

Perceptions of Students, Lecturers and Administrators
of the Administration of the Executive Masters of
Business Administration (EMBA) Programme at Africa
University, Mutare, Zimbabwe

Stanislas Bigirimana, Phd

Faculty of Management and Administration, Africa University

PO BOX 1320 Mutare, Zimbabwe

E-mail: sbigirimanaus@yahoo.com

Prof Nelson Jagero, Phd

Faculty of Human Resource Development and Education, Chuka University

PO BOX 109 Chuka Kenya

E-mail: jageronelson@yahoo.com

Joseph Chinzvende, EMBA

Department of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Africa University

PO BOX 1320 Mutare, Zimbabwe

E-mail: chinzvendej@africau.edu

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to assess the perception of the role of services departments i.e. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), library, registry and business office towards the EMBA program. Questionnaires were distributed to students, lecturers and administrators of the EMBA program. Record sampling and direct observations were other methods used to collect data. Responses from the questionnaires were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. The analysis showed that there is need for improved quality of service in support departments to the EMBA program.

Keywords: executive education, EMBA, business education, non-conventional programmes

1. Introduction

Africa University is the first fully accredited United Methodist-related institution of higher learning on the African continent. It was established by the action of the United Methodist General Conference in 1992. Moreover, Africa University is the first private university in Zimbabwe (Africa University Prospectus, 2005-2007). Africa University is located in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe, in a city called Mutare in the Manicaland Province. The majority of faculty and administrative staff are Africans, who serve alongside visiting educators from the United States, Europe, and other parts of the world. The official language at the university is English. The vision of Africa University is to become a world class university for leadership development in Africa. The mission of Africa University is to provide quality education within a Pan-African context through persons who acquire general and professional knowledge and skills, grow in spiritual maturity, and develop sound moral values, ethics and leadership qualities.

The Executive Masters of Business Administration (EMBA) Program was established at Africa University in 1998 targeting experienced managers seeking advanced business training in addition to their undergraduate degrees. The program is offered during weekends on a modular. In 2009, the programme was run on two additional campuses, one in Harare, Zimbabwe and another in Maputo, Mozambique.

2. Research Problem

Africa University is located in Mutare the fourth largest city in Zimbabwe and offers various academic programs including the full-time Masters of Business Administration (MBA), and the executive MBA on a part-time modular basis during weekends. Customer service is now top priority in most educational institutions. Universities are no longer perceived as national service providers but as businesses. At Africa University, there are departments dedicated to providing service. These include Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), library, Registry and Business office. This study aims at establishing the impression of students, lecturers and administrators on the role of these service departments towards the Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) program.

3. Literature Review

The Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) program is a university-based approach to executive education. It is designed specifically for working business professionals so that students can complete a program with minimal work interruption. (Carrel & Schoenbachler, 2001) EMBA programs are a by-product of non-credit management training programs. Early management training programs were designed for executives from large corporations and typically included four weeks of courses. Companies sent managers to executive programs in an effort to enhance skills, win loyalty from employees, and gain a competitive edge in the marketplace. In some countries, EMBA were offered along non-degree programs as “mini MBAs”, directors’ seminars, corporate retreats, and training programs in subject-specific areas like negotiations, leadership, or marketing. (Simmons, Wright, & Jones, 2006, 29-42)

The first EMBA program was offered in 1943 at the University of Chicago. More than 20 years passed before the second EMBA program was developed at Michigan State University. By the end of the 1970s, there were 34 EMBA programs in the United States and today there are 140 EMBA programs in the United States alone. These programs are members of the EMBA Council, a professional group representing universities and colleges throughout the world (Daniel, 1998).

Programs vary with regard to how they are structured. Some offer intensive classes over weekends, while others utilise an intensive modular approach during which students are required to attend classes in blocks varying from one to three or four weeks. (Page, Bevelander, & Pitt, 2004). Many business education scholars advocate redesign of MBA programs to exploit the emerging opportunities and interests of new generations of students given the increasing professionalization of management. Accrediting agencies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) in the US urge business schools to adopt strategic management processes to address change in the business environment. (Drew 2011) For instance, the number of programs in entrepreneurship and related disciplines has increased enormously (Welsh & Carraher, 2009). A common structural change is the creation of a center or institute to act as a catalyst or focus for an important future-directed activity. A large percentage of universities now have Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) to fulfil local and regional outreach mandates.

Similarly leadership centres are established to provide executive development programs. (Drew, 2011). Further, Drew (2011) notes that “a center may focus on teaching, research or outreach, and attune its own mission to the mission of the school and university of which it is a part. Drew (2011) also argues that, “establishment of a “center of excellence” is a common mechanism for promoting faculty expertise and institutional core competencies in particular areas. A center may be created and supported as part of an institutional branding and reputation-building strategy”.

Although the number of companies sponsoring employees on an EMBA is dwindling, the EMBA market has continued to grow, and for many business schools this product may be the only star in a rather dismal universe. (Page, Bevelander, & Pitt, 2004: 3) Nevertheless, there is sometimes a feeling that EMBA programs must become more proactive in recruiting both students and sponsoring organizations. (Carrel & Schoenbachler, 2001) Institutions offering EMBA programs must respond to market needs (Baruch & Leeming, 1996). According to Sharkey and Beeman (2008) the EMBA market would be the first to become hypercompetitive because of its connectedness to businesses, importance to universities, and attractiveness to students. They further argue that, it is widely accepted in the business world that the holder of an EMBA has received top-notch instruction in the latest business theories, as well as exposure to direct practical application of theoretical knowledge. The EMBA degree becomes then the “seal of approval” that the person being hired is well trained, bright and ambitious. National universities compete on the basis of prestige, reputations and rankings; while, regional universities compete for location-bound individuals on the basis of convenience and timing.

For nationally known EMBA programs, an important component of their competitive strategy was maintaining or increasing their ranking by accreditation bodies. Further Sharkey and Beeman (2008) reports that “this reputation-centred competition was largely limited to the top 20 programs”. For most of the other thousands of colleges and universities, ranking was a non-issue. These schools faced localized competitive pressure that was centred more on cost and accessibility than reputation. As a result, high-quality night programs were developed in response to those students who worked during the day. The rapid growth of such programs indicated the overwhelming desire of customers for the EMBA degree.

Furthermore, developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) were lowering the costs of offerings off-campus, distance learning, modular, or weekend programs in other geographic areas. As a result, colleges and universities began to present existing programs in the “home markets” of other schools, thus creating increased rivalry. Many new players began to offer an executive MBA or similar degrees, among new entrants were

corporations and universities from outside the USA (Tay, 2001). As enrolment in these new programs grew, the number and quality of students in the “regular” MBA declined. MBA programs were now experiencing competition from inside their own university as well as outside. As a result, both revenue and enrolment suffered.

In Zimbabwe, the executive MBA program is offered by both private and state universities. University admissions and EMBA programs have become commercial activities. This is particularly true for MBA programs, which are in many cases flagship programs for colleges of business. The quality of the Executive MBA program has a direct impact on how alumni and the business community perceive the entire college or university. Tay (2001) also reports that since most of these schools lack brand identity, accreditation, reputation, alumni network, and so forth, they have little basis for competition except service, promotion and cost.

However, student satisfaction is not determined solely by students’ teaching and learning experiences as a customer of a particular institution (Henning-Thurau, Lager, & Hansen, 2001). A new generation of students has entered the universities and has a new set of expectations. The introduction of tuition fees and the phasing out of government grants to university students has led students to act more like customers. Many times you can hear them demanding value for money. Student’s expectations are now high. They include flexibility and choice in the delivery of education, access to cutting edge technology, and a two way communication process between themselves and the institution. Most students expect: (1) to be consulted about their learning experience, (2) accurate information about their courses, assessment procedures and complaint processes, (3) honesty with respect to whether their needs can be met or not, (4) quality and professionalism in the provision of service, (5) value of study to career prospects. Students today are driven primarily from the employability prospects and personal wealth creation that a degree can offer. They reject outright the traditional idea that higher education is an immersion into a subject area that can change them as persons.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The research design is qualitative in nature. Qualitative studies seek to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the population it involves. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of particular populations. Quantitative research of a survey type was used because the researcher wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the causes of the decline in enrolment of students in the EMBA program at Africa University.

4.2 Research Instruments

Questionnaires, record sampling, direct observation and guided interviews were used.

Secondary data were collected through document analysis.

4.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Africa University has more than 350 junior and senior members of staff. The target population were the lecturers teaching in the EMBA program, the students in the EMBA program and administrators who were directly involved in the program. The target population was made of students, lecturers and administrators. In this study, a purposive sampling technique was used to assess the perceptions of the service providers to the EMBA program at Africa University i.e. lecturers, administrators, ICT, library and business office. Administrators and lecturers were given questionnaires in their offices. For students, a simple

random sampling procedure was used because it provides equal opportunity of selection for each element in a population. Questionnaires were placed on a desk at the entrance of lecture rooms and students were requested to pick them and fill them if they wished to. The total sample consisted of 50 EMBA students, 20 administrative staff and 10 lecturers who were directly involved in the teaching of courses in the EMBA program as detailed below:

Table 1. Breakdown of the sample

Section	Number of Participants
EMBA Lecturers	10
Administrators	20
EMBA Students	50

4.4 Data Presentation and Analysis

The data were presented in the form of tables, graphs and charts. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 14.0 for Windows Evaluation Version was used to further explore findings from the data so that a thorough analysis could be done.

5. Findings

5.1 Knowledge About the EMBA Program by Students

60 % of the students said they got to know about Africa University EMBA program through friends and 20% through the press as shown by Table 2 below. This might imply that former students talk about the good work at Africa University. Advertising in the press and on website also contributes to popularisation of Africa University.

The knowledge of the EMBA program by students and their source of knowledge are distributed as follows:

Table 2. Knowledge about the EMBA program by Students

Source	Percentage
Friends	60.0
Relatives	8.0
Press	20.0
Website	12.0
Total	100.0

5.2 Knowledge About the EMBA Program by Administrators

65 % of the administrators said they got to know about Africa University EMBA programme through friends and relatives. 30% knew about AU through the press and 5 % through the university website.

Table 3. Knowledge about the EMBA programme by Administrators

Know About Africa University					
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Cumulative %
Valid	Friends	8	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Relatives	5	25.0	25.0	65.0
	Press	6	30.0	30.0	95.0
	Website	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

5.3 Intention to Recommend Someone to Study at Africa University

On the question whether students would recommend someone to apply for study at Africa University, Figure 1 shows that more than half of the student respondents would recommend someone to study at AU.

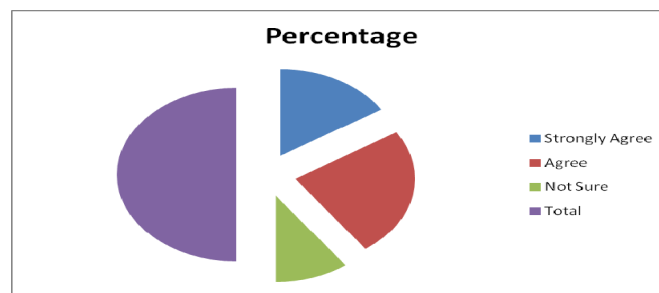


Figure 1. Intention to recommend someone to study at Africa University

5.4 Service Delivery by Various Service Departments

Table 4 shows a summary of responses of students, lecturers and administrative staff to the service departments at Africa University. The service departments were ICT, Library, Registry and Business office (Accounts). The response of by those or strongly agreed were summed up to make at total of agreed for students, lecturers and administrators. The result showed there is a significant difference in the proportion of lectures who agreed with the services offered by the service department mentioned and that of the students. This difference may be due to students who just want more than what is provided.

Table 4. Summary of Service Department (Quality service Offered)

Library Support	Lecturers	Students	Admin
Reliability	100	48	50
Assurance	100	44	95
Responsiveness	60	45	60
Communication	70	48	70
Academic Affairs	Lecturers	Students	Admin
Reliability	50	70	80
Assurance	50	80	60
Responsiveness	60	58	70
Communication	70	66	75
ICT Support	Lecturers	Students	Admin
Reliability	75	70	65
Assurance	80	48	70
Responsiveness	60	40	75
Communication	80	30	85
Accounts	Lecturers	Students	Admin
Reliability	80	40	75
Assurance	75	60	70
Responsiveness	80	30	85
Communication	80	45	70

5.4.1 Service Delivery by The ICTs Department

The Figure 2 below shows a summary of service delivery by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). ICTs are used for teaching, learning and internet availability. Figure 4 below shows that 80 % of the lecturers agreed that they use ICTs in the teaching /learning process. 76% of the student s agreed that ICTs are used in the teaching learning process and 75 % of the administrative staff agreed that ICTs are used in the teaching/ learning process as shown by Figure 2 below.

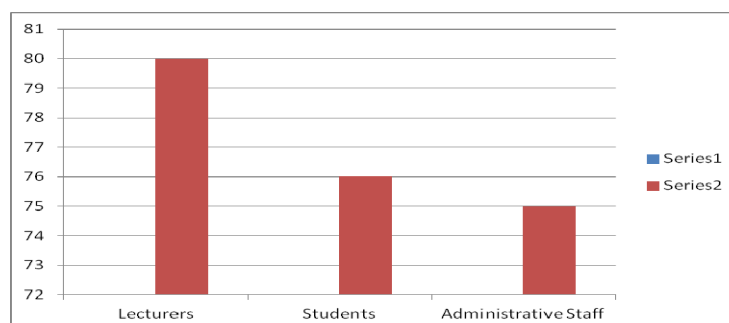


Figure 2. Degree of Use of ICTs in Teaching, Learning and Internet Access

The quality of the service offered has been measured following four criteria namely reliability, quality assurance, reponsiveness and communication. On ICT the lecturers generally agreed that the service is reliable and there is assurance of business continuity. However they indicated that the department is not responsive. The students indicated that the department is

reliable but they are not sure of business continuity and responsiveness. On communication 30 % said there is communication from this department. 90% of the administrative staff agreed that the ICT department communicates any event concerning the service being offered. Figure 3 below shows the frequency distribution of service delivery in the ICTs department.

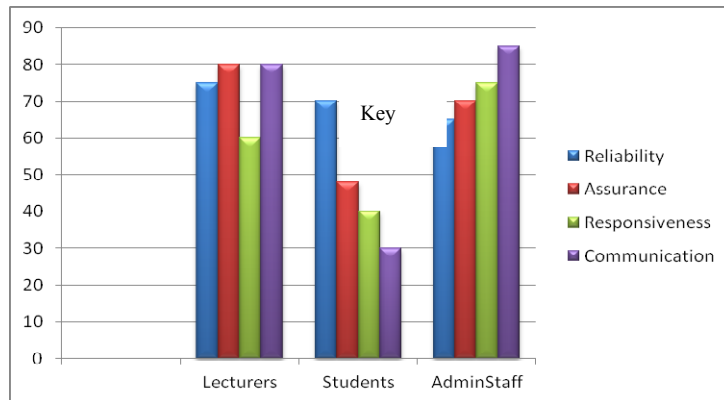


Figure 3. Frequency distribution Quality services the ICTs department

5.4.2 Service Delivery by The Library

The lecturers generally agreed that the library offers reliable service and that there is assurance of business continuity. The students response showed that 50% agreed that the library offer quality service and the other half did not agree. They expect improved service delivery. The administrative staff were slightly above the students but they expect improved service delivery from the library.

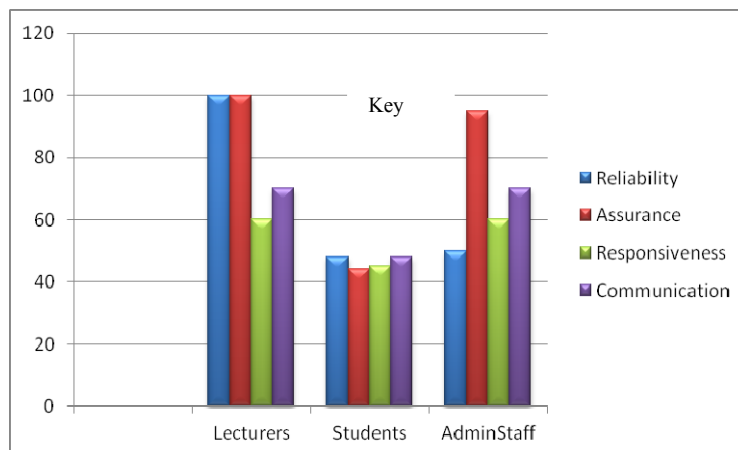


Figure 4. Frequency distribution Quality services in Library Department

5.4.3 Service Delivery by the Registry

Figure 5 below shows that 50% of the lecturers agreed that the Registry department is reliable and there is assurance of business continuity. The students generally agreed that the registry department offers good service but there is need to be responsive. The administrative staff were impressed by the service offered by the department

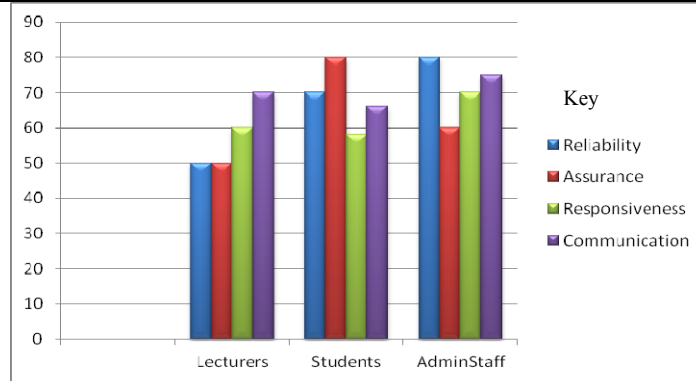


Figure 5. Frequency distribution Quality services in Registry

5.4.4. Service Delivery by The Business Office

Figure 6 shows that 80% of the lecturers agreed that the department offered good service. The students on the other hand said there is need for improved service delivery in the business office. On responsiveness only 30% agreed that the business office was responsive. Contrary the staff members tend to agree with the lecturers in that quality of service was being offered by the business office.

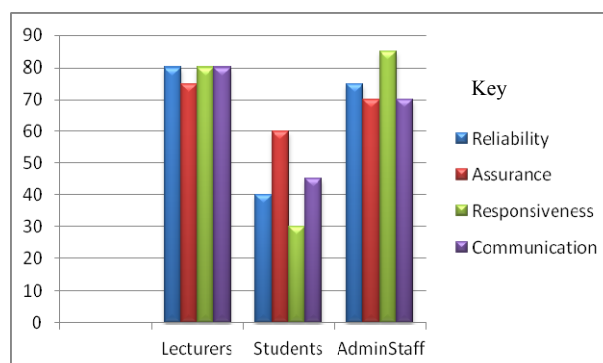


Figure 6. Frequency distribution Quality services in Business Office

6. Conclusion

The aim of the study was to investigate the perceptions of students, lecturers and administration staff towards the Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) program at Africa University with special reference to service departments i.e. ICT, library, Registry and Business office. Students generally pointed out that they did not receive communication on important activities and events on time. Students, lecturers and administrators want the quality of service offered by library, ICT, Academic affairs and business office to be improved. There was need to improve service delivery from the ICT department. The department was not visible to EMBA students. Access to computers accounts creation and orientation to the EMBA students was not done in a systematic way. There was need to invest in e-learning. The majority of the EMBA students were working and it was going to make life easier if they could access their learning materials at home or at their working places. The nature of some students required they to move from one town to another but with e-learning they can do it online. There was need to improve service delivery

from academic affairs office. Most lecturers and students agreed that the processes of application, admission, registration and publication of results needed to be improved. There were suggestions that on venues outside the Africa University main campus, the administration should ensure that these venues are conducive to learning. Two issues in particular were mentioned: noise (church services in the vicinity of the venue) and parking spaces for students' vehicles. Other suggestions are that communication among students, lecturers and administrators should be improved and that aggressive advertising and promotions were needed to rekindle the product awareness. There was need of improvement in the way student grievances are addressed given the current situation where long delays are observed. Service departments, it was suggested, should open on weekends to cater for the EMBA students. Online learning should be introduced for students to study at their workplace or even at home. Academic affairs should introduce online application, online registration and online publication of results to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Use of Electronic books, databases and other electronic resources can help make the library accessible by students who are not on campus and students should be able to check their fees statements online.

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