phenomenon is partly related to cognitive and fashionable ideas about the importance of assuring quality in particular ways and modes, EQA can also be said to be challenged by a new set of fashionable ideas that might challenges the foundations of which EQA was originally based.
As legitimacy essentially emerges out of mutual interactions between a focal organization or practice and the larger environment, future legitimacy is then highly dependent on the relationships – or put somewhat differently – the dependencies that may emerge between the different stakeholders involved in EQA.

4. Current and future dependencies in EQA

Historically, many EQA agencies were established in an era where improvement and enhancement were high on the agenda, and a substantial amount of the agencies have remained loyal to this purpose despite the changes noticed above (Shah and Nair, 2013). The question one may ask is whether the governments that once established quality assurance agencies will continue to keep enhancement high on their agenda? Here, the jury is still out, and one should be careful portraying developments in EQA in a global convergence perspective, although elements of convergence in approached indeed are observable (Stensaker, 2011). One should also be careful in portraying the development in deterministic ways as the history has shown that the EQA community can mobilize agency and defend their interests if challenged (Zemsky, 2011; Gornitzka and Stensaker, 2014). To cater for a future with different pathways opening up, this paper will provide three different scenarios of what the future of EQA may imply, also suggesting the possible dependencies that might emerge in each of the pathways identified.

Scenario 1 is based on the historical flexibility demonstrated by EQA agencies which have enabled them to adapt to the dynamics within higher education. Thus, this scenario is less about radical change, and more oriented toward incremental adjustments of current practices. However, for EQA to develop in a more incremental way, mostly allowing existing practices to be continued, EQA is highly dependent on their political legitimacy and their relationship to their funders and regulators. The three forms of legitimacy provide some hints as to the factors realizing this scenario as moral (upholding the inherent values of higher education), pragmatic (delivering outcomes relevant to the political agendas) or cognitive (conducting EQA in the latest fashion) strategies may all be of relevance.

Somewhat paradoxically, it may well be that cognitive legitimacy – i.e., operating in globally acceptable ways – could be a very viable strategy for the EQA community as a response to a potential loss of pragmatic legitimacy (public critique of whether EQA can be trusted). In Europe, there is evidence that European Standards and Guidelines are “disciplining” signatory countries of the Bologna process and that too much diversity from these standards and guidelines become difficult to defend by law makers and national governments (Bollaert, 2014). Sweden is an example of a country which tried to challenge these emerging European “rules” but which adapted back into the fold again in a relative short time frame (Gornitzka and Stensaker, 2014). However, in this scenario, dependency is not only between QA agencies and their funders and regulators, but also toward other agencies and to the whole EQA community. For cognitive legitimacy to be developed continued internationalization and enhanced globalization of the EQA “industry” is a necessity. An implication is that agencies also need to be more engaged in and adaptable to generic trends in EQA.

Scenario 2 describes a future where the state dramatically alters the ways in which quality issues in higher education are handled, and where the forms of EQA as they are conducted today are shifted toward a more radical form of output orientation. In this scenario, learning outcomes, student satisfaction, graduation rates and employability are the (only) issues that matter, and where academic expertise and the internal standards of disciplines and professions are downplayed. In some countries where current ambitions are to link funding of higher education and quality assurance more closely (Denmark is an example here), such links may radically shift attention away from the traditional purposes of EQA, and imply a quite different role for the quality assurance agencies. In Europe, the
new standards and guidelines for European quality assurance (ESG) which were implemented in 2015 emphasized student-centered learning, teaching and assessment to a much larger degree than in the original ESGs, and can be seen as an example of a development much in line with Scenario 2. However, as higher education institutions most likely will object to be exposed to pure outcome-based assessments and evaluations, likely dependencies may be established between the EQA community and the higher education sector. This interdependence between EQA and higher education institutions could be legitimated in different ways, including the ability to innovate EQA procedures and demonstrating the continuing relevance of EQA, or focusing more on the moral forms of legitimacy and highlighting the inherent values and norms of higher education and the need to balance social, cultural and economic purposes of higher education.

Scenario 3 is based on the idea that increased competition and de-regulation of the entire EQA “market” will force agencies into a much more competitive situation – both within and across national borders. In a situation where higher education institutions are potentially allowed to choose their evaluators, a different dependency toward higher education institutions develops – that toward the “paying customer” – and how well quality assurance agencies can satisfy the aims and ambitions of those that pay for the services provided. As aims and ambitions of higher education institutions most likely will differ considerably, the services provided by the EQA agencies will have to adapt accordingly where new tasks and activities may have to be undertaken by quality assurance agencies. As McDougald and Greenwood (2012) have shown regarding how the financial audit industry was transformed when it was deregulated, new tasks such as consultancy will most likely have to be developed as part of the agency portfolio. This is a situation which in some countries – Germany is an example – is already somewhat of a reality. For some agencies, the competition may well imply a radical change of tasks performed as the traditional EQA activity will be more dependent on the credentials of the agencies involved in the process. As status, reputation and other symbolic credentials most likely will decide the winners and losers of the competition, new dependencies may also be developed between the agencies and other stakeholders in the market that may be of importance in developing distinct EQA profiles. Are we to see strategic alliances between student interest organizations and quality assurance agencies? Between agencies and global ranking providers? Such alliances might be based on all the identified forms of legitimacy offering EQA services relating to “sustainability issues” (moral) on the one side and distinct “quality brands” (cognitive) on the other. For the EQA community, this scenario might have dramatic changes with respect to issues such as staffing, marketing, communication and branding. The scenario may also suggest the introduction of new ethical dilemmas for agencies balancing traditional objective evaluation and accreditation activities on the one side and more subjective consultancy activities on the other. In the long run, the competitive situation can even become more dramatic, causing the closing down or the merging of agencies creating a market for EQA consisting of a very limited number of players globally (again equaling the development in the financial audit industry, see McDougald and Greenwood, 2012).

5. Conclusion
The scenarios sketched are most likely to appear in some hybrid forms, and where different countries and regions might end up with special configurations where path-dependency most likely will also play a key role in the future EQA systems developed. However, the points to be made here are that regardless of the scenario, the past legally based legitimacy of EQA – embedded in national regulations and laws – should not be taken for granted. Furthermore, other forms of legitimacy – moral, pragmatic or cognitive forms – may be very important assets in EQA in the years to come.

As suggested in this reflective paper, the future is very much in the making and in many countries EQA is almost constantly under transformation, not least by political regime
shifts (Westerheijden et al., 2014). While some of the scenarios may be interpreted as quite gloomy – at least from an agency point of view – the situation illustrates the current dynamics of higher education. As underlined by drawing attention to possible dependencies between EQA and the many stakeholders of and in higher education, the EQA field is facing a period of uncertainty where a range of possible alliances may be created and where issues of legitimacy may play a crucial role in the outcomes achieved.

In an era where the need to be “strategic” often pops up as a key issue, the current scenarios may create both confusion and uncertainty. If the future of EQA is up for grabs, with quite diverse pathways in the horizon, EQA agencies face some difficult choices, where their destiny is often beyond their control. While the scenarios offered in this paper hint at several options for building alliances and achieving legitimacy in the future, the closing message is perhaps that agencies able to combine and build pragmatic, moral and cognitive forms of legitimacy not only will be more likely to survive, they will as a consequence also better cater for the diverse needs directed at EQA in the future.

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A literature review on the student evaluation of teaching

An examination of the search, experience, and credence qualities of SET

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Abstract

Purpose – Competition among higher education institutions has pushed universities to expand their competitive advantages. Based on the assumption that the core functions of universities are academic, understanding the teaching–learning process with the help of student evaluation of teaching (SET) would seem to be a logical solution in increasing competitiveness. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – The current paper presents a narrative literature review examining how SETs work within the concept of service marketing, focusing specifically on the search, experience, and credence qualities of the provider. A review of the various factors that affect the collection of SETs is also included.

Findings – Relevant findings show the influence of students’ prior expectations on SET ratings. Therefore, teachers are advised to establish a psychological contract with the students at the start of the semester. Such an agreement should be negotiated, setting out the potential benefits of undertaking the course and a clear definition of acceptable performance within the class. Moreover, connections should be made between courses and subjects in order to provide an overall view of the entire program together with future career pathways.

Originality/value – Given the complex factors affecting SETs and the antecedents involved, there appears to be no single perfect tool to adequately reflect what is happening in the classroom. As different SETs may be needed for different courses and subjects, options such as faculty self-evaluation and peer-evaluation might be considered to augment current SETs.

Keywords Higher education, Student expectations, Service marketing, Teacher evaluation, Teaching and learning process

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

For the past number of years, the increasing number of degree providing institutions has dramatically changed global higher education (Altbach et al., 2009; Usher, 2009). This rising number of higher education institutions has actually led to increased competition among universities (Naidoo, 2016). Furthermore, with cutbacks in government funding for higher education (Mitchell et al., 2016), differentiation is essential for universities to distinguish themselves and compete with other institutions (Staley and Trinkle, 2011). Such differentiation of higher education institutions has become commonplace, forcing universities to become more innovative, cost conscious, and entrepreneurial (Longanecker, 2016; MacGregor, 2015). These global dilemmas are not new to Taiwan, wherein universities have to outperform each other for financial subsidies, while also competing to recruit new students (Chou and Ching, 2012). The problem of recruitment results from a serious decline of birth rate in Taiwan. The National Statistics Office of Taiwan (2018) reported that birth figures declined

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from 346,208 in 1985 to 166,886 in 2010, representing a fall of almost 50 percent. Projecting these numbers into university entrants, a drop of around 20,000 incoming students can be noted for the academic year 2016/2017 (Chang, 2014). In fact, only 241,000 freshmen students are noted for the current 2017/2018 academic year and this number is expected to drop to around only 157,000 in 2028 (Wu, 2018). This issue of declining number of students has resulted in financial difficulties for academic institutions (Chen and Chang, 2010). In such difficult times, it is crucial for higher education institutions in Taiwan to differentiate themselves and develop their competitive advantages.

In the age of big data, differentiation can be achieved with the help of large data sets that provide institutions with the capacity to address complex institutional issues (Daniel, 2015; Norris and Baer, 2013). Many researchers have begun to collect and analyze institutional data sets to address various administrative and instructional issues faced by the universities (Picciano, 2012). The results of these studies can provide school administrators and students with useful information (Castleman, 2016). In Taiwan, big data has provided institutions with information on topics such as trends in enrollment rates, students’ online learning performances, and research outputs measured by number of academic publications (Tseng, 2016). Another study reported on the advantages of collecting and understanding student learning experiences using big data (Lin and Chen, 2016). Based on the assumption that the core functions of higher education institutions remains to be academic (Altbach, 2011), i.e., teaching and learning, determining and understanding the quality of the teaching learning process with the aid of big data can be extremely useful.

In order to understand the quality of the teaching learning process, higher education institutions in Taiwan and elsewhere have long been using the student evaluation of teaching (SET), which provides feedback on teaching performance and appraises faculty members (Aleamoni and Hexner, 1980; Centra, 1979; Clayson, 2009; Curran and Rosen, 2006; Pozo-Muñoz et al., 2000). Even though the practice of using SETs is well established in higher education institutions (Rice, 1988; Wachtel, 2006) and is considered relatively reliable for evaluating courses and instructors (Aleamoni, 1999; Marsh, 1987, 2007; Nasser and Fresko, 2002), its usefulness and effectiveness has been challenged (Boring et al., 2016).

Over time, numerous issues have arisen in research on SETs. It has been claimed that SETs are used as a tool by students to reward or punish their instructor (Clayson et al., 2006), that SET results differ across areas (course, subject, and discipline) (Chen, 2006) and type (including course design and class size) of study (Feldman, 1979; Marsh, 1980), and that completion rate and background demographics of students significantly affect SETs (Stark and Freishtat, 2014). Moreover, SETs can be biased with respect to the gender of the instructor and that of the students (Boring et al., 2016). Interestingly, recent research has found that effective teachers are receiving low SET ratings (Braga et al., 2014; Kornell and Hausman, 2016). This has caused many institutions, including universities in Taiwan, to analyze and redesign their SETs (Chen, 2006; Zhang, 2003).

In light of these issues, the current paper shall seek to provide a better understanding of the inner workings of SETs. With the better understanding of SETs, more appropriate and effective evaluation tools can be developed. In addition, the categorization of education as a type of services (WTO, 1998) has also opened up new ways of looking into the entire academe. Anchoring on the narrative literature review paradigm, this paper will shape the discussion of SETs within the concept of service marketing. A common framework used to evaluate services, which is to determine the search, experience, and credence qualities of the provider (Fisk et al., 2014, p. 151; Wilson et al., 2012, p. 29). In addition, the paper will review the definitions of SET in the existing literature as well as the dimensions commonly used to measure the quality of teaching. Finally, the various factors that affects the collection of SETs are discussed.
2. Methodology

The current study is anchored on a literature review paradigm. For any study, a literature review is an integral part of the entire process (Fink, 2005; Hart, 1998; Machi and McEvoy, 2016). In general, literature reviews involve database retrievals and searches defined by a specific topic (Rother, 2007). To perform a comprehensive literature review, researchers adopt various approaches for organizing and synthesizing information, adopting either a qualitative or quantitative perspective for data interpretation (Baumeister and Leary, 1997; Cronin et al., 2008; Fink, 2005; Hart, 1998; Lipsey and Wilson, 2001; Petticrew and Roberts, 2005; Rocco and Plakhotnik, 2009; Torraco, 2005).

For the current study, the researcher adopts a narrative literature review approach. Narrative review or more commonly refer to as traditional literature review is a comprehensive, critical, and objective analysis of the current knowledge on a topic (Charles Stuart University Library, 2018). The review should be objective insofar as it should have a specific focus but should provide critiques of important issues (Dudovskiy, 2018). More importantly, the results of a narrative review are qualitative in nature (Rother, 2007).

The study follows the suggestion of Green et al. (2006) with regard to synthesizing search results retrieved from computer databases. For the current study, the researcher used Google Scholar as a starting point, followed by searches within ProQuest and PsycINFO. Keywords used for searches were “student evaluation of teaching” and related terminologies (see next section for more information on SET synonymous terms). Selections of relevant articles are explicit and potentially biased insofar as the researcher focuses on the search, experience, and credence qualities of providers within SET studies. Data analysis methods consist of a procedure for organizing information into specific themes developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Glaser’s (1965, 1978) technique for continuous comparison of previously gathered data.

3. Defining student evaluation of teaching

In relation to students’ college experience, determining whether a course or a teacher is good or bad can be equated to measuring service quality (Curran and Rosen, 2006). This is especially the case with regard to SETs. The concepts behind SETs have been discussed since the early 1920s (Otani et al., 2012), and literally thousands of studies have been carried out on these various interrelated concepts (Marsh, 2007). Furthermore, within the vast spectrum of literature on the topic, a variety of related terms are used interchangeably. Hence, a thorough, comprehensive literature review is impossible.

SET is a relatively recent term that is used synonymously with several previous terminologies such as Student Evaluation Of Educational Quality (SEEQ) (Coffey and Gibbs, 2001; Grammatikopoulos et al., 2015; Lidice and Saglam, 2013), SET effectiveness (Marsh, 1987, 2007), student evaluation of teacher performance (Chuah and Hill, 2004; Coburn, 1984; Flood, 1970; Poonyakanok et al., 1986), student evaluation of instruction (Aleamoni, 1974; Aleamoni and Hexner, 1980; Clayson et al., 2006; Powell, 1977), student course satisfaction (Betoret, 2007; Bolliger, 2004; Rivera and Rice, 2002), or just simply student course evaluation (Anderson et al., 2005; Babcock, 2010; Bembenutty, 2009; Chen, 2016; Duggan and Carlson-Bancroft, 2016; Huyhn, 2015; Pravikoff and Nadasen, 2015; Stark and Freishtat, 2014). Despite the difference in terms, the core objectives of all of the above are similar.

According to the classification and definition of basic higher education terms set by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, SET is described as:

[...the process of using student inputs concerning the general activity and attitude of teachers. These observations allow the overall assessors to determine the degree of conformability between student expectations and the actual teaching approaches of teachers. Student evaluations are]
expected to offer insights regarding the attitude in class of a teacher and/or the abilities of a teacher […] (Vlăsceanu et al., 2004, pp. 59-60).

This definition implies three main aspects, namely, the evaluation of the teacher (the teacher itself), the teaching process (general activity and teaching approaches), and the learning outcomes as perceived by the students (student expectations). This is similar to the framework for evaluating service marketing, whereby the teacher corresponds to the “search” qualities, the teaching process to the “experience” qualities, and the learning outcomes to the “credence” qualities (see Figure 1).

3.1 Search qualities in SET
As previously mentioned, one of the first aspects of SET that focuses on the teacher is the student evaluation of the teacher, or rather the student’s perception of the teacher’s characteristics (Fox et al., 1983). As Tagiuri (1969) notes in an early study, a person’s (in this case a teacher’s) personality, characteristics, qualities, and inner states (p. 395) matter significantly. Early research findings suggest that students sometimes interpret a teacher’s creativeness as a positive characteristic (Costin et al., 1971), while others note that a teacher’s personality traits affect their SET ratings (Clayson and Sheffet, 2006; Mogan and Knox, 1987; Murray et al., 1990). For instance, the interpersonal characteristics of teachers influence interactions between the students (Mogan and Knox, 1987), which ultimately leads to better engagement and learning (Hu and Ching, 2012; Hu et al., 2015; Skinner and Belmont, 1993).

This focus on the teacher also leads to various biases in SET. For example, teachers’ physical appearance can have an effect on their SET ratings (Bonds-Raacke and Raacke, 2007; Hultman and Oghazi, 2008). Felton et al. (2004) in their study of the university teachers rating website (www.ratemyprofessors.com) conclude after analyzing 3,190 faculty members across 65,678 posts that physically attractive teachers get higher ratings. In addition, a study by Buck and Tiene (1989) finds that attractive female teachers, even if they are considered authoritarian, tend to receive higher SET ratings compared to their less attractive female counterparts. Besides the teacher’s physical appearance, gender, and age are also important (Buck and Tiene, 1989; Sohr-Preston et al., 2016). Younger male faculty members were found to receive higher ratings (Boring et al., 2016), while more senior teachers received lower SET ratings (Clayson, 1999). Similarly, a teacher’s ethnicity is also a factor (Dee, 2005; Ehrenberg et al., 1995). For instance, students may consider female African American teachers more sympathetic (Patton, 1999), which can affect their SET ratings. These biases in SETs are unfair since an individual’s demographics and personality traits are fixed and cannot be changed.

Drawing on the concept of service marketing, the aforementioned teacher factors can be considered the search qualities that students look for before enrolling in a particular course. Students sometimes look for easy teachers just to pass a subject (Felton et al., 2004).
However, research shows that most students tend to search for competent teachers (Feldman, 1984) and credible faculty members (Patton, 1999; Pogue and Ahyun, 2006). This disproves the fallacy that easy teachers receive high SET ratings (Beatty and Zahn, 1990; Marsh and Roche, 2000).

By definition, search qualities are the easily observable and most common physical attributes a product (or in this case a teacher or course) may possess (Curran and Rosen, 2006, p. 136). Moreover, these search qualities are apparent and can be judged relative to similar options (Lubienski, 2007). What is most important is that students are able to judge these search qualities beforehand. This means that students have certain initial preferences with regard to aspects such as the type of teacher, the physical characteristics of the classroom, or even the schedule of the course. Students tend to compare various options before signing up for a class. In addition, social psychology literature has long demonstrated the influence of beauty on individual judgments (Adams, 1977; Berscheid and Walster, 1974). Individuals tend to relate beauty to being good (Eagly et al., 1991). This halo effect explains why teachers’ attractiveness tends to influence their SET ratings (Felton et al., 2004). Furthermore, students may also have a preference with regard to the physical situation of the classroom (Douglas and Gifford, 2001; Hill and Epps, 2010), which influences their overall level of satisfaction.

In summary, more emphasis should be placed on the perceived expectations of students, which can be discerned from their search qualities. As studies by Buck and Tiene (1989) and Patton (1999) find, students tend to associate physical attributes with certain types of behavior, such as expecting attractive female teachers to be more feminine and female African American teachers to be more sympathetic. Another important issue here is that students are expecting something, regardless of their reasons for having these expectations of their teachers and courses. These expectations, whether arising from stereotyping of attributes or hearsay from schoolmates, must be met to satisfy the students. However, this should not be the case, and teachers should focus on building their professionalism and credibility (Carter, 2016). In-class behaviors such as self-disclosure, humor, warmth, clarity, enthusiasm, verbal and nonverbal messages, teacher immediacy; nonverbal interactions that enhance closeness (Mehrabian, 1968, p. 203), and affinity seeking; the creation of positive feelings toward oneself (Bell and Daly, 1984) are just a few examples of effective strategies that can positively affect how students view teachers (Patton, 1999). These behaviors make for effective teaching and can also prevent students from stereotyping teachers because of their appearance or on account of demographic features.

### 3.2 Experience qualities in SET

Besides the teacher, the second aspect of SET identified is the teaching process. In reality, this is what the majority of SETs currently being used measures (Algozzine et al., 2004; Wachtel, 2006). The goal of SETs is to determine the teachers’ teaching effectiveness (Marsh, 2007). Such instruments have been used throughout academia for a long time, but their validity, reliability, and usefulness are still being challenged (Aleamoni, 1974, 1999; Aleamoni and Hexner, 1980; Arreola, 2007; Costin et al., 1971; Feldman, 1978, 1984; Marsh, 1984, 2007; Marsh and Roche, 1997; Rodin and Rodin, 1972; Wright et al., 1984). This makes sense since teaching is a complex activity (Shulman, 1987), so the factors used to measure a teacher’s effectiveness are multidimensional (Marsh, 1991, 2007; Marsh and Bailey, 1993) and difficult to comprehend. Nonetheless, it has been proven that SETs contribute to faculty development by enhancing the teaching and learning experience (Centra, 1979; Marsh, 1980, 1984, 1987, 1991, 2007; Marsh and Bailey, 1993; Marsh and Roche, 1997). This function is formative (Shulman, 1987), meaning that SETs can provide evidence to support improvements that shape the overall quality of teaching (Berk, 2005, p. 48).
Evaluating the teaching process is a complex and complicated undertaking, requiring a full understanding of how students came to conclusions with regard to their teachers and courses (Curran and Rosen, 2006). Typically, taking a university course would require the student to attend class every week, which corresponds to repeated service encounters that are critical to later evaluation (Solomon et al., 1985). Within the concept of service marketing, these repeated service encounters (which in this case are the repeated classroom encounters) correspond to the experience qualities that students perceive when taking the course. These experience qualities are not readily apparent and can only be judged when the entire service experience is over (generally at the end of the course) (Curran and Rosen, 2006; Lubinski, 2007). However, because such experiences are repeated, it can be difficult to know whether the resulting SET ratings are based on an overall experience of the course or just on one single event that made a lasting impression (Curran and Rosen, 2006). Furthermore, students attend class with their classmates, so there are other individuals partaking of the service delivery at the same time. Therefore, the interactions of these students within the class might either enhance or reduce the service quality, which might, in turn, affect an individual student’s experience (Grove and Fisk, 1997).

Based on the above points, evidence shows that students can compare their teachers with other teachers teaching the same course before actually signing up for the class. However, it is most likely that student would ask around, seeking other students who had taken the course already and asking for their comments. This is because students generally do not have access to SET results (Marlin, 1987). Marsh (2007) notes that although a few universities do publish their SET summaries, this is solely for the purpose of course or subject selection. The publication of SET results is controversial (Babad et al., 1999; Perry et al., 1979) and is generally regarded negatively by faculty members (Howell and Symbaluk, 2001).

It is important to note that, based on asking around prior to taking a course, students might expect to receive a certain grade or a certain amount of classwork, or even have expectations with regard to how the lectures are conducted (Nowell, 2007; Remedios and Lieberman, 2008; Sander et al., 2000; Voss et al., 2007). If teachers then behave contrary to the students expectations, students may be disappointed and SET ratings may be affected (Bennett, 1982). Such student expectations can also contribute to the development of a psychological contract between the teacher and the students. These prior expectations, whether arising from the students’ desire to benefit from the course (Voss et al., 2007) or from hearsay, are found to contribute to such a psychological contract (Roehling, 1997).

A psychological contract can be defined as any individual beliefs, shaped by the institution, regarding the terms of an exchange agreement, between students and their teachers (Kolb, Rubin, and Mcintyre, 1984; Rousseau, 1995, 2001). Recent research finds that when the psychological contract between the teacher and the students is positive, learning motivation is enhanced (Liao, 2013). Furthermore, these agreements might be either implicitly or explicitly made between the teachers and students. To make them more effective, the agreements should be negotiated at the start of the term, and should constitute a shared psychological contract between the teacher and the students (Pietersen, 2014). More importantly, Cohen (1980) notes that if SETs are accomplished during the middle of the semester, teachers are still able to improve their teaching pedagogy re-aligning the previously agreed upon psychological contract. Hence, faculty members who received mid-semester feedback ended up with significantly higher SET ratings than their counterparts who did not have a mid-semester evaluation (Cohen, 1980). Ultimately, mid-semester feedbacks provide ample opportunity for instructional improvement (Overall and Marsh, 1979).

In summary, it has been noted in the literature that evaluating the teaching process, or rather the effectiveness of teaching, is a complex task. It is multidimensional and mostly concerns the experience qualities of the students who have taken the course. More important, in relation to the numerous biases associated with SETs discussed in the
introduction of this paper, perceptions of course delivery and service quality are affected by a variety of issues, including peers, class size, and type of course. Adding to the fact that students have their own personal expectations of what the course should offer, it is difficult to satisfy every student. Pietersen (2014) suggests the making of a psychological contract between the teacher and the students, to provide clear study goals and remove false expectations. In addition, an evaluation can be conducted in the middle of a semester, giving the teacher ample opportunity to address students’ doubts and to re-adjust the shared contract based on students’ abilities. Furthermore, as the goal of SETs is to provide formative suggestions for teachers to improve teaching, it is also prudent to include statements on the provision of formative lessons and on how course designs contribute to student learning (Brownell and Swaner, 2009; Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2013).

3.3 Credence qualities and SETs
The last component of SETs identified is the evaluation of learning outcomes, more specifically, the accomplishment of goals. It has long been accepted that goals are important predictors of educationally relevant learning outcomes (Ames and Archer, 1988), while also focusing on the motivational aspects driven by mastery and performance-approach goals (Harackiewicz et al., 2002). In simple terms, if students clearly understand the skills necessary for future employment, while also understanding taking a certain course will enable them to master those skills, they should be motivated to do well in that course. Research shows that students are more engaged with their academic classwork when future career consequences are clearly understood (Greene et al., 2004; Miller et al., 1996). However, in reality many students are uncertain of their study goals and are at risk of dropping out (Mäkinen et al., 2004).

A university education is characterized by high credence properties (Curran and Rosen, 2006). Credence qualities are those properties that are not apparent, can be never be fully known or appreciated by students (Lubienski, 2007), and might, therefore, be impossible to evaluate (Curran and Rosen, 2006). Credence properties are generally found in goods and services that are characterized by high levels of complexity (Darby and Karni, 1973), such as the teaching and learning process. More importantly, even after the service has been used (in this case, when a student graduate from the university), the consumer (student) may still find it difficult to evaluate the service (Zeithaml, 1981). A famous example of credence qualities in a product can be found in the taking of vitamin pills, where there is low verification of the alleged effectiveness and quality of the product, even after it has been tried by the consumer (Galetzka et al., 2006). In higher education, the true value of a course may be realized by a student only after the skills and knowledge learned are used in employment, which might be several months or even years after the service has ceased (Curran and Rosen, 2006).

The credence qualities of higher education are related to the concept of academic delay of gratification (Bembenutty, 2009). Academic delay of gratification is a term used to describe the “postponement of immediately available opportunities to satisfy impulses in favor of pursuing chosen important academic rewards or goals that are temporally remote but ostensibly more valuable” (Bembenutty and Karabenick, 1998, p. 329). Similar to what is described by the achievement goals theory, students are motivated when they clearly perceive benefits that lead to future success (Bembenutty, 1999). In addition, students who adhere to the academic delay of gratitude principle tend to become autonomous learners (Bembenutty and Karabenick, 2004). If students know the usefulness of the course subject, they are more willing to delay gratification, participate in class, and complete academic tasks, and are ultimately more satisfied and hence give high SET ratings (Bembenutty, 2009).
In summary, the literature shows that besides formative evaluations, SETs also include summative evaluations (Kuzmanovic et al., 2012; Mortelmans and Spooren, 2009; Otani et al., 2012; Spooren and Van Loon, 2012), which involve summing up the overall performance of teachers (Berk, 2005). Summative SETs generally contribute to teacher audits and evaluations that may lead to the hiring, tenure, and even promotion of faculty members (Arthur, 2009; Berk, 2005; Marks, 2000; Stark and Freishtat, 2014). Literature suggests that school administrators should be careful in using SET results containing many summative evaluations (Spooren et al., 2013), because, with respect to the credence properties of education, students might be unable to grasp the entire and actual benefits of certain courses. In order for effective learning to occur, the potential benefits of the course and an outline of acceptable performance should be defined in advance (Otter, 1995). Moreover, connections should be made between previous, current, and future courses, thus providing an overview of the entire program together with a clear outline of future career pathways.

4. Dimensions of SET
As has been noted, SETs are complex and involves multiple interrelated dimensions. In his early meta-analysis, Feldman (1978) shows that although most studies focus on the overall rating of the instructor. However, SETs that focus only on summative evaluations and that use global measures (few summary items) are highly discouraged (Cashin and Downey, 1992; Marks, 2000; Sproule, 2000). The majority of SETs aim at a more comprehensive rating of teachers and, as Marsh (2007) notes, are mostly constructed around the concept of effective teaching. The usefulness and effectiveness of an SET depends on how well it can capture the concepts it measures. Hence, careful design is essential (Aleamoni, 1974, 1999; Aleamoni and Hexner, 1980; Arreola, 2007).

One of the early syntheses of SETs is conducted by analyzing students’ views of the characteristics of a superior teacher (Feldman, 1976). For the study, three categories are identified: presentation, which includes teachers’ enthusiasm for teaching and for the subject matter, their ability to motivate students, their knowledge of the subject matter, clarity of presentation, and organization of the course; facilitation, which denotes teachers’ availability for consultation (helpfulness), their ability to show concern and respect for students (friendliness), and their capacity to encourage learners through class interactions and discussions (openness); and regulation, which includes the teachers’ ability to set clear objectives and requirements, appropriateness of course materials (including supplementary learning resources) and coursework (with regard to difficulty and workload), fairness in evaluating students and providing feedback, and classroom management skills (Feldman, 1976).

Another early analysis of SETs conducted by Hildebrand (1973) and Hildebrand et al. (1971) and his associates identifies five constructs for measuring the effectiveness of teaching: analytic/synthetic skills, which includes the depth of a teacher’s scholarship and his or her analytic ability and conceptual understanding of the course content; organization/clarity, denoting the teacher’s presentation skills in the course subject area; instructor group interaction, which describes the teacher’s ability to actively interact with the class, his or overall rapport with the class, sensitivity to class responses, and ability to maintain active class participation; instructor–individual student interaction, which includes the teacher’s ability to establish mutual respect and rapport with individual students; and dynamism/enthusiasm, which relates to the teacher’s enthusiasm for teaching and includes confidence, excitement about the subject, and pleasure in teaching (Hildebrand et al., 1971, p. 18).

More recently, the SEEQ is frequently used by many higher education institutions. The SEEQ measures nine factors that constitute quality instruction (Marsh, 1982, 1987; Marsh and Dunkin, 1997; Richardson, 2005). These are assignments and readings, breadth of coverage, examinations and grading, group interaction, individual rapport, instructor enthusiasm, learning and academic value, organization and clarity, and workload and
difficulty (Marsh, 2007, p. 323). Some SEEQ studies include an overall summative evaluation of the course subject as an additional factor (Schellhase, 2010). The similarities with Hildebrand (1973) and Hildebrand et al. (1971) and Feldman’s (1976) criteria of effective teaching are apparent.

In a series of studies conducted at the University of Hawaii, SET is first analyzed with respect to the perspectives of faculty members, which identifies important factors such as evaluation information based from students, information from peers (colleagues), student performance and grades, and external performance evaluations of teachers (Meredith, 1977). A study that included apprentice teachers (practice teachers) found that students preferred instructors who exhibited classroom organizational skills, who focused on students’ learning outcomes, and who interacted well with students (Meredith and Bub, 1977). A set of evaluation criteria was developed based on a study of both faculty members and students in the School of Law at the University of Hawaii, which included dimensions such as knowledge of subject matter, ability to stimulate interest and motivate students, organization of the course, preparation for the course, concern for students, quality of course materials, and an overall summative evaluation of the teacher (Meredith, 1978). Other studies measured teaching excellence by subject mastery, teaching skills, and personal qualities of the teacher (Meredith, 1985b), while an overall analysis of student satisfaction used the criteria social interaction, teaching quality, campus environment, employment opportunities, and classroom facilities (Meredith, 1985a), all of which contribute to SET ratings.

In summary, it is noted that SETs can vary depending on whether the evaluations are from the perspective of faculty members (how teachers teach) or from the students (how students learn). However, although several variations of SETs exist, comparisons suggest that as long as the overall objective is to evaluate effective teaching, dimensions within these SETs are interrelated and may overlap (Marsh, 1984, 2007; Marsh and Bailey, 1993; Marsh and Dunkin, 1997). A study conducted by the American Association of University Professors involving 9,000 faculty members found that SETs are generally established with controversial biases and issues (Flaherty, 2015). The more important issue is the establishment of the objectives for SET implementation within the university and careful decision making about who should participate in the development of such an evaluation instrument.

5. Antecedents of SET

Within the vast literature on SETs, analysis of their validity and reliability has identified various antecedents affecting effective evaluation. SET ratings are dependent on several issues, including the various biases already discussed. The first obvious antecedent is the instructor, as can be discerned from the previous discussions. Besides personality issues, gender plays an important role. Boring et al. (2016) find that SETs are statistically biased against female faculty, and that such biases can cause effective teachers to get lower SET ratings than less effective ones. MacNell et al. (2015) conducted an experiment in which students were blind to the gender of their online course instructors. For the experiment, two online course instructors were selected, one male and one female, and each was given two classes to teach. Later in the course, each instructor presented as one gender to one class and the opposite gender to the other class. The SET results gathered at the end of the semester are interesting. Regardless of the instructor’s real gender, students gave the teacher they thought was male and the actual male teacher higher SET ratings than the teacher they perceived as female. This experiment clearly shows that the rating difference results from gender bias (Marcotte, 2014).

Previous studies also show that the time of SET evaluation matters. As discussed, when SET evaluations are administered during the middle of the semester, results can assist teachers in re-evaluating their course design to better fit with the students’ needs and capabilities. However, this phenomenon is limited. SETs are mostly given before the end of
the term or during final examinations, and studies have shown that ratings taken at this time tend to be lower compared to evaluations conducted a few weeks before final exams (Braskamp et al., 1984). Interestingly, no significant differences were found when comparing SET ratings gathered before the end of the semester with those taken in the first week of the succeeding term (Frey, 1976). This debunks the fallacy that students tend seek revenge on teachers because of issues with the grades received (Clayson et al., 2006; Skinner and Belmont, 1993). In fact, studies have proven that students who received poor grades were less likely to care enough to complete the SET (Liegle and McDonald, 2005).

In terms of the students themselves, as previously mentioned the background demographics of students do significantly affect SETs (Stark and Freishtat, 2014). Although some biases are found between gender and SET ratings (Boring et al., 2016; Feldman, 1977), still there are no consistent evidence of such difference exists (Wachtel, 2006). For instance, different studies have shown that male and female students give higher ratings as compared to their peers of opposite genders (Tatro, 1995). In some instances, students evaluate their same gender teachers higher than their opposite gender instructors (Centra, 1993a, b). With regards to ethnicity, Marsh et al. (1997) translated the SEEQ instrument into Chinese and found that there are no significant differences with the results reported as compared with the studies done in the USA. In other Chinese studies, besides the significant differences in SET ratings between students of various discipline and nature (Chen and Watkins, 2010; Liu et al., 2016), it is well noted that linguistics or foreign language teachers tend to received higher evaluations than the faculty of other discipline (Chen and Watkins, 2010).

Administration conditions or the way SETs are administered also matters. Currently, SETs are mostly collected using online course evaluations (Spooren and Van Loon, 2012). However, literature shows that online SETs results in lower participation (Anderson et al., 2005; Avery et al., 2006), although reminders do increase the response rate (Norris and Conn, 2005). With paper-and-pen SETs, the person administering the evaluation also contributes to any inconsistencies in the ratings. This holds true even if the teacher leaves the room during the SET administration and the forms are anonymous, as students may still be reluctant to provide an objective evaluation (Pulich, 1984). Many researchers have agreed that SETs should be entrusted to a third-party individual for effective collection (Braskamp et al., 1984; Centra, 1979).

The characteristics of the course subject also matters. Wachtel (2006) notes that the nature of the course subject, such as whether it is a required course or an elective, affects how students rate its importance. Sometimes students give higher ratings for elective course subjects due to their having a prior interest in the subject (Feldman, 1978). Class schedule can sometimes affect ratings, and odd schedules such as early morning classes or late afternoon classes have been found to receive the lowest SET ratings (Koushki and Kuhn, 1982). However, inconsistencies were found in several other studies (Aleamoni, 1999; Centra, 1979; Feldman, 1978; Wachtel, 2006), but it has been suggested that the level of the course is a relevant factor. The year or level of the course is closely related to the students’ age; as students continue with their studies, they becomes more mature and become aware that their opinions are taken seriously by the school administration (Spooren and Van Loon, 2012). Class size has also been found to have an impact (Feldman, 1978; Marsh, 2007) since bigger classes tend to present less opportunities for interaction between the teacher and the individual students, which can affect ratings (Meredith and Ogasawara, 1982). Finally, the subject area and the discipline also greatly influence SET ratings. Since the discipline affects how classes are held (e.g., laboratory classes compared to lecture intensive courses), comparisons between colleges are not advisable (Wachtel, 2006). For instance, task-oriented subjects such as mathematics and science offer less interaction than the social sciences (Centra, 1993a, b).
In summary, apart from the issues relating to students that affect SETs discussed in the “Experience Qualities” section of this paper, including their gender, learning motivations, and grade expectations (Boring et al., 2016), many more have been added to the discussion. Having examined the various antecedents of SETs, it is apparent that one model is not suitable for all instances. More specifically, one single type of SET cannot and should not be used to collect students’ perception across all courses and subjects. This is actually the main reason why some higher education institutions choose to use global measures to collect the summative evaluations of the class. In practice, separate SETs should be used for different course types. Since this can place a significant burden on institutions, careful analysis and research is necessary.

6. Conclusion
To sum up, literature has shown that the use of SETs to collect information regarding the teaching–learning process is commonplace. However, given the complex nature of academic processes, the data resulting from SETs are questionable and limited. The current paper presents a review of the literature on SETs, focusing on the concept of service marketing evaluation. The framework’s three criteria are used to examine SETs, whereby the teacher represents the “search” qualities, the teaching process the “experience” qualities, and the learning outcomes the “credence” qualities.

The search qualities with regard to SETs are the easily observable attributes of teachers. These may include the appearance, gender, age, ethnicity, and personalities traits of faculty members. In practice, course subject selections are made prior to enrollment in a course; students can compare faculty members when deciding which one to enroll with. Hence, the expectations of students are important. It has been noted that stereotyping faculty members according to certain demographic factors such as gender and age is unfair since these features are fixed and impossible to change. Students should look beyond these obvious factors and focus more on the teachers’ credibility and competencies.

Beyond initial search preferences, students place much importance on evaluating their learning experiences. As the literature suggests, for the sake of simplicity, many SETs include only global summative evaluations of the teaching–learning process. However, given that the nature of the learning experience is complex and multidimensional, evidence to support student development should be in the form of formative judgments. Furthermore, the actual teaching–learning process is composed of repeated service encounters (a semester in Taiwan typically lasts around 18 weeks). It is, therefore, difficult to determine whether a single class experience or the collective sum of the semester’s learning encounters contribute to the SET ratings. Considering the influence of prior expectations on SET ratings, teachers are advised to establish a psychological contract with the students. To make these agreements effective, they should be negotiated at the start of the term, so that they are shared contracts between the teacher and the students.

Finally, accepting that university education is characterized by high credence qualities, students must be aware of the concept of academic delay of gratification, so that they understand and accept that the benefits of undertaking a course are not immediate. Combining this with the importance of students’ expectations and the usefulness of creating a psychological contract, clear definitions of the potential benefits and acceptable performance should be provided during the first class. Moreover, connections should be made between previous, current, and future courses, thus providing an overview of the entire program together with career pathways.

In summary, since SETs are frequently used to collect information on effective teaching, it is important for higher education institutions to establish what kinds of SETs are effective. Given the complex factors involved and the various antecedents of SETs, it appears that no one perfect tool exists to accurately measure what happens in the classroom. As different
SETs may be necessary for different courses and subjects, options such as faculty members’ self-evaluation and/or faculty members’ peer-evaluation might be considered to provide what is lacking in SETs. It is hoped that as technology advances, an innovative way of collecting SETs might be found to make the process more productive.

6.1 Recommendations for further research
Having analyzed the above issues, several recommendations for further research are proposed:

Develop and validate an SET. The development of the SET is important in the ongoing dialogue within the literature. As the literature shows, SETs are only useful if they can appropriately capture what they are being used to measure. Hence, in order to develop a relevant and constructive SET, the participation of significant stakeholders, such as school administrators, faculty, and students, is essential. A constructive SET would be capable of providing formative recommendations to improve the performance of both faculty members and students. More important, an effective SET should consider the service attributes (the search, experience, and credence qualities) that students want.

Develop an SET software program. In the current age of technological advances and big data, students are adept at using mobile devices (Gikas and Grant, 2013). Therefore, an app designed to collect SET ratings – either directly after each class, twice a semester (after midterm exams and before the end of the semester), or once before the end of the semester – could be made available to students for easy and convenient collection of data. This could initiate a new strand of SET literature. Combining technology with pedagogy can provide a more accurate evaluation of teaching, by facilitating the collection of real-time SET results.

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“Parents just don’t understand” – generational perceptions of education and work

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Abstract
Purpose – Using a Southeast Asian context, this paper asks a question that has seldom been researched: Is there a divergence between parents’ and their college-going children’s perceptions of education and employability at a time of rapid economic change? If such a divergence exists, it would have hidden costs for the children. Parents’ choice of professions no longer in demand when their children reach working age can permanently damage the latter’s earning power. Also, parents’ choice of fields of study that their children are not proficient or interested in jeopardizes the latter’s chances of success in their studies. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected using mixed methods, a combination of structured online questionnaires from two local special-purpose sample surveys conducted by the authors, and follow-up interviews. Graduate Employment Survey 2 (GES2) was the second of a three-phase British Council-sponsored study, focusing on TNE, that used a structured online questionnaire for students of several tertiary education institutions, both in the public and private sectors, and for several group interviews of students in 2015. A structured questionnaire was also administered to a small number of parents.

Findings – In terms of employment, the rankings of HEIs by parents and students were generally consistent. Study in foreign HEIs abroad has the highest likelihood of employment. Branch campuses were ranked next highest. Despite this, of interest is the difference in mean scores between first and second ranked HEIs. Whereas students rate branch campuses as not much inferior to foreign university campuses, parents see a major gulf between them – they rate foreign campuses more highly than branch campuses more poorly. This difference is likely caused by parents’ traditional preference for foreign study over local, coupled with a lack of TNE knowledge.

Social implications – A fundamental issue of perception is how parents and students see the role of education. Is education a destination or is education a journey? This disconnect has consequences. Given the shifting nature of employment, the need for transferable skills and the fact that some of the jobs that the next generation will be doing are not even known today, parental advice based on what they know may not do justice to their children’s choice of career. Likewise, the approach of TNE to promote traditional degrees to job paths is also a conventional approach that has a limited shelf life.

Originality/value – The role of parents in education choice has received surprisingly scant academic attention. With technological change driving product and service innovation ever more rapidly, previously unknown types of work have emerged in a relatively short span of time. In this situation, the risk of...
mismatched perceptions between parents and their children, whose educational experience spans a generation, is becoming increasingly real. While most studies of a parental role have been undertaken for Western countries, there is much less research on East Asian parents’ role in their children’s education.

Keywords Employment, Education, Parents, Perceptions mismatch

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The opening lines of the 1989 Grammy Award winning song for Rap music “Parents Just Don’t Understand” are “You know parents are the same no matter time nor place […]. There’s no need to argue, parents just don’t understand” (Esquire, 2014). How much truth is there in these lines when they relate to education of their children? This is an issue that has received surprisingly scant academic attention. With technological change driving product and service innovation ever more rapidly, previously unknown types of work have emerged in a relatively short span of time (Bughin et al., 2016; Ross, 2016). In this situation, the risk of mismatched perceptions between parents and their children, whose educational experience spans a generation, is becoming increasingly real.

Parents’ role in their children’s education has been widely researched. There is general agreement that this role is important, explained by motivations like their self-perceived parental role, desire to help their children in school, and responding to their children’s or the school’s requests for help (De Fraga et al., 2010; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995). The specific role was shaped by “specific domains of skill and knowledge they possess, the demands on their time and energy, and specific requests for involvement from children and the school” (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995). How well the parent plays this role depends on his/her education, family income, and, although much less researched, culture and ethnicity, the last mainly with reference to immigrants (Eccles and Davis-Kean, 2005; Grolnick et al., 2009; Schuller, 2011). Overall, this role has been deemed to be positive, based on the parents’ experience being brought to bear in guiding their children (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995). Beyond education, parents’ role in their children’s career choice has been found to be not only important, but also having a key impact because parental influence dominates that of teachers and counselors (Clutter, 2010). However, parents themselves may be unaware of or not acknowledge this very strong role of theirs (Taylor and Harris 2004).

While most studies of a parental role have been undertaken for Western countries, it is Asian parents who grab the occasional limelight. Through controversial writing like the novel *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, published in 2011, and through periodic reports (Breitenstein, 2013; Mansell, 2011; Sharma, 2013), Asian parents have gained a reputation for driving their children to academic success. Factors cited include “taking education seriously as a fundamental pillar of […] Chinese identity” (Becky Davis, cited in Mansell, 2011) and a high value placed on education generating high expectations that are transferred through parenting to their children (Breitenstein, 2013).

By way of clarification and following Chao and Tseng (2002), we refer to “Asia” less in strict geographical terms and more in terms of societies and cultures in the region in which family plays a pre-eminent role and in which education is given high priority. This would apply particularly to Confucian cultures, broadly defined, in East Asia, such as China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), Japan, Korea, Singapore and Vietnam, and including Chinese overseas communities in Southeast Asia. It is neither suggested that societies in all countries in Asia are defined by these traits, nor that these traits are unique to Asia.

While Western media coverage typically documents children of immigrant parents, this phenomenon is clearly more widespread, as demonstrated by East Asian children perennially topping international tests like the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). For instance, in the 2015 TIMSS study, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Japan
topped the 4th grade and Singapore, Japan and Taiwan topped the 8th grade. In the 2015 PISA test, the top five positions were occupied by Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea. Debates about their superior performance have revolved largely around the adequacy of Asian rote learning (see, for instance, Kember, 2015; Matthews, 2014), which may account as much as the mode of learning. There is much less research on East Asian parents’ role in their children’s education compared to parents from other areas and/or cultures. However, this is changing, as recent writings show the intense involvement of East Asian parents in ensuring that their children receive the best education they can afford (Sharma, 2013; Yan, 2015).

This paper attempts to bring together the above strands of the increasing rapid emergence of new occupations and of strong parental direction of their children’s education in examining a parental role in education. Using a Southeast Asian context, it seeks to delve into the substance of this role, asking a question that has seldom been researched: Is there a divergence between parents’ and their college-going children’s perceptions of education and employability at a time of rapid economic change, as much of East and Southeast Asia is experiencing? If such a divergence exists, it would have hidden costs for the children. Parents’ choice of professions no longer in demand when their children reach working age can permanently damage the latter’s earning power. Also, parents’ choice of fields of study that their children are not proficient or interested in jeopardizes the latter’s chances of success in their studies. Times of rapid change heighten the risk of mismatch and hence its costs. Specifically, the research objectives are to plot the degree of correspondence between students’ and their parents’ perceptions of education and work, and to draw implications from these findings for the role of stakeholders in this crucial area.

The context for this paper’s analysis is Malaysia, a choice made on the following bases. First, rapid advances in education marked by quotas in public higher education institutions (HEIs) have brought about a thriving private HEI sector. The emergence of the latter has spawned a range of fields of study and qualifications that parents, with their own study backgrounds, are likely to find it hard to grasp fully. Second, the country has a long tradition of sending students overseas, now complemented by internationalization of local education. Third, local education standards have fallen, rendering this sector no longer the premium choice it used to be. Fourth, some public HEIs have partnerships with foreign HEIs to provide undergraduate programs. For example, the University of Malaya has collaborated with the University of Wales to establish the International University of Malaya Wales. These developments give Malaysian parents a much larger scope for guiding their children in making education and career choices. Finally, Malaysia, dubbed by the World Bank as a “miracle” economy because of its record of impressive growth (World Bank, 1993), is witnessing a rising demand for new types of work as it struggles to upgrade its technological capability (Shamsuddin, 2017, p. 6).

The findings here, if extended to the Asian experience, should speak to the bigger picture of a possible mismatch between parent–children expectations. This can arise when the structure and range of opportunities may have grown, but parental perception still remains focused on a narrower range of traditional options so that parental advice is based on only partial understanding of the relevance and true value of different options and experience available to students. With time, the market will surely take care of this, but given the strong influence of parents on their children’s education and career choice, this mismatch between parents’ perceptions and reality can be a critical issue in determining employability, one of the net objectives and results of education.

Following the introduction in Section 1, the Malaysian context for parent–children perceptions on education and employment is sketched briefly in Section 2. Section 3 presents the data and methods used for analysis. Employment as a goal in education, a common theme running through other Asian studies (e.g. Shimomura et al., 2007), is the
substance of Section 4. Section 5 then compares perceptions on post-education career. Section 6 concludes by drawing implications for Malaysia with extensions to the wider context of parent–children interactions.

2. The Malaysian context

Malaysia’s education scene has several distinctive features that render a study of student–parent perceptions particularly interesting. The first is the co-existence of a large private sector alongside the public sector in higher education provision. The rapid expansion of private sector higher education began in the 1980s but was given impetus by the Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996 (Act 555). The rise of private higher education owed much to the government’s policy of affirmative action in which places in public universities were reserved for the local population, primarily Malays (Bumiputera), leaving insufficient places for the non-Bumiputera students graduating from secondary education. While students from affluent families were able to travel overseas for their education, those less affluent had to seek alternatives. These came in the form of private higher education (Tan, 2002). But more than catering for these students, private HEIs served to meet the demand for higher education that public education could not meet. The government’s passage of the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act in 1996 permitted the private sector to register its education establishments as HEIs (Tan, 2002, p. 124). The result was a more than twofold increase, roughly 118 percent, in the number of private HEIs from 280 to 611 in the four years from 1995 to 1999; while the expansion of enrollment in these institutions took a little longer to materialize, the share of private higher education enrollment rose from 32 to 43 percent in the five years from 2006 to 2010, based on World Bank data.

Second, the recent growth of transnational higher education (TNHE) is directly related to the expansion of private higher education. TNHE in Malaysia goes back all the way to the country’s independence in 1957, even earlier on if the large number of Malaysian students on scholarships or privately-funded sent overseas is included. At that time, much of the TNHE arrangements focused on professional and skills-based qualifications such as Pitman, and City and Guilds Certificates.

Originally disallowed by the government from awarding degree qualifications, colleges offering certificate and diploma courses in the private education sub-sector sought partnerships with foreign tertiary institutions that could. These partnerships took the form of a variety of arrangements, e.g. from “1+2” (one year in Malaysia and two years in the overseas university), “3+0,” and “4+0” programs to joint degrees. To date, nine branch campuses of foreign universities – Curtin, Monash, Swinburne (Australia), Heriot-Watt, Newcastle, Nottingham, Reading, Southampton (UK) and Xiamen (China) – have also been established in Malaysia. More cost effective than going overseas to obtain a foreign degree or one recognized internationally and with English as the medium of instruction, these programs have become immensely popular. As a result, government policy shifted to view the promotion of TNHE as part of the official strategy to turn Malaysia into a regional education hub. Over time and with greater exposure to and experience with TNHE, the local system has evolved from just an importer of TNHE programs to a creator.

Third, even as public education expanded in terms of enrollment and the number of HEIs, made possible by public expenditures as a share of GDP that is one of the highest in Asia (Fernandez-Chung et al., 2014), quality has eroded. This erosion can be attributed to deteriorating English language proficiency consequent upon the switch of the medium of instruction in schools to the Malay language and to the enforcement of affirmative action in education (Cheong et al., 2016). This has been demonstrated by Malaysian student performance in the international benchmark tests like the TIMSS, conducted every four years, and the OECD study PISA conducted in 2009, 2012 and 2015. For TIMSS, Malaysia’s absolute scores, not just rankings, in mathematics and science for Grade 8-equivalent
students have fallen between 1999 and 2011, dipping below the international average score of 500 by 2007. This stands in sharp contrast to the performance of the newly industrialized economies (NIEs) Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan that consistently top all other countries. The results from PISA are similar. Malaysia’s scores are below average and far below those of the NIEs.

Fourth, given the affirmative policy of the Malaysian government, public higher education has a large proportion of "Bumiputera" students, whilst private high education is dominated by the non-Bumiputera. Parents of private tertiary students are more driven than those with children enrolled in public HEIs who are more assured of public sector employment. Tuition fees imposed by private HEIs are about three or four times higher than those charged by public universities. Yet, to many a parent, cost is secondary because a good education is about ensuring survival. Parents want to give their children an education that will be valuable for life. They do not mind paying for this experience – perceived to be made available in private HEIs where the medium of instruction is English, curriculum and academic staff are internationalized with the inclusion of TNE and joint-degree programs, and competition prevails among students who are “fighting to be among the best” and staying challenged by their peers. There is therefore a demarcation pertaining to the output of graduates from public and private HEIs, the former who feel that they will be given greater opportunities to join the public sector, while the latter are likely to gravitate toward the private sector (Lee and Khalid, 2016; Fernandez-Chung and Leong, 2018).

Fifth, focus-group discussion with senior management and academic staff of selected public and private HEIs suggest that they have more problems when it came to convincing parents in the choice of studies for their children (Fernandez-Chung and Leong, 2018). It was indicated that “Ensuring parents’ knowledge of the labor market is not so relevant in the UK, but in Malaysia, parents seem to follow a pattern and it is usually something pre-determined. It is difficult to convince them otherwise” (p. 96).

The opportunities and issues related to private tertiary education imply more and more open choices for parents and students as they decide on the type of programs that the latter should pursue. For parents, many of the THNE arrangements represent new, often unfamiliar, options that they did not have in their own time.

Two international surveys speak to the attitudes/preferences of parents and students in the Malaysian context. These are the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) Survey and the Student Barometer Survey (SBS), both of which had sub-samples of Malaysian students. HSBC commissions an annual survey of parents as part of its “Value of Education” series of studies. In the 2015 Learning for Life Report, the independent consumer research study into global education trends covered parents’ attitude and behavior toward their children’s education in 16 countries and territories worldwide. SBS is a global survey with feedback from over two million respondents from 1,400 education institutions in 28 countries. In Malaysia, six tertiary institutions participated with over 12,000 student respondents in 2014.

The HSBC 2015 survey casts some light on students’ and parents’ perception on the role of education and shows this to be an area of perception convergence. This survey shows parents to favor occupations in the physical sciences – medicine, engineering and computer science – that are reputed to bring high income and courses with high prospects of employment. Table I shows that 83 percent of all parents surveyed had specific occupations in mind for their children, and of these 83 percent, three occupations were mentioned by 38 percent of these parents. Malaysian parents were even more decisive; 92 percent had specific occupations for their children and the same three occupations were mentioned by 46 percent of the parents. And they expect a good education to enhance competitiveness at work. This suggests a focus on income earning potential (monetary return to education) and employment as a destination in that the occupation/job their children secure after
completion of education will be their occupation/job for life. Career success is also emphasized in the choice of subjects.

In the SBS, earning potential, institution reputation and research quality are assessed to be so close together that it is hard to tell which is more important (SBS: 15). Nevertheless, the results signal broad agreement with HSBC’s surveyed parents.

Do these findings mean that perception divergence is not an issue in Malaysia? This paper addresses this question using two alternative primary data sources from studies undertaken by the authors. However, the HSBC and SBS surveys provide bases for comparison with these alternative data sources.

### 3. Data and methodology

The data used in this paper come from a local special-purpose sample survey conducted by the authors. This was a 2015 Graduate Employment Study (GES 2), sponsored by the British Council, and with particular emphasis on TNHE. Students who responded were mainly enrolled in private HEIs. Responses from 358 students (83 percent), 31 parents (7 percent) and 40 students (10 percent), the latter involved in focus-group discussion and interviews, were obtained. Data from the 358 student respondents were from a structured questionnaire administered online to students of several tertiary education institutions, both in the public and private sectors. The 40 students participated in several group interviews of students, in four focus-groups. A separate online questionnaire was also used to collect data from the sampled parents.

As for demographics, the student survey respondents from GES2 consisted of more females (58 percent) than males (42 percent), who were mostly Malaysians (78 percent), enrolled more in the social (56 percent) than the physical sciences and, mostly, in private tertiary education institutions (76 percent). Among the 358 student respondents, only 31 parents responded. The composition of parent respondents was in line with that of students, with 77 percent being Malaysians, 84 percent with children in private institutions and 59 percent enrolled in social science programs.

An issue of note is the choice of analytical method in comparing perceptions. Since these comparisons involve numerical values – mean scores – tests like the two-sample t-test of means and the Wilcoxon rank sum test are suggested. However, since scores given are completely subjective, it is possible that one party will score consistently above the other. As a result, such tests would not yield meaningful results. Hence, only qualitative comparison of rankings is possible and used in this paper.

### Table I.

Parents’ perceptions of aspects of children’s education, total sample and Malaysia, 2015, in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have specific occupation in mind for children: of which</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer science</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer children to study in all 5 subjects below:</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, management and finance</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and information sciences</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness at work is expected of university education</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to send children abroad</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to pay at least 25% more to send children abroad</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HSBC (2015)
4. Perceptions on employment as a goal in education

4.1 Employment and education

A fundamental issue of perception is how parents and students see the role of education. Is education an end in itself (education as destination) or is it just the means to an end (education as journey)? Earlier, it was revealed that students and parents broadly concur on the role of education. The Malaysian survey GES2 does not address this issue directly but only indirectly.

However, the GES2 results that address this issue indirectly through the choice of HEIs to study not only contradict those found in the HSBC and SBS surveys, but also point to a potential disconnect between parents and their children as students. Table II, in Section 4.1.1 shows that, while parents prioritized the reputation of institutions, presumably assuming that good reputation automatically ensures employability, students were more focused directly on employability. This potential source of disconnect has consequences. Given the shifting nature of employment, the need for transferable skills and the fact that some of the jobs that the next generation will be doing are not even known today, parental advice based on what they know may not do justice to their children’s choice of career. Likewise, the approach of TNE to promote traditional degrees to job paths is also a conventional approach that has a limited shelf life. With neither parents nor institutions prepared to respond with anything other than what they know and have always used/thought and with students relying heavily on parental advice, a mismatch between perception and reality is looming that can lead to students making sub-optimal career choices.

4.1.1 Choice of institutions to study. How are these preferences manifested in key decisions relating to their children's education? For instance, what criterion is the most important, namely, employability or academic quality in the selection of an education institution for the children? The HSBC study suggested, albeit obliquely, that it was employability since parents saw “the job market as increasingly competitive” (HSBC, 2015, p. 19).

As already indicated, data from the GES2 showed a divergence between parents’ and students’ perceptions. Malaysian parents valued good academic reputation and record over employability. Of course these criteria are related; good academic reputation leads to better employability. Malaysian students were more focused on employability (Table II). A plausible argument explaining this divergence of views is the change in the job market over a generation. When the parents left school or university to seek work, competition in the job market and the types of occupations available were more limited so that a good academic record was a guarantee of a good job. In the more competitive job environment that requires a wider range of skills today, students recognize this in itself is no longer enough. Also of relevance, although not a top-five priority, affordability was, understandably, viewed much more important by parents than by students.

In the GES2 study, students chose TNHE study mostly because of its international recognition (mean score 3.5 out of 4) rather than earning potential (3.0) (Hill et al., 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Reason for choice of institution</th>
<th>Weighted mean scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International recognition</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degree valued by employers</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More prestigious than others</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institution well regarded</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good academic record</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source:</td>
<td>Graduate Employment Study (2015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Reason for choice of institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good academic record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualification valued by employers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Top five reasons for choice of education institution given by students and parents
They gave the same reason for enrolling in the particular HEI and also believed that UK HEI should be the party entrusted with quality control, implicitly acknowledging that these have higher quality programs than their Malaysian counterparts.

Since both parties’ judgments are grounded in a recognizable and understandable methodology, namely knowledge of the job market through experience, social contacts, and/or the media, the difference in perception must have arisen from the changed context with reference to the job market. The context that is relevant can be inferred from the perception of employers who are the consumers of the graduates’ talent, skills and knowledge. The GES2 found employers to emphasize the importance of soft skills and personal values over hard skills that a good degree brings, tending therefore to support the students’ perspective (Cheong et al., 2015). Parents’ failure to recognize this is rooted in ignorance of new or recent developments. In the HSBC survey, the percentage of Malaysian parents who sought vocational advice and realizing that they were not aware of “new careers” in the labor market was as high as 82 percent (HSBC, 2015, p. 16). Failure to recognize these realities is likely to leave children dependent on parental advice unprepared for entry into the job market.

It is also worthy of note that of all the responses received in GES2, not a single student or parent made reference to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as an option despite its contribution to technological upgrading in countries like Germany, Korea and Singapore. This is confirmation of the finding from Cheong et al. (2013) that TVET has a negative image among Malaysians.

4.1.2 Studying abroad. Parents are aware their children have more opportunities for overseas study than when they were students themselves (HSBC, 2015, p. 26). This explains their willingness to send their children abroad for studies (Table II). However, in the HSBC survey, the proportion of parents having this willingness was reported to decline for parents with older children, presumably as the cost implications become more real at this stage (HSBC, 2015, pp. 26-27). The costs are clearly material – the proportion of parents who were prepared to pay more for their children’s international education was lower than the proportion indicating willingness to send their children overseas.

Malaysian data did not speak to the extent parents would go to fund foreign study. This issue was however addressed with respect to East Asia (China, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong) and Singapore (Sharma, 2013) with the observation, although anecdotal, that parents would go to such lengths as selling assets, get into debt, and cut back on other expenses to send their children, including abroad, for higher education. An entry in an education portal for China (EduGlobal Blog, 2015) that reviews criteria of parents noted that cost “is almost an afterthought for applicants to undergraduate programmes but is paramount to most applicants to graduate programmes.” The most important considerations were a specific country, branding, and international ranking. These considerations differ from the criteria used by Western parents, whose choices were based more on the substance of the education their children would receive, such as “school climate and classroom discipline” (Kelly and Scafidi, 2013, p. 1).

In the GES2, students stress the importance of internationalism more than their parents (Table III in Section 4.1.3). An important question to ask is what formed the basis of such a perception? Social media and networking may underline this belief, as much as knowledge, even if from hearsay, that foreign graduates find it easier to secure employment and are accorded preference for selection and promotion. Employers certainly rate foreign graduates above all other graduates but are also aware of their limitations (Cheong et al., 2015, pp. 10-11). Students see international education enhancing their employment prospects (62 percent of students responding), including gaining connections worldwide (45 percent). Also relevant must be knowledge of their parents’ views about the desirability of a foreign education. Students’ positive views are not likely
to be diluted by considerations of cost, given their assumption that it is their parents who need to fund their overseas study. These findings coincide broadly with those from the QS survey. In Question 4 of the QS survey, students were asked the benefits they perceived of attending internationally recognized universities. Their response: employment prospects 62 percent of respondents; connections worldwide 45 percent; quality of education 34 percent; student experience 28 percent; and travel opportunities 27 percent.

4.1.3 Choice of TNHE. With Malaysia being a major player in TNHE, studying abroad is not the only option for students aspiring to an international education. However, TNHE, to the extent it is understood, is widely considered to be a second-best option compared to study abroad, especially by parents taking into consideration financial costs and social and cultural factors like preference for children to remain home for safety reasons and the anxiety created lest they mix with the wrong company. Understanding why students and parents opt for TNHE not only opens another window to perceptions of internationalization of tertiary education but also says something about whether the TNHE concept itself is adequately understood.

As Table III from the GES2 data shows, students rank international exposure highest, consistent with their choice of HEI. Employment considerations were ranked third and lower. Parents were more focused on first English language proficiency, second on the ease with which their children can get a job, and third in commanding a high salary. All three reasons are about getting their children good jobs, reflecting the aspirations of the parents’ own generation. Parents’ average scores were uniformly higher than students’, suggesting they had stronger views than the students themselves. On the use of English, parents’ views were aligned with employers, as a recent poll showed (Malaysian Insider, 2015). The extent to which programs selected were only offered in the TNHE mode was low, suggesting that both parents and students made a conscious choice with respect to TNHE.

The different perceptions on TNHE are suggestive of differences in understanding about the role of TNHE. Whereas students are aware of the advantage of international exposure through TNHE, indeed its major selling point, parents have limited understanding of this type of education, equating “transnationality” to “foreign” and therefore good for employability.

5. Perceptions on career

No less important a question to ask is whether there is convergence in career choice between parents and their children as students. To the extent that parents are able to decide their children’s career choice, their children’s disagreement with that choice can lead to a lack of interest in their field of study or be trapped in a profession for which they have no interest or competence. Of the two data sources, only the GES2 provided data that permit direct comparison of career prospects. A question in the GES2 asked about the HEI from which students have the most likelihood of gaining employment and another asked about the skills that were most important. This is discussed next.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Weighted mean scores</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater international exposure</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheaper than going abroad</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of English preferred by employers</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to obtain employment</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earn higher salary</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program only offered in TNE mode</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Graduate Employment Study

Table III.

Reasons for choice of TNE program given by students and parents

Generational perceptions of education and work
5.1 Employment likelihood

In terms of the likelihood of employment, the rankings of HEIs by parents and students were generally consistent. Study in foreign (Western) HEIs outside Malaysia has the highest likelihood of employment. Their branch campuses in Malaysia have been ranked next highest (Table IV). Despite the similar ranking, of interest is the difference in mean scores between first and second ranked HEIs. Whereas students rate international branch campuses as not much inferior to foreign university campuses, parents see a major gulf between them – they rate foreign campuses more highly than branch campuses more poorly. This difference is likely caused by parents’ traditional preference for foreign study over anything that is local, coupled with a lack of knowledge about TNHE in general. In any case, branch campuses did not exist in their time. However, as already indicated, sending their children abroad has major cost implications that some would find hard to afford. Thus, parental preference and ultimate choice of HEI for their children represent a compromise between perceived quality and real costs.

Another major difference is how public sector HEIs are ranked. Parents rate public sector HEIs lowest and students the third lowest. It is likely that parents were evaluating public HEIs in terms of what they were in their time and remained the HEIs of choice in tertiary education. Students, armed with better access to information, nevertheless had no solid basis for comparing the decline of public higher education (Cheong et al., 2011; Mukherjee and Wong, 2011). This revelation must have opened the eyes of parents to the world of private sector HEIs.

5.2 Soft vs hard skills

Parents’ and students’ prioritization of the skills they bring to an employment interview can say a great deal about their perceptions of what skills HEIs should transfer to help their graduates secure employment. As Table V shows, students emphasized soft skills over hard skills, whereas parents emphasized the opposite. Students’ focus on soft skills reflects their recognition of what employers require of employees, this information coming from friends or through advertisements in the media. The GES2 findings for students are consistent and find validation with those from the SBS. As Table VI from the SBS shows, students are more satisfied with the teaching of English, a soft skill, over program content, a hard skill. It is noted that this perception applied to Malaysian students only; international students in the SBS were more satisfied with hard skills that they had gained.

On the other hand, parents, basing their views on their past experience, still believed in the preeminence of hard skills. This is consistent with their views about the greater importance of a good qualification over employability and of quality in the choice of an HEI over other criteria discussed earlier. This is another instance in which parents’ use of the past to judge their children’s future may lead their children to be poorly prepared to enter the job market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of HEI</th>
<th>Students' weighted mean scores</th>
<th>Parents' Type of HEI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign HEIs outside Malaysia</td>
<td>4.34 4.63</td>
<td>Foreign HEIs outside Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International branch campuses in Malaysia</td>
<td>4.22 3.84</td>
<td>International branch campuses in Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local private HEIs</td>
<td>3.74 3.79</td>
<td>Local private HEIs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local public HEIs</td>
<td>3.59 3.39</td>
<td>Local university colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local private colleges</td>
<td>3.45 3.26</td>
<td>Local private colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local university colleges</td>
<td>3.34 2.79</td>
<td>Local public HEIs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Graduate employment study*
6. Conclusions and implications

While much of the extant literature assumes and lauds the positive role of parents and parenting in their children’s education (see, e.g. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995), the findings from Malaysian data, limited as they are, reveal areas of divergence in parental and student perceptions that can lead to a revision, if not contradiction, of this view. These aspects, seldom discussed, relate to parental and student perceptions of the area of study and hence of career choice when times have changed.

In Malaysia, as in other countries in Asia, students rely heavily on family advice in major decisions about their education and their subsequent career. Indeed, in the choice of education institutions, the SBS for Malaysia showed that 58 percent of the respondents indicated that their family helped decide these, while another 44 percent indicated that friends helped (I-Graduate, 2015, p. 17). It is therefore no surprise that, in general, students and their parents have a similar set of criteria they consider important. What sets the country apart is the rapid expansion of TNHE consequent upon the government’s liberalization of the private tertiary education sector. And this development coincides with the phase of intergenerational change when parents of current students had completed their education by the time TNHE became widespread, while their children enrolled in private tertiary institutions are beneficiaries of an expanding variety of TNHE collaborative arrangements. Also, integral to this dynamic is the fact that the job market has also expanded, both in terms of variety not only of jobs but also of the skills required to adapt to different job situations. Globalization has also intensified competition and the need for competitiveness in the labor market, giving employers greater leverage over and expectations of employee skills.

Under these circumstances, parents’ views on education and career based on past experience are not necessarily good guideposts for their children. The Malaysian data show them to rely on good teaching quality and institutional reputation over other intangible attributes like international recognition and hence hard skills over soft. They tend also to view study abroad as by far the best experience, believing that foreign universities are better than all other options. Yet they appear not really conversant about what other benefits of an international education bring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ and parents’ perceptions of importance of types of skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Types of skill</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft skills, including language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard skill – knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-specific competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to different environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Graduate Employment Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malaysian students</th>
<th>International students</th>
<th>Total students in Malaysia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academics’ English</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>83.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert lecturers</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality lectures</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program content</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Student Barometer Survey (2015, pp. 19-21)

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95
They also saw their children’s job as a permanent vocation, i.e., employment as a destination. The children, however, with greater access to current information, had views more in line with what employers wanted – soft skills, personal values, and English language proficiency. They saw soft skills giving them the flexibility to move from one job to another, seeing employment as a journey to be traveled. However, while appreciative of an international education, be it through overseas study or TNHE, they cannot fully articulate what are its benefits.

What implications can be drawn from this disconnect between parent and student perceptions in these crucial areas of study and career? First, parent–children divergence in views has hidden costs. Parental advice may not always be appropriate for the work environment their children will face. If children rely on this advice, they may end up doing subjects they have little interest or competency in, or worse, being unprepared for the job market when they complete their studies. In a highly competitive labor market, a good academic qualification can only go so far. Furthermore, parents’ understanding of why and how the job market has become more competitive may be quite imperfect. Traditional work virtues are becoming less relevant as a deciding factor as competition for jobs intensifies. Students, on the other hand, have access to a wider spectrum of information sources due to globalization and the Internet and can interact with friends who also have the same access. This has given them some idea of what the market wants.

Second, these hidden costs, though difficult to estimate, need to be explicitly taken into account in theoretical discussions and/or modeling of the impact of parental influence on their children’s education, much of which are focused on benefits (e.g. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995). These costs may be structural (reflected in the parent-child or family relationship) and/or contextual (reflected in the extent of intergenerational change in the education and work environment).

Third, dependence on family (and friends) for advice speaks poorly of the role of education institutions in providing guidance and counseling to students. Indeed, in the Malaysian case, it is unclear if HEIs themselves have sufficient awareness of or knowledge about what employers want. It also reflects badly on the role of employers in conveying what skills they need directly to the public. The other major stakeholder, the government, also cannot be absolved from blame in not facilitating, if not engineering, closer links between employers and HEIs that would permit an exchange of information. Rather than supplant parental influence, an alternative strategy is to leverage parental influence through involving them in institutional counseling mechanisms and through updating their knowledge so that the costs described above can be mitigated. Unfortunately, this has seldom occurred. It also suggests that instead of a top-down, directive approach the government currently practices, a more inclusive role for key stakeholders, especially parents and industry, should be adopted in areas like education planning, curriculum development, internships, career counseling and advice. Fourth, the focus on academic studies by both parents and students to the neglect of TVET must be a factor contributing to Malaysia’s skill shortage. The government itself, although having strengthened TVET over the past decade, has not until recently, under the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016 – 2020) (Government of Malaysia, 2016), made TVET a central theme of national educational planning. Whether policy rhetoric is translated into measures on the ground remains to be seen.

Finally, although confined to Malaysian data, this study’s findings have relevance for other countries in Asia and elsewhere, where family advice is a major factor in children’s education and career choice. At the same time, countries differ, even in Asia, with respect to the role of families, education systems and the extent of government involvement in education. Contextual and situational differences will bring about differences in parental impact. In the Malaysian case, in addition to the centrality of family in decision-making, the fact that respondents are associated with private tertiary education and are the subject of discrimination renders its situation arguably to be at variance with that of its regional peers. The actual impact of parental influence in each country must depend on a mix of generic and country-specific factors.
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Induction of junior faculty members of higher education institutions in Eritrea

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore how the graduate assistants (GAs) are inducted into the system and ethos of the institutions of higher education (IHE) in Eritrea. The paper serves in the purpose of creating more conducive and supportive work environment in IHE facilitating the socialization of junior faculty members to the culture, standards and system of the institutions.

Design/methodology/approach – The research adhered a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data were gathered through a Likert scale questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The study was conducted in seven IHE involving 165 participants.

Findings – The GAs' knowledge of job description, access to institutional information, sharing of resources, the quality of guidance and support provided, supervised teaching and feedback are discussed in detail. Results revealed that the GAs shoulder vital responsibilities but they receive poor induction at individual and institutional levels. GAs complain for lack of job description clarity and lack of transparent institutional communication at work. Holding first degree, GAs teach senior courses without any prior induction, pedagogic trainings and unsupervised. The GAs are recruited on the basis of the colleges' long-term staff development plan, but little is done.

Practical implications – Despite their academic rank, the GAs represent 64 percent of the national academic staff (ADF, 2010). Creating conducive work atmosphere for the junior faculty members in the institutions is a long-term investment on institutional capacity building and quality assurance of the institutions' performance.

Social implications – Induction of the newly recruited junior faculty members to the social, professional and the institutional ethos is a socialization process that would minimize the professional isolation and inefficiency of new recruits.

Keywords Guidance, Professional support, Access to information and resources, Duties and responsibilities, Induction

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Recruitment of newly graduated candidates as graduate assistants (GAs) in teaching in the Eritrean institutions of higher education (IHE) is very common practice. The IHE consider the recruitment as a long-term investment of institutional capacity development and as a means to relieve the country from paying massive amounts of hard currency to large numbers of expats. The recruitment of these young graduates in Eritrea is contrary to the findings by Austin (2002) that stated teaching assistants are temporarily hired to respond to seasonal departmental demands without a vision to develop them to future professors. Austin noted that as a result, less attention is given to planned conversation opportunities, feedback and guidance of career aspirations for them. However, the guidelines of the National Board for Higher Education (NBHE)(1) in Eritrea (January, 2010) indicated that the GAs are recruited on

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the basis of the colleges’ long-term staff development plan in “a specific field of specialization within a particular department” (p. 2). The recruitment puts challenges to the colleges to make the transition of the recruits from student life to the workplace in the IHE.

In the Eritrean IHE, GAs are bachelors (first degree holders), but practically work as fully-fledged instructors in the institutions. These newly recruited GAs are fresh graduates that require induction and close guidance to better adapt to the workforce and effectively contribute to the IHE. The paper explored the views of the senior and the junior faculty members to understand how the GAs are inducted into the system and ethos of the IHE in Eritrea. Induction refers to an organized way of introducing GAs to the rules, regulations, guidelines, culture, ethos, standards and procedures, their duties and responsibilities and expectations (Aspfors, 2012; Major and Dolly, 2003). As it is implied in Figure 1, induction program in IHE is constructive way of influencing the attitude, knowledge and values of beginning faculty and keep them on track in the workplace. As it is implied in Figure 1, induction adequately prepares the newly recruited GAs for the complex task of teaching and improves their academic skills, self-confidence, self-efficacy, enthusiasm and accountability (Potter and Hanratty, 2008; Major and Dolly, 2003).

Induction as a process of professional and institutional socialization of GAs is not an isolated incident, rather a continuous process. Induction and mentorship are inseparable elements in the continuum of professional development of the GAs in the colleges. A combination of induction and mentoring programs would play a constructive role in inducing all the professional values required for the GAs at work. As it is implied in Figure 1, induction adequately prepares the newly recruited GAs for the complex task of teaching and improves their academic skills, self-confidence, self-efficacy, enthusiasm and accountability (Potter and Hanratty, 2008; Major and Dolly, 2003).

The diagram is generated by the researcher to explain the significance of induction to beginning GAs in an academic institution. Metaphorically, the diagram represents an induction and mentorship ladder in IHE displaying an educational institution, its management system and all the staff members with their inputs in one way or another. The institutional setting and its management system are set up as the foundation of the ladder. This is to indicate the significance of these components to design strategic programs such as induction to create a conducive teaching and learning environment, cultivate quality manpower and render competitive services with the available resources. Induction and mentoring are the main arms in creating team spirit within IHE. Integrating induction and mentoring programs as tools to socialize junior faculty members is an effective mechanism.

**Figure 1.**
Multidimensional influences on junior faculty members’ professional growth
to improve work quality. Motivation, inspection, recognition, feedback and other support systems for the GAs are expected at different parts of the ladder. The GAs are anticipated to go up the ladder holding and footing on the stepladders. The arrows symbolize the interdependence of the influencing elements within the academic institutions. Committed and inspired GAs are more likely to develop a sense of institutional belongingness, strive to improve their professional competency and creatively contribute to the system. The magnitude of the inspirational influence of the GAs increases when they contribute back into the system that shaped their professional development vis-à-vis the inspired GAs aspire to contribute inspiring inputs into the student community.

Ssempebwa et al. (2016) noted that the state of affairs of the early career academics (ECAs) in African colleges and universities requires serious attention of responsible leadership. The lack of proper induction and coaching of the ECAs is spawning multitude program and institutional inefficiencies. According to the researchers, the academic mediocrity of faculty and the compromised educational quality at the African colleges and universities inevitably follows the influx of inexperienced faculty to the IHE. The majority of the national academic staff at the IHE in Eritrea are GAs that require at least on-the-job short-term and further formal trainings to work as full-fledged professionals in their respective fields.

2. Methodology
The research was conducted in the seven IHE in Eritrea. These seven IHE comprise nine colleges which are servicing as the country’s centers of tertiary education offering diploma and undergraduate degree programs. Three of the colleges offer masters’ programs in a handful fields. The study employed a mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Representatives of the leadership of the colleges, senior staffs in the departments and the GAs participated in the research. The leaders were purposefully identified for an in-depth interview; however, the senior staffs and GA participants were randomly selected from all the IHE. Representing the IHE, 165 staff members (7 deans, 25 senior staffs and 133 GAs) took part in the research.

Qualitative and quantitative information were gathered as primary data for the study. In addition, a desk review analysis was conducted with the documents of the NBHE. Therefore, the academic community in the higher education and the working documents of the institutions were the major sources of data. The quantitative data were collected through Likert scale questionnaire and guiding questions were used for the in-depth interviews. These data collection tools were developed in consultation with established researchers in education and humanities. The questionnaire was pilot-tested and ratified accordingly.

Participants had offered their full consent for the research participation. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed in the participants’ workplace. Some GAs were consulted via the internet to fill the same questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered for the GAs only, but the authorities in the colleges, the senior staffs and 28 of the GAs were interviewed in their respective workplaces. The in-depth interviews were audio recorded and carefully transcribed. Complementary secondary data were collected from the NBHE office and some of the colleges. The fact that the IHE are scattered in different parts of the country, time and financial constraints were among the main challenges during the data collection. The data from the different sources are organized to answer the major research questions of the study including:

RQ1. How are the GAs inducted into the system, standards and ethos of the IHE in Eritrea?
RQ2. What are the duties and responsibilities the GAs engaged in?

The qualitative data are thematically summarized and the quantitative data are analyzed using SPSS. One-way ANOVA is used to compare between GA groups from the
colleges with respect to their views on induction and support systems at the colleges for GAs. Based on the area of relevance and administrative practices the colleges were categorized into four groups.

3. Results
This section presents the major findings of the research. The researcher used results from institutional documents, in-depth interviews and questionnaire to triangulate the analysis. The following issues, figures and tables succinctly summarize the major findings of the research. The in-depth interviews with key informants revealed the issues including:

- GAs are working as “instructors” at IHE in Eritrea.
- GAs are described as the “backbones” of the colleges in teaching.
- GAs teach specialized courses without supervision.
- Newly recruited GAs are not properly inducted and professionally supported at the IHE.
- Organizing induction programs for the beginning GAs is regarded as significantly important by the participants.
- The GAs complain for lack of transparency of relevant information at the colleges.
- Despite a huge need for professionally and hierarchically promoting the GAs, the issue is not seriously handled.
- Despite the circumstances, GAs do not have resentments for their work experiences in the graduate assistantship.

Figure 2 displays the national and expatriate staff members at the EIT with respect to their academic qualification. The report adapted from the EIT official reports of the existing staff on ground in the first semester of the 2017–2018 academic year. The expatriates are hired on contractual basis mainly Indian nationals. The bar graph shows teaching composition of the staff on ground in one institution (EIT). Learning from this report, it does not require great effort to understand the huge number of bachelors (GAs) teaching staff in the IHE at national level.

Figure 3 shows the state of job description clarity for the GAs at the colleges. Participants were asked whether the GAs have clear job description. Though there is a difference of views between the senior staff and junior staff toward the issue, in general both groups agreed that the GAs job description is not clearly specified. However, on average the

Figure 2.
Academic staff of the Eritrea Institute of Technology (EIT)

Source: Eritrea Institute of Technology
GAs themselves are more aware about the blurrily described role the GAs are required to play in the colleges (Figure 3).

One-way ANOVA was calculated to determine the differences of induction programs and support systems available at the colleges to professionally nurture the GAs. Table I displays the results of the comparison. Post hoc test has been calculated to further explore the differences between the groups.

4. Discussion

The discussion section focuses on the major themes identified from the data. Therefore, the GAs’ induction is treated in light of the duties and responsibilities in which the GAs are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>3.647</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.216</td>
<td>2.442</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>64.215</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67.862</td>
<td>132</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>12.750</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.250</td>
<td>9.557</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>57.367</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0.445</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70.117</td>
<td>132</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>1.076</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>1.554</td>
<td>0.204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
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<td>129</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30.845</td>
<td>132</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiential stimulation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>2.207</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.736</td>
<td>1.513</td>
<td>0.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>62.704</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0.486</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64.911</td>
<td>132</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** p is significant at 0.001

Table I. Comparison between groups of GAs in the IHE
actively engaged. The guidance GAs receive in the IHE in line with the tasks they are assigned for and the significance of induction for them. The paper also discusses the GAs’ access to institutional information, sharing of available resources, the promotion strategies for the GAs and the GAs’ experiential inspirations in the graduate assistantship position. The findings show that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups of GAs from different colleges with respect to their views on the induction and support system available for the GAs at the college with the exception of their access to information.

4.1 GAs’ duties and responsibilities
The NBHE guidelines indicate that “at normal conditions” GAs are not legible to take full responsibility of an independent teaching of a course. The NBHE guidelines for recruitment (Revised February, 2008) allow GAs to teach “under exceptional circumstances […] at the level of lower division courses and under the supervision of a senior faculty member” (p. 8). However, the context is crystal clear evidence of the gap between theory and practice of higher education management. In reality, the vast majority of teaching activity is carried out by GAs for several years without prior induction and pedagogic orientations. It is not only the academic qualification of the GAs that matters at work but also the support systems offered to them.

The question “is there lack of clear job description for the GAs?” was asked to the senior staff and the junior staffs alike. The findings show that the GAs complain about blurred job descriptions. GAs complain for being called up on to fill gaps created now and then; especially for none “benefit” activities in the departments, GAs are at the forefront” (GA-28). Surprisingly, when GAs formally ask for clarity of job description, their leaders perceive it as a sign of less commitment at work. The GAs claim that they were told by the “leaders” to “never ask such questions.” The lack of clear job description can be used as an excuse for failing to do one’s own again and could make the GAs rather unaccountable and less responsible. A GA noted that “I can pretend as if I did not know that it was my duty whenever I fail to accomplish my job due to lack of clear job description” (GA-12).

The GAs make paramount contribution to their respective departments in teaching the undergraduate students. The answer to one of the research questions (RQ2) revealed that they are highly involved in teaching courses and offering services. In some departments, the GAs are responsible for every task including leading the department – acting as head departments. Rena (2008) noted that it is not unanticipated fact to witness GAs taking full responsibility of course offerings in the colleges (in Eritrea). The senior staff members attempt to rationalize the phenomenon that when GAs are teaching, they are assigned to teach introductory courses. But a large number of GAs are given responsibility to teach the undergraduate students. In some departments, courses are primarily taught by GAs including specialized courses in colleges such as education and engineering. In a number of departments, inexperienced GAs teach even specialized courses independently. Taking the contribution of the GAs to the colleges in teaching into account, a dean of a college described them as “the backbones” of the colleges. On the other hand, with respect to the level of education and experience of the GAs, there is no doubt that the situation is contributing to a compromised quality of tertiary education, especially when the GAs teach senior students and more specialized courses. This situation is likely to multiply inefficiency in the colleges and beyond.

4.2 Guidance and professional support for the GAs
The GAs need psychological, moral and professional back up and guidance from the senior faculty members and the leadership to boost their professional performance. Osman and Hornsby (2016) remarked that the commitment of leadership to work for a common purpose of promoting teaching and research in IHE materializes the “necessary conversations
around teaching and learning within disciplinary contexts and [to] be a source of help or inspiration for ECAs” (p. 1848). The GAs need support to cope with their personal and professional demands at the early stage of their career development. Research indicates that social and professional isolation characterizes the major concerns of junior faculty during their early careers (Johnston and McCormack, 1997). Hardwick (2005) explained that joining the IHE as a staff is “both the best of times and the worst of times” (p. 22). The demanding, competitive, hectic campus life and the multitude roles a faculty member has to play in academic and social lives create difficulties for junior staff members to maintain a balance between the tasks at work and personal life affairs. Researchers in the area found out that setting a goal at the early stages of career.

Price and Cotten (2006) noticed that well organized on-the-job socialization for junior faculty determines the quality of their experience and the effectiveness of their contribution to the academic institutions. All groups of respondents revealed that there are no on-the-job trainings organized to foster the GAs’ teaching and research assignments. The GA participants explicitly explained that things could have been much better for them and for their institutions if effective induction mechanisms were organized at the beginning of their career. The participants indicated that there is lack of coordinated guidance and support for the junior faculty members. The guidance subscale results for the one-way ANOVA revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the different colleges in terms of the guidance and support system they have to nurture the professional development of the GAs F(3, 129) = 2.442; p = 0.067. IHE give the GAs huge responsibility but fail to induce GAs to the institutional standards and beyond. The participants revealed GAs are not properly inducted into the system of the colleges. Thereby personal and institutional inefficiencies linger and spread as the IHE are the powerhouse of the educated manpower of other institutions in the country.

Guidance and direction are needed to shape the GAs’ professional career and build their confidence at work. In academia, guiding and supporting the junior faculty gives more credit to socialization of professional role than organizational role (Ortiz-Walters and Gilson, 2005). Moses (1985) remarked that:

Staff as teachers and researchers do not work in a social vacuum. Departmental morale, institutional ethos, career ambitions, interpersonal relationships, and available resources all contribute to whether the individual staff member is helped or hindered in the pursuit of [...] academic excellence. (p. 338)

The GAs need a bridging help and guidance from the seniors in handling professional demands, especially in teaching and research methodologies. A GA remarked “We are looking for seniors who can genuinely lead us along the professional journey to discover our strengths and limitations” (GA-22). The GAs asserted that new faculty members need to actively engage in group projects with senior staff members. The NBHE faculty evaluation guidelines (Revised February, 2008) stated that GAs are “expected to work very closely with a senior faculty member in preparing a detailed MA/MSc dissertation proposal which will account for the 10% weight given to the category” (p. 4). However, this is not practical and the GAs have little chance to grow professionally in research.

GAs’ active participation in interdisciplinary teamwork and professional partnership with the senior faculty members is very much missing. The GAs blamed the institutional system and working conditions in their colleges for the unsatisfactory guidance and support and described it as “little” help. They elucidated the fact that their colleges have no conducive work environment that invites faculty to work in teams. Thereby, the seniors and the GAs are not working in a complementary manner. However, the GAs remarked that there are helpful senior faculty members who provide credible guidance when approached. GAs described some of the senior staffs as willing to involve the GAs in their research projects.
The GAs characterized majority of the senior staff as “individually own good qualities” but lack commitment to work in teams. GAs explained that with the exception of few, the majority of the seniors try to keep their “fame and dignity” by keeping distance between them and the most junior staff members.

A head of department in EIT noted that though healthy teamwork spirit among faculty members is crucial, the seniors are taking neither good nor bad initiatives to influence the GAs. The senior faculty members acknowledged the fact they are not serving as role models for the GAs due to lack of institutional motivation for the faculty members. Participants indicated that with the exception of few resourceful and experienced expatriate instructors, GAs expect very little from the large number of expat staffs in the colleges. A GA noted that nearly all expatriates are from the same cultural background and they create their own folks in the colleges.

Another challenge forwarded by the participants was most of the colleges are located out of the capital. Everyone moves back from the colleges to the city after teaching the assigned course leaving little room for collegial at the IHE. However, location was not justifiable excuse because the responses of unsatisfactory interpersonal and professional relationships are similar in all colleges irrespective of the faculty’s workplace and residence location including the colleges in the capital. Tierney and Bensimon (1996) remarked that “collegial relationships are sporadic at best and intellectual conversation appears to be on the verge of extinction” (p. 128). The interviewees of the current research indicated that both interpersonal and professional communication at the colleges need nurturing. Professional harmony develops when the faculty develop a culture of team work. Induction and on-the-job training programs can play vital role in creating the spirit of team work among faculty, enhancing the GAs’ capacities and task performance in teaching and research to foster educational excellence in the IHE.

The GAs are still below the requisite of the institutions’ qualification to teach. Thus, supervising the GAs at work is beneficial not only for the colleges to keep the standards of teaching and learning process, but also for the GAs’ professional growth through constructive feedbacks. Therefore, the combination of the seniors’ teaching strategies and the GAs’ technological know-how could create an excellent blend in the form of team teaching or supervised teaching. Healthy professional relationships help junior faculty not only develop teaching and research skills but also decrease social isolation and consequentially increase job satisfaction, morale and retention (Price and Cotten, 2006).

The criteria used as indicators of staff performance are aimed at promotion, but neither adequately defined nor openly discussed (Price and Cotten, 2006). According to the NBHE (2010) scholarship guidelines, the GAs’ performance is used as one of the major criteria for selection of postgraduate study candidates (master’s). The guidelines stipulate GAs’ tasks are regularly evaluated by department heads and the NBHE; those who perform better in their assignments get priority.

Adams (2002) noted that even though teaching, research, and service in IHE “are listed as the criteria for tenure, the specific standards and weighting of them seem unclear to new faculty” (p. 7). The GAs are concerned about the unclear criteria for evaluating their research, teaching and service performances. Furthermore, GAs complained for the inadequate feedback, absence of recognition for their contribution and lack of reward. The NBHE guidelines state that every faculty’s evaluation is professionally evaluated at the students’ evaluation, peer evaluation and department heads’ evaluation. The GAs reported that there is no systematic supervision and evaluation mechanism for the GAs except for the irregular students’ evaluation. Once given a teaching task, there is no professional supervision on what/how they teach. The respondents explained that with the exception of the inconsistent usage of the students’ evaluation procedure, none of the evaluation mechanisms stated in the NBHE guidelines are applied on ground - neither departments nor NBHE practice it.
The GAs complained that their performances are evaluated in subjective ways except for the irregular students’ evaluations. They are concerned not only with the inconsistency, subjectivity and procedure of the performance appraisal, but also with relevance of some items in the students’ evaluation form, its purpose and significance too. According to the guidelines, students’ evaluation of instructors serves two major functions: to provide feedback to the instructors to improve their teaching quality and as a source of information for curriculum revision. But the GAs said that the results of the evaluation are neither systematically summarized nor professionally kept as records for promotion or demotion related recommendations; students’ evaluations are vain attempt for the sake of formality. The GAs remarked that there is no distinction between the evaluation mechanisms applied to senior faculty members and the GAs in the students’ evaluation form. Huling-Austin (1992) recommended for “beginning teachers to be evaluated differently from experienced teachers because learning to teach is highly complex process that takes time to master” (p. 178).

A GA respondent indicated that the students might flatter the “instructors” for fear of failing or lower grades and “students evaluate a professor’s fame than his/her performance” (GA-24). Moreover, the students associate the delight teacher’s evaluation with their performance on a subject matter the teacher is teaching. A GA noted that “for instance if a student is poor at mathematics, he/she is more likely to poorly evaluate a good performing mathematics instructor” (GA-10). Another participant pointed out:

The timing of the evaluation is very short and inappropriate too. The students’ evaluation form is distributed at the end of a semester to the students for two or three minutes to be filled after the class session of the course to-be-evaluated is over. Above all, the students may not have a thorough look at the evaluation questions for they might be under the pressure of exam anxiety as it is distributed in the advent of the final exam (GA-2).

However, a dean of a college remarked that though it has to be researched, there are more complaints against expatriate instructors from students than for the GAs; students evaluate GAs very positively. According to the NBHE guidelines, the appointment procedures of faculty members “at all levels” in the IHE are based on one-year probation contract. The appointment fate of the faculty is finally determined based on the faculty’s one-year performance. But the reality is different as an associate dean eloquently put it “more people dismiss the colleges than the colleges do.”

Although GAs are teaching like instructors because of the facts on ground in relation to lack of senior staff members in the departments, their work can be more effective when there is proper professional supervision for their tasks. In the absence of basic professional supervision and task evaluation procedures at workplaces, slight mistakes can cause dire consequences. If poor performances go unsupervised, job remains compromised and in the long run it can have an adverse impact on the institutional competence. The encouragement of the junior staff to bring their unique potentials to the colleges assists the swift bloom of scholarship in the IHE. Therefore, well-coordinated support systems can encourage the GAs to grow professionally, serve diligently and live up to the standards of the colleges. The institutional documents in the IHE such as Figure 2 indicate that the colleges largely depend on GAs and expatriate faculty to function as centers of tertiary education. One way or the other, the situation requires an intervention to ensure the professional competence and efficiency of the GAs through induction and coaching initiatives as well as other long-term plans of professional development including postgraduate education.

The literature and research findings in the area show that junior staff members invariably link their early career challenges to decreased support system at the institutions. A former GA respondent emarked that he was given a duty to conduct practical sessions in a science laboratory class on the first day of his recruitment as a GA without precautionary
advice at least on how to deal with the chemicals in the lab or some basic skills about classroom management. He said that “I unnecessarily suffered a lot [as a GA] though it would have been easier with the help of a senior faculty to show me the route” (Senior Staffs-1). It is very risky for the GAs and the students to work without inductions in the science fields, because they are dealing with chemicals and toxic substances that can cause harm without safety measures.

The importance of properly inducting the junior faculty to familiarize them with their roles and job description, the institutional culture, opportunities and challenges ahead was not questionable for the respondents. However, the deans of the colleges proclaim that departments recruit the “best” graduating students based on their grade point average (GPA) to work as GAs. The deans are convinced that the new recruits know everything about the system of the IHE without additional induction programs because they studied undergraduate studies in the same institution. Similar research findings revealed very pronounced attitude differences between senior and junior faculty with regard to the importance of induction for junior faculty members. The juniors wanted induction as a way of socialization into the culture, standards and procedures of the departments. On the contrary, the senior staff members had contradicting views considering formal induction for junior staff as time consuming and costly (Decker, 2008; Park and Ramos, 2002). The GAs and the senior staffs participants of the current research pointed out that induction is an appropriate way to clarify the duties, responsibilities and expectations of new recruits. Proper communication of relevant information in the colleges clarifies newly hired junior faculty’s unrealistic expectations of professional development and facilitates institutional communiqué. A GA participant explained that as a great player does not necessarily make a great coach, scoring a high GPA may not indicate one’s pedagogical ability to convey the intended message to students as an “instructor.” Another GA remarked that despite the level of academic background, it is not easy to stand in front of students without the basic pedagogic knowledge.

The GAs learn the basic information regarding their duties and responsibilities as well as expectations at work informally from other colleagues in their departments who came across the same circumstances. Francis (2006) explained “employers generally do a good job at welcoming and orienting the new starts, colleges and universities, by contrast, are generally poor at preparing students for the move” (p. 88). GAs disclosed that colleges are in short supply of such support leaving the GAs to work in “swim or sink” conditions.

4.3 GAs’ access to information and resources
One of the most frequently heard clichés of our time is “information is power.” Transparent communication at workplace benefits both the institution and its members. Transparent communication of expectations at department and college level can positively influence the academic career and productivity of the staff members. Provision of various channels of communication and transparent information reduces uncertainty among beginning employees (uncertainty reduction theory, in Christensen, 2007). The transformational leadership theory noted that transparent communication between individuals working as a team produces better work outcomes (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Flow of information about teaching, research and various existing and expected support services for junior faculty enhances professional development and accountability (Boyden, 2000). The GAs complained for the inadequacy of the information flow about the institutional rules and regulations as well as institutional management processes and expectations.

The colleges are criticized for ambiguity of the top–down flow of information at department and college level. In relation to timely exchange of information to the faculty, the GAs blamed their leadership for sneakily acting. They complained that information is deliberately withheld, especially when it is related to postgraduate study scholarships.
It seems a habit of the college authorities and their allies to work on deadlines rushing at the last hour acting for the sake of formality. Institutional information at department and college levels are fragmented, isolated and indirect. This produces feelings of less belongingness to the institutions and their mission. One of the GAs said that “I have no idea about the mission of the institution [his college]; I simply work assuming that it is to produce more students” (GA-25).

Properly channeled information promotes the cultivation of collegial harmony among faculty members (Kanuka, 2005). In the absence of clear and transparent institutional information, employees are unable to identify and pinpoint the gaps between institutional success and failure. A state of not informed is more or less a state of misinformed. The participants noted that the delays and at times withholding of important information is not only for GAs; it is a common problem for the juniors and the senior faculty alike. One of the deans admitted that “of course there is a gray area” in relation to information flow.

However, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups of GAs from different colleges F(3, 129), 9.557, \( p = 0.000 \) in terms of their access to institutional information and its transparency. *Post hoc* test was calculated to assess the specific differences of responses between groups of GAs from different colleges. The *post hoc* test results show that statistically significant difference between GAs from EIT complained more than the GAs from the other colleges in terms of the transparency and access to their institutional resources. The interviewees complained that institutional guidelines at the colleges are not detailed, consistent and at some point are manipulative.

As e-learning is becoming a norm of teaching–learning processes in today’s academic institutions, faculty members complained that they are lagging behind with respect to the technology mediated teaching. A GA participant noted that the technological infrastructure of communications is frustrating. The staff members described the lack of fast internet connectivity in the colleges as “unjustifiable barrier.” In the words of a GA “we would like to provide our students up-to-date information in our teaching. Today, internet in IHE is a necessity, not a privilege” (GA-9). McKimm et al (2007) noted that colleges and universities need to introduce change and flexibility in order to cope up with the demands of the twenty-first century; otherwise they will remain marginalized.

In higher education setting, fair share of the available resources and services among the senior and the junior staff matters. The interviewees were happy with fair distribution of the limited available resources and services at the colleges. The interviewees were convinced that there is shortage, not sharing problem of resources at the colleges. However, they underlined the lack of coordination and inefficient management systems of the resources. One of the GAs described people in charge of resources in the colleges as “good store keepers.” GAs complained that the computers and other equipment get nearly outdated while locked in store and yet the faculty have acute shortage of computer facilities at work. But a discrepancy was noticed between the opinions of the interviewees and the questionnaire respondents with regard to fair sharing of resources and services to some degree. The questionnaire respondents told a different story in which 75 percent of them disagreed with the idea that there is fair allocation of resources and utilization of services in the colleges. Some long serving staff at the EIT still seem to have long lasting memories of marginalization and discrimination between GAs and the senior staff members with regard to sharing resources and services.

4.4 Promoting the GAs into a higher qualification

The quality improvement in IHE is linked to the empowerment and encouragement of faculty members to maximize their unique and potential skills to individually and collectively contribute to the system. It is common sense that the dynamism of human
behavior is energized, directed and maintained through motivation. Rena (2006) noted “The human resource development strategy pursued by the Eritrean government is in line with the human capital approach” (p. 78). The promotion and professional growth become the consequential outcomes (Luna and Cullen, 1995). The African Development Fund (2010) assessment report reflected on the serious weaknesses of human capital in the academic manpower of Eritrean IHE that desperately need improvement. In view of the current staffing situation of the IHE, creating all possible options of staff development with respect to the mass of GAs appears to be a priority. The IHE Scholarship Guidelines remarked “The IHE should aggressively look for possible sources of scholarships” (p. 2). There is a significant need to reduce the colleges’ dependence on importing expatriate instructors in mass by building the colleges’ capacity to run by locals with postgraduate qualifications.

Fuller et al. (2008) stated that in academics the current junior faculty members are tomorrow’s leaders. Therefore, retaining professionally equipped junior faculty is groundwork for the future of the IHE. The majority of the GAs have unshakeable determination for their professional growth. According to the senior faculty explanations, GA is a staff in transition, but keeping the young graduates as GAs for decades is rather a wastage of time and opportunities for them and the institutions. The result of the comparison revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the responses of GAs from different colleges with regard to their unsatisfied need for academic promotion $F(3, 129) = 1.554; p = 0.204$.

Academic profession is a function of professional growth; otherwise, undue career stagnation is not the characteristic of a healthy, dynamic IHE. Therefore, the answer for one of the research questions “Is there a need for the colleges to upgrade their GAs into a higher position?” is crystal clear because the GAs are teaching senior courses and their competency need to be built. The findings from the promotion subscale of the research revealed that there is no statistically significant different between the GAs of different colleges in terms of their need for promotion. Importing expatriate instructors every semester on a contractual basis is a significant problem concerning to manpower at the colleges. In addition to retaining and motivating the senior Eritreans, the problem of professionally trained human capital at the IHE can be alleviated only by promoting and providing opportunities for the junior staff.

In the competitive twenty-first century, the IHE cannot withstand their challenges ignoring the fact that the GAs are the ones expected to shoulder the responsibility of assuming role of the aging national staff and to replace the contractually hired mass of expatriate teaching staff. One of the interviewee noted that “if the expatriate faculty are called upon to fill gaps, importing them cannot fill any gap rather creates a vicious cycle of gap filling.” The GAs are the future intellectuals expected to fill the gap and expedite the contribution of the IHE to the society at large. Therefore, promoting the GAs into a higher rank through all supportive means to shift from the import to exit strategy with respect to the large number of expatriate staff is a noble option to make a difference in the human capital of the IHE in Eritrea. The IHE have to use the large number of expatriates to build their internal capacity in terms of manpower. Otherwise the colleges may remain overseas internship training centers for less trained expatriates who never sleep surfing for a better job elsewhere while in the Eritrean IHE.

4.5 GAs’ experiential inspiration in the graduate assistantship position
Consistent empirical reports show that junior faculty members attribute their experience of overburden and stress to the multiple demands at work (Austin, 2002). In line with the research findings, the GAs complained for the challenges they face as novice “instructors” and working as “instruments to the senior staffs” (GA-11). Park and Ramos (2002) studied the
experiences of GAs at Lancaster University. The researchers found a number of evidences supporting the idea that GAs are viewed and treated as “the donkeys in the department” due to the burden they carry and incomparable benefits they receive. One of the GA participants pointed out “we are just the mules of the department” (p. 51). Eltringham (2008) was GA simultaneously working and studying at Villanova University. Eltringham described the double modality situation of being a GA and a student at the same time as “schizophrenic.” GAs described the graduate assistantship position as a legitimate ground for the seniors to exploit them where there is “more work than it is worth” (Price and Cotton, p. 12).

The GAs were asked if they are inspired or frustrated from their work experience in the IHE and the responses were with mixed attitudes. A GA who worked in one of the colleges for several years commented that he learned nothing from his work experience as a GA, except “campus politics.” McGregor’s Theory of Y Managers (in Bolden et al., 2003) remarked the fact that practically shaped GAs through induction and coaching have a tendency to exercise self-direction and self-control to achieve organizational objectives. Professional and collegial interconnectedness facilitates the clarity of the institutional mission, reinforce teamwork spirit and ensures effectiveness at individual and team levels. Consequently, they remain “connected to colleagues and common purpose, a connection to something larger than self” (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2006, p. 280).

There was no statistically significant difference among the GAs from different colleges in terms of their views toward their experiences working as GAs F(3, 129) = 1.513; p = 0.214. Despite their challenges at the workplaces, the GAs did not report regret working for the graduate assistantship. The GAs have positive and resilient attitude in interpreting their work experience. Sometimes the GAs are the source of inspiration to many senior faculty and administration – they are young and visionaries. The GAs have the zeal and energy to hammer their vision and goals. But if the dream of promotion in any form takes time to become a reality, their ambitions naturally wane.

Educators describe inspiration and modeling in education as the key tests of good leadership. Understandably, a number of factors beyond the leadership capacity might have contributed to the current undesirable “backlog of GAs” in the colleges working as “instructors.” The major challenge is that with the exception of few departments all the IHE in Eritrean currently offer undergraduate programs only. The GAs do not have the opportunity to study while they are helping a senior faculty in their department. By the same token, when overseas’ master’s or PhD opportunities are offered too late, pursuing the study becomes “none academic demand” – being personal than institutional demand.

The GAs noted that they try to secure worldwide competitive scholarships through painstaking hard work. However, the GAs blame the IHE for hindering the process instead of being proud of the winners and facilitate the case. The excuses might “kill the intelligence of brilliant citizens” said a GA. Hurting the psychology of the GAs by preventing to pursue their professional career dream through the scholarships might make them wilds in which sometimes they will benefit neither the institutions nor themselves. When the GAs are denied the scholarship by their own institutions, the success becomes wastage and a source of frustration. However, they will never stop from attempting to achieve it at any cost or risk and take drastic decisions of the extent to absconding only for this reason.

5. Conclusion
The colleges are expected to play leading role in finding solution to multitude challenges in the society. GAs are the future intellectuals expected to contribute and expedite this role of the institutions and the society at large. Practically, the GAs in the colleges are working as full-fledged instructors. However, taking the academic qualification of the GAs, the responsibility given to the GAs as well as the guidance and support provided to them in the Eritrean IHE into account, the GAs are below the requisite of their current task. Unless the
The colleges work to upgrade the GAs’ academic qualification, the situation will multiply inefficiency in the colleges, which has a multiplier effect in the society. Induction and on-the-job training programs play vital role in enhancing the GAs’ capacities, task performance in teaching and research, to create the spirit of team work among faculty and to foster educational excellence in the IHE. Participants noted that transparent flow of institutional communication can serve as a buffer for the GAs to withstand burnouts at work and minimize the effects of the tantalizing temptations to abscond for “better opportunities.” The interpersonal and professional communication between junior and senior faculty members at the IHE needs nurturing. In view of the current staffing situation of the IHE, creating all possible options of staff development with respect to the mass of GAs appears to be a priority. The situation requires an intervention to ensure the professional competence and efficiency of the GAs through induction and coaching initiatives as well as other long-term plans of professional development including postgraduate education.

6. Recommendations

- The colleges need to organize short-term induction programs to properly introduce and socialize new recruits into the system of the IHE.
- Proper induction for GAs would minimize confusion, professional isolation and fosters collegiality increasing personal and institutional effectiveness in the IHE.
- In the Eritrean IHE, induction would enhance clarity of unrealistic expectations of new recruits.
- Establishing at least master’s program for majority of the departments would create a chance to promote the GAs’ academic rank and minimize the probability of absconding of staff on study leave.

Note

1. NBHE: National Board for Higher education at the time of data collection, currently known as National Higher Education and Research Institution.

References


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Changing European Academics: A Comparative Study of Social Stratification, Work Patterns and Research Productivity

Authored by Marek Kwiek
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Changing European Academics delivers important insights and awareness on the current situations of higher education and academic stratification of the European countries. This book plays a critical role as a reference point for researchers, academics, scientists and even policymakers to understand the impact of the new higher education reform in Europe and the various types of academic stratification which are happening under the waves of the reformation. This book points out the insightful development of the current higher education massification, globalisation and marketisation.

The theme of social stratification in science is the thread that weaves the chapters and the patches of different topics, such as academic performance, reward, power and age together. These topics present the full picture of “what does it means to be an academic”, allowing the readers to explore at the micro level, the attitude, believes and value system of a European academic or even academic as a whole. Using cross-national data sets, the book examined and analysed the challenging research topics which was hard to explore in the past, such as the comparison of work patterns and the research performance rewards of academics from different nations. The readers, especially readers who are academics themselves, are taken on a journey of realisation of their role as an academic in this sharply stratified academic environment.

The organisation of Changing European Academics allows the reader to easily explore different topics on the current situations of European academics. The book is divided into six chapters with six different focusses on the theme of social stratification in science: academic performance stratification, academic salary stratification, academic power stratification, international research stratification, academic role stratification and academic age stratification. The orderliness of the book adheres to an insightful and well-structured academic publication. The chapters create structural dialogues on social stratification which is less likely to be discussed in the previous literature of the field, as Kwiek argues in his chapters, and stimulates conversations and even debates the validity of traditionally believed value system on higher education and academic research.

For instance, opening with the discussion on academic performance stratification, the author points out how in the situation of science and academic research, the performance closely aligns to the recognition of one’s work and how this recognition is then linked to the resources available for further research and affects performance for the next research. It explores the situation in which a small number of high-performing academics, which are most of the time those experienced, senior (Chapter 6), top earning (Chapter 2) and with greater government
influence on academic decision (Chapters 3 and 5), controls the value system of science and how they are rewarded with “disproportionately large share of rewards and the resources” (Kwiek, 2018, p. 220). The author, however, also challenges the reader with the findings which these high-performing top earners in the selected European countries actually spend more time on their work and even on administrative work and services than traditionally expected which is based on the findings of the past research which is done mainly at the national level.

Changing European Academics challenges the traditional academic assumption that the number of publications being an essential indicator decides the success of an academic. It also challenges the actual value of being an elite top performer through the sharply graded reward system and the legitimacy of the increasing competition for the limited space on top in this area of higher education massification. This idea of re-defining the traditional norms and value systems somehow echoes the social construction of identity and value which shared understandings of both identity and value may be fluid in certain situation (Jenkins, 2014) and in this case identity and certain value can be redefined through the group of new academics and through the reformation of higher education of this current era. Using his unique perspective on such system, Kwiek leads the readers to dissect academic stratification with a different yet felicitous point of view. The author also presents a board analysis on types of academic research and discussed how some types of research tend to receive more attention than the others, such as the research with large data set tend to be placed with more value by scholars than those with a smaller scale. Changing European Academics offers an objective view of the concept of being an academic and illustrates the various situations of how stratification happens in the fields of science.

The author supplies an in-depth analysis of the large cross-national data sets and each chapter is filled with great quantitative evidence and analytical arguments. The author also includes a chapter of qualitative research in the book. This arrangement gives a “fresh set of mind” to the reader after being engaged with the dominating quantitative-based research in the previous chapters of the book. This arrangement somehow also smartly points out that the challenge where qualitative research methods are less likely to be included in large-scale or international research which, therefore, indicates that it is less valued in the stratified academic world. Yet, this qualitative chapter points out the importance and richness of such methods and how qualitative data sets are crucial for understanding the attitude and value system of a group of people from its very own discourse. This arrangement allows the readers to think not only about the content of the book but the fact that this very book is also a piece of publication that is in the loop of academic performance stratification.

Changing European Academics is a collection of the most up-to-date and significant information on the current situation of European academics. The book’s use of cross-countries data and the sharp analytical argument helps to make the phenomenon of academic stratification being re-examined, reflected upon, discussed and reimagined. The enthusiasm for the topic from the author can be easily identified throughout the book. Overall, this is a book with great academic value. It is even possible to suggest it being a stepping stone for the research field of higher education. Thus, this book is highly recommended not only to the academics who are of the field but to all academic, policymakers, students and anyone who is interested in understanding “what does it means to be an academic”.

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References


Higher Education Evaluation and Development

Volume 12 Number 2 2018

Number 2
53 Editorial board
54 Quality assurance and the battle for legitimacy – discourses, disputes and dependencies
  Bjørn Stensaker
63 A literature review on the student evaluation of teaching: an examination of the search, experience, and credence qualities of SET
  Gregory Ching
85 “Parents just don’t understand” – generational perceptions of education and work
  Kee-Chook Cheong, Christopher Hill, Yin-Ching Looi, Chen Zhang and Zheng Zhang
99 Induction of junior faculty members of higher education institutions in Eritrea
  Zecarias Zemichael
115 Book review

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