

Internal Quality Assurance in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions : A challenge to Quality Education Delivery.

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ABSTRACT

The need for quality tertiary education has been the concern for government, management of institutions, and other stakeholders in the education enterprise. Previous studies reveal a falling standard in Nigerian tertiary education system and call for immediate checks to improve the standard through quality assurance practices. The paper examined the internal quality assurance practices in the Nigerian tertiary institutions and their challenges to quality education delivery. It further reveals the critical factors affecting internal quality assurance at the institution's level and ends with ways to improve internal quality assurance practices to ensure sustainable quality education delivery in Nigeria. Issues highlighted for improving internal quality assurance include; sensitization and re-orientation towards quality, maintaining ethical values, training, and development for all staff, integration of ICT facilities for effective networking, and many others.

KEYWORDS: Quality assurance, Education, Internal quality assurance, Tertiary institutions

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education remains at the center stage of all development of all nations in the world, both political, socio-economic, technological, and other aspects of advancement. As many countries invested heavily in education, as well, tremendous efforts are made to ensure that, education will yield the desired results. Thus, the extent to which a nation reaps the benefits of such an enormous investment largely depends on the quality of education (Archibong, 2013). Institutions now live in an increasingly competitive environment, where factors like innovation and quality management can lead to competitive advantage (Schniederjans and Schniederjans, 2015). Thus, quality remains the focus of governments, private, and all stakeholders in the education enterprise. The emergence of the knowledge economy coupled with an increasing number of tertiary institutions across the world creating competitive pressure within the industry, quality assurance is the only strategy in ensuring effective management, customer satisfaction and sustainable source of competitive advantage. While there is an increasing number of tertiary institution across the globe, there is great concern about the future, quality, and academic standard among these competing higher education institutions. Tertiary institutions served as an incubator for breeding the necessary human resources for all sectors in the economy, both public and private. Okae-Adjei (2016) cited in Coates (2006) opined that keen interest in QA has been stimulated and maintained by a range of factors including students' need for accurate information to select course of study; institutions' need for information to help them benchmark and market their performance; governments' and other stakeholders' need for information to seek for funding, develop policy and ensure accountability. For these and other reasons, the phenomenon has become part of the fabric of many

tertiary institutions. Ryan, (2015) cited in Karaim, (2011) posits the global demand for higher education to hits 263 million students by 2025, an increase from a little less than 100 million. The increasing demand for higher education will lead to an increase in quality assurance practices, mainly due to the internationalization of higher education.

Internal quality assurance forms the basis or primary source of quality checks in quality assurance practices. Thus tertiary institutions put in place the internal quality assurance mechanism that will not only ensure the smooth running of the system but the overall quality of education, customer satisfaction, and achieve competitive advantage. While there is a rising number of tertiary institutions (public and private) in Nigeria today, there is also challenges of academic standard within the education enterprise, factors like underfunding, frequent strike actions, inadequate teaching, and learning facilities, weak management, employment and training of qualified teaching and non-teaching staff, students' admission and rising enrolment figures, examination malpractice and other students' misbehaviors are common among the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Internal quality assurance practices if effectively put in place, will reduce these challenges and improve the quality of education in the country.

In Nigeria today, there are more than 300 hundred tertiary institutions, ranging from universities, colleges of education and polytechnics under the three supervisory agencies; National universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for colleges of education (NCCE), National Board for technical education (NBTA). These agencies supervise the affairs of tertiary institutions in Nigeria; they established measures and standard aimed at improving the quality of education delivery in the country. The agencies perform such duties as establishing the minimum standard and its periodic reviews, developing curriculum and accreditation exercise. The success of these external quality practices depends largely on how effective internal quality assurance practices are put in place to achieve the desired goal (quality education delivery). To strengthen the internal and external quality assurance practices, higher education institutions must establish a functional quality assurance unit that will effectively establish and monitor the internal assurance practices for quality education delivery.

The paper critically examined the internal quality assurance practices in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It also brings out issues that, if implemented, will go a long way in improving them to achieve quality education delivery in the country.

II. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the paper is to examine the internal quality assurance in the Nigerian tertiary institution and the challenge for quality education delivery. While the specific objectives are, to;

- i. Identify the internal quality assurance mechanism in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
- ii. Examine the implementation of internal quality assurance in the Nigerian tertiary institutions
- iii. Determine the challenges of internal quality assurance on quality education delivery in Nigeria.

III. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Concept of Quality and Quality Assurance

Many organizations across the world have improved the quality of their products and services in order to enhance organizational performance and to be competitive(Lakhal, 2009). Recent studies have established that, while markets are growing with close competitive pressure, there is also a growing priority on quality implementation which makes it a potentially valuable way to differentiate the products or services to take competitive advantage. Thus, Quality improvement if implemented, will have positive results in cost reduction, increased productivity, and provide competitive advantages at the marketplace (Duraković, Bašić and Muhić, 2014). Recent literature described quality as doing things better with focus on incremental improvement and satisfying existing customers (Leavengood, Anderson and Daim, 2014). Meeting the needs and expectations of the people that need the product/service explains the quality of a good or service. (ISO, 2005). Additionally, organizations must adopt strategic quality orientation based on customer satisfaction and continual improvement to maintain competitive positioning of the firm, and that, involve either product or service (Wang and Wei, 2005).

Quality assurance (QA) is about ensuring that standards are specified and met consistently for a product or service (Maniku, 2008). QA ensures that there are mechanisms, procedures, and processes in place to achieve the desired quality; however, defined and measured, is delivered (Harvey and Green, 1993). In essence, quality assurance is a systematic procedure that verifies how education meets the specified conditions requisite to the actualization of its goals (Archibong, 2013). Vroeijenstijn, (1995) also described QA as systematic, structured, and continuous attention to quality, particularly quality maintenance and quality improvement. Quality assurance practices have an extended range of activities; therefore, the choice of quality measures vary from country to country and thus, make it extremely difficult to measure the quality of education. Independent private agencies conduct the ranking of tertiary institutions (universities); they usually used the data given to them by the institutions. They also used different criteria, which makes it bias to some extent.

Quality Assurance in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Many studies maintained that it is difficult to define or determine quality in education, the word quality, imported from the industrial sector to the education domain, sounds

vague, complex, and sometimes controversial (Newton, 2002). While it is essential to maintain quality in education, major stakeholders (students, teachers, government, private investors, and parents) in education enterprise see quality differently as a concept. Educational institutions with different management structure and internal mechanisms for management and standard tend to have internal control and measurement. The most important guide is the "minimum standard" established by the supervisory agency which serves as the consensus for quality measurement among the tertiary institutions along with other internally generated tools for measuring quality to achieve competitive advantage (Okae-Adjei, 2016). Quality assurance is the universal service quality approach adopted by higher education to establish, manage, and control quality standard in education. Adegbesan, (2011) underlined some needs for quality assurance in tertiary institutions in Nigeria to ensure the quality of teaching and learning as follows;

- i) QA will serve as an indispensable component of quality control strategy in education,
- ii) QA will ensure and maintain a high standard of tertiary education,
- iii) QA will assist in monitoring and supervision of education,
- iv) QA will determine the quality of the teacher input,
- v) QA will determine the adequacy of the facilities and other requirements needed to ensure quality control of education, and
- vi) QA would ensure prudent financial management to achieve the goals of quality education in the institutions.

In Nigeria, the Federal Government is responsible for regulating the education sector in terms of policy formulation and ensuring quality control (IOM, 2014). Among the three stages of formal education in Nigeria, the study will focus on the third stage, which is tertiary education. That is, education for post-secondary level, also called higher education that offers participants with post-secondary courses and engages in research activities (Scott, 2005). Similarly, the term is usually used to distinguish courses of study, as well as a result, that is, the award of a degree, diploma or similar advanced qualification, depending on the awarding institution (Lawton and Gordon, 1993). In Nigeria, people acquire tertiary education from universities, colleges of education, polytechnics or mono-technics and institutions accredited by various supervisory agencies like the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). For this paper, tertiary institutions refer to universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, and monotechnics (Shuaib, 2019).

Internal Quality Assurance and the Challenges of Quality Education in Nigeria.

Internal quality assurance practices form the basis for internal assessment within the institution's framework. It is the mechanisms established by the management as checks and measurement for meeting quality assurance standard. Internal quality assurance involves every member of the institution's community that is management and the entire staff of the institution through a close watch of quality assurance unit or department (Shuaib, 2019). Previous studies established that Internal Quality Assurance-centered approach has a more significant impact on the precise quality of teaching and learning when compared to more accountability-driven EQA mechanisms, which may not ensure quality improvement (Matei and Iwinska, 2016). The internal quality assurance structure and components include:

- i) Quality assurance unit or department.
- ii) Student assessments/evaluation.
- iii) Overall performance/output
- iv) Internal screening.
- v) Compulsory attendance to school activities for teachers and students.

The management and senate or academic board of the university, college of education or polytechnic in collaboration with supervisory agencies (NUC, NCCE, and NBTA) established the internal quality assurance mechanisms in their institutions, while the quality assurance department ensures strict compliance of the quality standard. The internal quality practices include; recruitment, selection and placement of academic staff, control of admissions, regulations of programmes at the departmental and faculty levels, examination regulations, appointment of external examiners, students' assessments and records adequate teaching and learning facilities, extracurricular activities are some of the internal quality control mechanism monitored and supervised by the institutions to achieve quality of education. Achieving this enormous task requires joint efforts and commitment of all the staff.

Challenges of Quality Tertiary Education in Nigeria.

Quite often, Nigerian tertiary education system is under severe quality challenges; these challenges are so open that, they undermined the development of many sectors across the country because tertiary institutions in Nigeria are mandated to produce a highly-skilled entrepreneurial, managerial, and technical manpower for the social and economic sectors. Besides, the higher institutions serve as the bastion of research and development, also a fundamental vehicle of economic and political development.

The quality assurance unit/department

The establishment of the quality assurance unit or department is the starting point; the unit is expected to monitor the structure of quality assurance through strict implementation of internal quality assurance practices. While some tertiary institutions do not even have the unit or department for quality assurance, those that already have, lack the professional staff to manage the unit effectively. It has become a matter of concern that all tertiary institutions should establish a quality assurance unit. The supervisory agencies should make it mandatory for all tertiary institutions to establish the structure of internal quality assurance practices starting with a unit or department that will oversee the internal quality assurance mechanism in the institution.

Internationalization of tertiary education:

Impact of globalization that turns the world into a global village is not restricted to the economic aspect also affect the education sector across the world. Tertiary institutions are competing in quality education delivery through a system of a strong network of effective service delivery. Students now move to tertiary institutions across the world, where they can obtain quality education within a reasonable time frame. Thus, if Nigeria wants to join the league of institutions that deliver quality education across the world, then the system must adopt changes that will attract quality students from different walks of life.

Falling standard of education:

Investigation shows that there is a significant decline in standards of education in Nigeria. After Nigeria's independence with few tertiary institutions across the country the standard was good, but, at later years, with population explosion coupled with an increasing number of tertiary institutions across the country, the standard of tertiary education started falling. At the time when government budgetary allocation keeps diminishing year after year, which means, underfunding, leading to inadequate learning facilities, shortage of qualified teaching staff, increasing number of enrolment, and unclear standard measurement. These and other reasons led to the quality of graduate output from the Nigerian tertiary institutions hurt the economy in terms of supply of quality workforce necessary for the socio-economic development of the nation (Archibong, 2013).

Frequent and unnecessary strike action

Academic programmes and activities are always truncated by frequent and unnecessary industrial action by both members of academic and non-academic. In practice, strike action may take from a one-week warning to total strike action that may last six months to one year or more. Previous studies indicated that the quality of tertiary education is grossly affected by many strike actions in Nigeria. Offem, Anashie, and Aniah, (2018) opined that strike actions abruptly affect the activities of the entire institution's management including planning and effective decision making by disrupting the academic calendar,

programmes, and plans. In 2018 alone, almost all staff associations (academic and non-academic) of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria spent more than four-month on strike, putting on hold all activities of the institutions, this is in addition to the general strike action by the Nigeria labour congress (Shuaib, 2019).

Global competitiveness and development

While developed economies invested heavily in education, which serves as a source of their development and advancement, Nigerian tertiary education is left behind with much records of deficiencies. The employers of labour received little from the bulk of graduates of the country's tertiary institutions. The curriculum should reflect the demand of the labour market and should maintain a periodic review to reflect the changing pattern of the industries.

Gross under funding

The United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends 26% of the national budget to education, and that is the minimum requirement or recommendation. However, the budgetary allocation to education reflects the negligence of most developing countries to education sectors. Consider the Nigeria's budgetary allocation from 2010 to 2018 as an example of how government deliberately undermined the quality of education by compromising the quality standard with gross underfunding of the education sector, in 2010 - 4.83%, then rose to 10.6% in 2014, 2015 - 9.5% then keep falling in 2016 - 8.2, 2017 - 8% and 2018 - 7.04% (Bogoro, 2015; Salami, 2017; Adedigba, 2017).

Lack of confidence in the system and the politics of world ranking

Many parents and stakeholders particularly the rich and elites have lost confidence in the Nigerian tertiary education system as such they resolve in sending their children abroad to study. Similarly, Nigerian universities have not join the league of world class universities based on the global ranking of universities. Example, Nigeria was ranked 44 after Kenya, Ghana and South Africa in the ranking of African Universities (Adebayo 2007). Nigeria's population is estimated at of over 180 million with more than 160 universities, but, none of the Nigerian university is regarded as World Class. In contrast, South Africa, with a population of 51.77 million people and less than 50 universities, has a number of her universities rated as World Class (Akubuilu and Okorie, 2013).

Improving Internal Quality Assurance in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

The management and entire communities of the Nigerian tertiary institutions should join hands to improve the internal quality assurance mechanism to ensure that the quality standard is established and maintained for overall quality education in Nigeria.

Sensitization and re-orientation towards quality:

Management and the entire system should imbibe the spirit of attitudinal change towards quality. All activities within the system should be geared toward innovation, quality, and quality improvement. Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be put in place to ensure that internal quality practices are established and achieved. Management should ensure regular training and re-training of the staff of the quality assurance unit to keep them up to date on current quality assurance practices. Also, the unit (quality assurance) should organize a sensitization seminar for the entire staff to show them how best to maintain internal quality measures. Targets and benchmarks should be set where necessary to serve as standard quality measures for the system.

Maintaining ethical values:

Gross misconducts among staff and student characterize the entire tertiary education system in Nigeria. Unless such unethical behaviours are minimized, the path to achieving internal quality will remain a myth. On the part of the staff, they are awarding marks to students in exchange for money or sex, irregular attendance to school activities including lectures, and plagiarism. While the students engage in indecent dressing, exams malpractice, cultism, absenteeism from lectures, falsification of entry result, and other related misconducts. The management and all stakeholders should join hand to fight these unethical practices within the system. Investigation shows that these negatives attitudes from both staff and students have undermined the quality standard in the Nigerian tertiary education system.

Training and development for all staff

An important area of Human Resource Management function of particular relevance to the effective use of human resources is "*Training and Development.*" The purpose of training is to improve knowledge and skills and to change attitudes. Training is one area where both the employer and employee share a common interest. It is argued that training has a significant influence on the success of every organization, both public and private. Similarly, it is an essential potential motivator and a means of career progression to the employee. Training is, therefore, a key element of improved organizational performance. Training increases the level of individual and organizational competence. It helps to reconcile the gap between what should happen and what is happening - between desired targets or standards and actual levels of work performance. Therefore, to improve internal quality assurance in Nigerian tertiary institutions, management and stakeholders should embark on training and re-training of their staff to compete effectively and face the current and future challenges of teaching and learning techniques.

Improved teaching and learning facilities

Competitive educational institutions are institutions with the most modern equipment for teaching and learning. An essential component of internal quality

assurance, which serve as the basis for quality input for quality education is teaching and learning facilities (Oladipo, Adeosun, and Oni, 2009). Provision for laboratories of all kinds, teaching aids, sports, and recreational facilities should be made available and accessible for students and teachers. The facilities should be able to adapt to current and future challenges of the educational enterprise. The carrying capacity of all the facilities should be taken seriously as most tertiary institutions pay more attention to a rising number to generate more funds without looking at the negative consequences of the ratio between the number and the capacity of the available facilities.

Functional guidance and counselling unit

Guidance and counseling is an essential component of internal quality assurance. Members of the school community should have access to the center, and management should provide all the necessary equipment for the center to function as expected. A professional counselor should manage the center and team up with management and quality assurance unit for effective service delivery.

Integration of ICT facilities for effective networking

Education enterprise develops faster as a result of a network of knowledge and skills. An effective way to do it is through information and communication technology. Most tertiary institutions in Nigeria, have an ICT policy with a portal linking it with the rest of the world. While commending the efforts of the supervisory agencies and institution's management, attention should be given to data sharing and management. The portals should be regularly updated with information necessary for internal and external consumption. The integration of ICT did not only improves the function of internal quality assurance and control but also facilitates the internationalization of tertiary education.

Students' involvement in quality assurance processes

Management and quality assurance unit should involve students in getting feedback from the teaching and learning experiences. Students should take part in the internal assessment in order to make timely adjustment where necessary. Rigorous screening of students during admission exercise is necessary to ensure that only student with the right requirements is admitted. It is a common knowledge that quality output is generated from quality input, where the requirements are compromised, it will affect the quality of output (the graduates).

Regular review of curriculum

Management and internal quality assurance unit should recommend to the supervisory agencies for the review of the curriculum to match with the demand of the industry. Investigations show that the consumers (employers of labour) are not getting what the expected from the product (graduates), and this happens as a result of either the curriculum is outdated, or it does not match with changing demands of the industry.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that there is a falling standard of tertiary education in Nigeria. While countries across the world are trying to improve the quality of tertiary education through effective quality assurance practices, Nigeria is yet to adopt internal quality measures with all sense of seriousness. This paper examined the internal quality assurance gap in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It highlights a considerable number of internal quality challenges and their effects on quality education. Previous literature established that one could not achieve quality output without quality input; thus, the focus of this paper is on internal quality assurance practices to determine the quality input from the beginning. The study established that the management has a role to play in establishing internal quality assurance mechanism and control that will support and complement the external quality assurance practices to achieve quality education in Nigeria. The paper also reveals measures for improving internal quality assurance practices and that, the institution's management should develop strategies for integrating these internal quality measures to improve the internal quality assurance for sustainable quality education. The quality assurance unit/department should be the coordinating center for internal quality assurance practices, and all tertiary institutions should have a functional quality assurance unit. Recruitment of staff should be strictly on merit, so also the admission of students.

Management should encourage regular evaluation of internal quality assurance practices and make amendments where necessary. Student's assessment is another critical measure; various techniques should be adopted, including outside classroom assessment. The joint team of management, academic staff, and the quality assurance unit should encourage innovation practices in the teaching and learning practices for quality improvement and sustainability. The above factors of improving internal quality assurance can as well serve as recommendations for this paper.

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