

Undergraduate Education Students’ Conceptualisation of Quality Education for Effective Secondary School Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

This is a survey study exploring how undergraduate education students perceive the concept of quality education for effective secondary school learning outcomes. A five (5) likert scale questionnaire consisting of thirty five statements on the concept of quality education in schools from literature was constructed and administered to one hundred and eighty five (185) 200 level university undergraduate education students. The undergraduate education students were asked about the concept of quality education in relation to effective learning outcomes in the secondary school system, that is, what they would acknowledge as quality education in any secondary school settings for effective learning outcomes. Out of the selected one hundred and eighty five (185) undergraduate education students, one hundred and sixty-five (165) undergraduate education students responded to the questionnaire, and these responses were analysed using descriptive analysis and t-test to test their conceptions on quality education in secondary school educational system. Independent t-test was used to test if there was any gender significant difference of the undergraduate education students’ perceptions on the concept of quality education for effective secondary school learning outcomes. The responses were analysed using data SPSS 18.0 Statistical Software to find the mean responses, standard deviations, one-sample test-values (t-value of 2.5) and independent t-test to test for gender significant difference for male and female undergraduate education students’ perceptions on the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in secondary schools. Gender differences in perceptions of the undergraduate education students were found to be significant in some areas of the dimensions on quality education.

Keywords: Quality education, conceptualisation, perceptions.

Introduction

Secondary school educational system in any country should always aim at providing quality education in order for students to acquire opportunities for personal development, future careers and confidence to adapt to new situations in the society. Quality education in secondary schools can be explained as the quest to ensure that students achieve decent learning outcomes and acquire values and skills that will help them play a positive role in their societies. Quality education should then be conceptualised as an education that would

provide students with the tools, skills and knowledge to deal with and find solutions to the challenges confronting mankind in all aspects of life. This means that quality education should be provided in secondary schools to influence what students learn, how well they learn and what benefits they derive from the education provided for them. Quality education can also be conceptualised as the desirable changes the secondary schools want to make in each student which should lead to an excellent student learning outcomes, since the pride and stability of any country depends on the quality of students produced at all levels of the educational system. The quality of education is always considered as an important factor in the development of any nation, because if a country's educational system is of high quality, it helps individuals to achieve their own economic, social and cultural objectives in the society.

The concept of quality education was also emphasised by The World Education Forum in Dakar (2000) to be improved in schools, and one of the recommendations made by The World Education Forum was that 'Improve all aspects of the quality of education to achieve recognised and measurable learning outcomes for all-especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills'. (Dakar Framework for Action Article 7, World Education Forum, 2000). Based on the recommendations in the Dakar Framework for Action and the Convention of the Right of the Child, as well as a number of other international conventions and recommendations, it was stressed that everyone has the right not only to receive education, but also to receive education of a high quality. According to the Forum, 'quality educational system must manage to provide all children and young people with a comprehensive education and with an appropriate preparation for working life, life in society and private life'.

The concept of quality education was explained by Bernard (1999) as:

The focus on learning which strengthens the capacities of children to act progressively on their own behalf through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills and appropriate attitudes; and which creates for children, and helps them create for themselves and others, places of safety, security and healthy interaction (pg 33).

Coombs (1985) emphasised that the concept of quality education pertains to:

The relevance of what is taught and learned to how well it fits the present and future needs of the particular learners in question, given their particular circumstances and prospects. It also refers to significant changes in the educational system itself, in the nature of its inputs (students, teachers, facilities, equipment, and supplies); its objectives, curriculum and educational technologies; and its socioeconomic, cultural and political environment (p. 105).

MacBeath et al., (1996), stressed that many students have the understanding of quality education as a fair system where their skills are awarded and where their achievements are acknowledged, for parents, quality education means a school where the students are safe and where they can learn in a stimulating environment, and for many teachers, the concept of quality education is a school where the students want to learn and where the working conditions are good.

Quality education in the context of Botswana secondary school education system is a fundamental human right, which aims to promote all round development of the individual, fostering of intellectual growth and creativity, empowerment of citizens to achieve their full potential, encouragement of moral, ethical and social values, cultural identity, self-esteem and good citizenship, and preparation of citizens to participate actively in further developing the principle of democracy. This is the Government of Botswana's philosophy on educating the youths in the society. This means that there should be quality secondary education for Botswana students, which should be indispensable in creating a bright future for individuals. Botswana also views education as one of the factors which contributes to the nation's development, according to the mission statement of Botswana educational system "To provide quality education and training that is accessible to all learners through efficient and effective management of resources to enable learners attain their full potential and contribute to national development" and the vision statement "To be a provider of world-class, quality and accessible education and training" (NDP 2009). This means that quality education should be paramount in all the educational systems in Botswana and especially in the secondary

schools in order to achieve the stated visions and missions statements of the educational developments of Botswana citizens. The school should be in the fore front of providing quality education to students in the basic school system and secondary schools, for effective learning outcomes and to enable the students function effectively and efficiently in the society, after acquiring adequate knowledge.

The Problem of the Study

The issue of quality education has been discussed in many fora in Botswana and the media is on the forefront especially with regards to the achievement of the country's vision for 2016, which envisions 'an educated and well informed nation' by 2016. But the issue of quality education is under scrutiny based on poor academic performance in schools and public examinations. Many students are leaving or graduating from secondary schools as unprepared products for the society, and most of them are not fully prepared to meet the future needs of the country. Since secondary education is the gateway to opportunities and benefits of economic and social development in any country, and without quality education at this level, Botswana will not be able to achieve the stated vision. It is necessary to explore the perception of University of Botswana undergraduate education students on the concept of quality education, since they are the future teachers who will provide quality education at the secondary school educational system in Botswana. If these undergraduate education students have the correct perspective on the concept of quality education, they will be able to provide students with adequate learning opportunities which will lead to effective learning outcomes. According to World Bank, lack of quality is a major problem in many educational systems: 'The quality of Education is poor at all levels in low- and middle-income countries. Students in developing countries have a mean level of achievement below that in industrial countries, and their performance shows (remove s) a much greater variance around the mean' (p. 3). This means that there is a huge need to improve quality in many countries educational system especially at the basic and secondary school levels.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how university undergraduate education students perceive the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in the Botswana secondary school educational system and the following research questions will be addressed:

- (i) How do undergraduate education students' perceive the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in the secondary school system?
- (ii) Is there any gender significant difference in the undergraduate education students' perceptions on the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in the secondary school system?

Significance of the Study

This research study will be of significance to the educational system in Botswana, Ministry of Education, teachers, students and secondary schools in Botswana to put more emphasis on the concept of quality education in Botswana secondary school educational system. This study may also be an eye opener on how to train future teachers on the concept of quality education and it is expected that these future teachers should be able to improve the quality of education provided to students in Botswana secondary schools and it can raise the standard of performance of students.

Literature Review

The Concept of Quality Education

Most of the participants who attended the UNESCO (2003) conference viewed quality of education as the learning outcomes of students, with regards to the input and process in

schools, which should also have quality in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, excellence, and social justice. They emphasised that the quality education output can be achieved only if quality is ensured at each level of the educational process from standard setting, learning environment, teacher training, teacher-learning process, assessment and monitoring. (p.10).

The participants at UNESCO (2010) suggested that quality education in any educational system should provide a child with the following:

- A better quality of life,
- Access to opportunities leading to a productive life
- The potential to find answers to problems
- Education that contributed to peace.
- The knowledge of and respect for history, culture, music and the environment in which the child lives.
- A healthy lifestyle, quality in relationships, family and community life, and knowledge of financial management for life after school.

Most of the participants agreed that there were barriers hindering the provision of quality education in the any educational system, especially in many of the developing countries. Such as:

- Opportunities for employment and promotion for educators
- Enrolment in tertiary education
- Opportunities for adult education
- A realistic teacher:student ratio
- Adequate qualifications for teachers, salaries and conditions of service
- Infrastructure that meets the needs of students and staff
- Resources for students to acquire numeracy and literacy skills

UNESCO's International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (often referred to as the Delors Commission after its chairperson and former EU Commissioner Jacques Delors) published in 1996 its report on *Learning: The Treasure Within*. In this report they concluded that: "... a greater focus on quality is desirable everywhere, even in countries where all children are enrolled in basic education" (p.120). It can be noted that quality has since the eighties become a key concept in the education discussion.

The participants at the UNESCO (2010) conference suggested reasons for the decline in quality education as follows:

- Curriculum which is inadequate for a globalized world
- Costs of education via the provision of buildings and facilities, teaching and learning resources and school uniforms
- Provision of suitable learning environments
- Inadequately trained and financially rewarded teachers together with a decline in the perceived value of teaching as a profession
- Poor literacy and numeracy
- Lack of clear pathways to enable lifelong learning.

Human Development Network (2002), explained the concept of quality education as 'The long-term goal in education is nothing less than to ensure everyone completes a basic education of adequate quality, acquires foundation skills in literacy, numeracy, reasoning and social skills such as teamwork, and has further opportunities to learn advanced skills throughout life, in a range of post-basic education settings' (pg 431).

Chitty (2002), identified three main educational approaches to quality education, namely: human fulfilment (which in the school setting involves the students to be satisfied with the

teaching and learning outcomes) preparation for the world of work (students should be prepared to utilise the knowledge they have acquired from schools) and contributing to social progress and social change (The school should be able to prepare students to contribute to the society).

The perceptions of Namibia teachers were drawn from a study USAID/EQUIP1 on the issue of quality education in which in-depth open-ended interviews were carried out with a core group of 40 grade 4 teachers in 20 rural schools of northern Namibia. Interviews were also carried out with other stakeholders - principals, parents, and students - at the 20 schools. Teachers viewed quality education primarily in terms of outcomes. Firstly, they focused on learning as a means to achieve students' individual goals: good results and performance leading to the skills for employment in the future. Secondly, teachers discussed quality education in terms of fulfilling the needs of the community and country. They described socially appropriate behavior and community commitment as also an important vision of quality education.

The World Bank reported on primary education in India (World Bank, 1997) examined a number of recent research reports. The conclusion from these reports was that the quality of education in Indian schools was poor. Students in grade 5 had often only learned half of what they were supposed to have learned in grade 4. In the state of Mahdy Pradesh 70% of the students in grade 4 and 60% of the students in grade 5, in what was referred to as "privileged urban areas", had not achieved the level prescribed in the curriculum for grade 2 in Hindi and mathematics. The content of the curriculum was mainly transmitted through the textbooks and they were regarded to be too theoretical and of little relevance in the reality in which the students lived.

From the reviewed of literature, it can be concluded that there is still the need to improve quality education in the educational system of many countries around the world and especially in Africa.

Methodology

The population for this study comprised of 185 (200 level University of Botswana undergraduate Education students), all the 185 students were given the questionnaire to respond to, out of which 165 students responded to the questionnaire. The undergraduate education students were used for this study, because they will soon be future classroom teachers and will be required after their training at the University of Botswana to provide secondary school students with quality education for effective learning outcomes.

The Instrument

The designed questionnaire for this study consisted of 35 statements and based on the concept of quality education from literature (remove*quality education) and from UNICEF (2000) approach to quality education in schools. UNICEF (2000) strongly emphasises what might be called desirable dimensions of quality as identified in the Dakar framework which recognised five dimensions of quality education. These five dimensions were in the areas of learners (Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities), environments (Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities) content(Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace), process (Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities) and outcomes(Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society) founded on the rights of the whole child, and all children, to survival, protection, development and participation (UNICEF

2000). Seven (7) statements were generated for each dimension, experts validated the instrument and the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha was 0.893. The undergraduate students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed on the various statements about their conceptions of quality education for effective learning outcomes for secondary schools. The rating scale of SD for Strongly Disagreed, D for Disagreed, A for Agreed and SA for Strongly Agreed were used. The responses of the students were awarded 1 for SD, 2 for D, 3 for A and 4 for SA. The responses were analysed using data SPSS 18.0 Statistical Software to find the mean responses, standard deviations and one-sample test-values (t-value of 2.5). In one-sample t-test, the observed mean (from a single sample) is compared to an expected (or reference) mean of the population (e.g., some theoretical mean), and the variation in the population is estimated based on the variation in the observed sample.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 1: Analysis of responses by the undergraduate students on their conceptions of quality education for effective learning outcomes within the secondary school system.

The concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in secondary schools should be as follows:	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	significance
Learners				
Item 1. Students' special interests, talents and skills should be developed.	3.0424	.71013	9.812	.000
Item 2. The education provided in secondary schools should prepare students for working life.	3.1030	.77793	9.957	.000
Item 3. Schools should aim at developing students' abilities to assess their professional achievement and capabilities realistically in pursuit of employment opportunities.	2.8000	.93834	4.107	.000
Item 4. Students should be prepared as leaders in order to be able to respond to the nation's cultural needs.	2.7152	.89583	3.085	.002
Item 5. Students should be prepared as leaders in order to be able to respond to the nation's technological and industrial needs.	2.8000	.81300	4.740	.000
Item 6. Students should be prepared as independent, confident, self directed and critical thinkers.	2.8970	.80867	6.306	.000
Item 7. Students should be developed to be competent and have confidence in applying computational skills in order to be able to solve day-to-day problems.	3.1152	.83670	9.444	.000
Environment				
Item 8. The school atmosphere should always be friendly and accomodating to students.	2.8333	.85207	3.567	.000
Item 9. Student-centred intellectual stimulating environment should be provided for effective learning outcomes.	3.1818	1.06079	8.256	.000
Item 10. Students should be provided with adequate resources and facilities to learn.	2.9273	1.16118	4.727	.000
Item 11. Learning environments for students should be very protective always healthy and safe.	2.1879	.88750	-4.517	.000
Item 12. Schools should provide suitable learning environments that are gender-sensitive.	2.6485	1.18325	1.612	.109
Item 13. There should be provision of infrastructure that meets the needs of students and staff.	3.2061	.99079	9.154	.000
Item 14. Students should be provided with adequate library facilities and enough up to date books for use.	2.9424	1.03565	5.234	.000
Content				
Item 15. Schools should provide students with diversified content	2.3939	1.24791	-1.092	.277

to accommodate for different abilities.				
Item 16. Students should be exposed to curriculum contents that were current.	2.7636	1.08701	3.115	.002
Item 17. Students should be exposed to social marketable and competitive skills that can be used nationally and internationally.	2.5758	.97625	.997	.320
Item 18. Students should be provided with skills and attitudes that are linked to national goals of education and positive participation in society.	2.9939	1.12887	5.620	.000
Item 19. Students should be offered quality academic and professional programmes that ensure a commitment and a mastery of life-long learning skills.	3.2848	1.11424	9.048	.000
Item 20. Students should be provided with skills and attitudes that are positively related to the societal needs.	2.8182	1.02096	3.456	.000
Process				
Item 22. Good teaching strategies used for effective learning outcomes.	3.2061	1.06208	8.539	.000
Item 23. Classroom teachers should be friendly and very approachable for students effective learning outcomes	2.9212	.99993	5.411	.000
Item 24. Schools should provide students with high level human resources for effective learning in schools.	3.0364	.99933	6.894	.000
Item 25. Students should be provided with adequate library facilities and enough up to date books for use.	2.7333	1.03672	2.891	.004
Item 26. Teachers should always encourage and develop a spirit of critical enquiry in students.	2.5455	.95926	.609	.544
Item 27. Adequate questioning techniques should be used in the classrooms for effective learning outcomes.	2.8545	1.15428	3.945	.000
Item 28. Teachers should understand and know their subjects very well.	3.0303	.95269	7.150	.000
Outcomes				
Item 29. Students produced in schools should be independent, confident, self directed and critical thinkers.	2.1212	.92912	-5.237	.000
Item 30. Students should be prepared as leaders in order to be able to respond to the nation's cultural, economic, political scientific, social, technological and industrial needs.	2.8667	1.12366	4.192	.000
Item 31. The abilities of students should be developed to assess their personal achievement and capabilities realistically in pursuit of appropriate career/employment opportunities/ possibilities and/or further education.	3.1758	1.05894	8.197	.000
Item 32. Students should be developed to appreciate their culture including languages, traditions, songs, ceremonies, customs, and social norms.	2.7758	.95860	3.695	.000
Item 33. Students should be able to acquire the knowledge and understanding of society and sense of citizenship.	2.8545	1.14367	3.982	.000
Item 34. Students' desirable attitudes/behavioural patterns to be developed for interaction with the learning environment in a manner that is protective, preserving, and nurturing.	2.7758	1.03212	3.432	.001
Item 35. Students should be developed to be competent and have confidence in applying computational skills to order to be able to solve day-to-day problems.	2.6545	.88106	2.253	.026

From table 1 above, the mean responses of undergraduate students ranged from 2.1697 to 3.7455, The t- value for 164 degrees of freedom at 0.05 significant level is 1.6542, all the t-values that are greater than 1.6542 were significant, that is t values > 1.6542 with p<0.05 were significant. The undergraduate education students perceived the statements with t-value greater than 1.6542 with p<0.05 as significant concepts of quality education for effective learning outcomes in secondary schools, and t-values less than 1.6542 with p>0.05 were

perceived as not significant concepts of quality education for effective learning outcomes in secondary schools.

In table 2 the results of the independent t-test on the gender significant difference of the undergraduate education students' perceptions on the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in secondary schools revealed that there were gender significant differences in items (3, 7, 18, 24, 27 and 28). In items (3, 7, 24 and 28) the mean responses for the male students were greater than the mean responses of the female students with p-values less than 0.05. It can be observed that the male students perceived these items as part of the concepts of quality education more than the female students. For items (18 and 27), the mean responses for the female students were greater than the mean responses of the male students with p-values less than 0.05, for these items, the female students perceived these items as concepts of quality education more than the male students.

Table 2: Results of the independent t-test on the gender significant difference in the perceptions of the undergraduate education students on the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in secondary schools.

The gender significant difference in the perceptions of the undergraduate education students on the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in secondary schools.	gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	significance
Item 3. Schools should aim at developing students' abilities to assess their professional achievement and capabilities realistically in pursuit of employment opportunities.	male 78	3.0000	.93189	2.486	.014***
	female 87	2.6437	.90190	2.481	.014***
Item 7. Students should be developed to be competent and have confidence in applying computational skills in order to be able to solve day-to-day problems.	male 78	3.3247	.78542	2.947	.004***
	female 87	2.9540	.81993	2.954	.004***
Item 18. Students should be provided with skills and attitudes that are linked to national goals of education and positive participation in society.	male 78	2.8052	1.18142	-2.183	.030***
	female 87	3.1839	1.04022	-2.166	.032***
Item 24. Schools should provide students with high level human resources for effective learning in schools.	male 78	3.2857	1.07431	3.160	.002***
	female 87	2.8046	.87390	3.121	.002***
Item 27. Adequate questioning techniques should be used in the classrooms for effective learning outcomes.	male 78	2.6623	1.17664	-2.159	.032***
	female 87	3.0460	1.09871	-2.149	.033***
Item 28. Teachers should understand and know their subjects very well.	male 78	3.2597	1.00528	3.052	.003***
	female 87	2.8161	.85629	3.022	.003***

Discussion

(i) How do undergraduate education students' perceive the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in the secondary school system?

The UB undergraduate education students perceptions on the concept of quality education were in line with UNICEF (2000) dimensions of quality education as identified in the Dakar Framework to a large extent for effective learning outcomes in the secondary school system. Dakar Framework paper in Defining Quality Education recognised five dimensions of quality: Learners, Environments, Contents, Processes and Outcomes, which were also recognised by the undergraduate education students. These undergraduate students have the right perceptions on the concept of quality education, but they failed to perceive the following as concepts of quality education.

- **Item 12** Schools should provide suitable learning environments that are gender sensitive.
- **Item 15** Schools should provide students with diversified content to accommodate for different abilities.
- **Item 17** Students should be exposed to social marketable and competitive skills that can be used nationally and internationally.
- **Item 26** Teachers should always encourage and develop a spirit of critical enquiry in students.

These five dimensions were all founded on the rights of the whole child and all children, to enable them survive, are protected and provide for their development and participation in the society. UNESCO also viewed good- quality education as a human right and supports rights-based approach to all educational activities (Pigozzi, 2004). Learning was perceived to be affected at two levels by UNESCO (2004) conference as follows:

- At the level of the learner, education needs to seek out and acknowledge learner's prior knowledge, to recognise formal and informal modes, to practice non-discrimination and to provide a safe and supportive learning environment.
- At the level of the learning system, a supportive structure is needed to implement policies, enact legislation, and distribute resources and measure learning outcomes, so as to have the best possible impact on learning for all.

Is there any gender significant difference in the undergraduate education students' perceptions on the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in the secondary school system?

There were gender significant differences in the undergraduate education students' perceptions on the concept of quality education for effective learning outcomes in the secondary school educational system in the following areas:

- **Item 3** Schools should aim at developing students' abilities to assess their professional achievement and capabilities realistically in pursuit of employment opportunities.
- **Item 7** Students should be developed to be competent and have confidence in applying computational skills in order to be able to solve day-to-day problems.
- **Item 18** Students should be provided with skills and attitudes that are linked to national goals of education and positive participation in society.
- **Item 24** Schools should provide students with high level human resources for effective learning in schools.
- **Item 27** Adequate questioning techniques should be used in the classrooms for effective learning outcomes.
- **Item 28** Teachers should understand and know their subjects very well.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The perceptions of the UB undergraduate education students on quality education should be an eye opener on the way forward to re-orientate undergraduate education students who will be future secondary school teachers on the concepts of quality education for effective learning outcomes in Botswana secondary school educational system. It is therefore recommended that to improve the quality of education, schools, teacher training institutions in Botswana should be in place the following:

- (i) Revising and updating the teaching curricula and teaching materials.

- (ii) Improving school facilities.
- (iii) Having effective school leadership.
- (iv) Principals of schools should organize constant training programmes in terms of seminars, conferences and workshops for teachers on the concepts of quality education.
- (v) Teacher training institutions should also expose their students to the concepts of quality education.
- (vi) Teachers should also be encouraged to work towards facilitating quality education in terms of effective teaching and learning outcomes in Botswana secondary schools educational systems.

In conclusion based on the recommendations in Dakar Framework for Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as in a number of other international conventions, it can be concluded that every one has the right not only to receive education, but to receive education of high quality. Therefore a quality education system should provide all learners at every stage of the education system, a comprehensive education and prepare them for working life, life in the society and private life. This means that quality education should be advocated for effective learning outcomes in any educational system.

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