

Research Papers/Extended Abstracts

**Assessing the quality assurance awareness of nonacademic staff: A case study of the Faculty of Agriculture in the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka**

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**Abstract**

Nonacademic staff including administrative staff contribute immensely to conducting the university operations without disturbances. Despite being key stakeholders within the university system, their awareness of the quality assurance of university education is not adequately explored in Sri Lanka in particular. Hence, the present study intends to bridge this research gap by assessing the quality assurance awareness of nonacademic staff within the university education system and specifically by identifying the awareness of nonacademics on quality assurance. The nonacademic staff of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna was selected as the target population. The population was equal to the sample and 35 respondents were individually interviewed conveniently using a semi-structured questionnaire for primary data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods including Pearson Chi-Square Analysis were used for the data analysis. The sample consisted of 66% of males and 34% females. 69% and 31% of respondents are engaged in operational level and managerial level occupations respectively. The majority (57%) are having more than 20 years of working experience. Results revealed that 45% of the respondents are having moderate awareness of quality assurance while 34% are having slight awareness. Interestingly, none of them is having adequate awareness of quality assurance in university education. According to the results of the Pearson Chi-Square test, a marginally significant association exists between gender and the quality assurance awareness of nonacademic staff ( $p=0.056$ ). The findings concluded that the majority of the nonacademic staff are having moderate awareness of quality assurance. The majority of respondents (64%) recommended conducting workshops and training programs to educate nonacademic staff in order to enhance their awareness of the quality assurance of university education. The findings of this study will be of great significance for university administrators to further improve the quality of university education with the enhanced contribution of nonacademic staff.

**Keywords:** *Awareness, Nonacademic, Quality assurance,*

## **Introduction**

Any society's progress starts with education. Education improves good human behavior and promotes civility, economic prosperity, and a reduction in conflict. Individuals' growing intellectual capacities contribute to the general growth of any economy. Any society's foundation is higher education, and a nation's human resource quality is determined by how well its higher education institutions perform in that role. Institutional effectiveness is an applied discipline with practical implications for the betterment of the national education system, not only a developing area of theoretical academic research. There are two basic ways to approach effectiveness in any organization: from the standpoint of the interaction between the organization and its external environment and from the perspective of the institution's internal operations (Kaur & Bhalla, 2018). Stakeholders within the institution are involved in the institution's internal operations. From the perspective of university institutions, academic staff, and nonacademic staff including administrative staff are under this stakeholder's operations within the institute.

The university's main missions of teaching and learning, research, and community participation are intended to be improved by internal quality assurance. However, nothing is currently understood about whether these areas have seen improvements as a result of internal quality assurance (Tavares et al., 2017). The majority of earlier studies have looked into the effects of quality assurance generally from the perspective of academics and students (Stensaker et al., 2011), not only through internal quality control procedures but also externally (Tavares et al., 2017). However, this has not been adequately addressed in the Sri Lankan context, where the awareness of this concept is questionable. Many types of research have undergone in the educational sector regarding the exploration of the quality assurance perception of academics and undergraduates on the quality of the education and the service provided within the university system (Akareem & Hossain, 2016; Williams et al., 2013; Tavares et al., 2017; Kaur & Bhalla, 2018). The situation in the Sri Lankan context in this regard is questionable. Therefore, this research study was done to address the research gap of assessing the quality assurance awareness of nonacademic staff including the administrative staff within the university education system with the main objective of exploring and enhancing the awareness of quality assurance among the nonacademic staff attached to the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka. To identify the awareness of administrative staff on quality assurance, to find the relationship between the quality assurance awareness of the nonacademic staff and their profile, and to give suggestions to improve the quality assurance within the institute were the specific objectives.

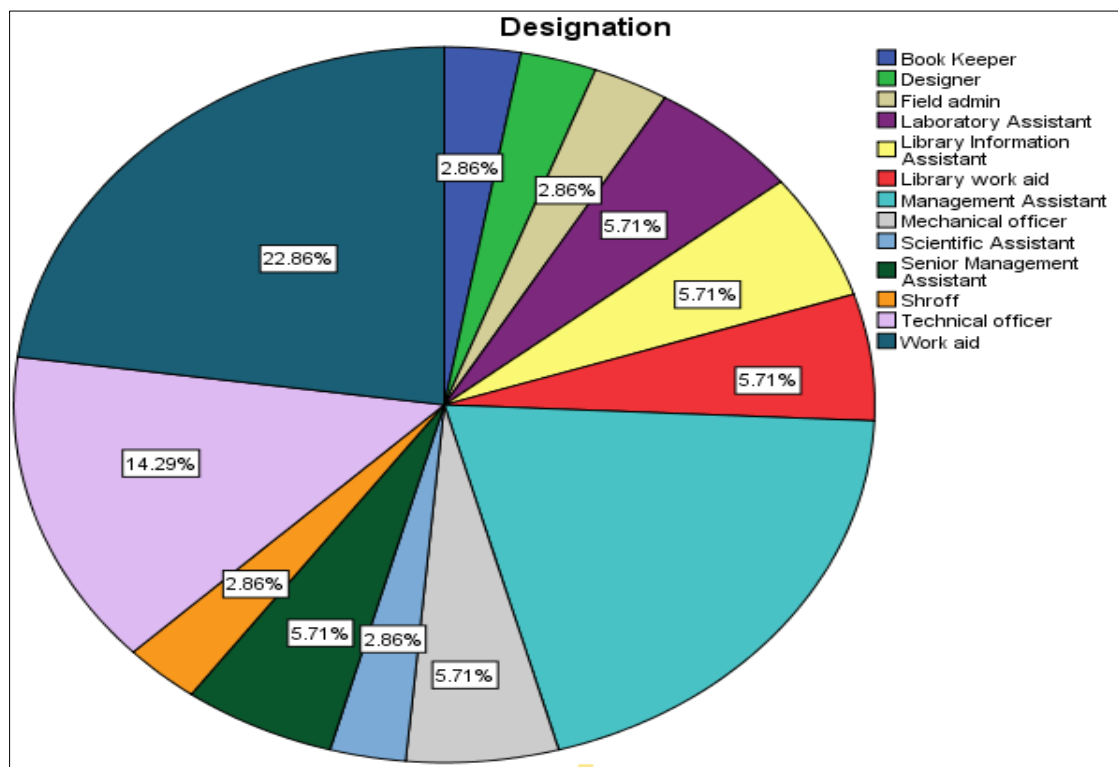
## **Methodology**

The study was carried out in the Faculty of Agriculture, the University of Ruhuna and as the population, the nonacademic staff of the faculty including administrative staff, library staff, and

departmental nonacademic staff were considered. The whole population was selected and 35 respondents were individually interviewed as per convenience through a semi-structured questionnaire for primary data collection. Awareness was measured by using the Likert scale. Primary data were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistical methods such as the chi-square test.

## Results

When considering the demographic profile of the respondents, the nonacademic staff of the faculty of agriculture, the University of Ruhuna is comprised of the administrative staff of the dean’s office, library, and the seven departments namely, the Department of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Biology, Soil Science, Food Science and Technology, Crop Science, Animal Science, Engineering and the Computer Unit. In terms of gender, 66% are male and 34% are female. According to the professional level, 69% of respondents are engaged in the operational level in terms of occupation while 31% are engaged in the managerial level. Figure 1 describes the distribution the designations of the nonacademic administrative staff dispersed in the faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna.



**Figure 1:** Designation of the nonacademic staff

**Table 1:** Results of the Pearson Chi-Square Test

| Demographic Variable       | $\chi^2$ Value | Degree of Freedom | P Value |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------|
| Gender                     | 5.411          | 3                 | 0.056   |
| Occupational Level         | 2.906          | 3                 | 0.406   |
| Working Experience (Years) | 7.986          | 12                | 0.788   |

## **Discussion**

According to Figure 1, designation of the nonacademic Staff, the majority of the staff members belong to GCE advanced level category (45.71%), while 25.71% are educated up to GCE Ordinary level. Diploma or degree holders are in similar percentages (14.29). In terms of working experience, the majority of 57.14% are of more than 20 years of working experience, 20% are of less than 5 years of working experience and 11.43% are of 5-10 years of working experience. The least percentage of 5.71% shows in diploma holders and degree holders. According to the results on the awareness of quality assurance, 45% of the respondents are having moderate awareness of quality assurance while 34% are having slight awareness. However, 5% of respondents have no idea about quality assurance while 14% are not aware at all. No one is having extreme awareness of quality assurance.

When testing the association between the demographic variables and quality assurance awareness of the administrative staff, only gender has a marginally significant association with quality assurance awareness according to the chi-square test results (Dawar & Pilutla, 2000) with the awareness of quality assurance (Table 1).

The majority of respondents (64%) suggest organizing awareness programs, workshops, and training programs for all employees within the administrative staff regarding quality assurance for improving quality assurance awareness. Educating the staff (10%), conducting formal programs and supervising them (10%), making arrangements to provide knowledge/understanding by covering up every work sector in the institution (21%), annually organizing quality assurance sessions with participation of sections of the institution (5%) are the main recommendations presented by the administrative staff of the faculty.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study of assessing the quality assurance awareness of nonacademic staff. A Case study of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna conclude that majority of the nonacademic staff are having moderate awareness of quality assurance. Only gender significantly shapes the awareness of quality assurance. Male are aware more of quality assurance than their female counterparts while the educational level, years of working experience, and level of occupation are non-significant. In terms of respondents' suggestions, it is recommended that quality assurance can be enhanced mainly by conducting workshops, and training programs to educate the employees of an organization.

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