EXTERNAL REFEREES' ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCHES OF A UNIVERSITY IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

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INTRODUCTION

The descriptive study evaluated the researches of a University in Southern Philippines in two time periods using the quantitative-qualitative research design. It discovered that the student researches improved significantly from fair to satisfactory in the areas of substantive, methodological and style parameters. However, the quality of faculty researches did not improve significantly in the substantive, methodological, and style aspects. The study also found out that the researches did not contain ISI journal references and that gray literature was accessed such as Wikipedia, unverified online sources and unpublished materials such as theses and dissertations. There was no discussion of research ethics in the methodology. There was lack of research utilization although there was evidence that the studies were disseminated in local and international fora.

Research is the force that unifies the other functions of higher education such as extension, instruction, and production. Research revivifies organizational effectiveness as it leads to new initiatives for change.

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The implementation of quality assurance in research was intended to synergize the mechanisms for faculty and student researches. Synder's model[2] as cited by Roa[3] requires a process evaluation that is most fitting to arrive at decisions about program changes and adjustment.

In the case of Liceo de Cagayan University, policy reforms were promulgated to guide researchers in their work. Research capability building strengthened the resolve for these policies to work. Tacbas[4] found that the research capability activities created a research climate at the University of Northern Philippines. Then, provision of research incentives was made to motivate researchers to be productive. This was proven to be effective in Lyceum Northwestern University in the form of honoraria, de-loading, institutional research funds, and monetary incentives of publication of research outputs.[5]

After three years of structural changes in the research program, there is an exigent need to assess the external review system's impact on the quality of researches of faculty and students. After all, a research program has to survive the challenges and constraints of research aided by continuous introduction of innovative policies and processes.[6]

FRAMEWORK

The concept of peer review in research is within the purview of quality assurance defined by UNESCO as an embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institution, or program.

Quality assurance is a process through which a higher education institution guarantees to itself and its stakeholders that its teaching, learning and other services consistently reach a standard of excellence. Therefore quality assurance incorporates all the processes internal to the institution, whereby quality is evaluated, maintained, and improved.[7] One of the indicators for A(r), which makes a school a research institution, is research capability. An institution should have a research program and a community of faculty, postgraduate students, and postdoctoral research workers that fosters and supports creative research and other scholarly activity.

An institution is judged by high level of research skills, a strong research culture, and a fully implemented research agenda supported by adequate resources and well-defined mechanisms to ensure publication and benchmarking. The research program results in excellent outcomes as shown by regular publication of faulty researches in ISI/refereed journal and a highly relevant research program. The institution demonstrates best practices that make the research community a model for others.

The highest standard in publication is the ISI Citation Index. For a journal publication to get an ISI, a strict refereeing process must be in place involving two to four referees for each manuscript submitted. Referees are from prime publishers in the field/subfields. Acceptance rate is less than 50 percent or much lower at 20 percent.

Articles published in the ISI journals tend to be more highly cited in the field. The highest level of ISI journals typically defines the most original and important contributions in the field/subfield. Publication of a research work in the ISI journal is a very good indicator that one's research is of significant contribution to the field/subfield.

The types of articles published in ISI or other refereed journals are those that are deemed original and are of significant contributions to the research literature. A research article's contribution in the field/subfield has the following characteristics: (1) there is something in the research that other group of scholars will find interesting, (2) the contribution matches the research questions/problem, and (3) the contribution is very clear in terms of its relation to what the present literature is stating.[8]

The Philippine Association of Institutions for Research, Inc. (PAIR) adopted for use by its member-institutions a refereeing form from the Research Unit of Davao Association of Colleges and Universities Network (DACUN). A publishable peer refereed research must pass the three aspects: substantive, methodological, and style.

The Substantive Aspect. This part covers the introduction, discussion and conclusion, and content and scope. The introduction must show exposition of the research problem by establishing the basis of the study. It must provide a brief review of the pertinent literature as a basis for infusing meaning and substance in the analysis, interpretation, and conclusion of the study. It must provide an overview of the plan of the study and must detail the presentation of the expected results.

The Discussion and Conclusion. This concerns the overview of the findings within the context of the problem. There is a presentation of the results, implications of the findings, and discussion on how the study helped resolve the original problem. There must be evidence that the data support the conclusion, which is within the boundaries of the findings.

Content and Scope. The article is enough to address the research questions effectively. Theoretical and practical implications can be drawn from the study. The results contribute to the state of knowledge in the field of study. The research possesses potential for research utilization.

Methodological Aspect. There is a fully defined design for making the research question operational. The samples and the sampling method are fully described. The measures, instruments, and materials are reliable and valid. The statistical procedures are enough and are appropriately applied.

Style Aspect. This part refers to editorial and writing styles. Editorial style requires that titles, headings and illustrations are related to the text. Tables and figures can stand alone without captions and convey information clearly. The format of references is standard, preferably using APA. The writing style involves the writing of the abstract with respect to length, accuracy, coherence, readability, and content. Length entails balance among different sections. There must be orderliness and logical flow in the expression of ideas.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study pursued the following objectives:
1. To determine the quality of researches of students for two evaluation periods;
2. To compare the quality of researches of students and faculty for two evaluation periods; and

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the descriptive design involving quantitative analysis of evaluation made by external referees, content analysis of the referees' remarks, interviews and participant observation as panelist during the oral defenses of 67 groups of student researches. The refereeing form used is the standardized form of the university with a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84.The reviewers were chosen on the basis of their academic expertise, peer reviewed publications, expertise in editorial and peer review, research awards and leadership. The reviewing tools consisted of two parts: the quantitative section, where the reviewer will give marks based on substantive, methodological, research ethics, and style aspects; the qualitative section, where the reviewers will give their comments and suggestions.

Table 1.*Distribution of the student and faculty research evaluation specimen by year*

Year	Total	Students		Faculty	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
2007	172	134	66.01	38	45
2008	115	69	33.99	46	55
Total	287	203	100	84	100

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of the Quality of Researches of Students

Table 2 illustrates the comparison of the previous and current evaluations of the quality of researches of the students.

The external reviewers noted a marked improvement from fair (2.34) to satisfactory (2.88) in the quality of researches done by students. This is attributed largely to the implementation of quality assurance measures particularly in the application of standards to the final manuscript submitted in the form of journal full text. A good number of these studies were accepted for oral and poster presentation in local (25) and international (5) research fora.

Substantive Aspects. The instruction the students received from their research classes guided the writing of their proposal, which was strengthened by the suggestions of the internal experts, composed of the dean and the research director or the authorized representative. Students were required to present solid evidence as to the origin of the problem from documentary sources, interviews and outside observation/s. This gave the exposition of the research problem a great boost.

The review ofrelated literature was improved though citation of current sources from policies, journals and previous studies. There was still prevalent use of *Wikipedia*, unverified online sources and unpublished sources such as thesis and dissertation. There was no evidence of the use of online ISI journal sources despite the presence of this facility in the university libraries. The use of ISI was not included in the research instruction of the students and was not checked and required by the research adviser.

The students were given the referee forms as basis for complying with the standards during seminars held for this purpose. Hence, the overview of the plan of the study and the presentation of expected results improved from fair to satisfactory. In the interview with research advisers and editors, they revealed that their knowledge of the refereeing process and the standards used by referees helped them in assessing the publication merits of the studies.

Discussion and Conclusions. During the previous years, students utilized their perception to interpret the data and support it with research literature. This time, the students went to the respondents and asked them to describe the conditions. This was triangulated by other stakeholders to provide a balanced view of the findings.

The supporting documents such as signed statements and photographs were attached to the study. The referees noted that Certificate of Informed Consent which is a requirement in research ethics was not part of the exhibit. This denotes that in general the research ethics part in the methodology was not complied.

The university statistician also assisted the students by pointing out the sections that required implications of the statistical test results. This led to the improvement in the discussion. Previously, the referees observed that some conclusions did not have data as support and sometimes they were not withinthe boundaries of the findings. This problem was satisfactorily addressed by the students.

Content and Scope. Before, the students wrote a statement of the problem in question form. Recently, the students wrote objectives of the study. The objectives guided the discussion of the findings. The referees found this part as satisfactory. Matching the theoretical underpinning with the results of the study, the students derived practical implications particularly relevant to their disciplines. The acceptance of some studies for local and international fora signifies the recognition of external experts that these studies contribute to the state of knowledge. The studies have shown high potentials for research utilization although there are limited avenues for this program at the present. The research coordinators in general expressed that the research utilization component has not been well entrenched. The wider dissemination here and abroad through public fora and journal circulation is the initial steps for its realization.

Methodological Aspects. In the past, most students had weak methodologies, particularly sampling design and instrumentation. This time, the students were stringently guided to explain the design and describe the steps in the sampling method. The Statistical Center provided reliability testing of instruments as part of the standard procedure in the services given to students. A professional statistician was also hired to check on the correctness of statistical tests and interpretations made. The research director and his representative checked this part in all the studies defended and revised. Statistics teachers were trained for this purpose. Hence, the quality improved from fair to satisfactory.

Style Aspects. Although there were increases in mean ratings of the editorial aspect, the verbal descriptions remained the same, satisfactory. There were deficiencies noted in the implementation of the APA documentation format. The interviews with English Teachers and Research Teachers revealed that the APA format was not strictly enforced since other styles were also taught such as MLA.

There has been a notable improvement in the presentation of the abstract, length of section, orderliness and flow, precision and clarity in the choice of words. These are attributed to the work of faculty editors who have been accredited by the university as official editors. The results of the previous year's refereeing system were used by the deans and research coordinators as guides in the polishing of the manuscript. Hence, the previous problems were satisfactorily addressed.

Table 2.*Previous (2006) and current (2007) evaluations of the quality of researches of the students by external referees*

A. Substantive Aspects	Evaluation			
	Previous (2006)		Current (2007)	
Introduction	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
Exposition of the research problem	2.40	F	2.82	S
Brief review of pertinent literature	2.31	F	2.72	S
Overview of the plan of study	2.43	F	3.02	S
Presentation of expected results	2.25	F	3.11	S
Grand Mean	2.35	F	2.92	S
Discussion and Conclusions	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
Overview of the findings within the context of the problem and expected findings	2.24	F	2.92	S
Presentation of supporting documents	2.33	F	2.72	S
Interpretation of the results	2.19	F	2.78	S
Implications of the findings	2.33	F	2.81	S
Demonstrates how the study helped resolve the original problem	2.29	F	2.74	S
The data support the conclusion	2.18	F	2.77	S
The conclusion is within the boundaries of the findings	2.23	F	2.78	S
Grand Mean	2.25	F	2.78	S
Content and Scope	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
The article is enough to address the research questions effectively	2.35	F	2.97	S
Identified theoretical and or practical implication that can be drawn from the study	2.39	F	2.91	S
Contributes to the state of knowledge in the field of study	2.46	F	3.20	S
Possesses potentials for research utilization	2.53	S	3.25	S
Grand Mean	2.43	F	3.08	S
* VD – verbal description				
	Evaluation			
B. Methodological Aspects	Previous		Current	
	Mean	VD	Mean	VD

Fully defined design for making the research question operational	2.25	F	2.77	S
Samples and sampling method and technique are fully described	2.21	F	2.61	S
Measures, instruments and or materials are reliable and valid	2.18	F	2.65	S
Statistical procedures are enough and are appropriately applied	2.30	F	2.89	S
Grand Mean	2.24	F	2.74	S
C. Style Aspects 1. Editorial Style	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
Titles, headings, illustrations, etc. are related to the text	2.56	S	3.05	S
Tables and or figures can stand without captions and portray information clearly	2.51	S	2.80	S
Format and references	2.54	S	2.72	S
Grand Mean	**2.54**	**S**	**2.86**	**S**
2. Writing Style	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
Abstract (length, accuracy, coherence, readability, content)	2.24	F	2.91	S
Length (balance in lengths among different sections)	2.49	F	2.86	S
Orderliness and flow in the expression of ideas	2.25	F	2.95	S
Precision and clarity in the choice of words (skillful communication)	2.28	F	3.06	S
Grand Mean	2.31	F	2.90	S
OVERALL MEAN	2.35	F	2.88	S

Test of Difference in the Quality of Student Researches

Table 3 exhibits the test of difference between the overall previous and current quantitative evaluations of the student researches. The obtained t-value is -4.791 at .000 probability indicating that there is a significant improvement in the quality of the researches of students. This is supported by a verbal description of fair (previous) to satisfactory (current). The null hypothesis of no significant difference is rejected. The findings point out that the implementation of quality assurance has improved the quality of the researches of students. This finding is corroborated in the substantive, introduction, discussion, scope, methodological, style, editorial and writing aspects. This implies that all areas identified in the standards for publication of researches have substantially improved. The classroom instruction, coordinating, panel review, editing, external refereeing, presence of the research director and his representative, and stakeholders' validation contributed to the maturity of the research quality assurance system.

Table 3.*Test of difference between the overall previous and current quantitative evaluation of the student researches*

EVALUATION	Mean	VD	t	P-value	Interpretation	Decision

			-4.791	0.000	Significant	Reject Ho
Previous	2.34	F				
Current	2.88	S				

Comparison of Previous and Current Evaluation of Faculty Researches

Table 4 displays the data on the previous and current evaluation of the quality researches of the faculty. The overall picture shows that the quality of researches of the faculty remained satisfactory from the previous (3.12) to the current (3.02) evaluation with a little decrease by 0.10 in the mean ratings. The competencies of the faculty in doing researches did not improve, it even went down. This is attributed to the following reasons: (1) lack of support system in the writing stage since theywere left on their own with little assistance unless they asked for it; (2) some researchers who benefitedfrom the referees' evaluation the previous year did not engage in research this time; and (3) the researchers lacked the competencies needed to meet the refereeing standards.

Substantive Aspects. There was slight improvement in the introduction with a mean rating of 2.88 (previous) to 2.99 (current). This was felt in the exposition of the research problem and brief review of pertinent literature. The referees remarked that the teachers did not use ISI references and, instead, utilized gray literature. This indicates a lack of skills in the use of online journals. The review was generally sparse and did not contain critical analysis of research literature.

Discussion and Conclusions. There was an increase in the previous mean rating (2.69) to the current (3.00) indicating slight improvement particularly in the interpretation of results and the use of data to support the conclusions. The ratings decreased in the rest of the indicators suggesting that the skills of the faculty weakened. The referees noted that since the literature review was inadequate, the implications of the findings were also weak.

Content and Scope. This part also decreased in rating from 3.20 (previous) to 3.05 (current) indicating a consistent decline in all the four indicators. The biggest mean difference is 0.33 for "Identified theoretical and or practical implication that can be drawn from the study." The studies were basically descriptive survey and generated little contribution to the state of knowledge of the discipline represented. In fact, the articles generally were barely satisfactory to address the research questions effectively as shown by a mean difference of 0.27. In general, the studies possessed only average potential for research utilization, way below the expectation of the university that the research findings could fuel the intellectual furnace of the academe.

Methodological Aspects. This part decreasedby 0.33 from 3.25 to 2.92. In fact, the item "Statistical procedures are enough and are appropriately applied" plummeted from very satisfactory (3.51) to satisfactory (2.96). The referees noted that some statistical tools did not match the research objectives considering the type of data used. The preparation of the research design, sampling method and instrumentation were all given lower ratings compared to the previous year. The referees noted some violations in the use of parameters particularly in not meeting the assumptions of normality of distribution, linearity, equality of variances, and randomization. The instruments generally were adopted from other sources and did not quite fit to the situation measured.

Style Aspects. Slight improvements were noted in the titles, headings, and illustrations; tables and figures can stand without captions and can portray information. Even the use of format and references decreased in rating. The picture is repeated in the writing style, and orderliness; flow in the expression of ideas and precision and clarity in the choice of words also decreased in ratings. Only abstract and length of sections showed little improvement.

On the whole, the faculty researches improved slightly in the writing of introduction, discussion and conclusion, and writing style. They decreased in content and scope, methodological and editorial style.

Table 4.*Previous and current evaluation of the quality of researches of the faculty*

A. SUBSTANTIVE ASPECTS	EVALUATION			
	Previous		Current	
Introduction	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
Exposition of the research problem	2.91	S	3.09	S
Brief review of pertinent literature	2.60	S	2.91	S
Overview of the plan of study	3.15	S	3.11	S
Presentation of expected results	2.88	S	2.84	S
Grand Mean	2.88	S	2.99	S
Discussion and Conclusion	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
Overview of the findings within the context of the problem and expected findings	3.11	S	2.96	S
Presentation of supporting documents	2.99	S	2.96	S
Interpretation of the results	2.80	S	2.93	S
Implications of the findings	2.87	S	2.83	S
Demonstrates how the study helped resolve the original problem	3.10	S	3.07	S
The data support the conclusion	2.93	S	3.20	S
The conclusion is within the boundaries of the findings	3.07	S	3.07	S
Grand Mean	2.69	S	3.00	S
Content and Scope	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
The article is enough to address the research questions effectively	3.30	S	3.07	S
Identified theoretical and or practical implication that can be drawn from the study	3.28	S	2.85	S
Contributes to the state of knowledge in the field of study	3.27	S	3.11	S
Possesses potentials for research utilization	3.30	S	3.20	S
Grand Mean	3.29	S	3.05	S
B. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS				
Fully defined design for making the research question	3.25	S	3.07	S

operational

Samples and sampling method and technique are fully described	3.04	S	2.78	S
Measures, instruments and or materials are reliable and valid	3.15	S	2.89	S
Statistical procedures are enough and are appropriately applied	3.51	VS	2.96	S
Grand Mean	3.25	S	2.92	S
C. STYLE ASPECHTS	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
1. Editorial Style				
Titles, headings, illustrations, etc. are related to the text	3.04	S	3.11	S
Tables and or figures can stand without captions and portray information clearly	2.88	S	3.11	S
Format and references	3.31	S	3.07	S
Grand Mean	3.30	S	3.10	S
2. Writing Style	Mean	VD	Mean	VD
Abstract (length, accuracy, coherence, readability, content)	2.82	S	2.92	S
Length (balance in lengths among different sections)	2.95	S	3.09	S
Orderliness and flow in the expression of ideas	3.16	S	3.13	S
Precision and clarity in the choice of words (skillful communication)	3.15	S	3.11	S
Grand Mean	3.01	S	3.06	S
OVERALL MEAN	3.12	S	3.02	S

Test of Difference in the Quality of Faculty Researches

Table 5 presents the data on the t-test results of the previous and current ratings of the faculty researches. The computed t-value of 1.147 at 0.257 probabilities indicates that there was no significant difference in the ratings. This means that the teachers did not improve in their research skills. This implies that the research quality assurance mechanisms for the faculty were ineffective and unresponsive to their needs.

Table 6.*Test of difference between the overall previous and current quantitative evaluations of the researches of the faculty*

EVALUATION	Mean	VD	t	P-value	Interpretation	Decision
Previous	3.07	S	1.147	0.257	Not significant	Failed Ho Reject Ho
Current	3.02	S				

CONCLUSION

The following are the conclusions of the study:

1. The quality of student researches significantly improved for the current evaluation indicating that the quality assurance for research was effectively implemented for student thesis writers.

2. The quality of faculty researches did not improve. Instead, the ratings decreased in most of the parameters indicating that the quality assurance for research was weakly implemented.

3. Both faculty and students did not use ISI journal articles; there was use of gray literature. There was no critical analysis in the review of literature. The faculty had issues on methodology, content and scope, discussion, and conclusions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

1. The Research and Publication Office relinquish the management of quality assurance of student researches and devolve this to the Academic Deans and Research Coordinators since the mechanisms for quality are already robust. For sustainability, selective audits by the RPO are performed for the student researches.

2. A comprehensive faculty retooling program is implemented to the faculty researchers to upgrade their research skills particularly on the review of the literature, research methodology, and analysis and interpretation of data.

3. A policy is enacted by the VPAA that would strictly enforce the use of authoritative research literature such as printed refereed journals and ISI online journals in general education and major subjects in all levels for both faculty and students.

4. Quality Assurance for faculty researches be reviewed, strengthened and strictly enforced.

ENDNOTES

[1] Pontillas, 2007.
[2] Synder, 2000.
[3] Roa, 2007.
[4] Tacbas, 2007.
[5] Reyes and Lopez, 2007.
[6] Milan, 2007.
[7] Duff, 2000 cited in the Primer for IQUAME.
[8] Bernardo, 2006.

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