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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Rowell, Ubogu & Money Veronica Orighofori

Institute of Education, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Quality assurance is recognized as essential to knowledge and active participation in knowledge within the societies, is essential to economic growth, and higher education institutions such as universities are the likely engines for the growth. This recognition has sparked renewed interest in, and concern about quality, quality improvement, and quality assessment in Nigerian universities today. This paper examined the concept of quality and quality assurance, issues identifying with quality assurance in Nigeria Universities were discussed. Challenges militating against quality assurance were highlighted. Such as under-funding, enrollment explosion, inadequate physical facilities and poor management. To assure quality in Nigerian universities, it was recommended among others that good planning and management are essential ingredients in the establishment of quality in an educational establishment.

KEYWORDS: *Quality Assurance, Nigerian Universities, Challenges, Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

The significance of education as a mechanism or change and meaningful national development cannot be overemphasized, It is recognized as a basis for the economic and social development of any nation. Section 1 of the Nigeria National Policy of education (FGN, 2004) states the need for functional education, to be important, practical and obtaining of appropriate skills and developing his society. This implies that the nature of teaching and facilities at our institutions, especially universities have to be oriented towards inculcating the values of acquisition competencies needed for cultural, social, economic and technological change. This is where quality assurance as a strategy for advancing quality in Nigerian University comes in.

However, exceeding viable schools and enhanced student/pupil results have to be the key targets of the government. This is because education of the highest quality is the foundation for the future of the country, Building human capital has therefore been recognized in recent times as crucial to the overall development of any nation, The best thing Nigeria can give to its citizens is quality education, which opens the entryway to the development and progress (Olubanwo, 2005).

The Concepts of Quality and Quality Assurance

The term quality has been variously defined by many people, Horn by (2004) defines quality as: "the standard of something when it is compared to other things like it, whether it is good or bad " Ijaiya (2001) view quality as: something everybody thinks is good and wants to have."

Thus, quality in Nigerian University education is a multidimensional idea which should grasp every one of its functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and grant, students, staffing, facilities equipment, building, services to the community and the academic environment (UNESCO, 1998).

Quality in education, infers the capacity or degree with which an educational system complies with the established standard and suitability of the inputs accessible for the delivery of the system (Fadipe, 1999).

To access and achieve the quality essential to work effectively in today's environment requires high-quality tertiary, institutions, Achieving and maintaining world-class standards and expectations require ongoing processes of quality assessment and improvement. In fact,the quality of education is crucial to the existence of every society. Thus, developing nations take it as a priority and would ensure that attention is paid to it. The Nigerian government and like other countries in the world is concerned and ensuring quality assurance is paramount, especially at the university level so that graduates of our universities would be confident of their skills.

Quality assurance also is about reliably meeting product requirement. It is the ability of educational institutions to meet the need of the user of manpower in connection with the quality of skills, acquire by their products, that is, students. The quality of an academic program turns out to be a general concern in light of the product of one university invariably becomes an employee in another university or other cultures' industrial setting. (Ijeoma and Osagie, 2005)Okebukola (2004) sees quality assurance in Nigeria Universities as a process of continuous improvement in the nature of teaching and learning exercises which will be effected through pathways of utilizing mechanisms, both internally and externally to the universities. It is guaranteed that at any rate, the provision of the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) records is achieved, kept up and improved. In summary, quality assurance is viewed as a planned and efficient review process carried out by an organization, institution or program to determine if acceptable standards are being met, maintained and enhanced. It guarantees confidence in a program of study given by an institution that standards and quality are being kept up and improved (UNESCO, 2006)

An Overview of Issues of Quality Assurance in Nigeria University

Higher education is the backbone of any society, it is the quality of higher education that decides the quality of human resources in a country. Thus, the Nigeria National Policy of Education (FGN. 2004) identifies the objectives of university education as to make an ideal improvement to national development by:

- Intensifying and broadening its programs for the advancement of high-level manpower within not outside the framework of the requirement of the nation.

- Making proficient course contents to mirror our national needs:

- Making all students, as an aspect of a general program of all-round enhancement in university education, to offer general study courses like the history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.

Unfortunately, the above-stated objectives have not been achieved. According to Babalola (2001), money spent on teaching, research and community services is less. Libraries in Nigerian universities lack adequate and relevant books. Laboratories do not have the vital apparatus; classrooms are not with adequate seats for the students and even university staff office accommodation is a mirage. There is a dearth of lecturers in the right quality and quantity in many Nigerian universities. This position of Babalola was corroborated by Ajayi (2004) when he reported that employers do complain about the output of Nigerian universities that they are poorly ready for work. Many university graduates are being viewed as

half-baked.

Currently, the student population in federal and state universities is high as a result of over-enrollment without expansion of facilities. NUC (2006) observes that the students' enrollment has increased from over 2,000 in 1962 to 720, 235 in 2006.

Table 1: Enrolment Growth in Nigeria Universities between 1999 – 2009

Academic Session	No. of Applicant	No. Admitted	%Admitted	No. of Unplaced Applicants
1999/2000	418,292	64,368	15:39	353,924
2000/2001	416,381	45,766	10:99	270,615
2001/2002	714,548	90,769	12:70	623,779
2002/2003	994,380	51,845	5.21	942,535
2003/2004	1,046,950	105,157	10,04	941,793
2004/2005	841,878	122,492	14.54	719,386
2005/2006	916,371	65,609	7.16	850,762
2006/2007	803,472	123,626	15	679,846
2007/2008	911,653	119,195	13	792,458
2008/2009	1,054,060	127,082	12	926,978

Source: Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, 2008

Table 1 above, thus shows that people have come to recognize how important the university education is in one's life as a channel for social portability, self -advancement and self-actualization. Nigeria has the biggest university framework in sub-Sahara Africa (NUC, 2006).

The Federal government, whose responsibility is sustaining public universities, has over the past decade not significantly increased the share of the government budget committed to education, despite exploding student numbers as seen in table 2. Between 2003 and 2013 spending on education fluctuated from 8.21 percent of the overall budget in 2003 to 6.42 percent in 2009, and to 8.7 percent in 2013. In 2014, the government increased spending on education significantly to 10.7 percent of the overall budget, however, on the off chance that this offer can be kept up following the oil cost actuated monetary crisis. Recent reports suggest that current spending levels have already decreased well below 10 percent. (World Education News Review, 2017)

Table 2: Enrolment growth in Nigeria Universities between 2010 and 2015

Academic Section	Number of Applicant	Number Admitted
2009/2010	1.5m	423,531
2010/2011	1.64m	417,341
2011/2012	1.63m	477,176
2012/2013	1.92m	463,355
2013/2014	1.79m	437,707
2014/2015	1.61m	485,338

Source: Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, 2015

Recent development in the Nigerian university system seems to indicate that all is not well as expected with the quality assurance in the Nigerian university system. The situation seems troubling when seen against the foundation that Nigeria once filled in as the center point of university education in the West Africa sub-region.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, university education which previously appreciated enormous global respectability and worthiness is quickly losing its high regard in the cafe of labor marker and members of the community because the current certified Nigeria graduate lacks an acceptable level of competence in their areas of specialization. (Omoregie, 2008).

The Honourable Minister of Education regretted that overseas universities are reluctant to universities degree and a lot of parents are sending their children to foreign universities for quality education (Ijeoma and Osagie, 2005). However, if the well articulated above objectives of university education is to be achieved standard need to be maintained in university education.

As it is everywhere throughout the world quality assurance in Nigerian universities has both the external and internal component. Regulatory and monitoring mechanism's set up to ensure quality through external review, according to Okojie, (2008), include processes giving rise to the establishment of universities and their programmes, accreditation of programmes, admission of qualified candidates into Nigerian universities, etc. For internal quality assurance, the focus is on the process of evaluation, maintenance and promoting quality within the university by the university. Every process of the administration of a university should automatically lead to the delivery of quality university education.

The NUC recorded the first endeavor at universalization of quality assurance in higher education across the globe in 2004. The study ranked the universities in terms of their productive functions and the relative efforts on their product. African universities were ranked, including Nigeria. This can be seen in the recent university graduate unemployment in figure 1.

Since this development, the NUC has heightened its efforts in standardizing the quality of university education in Nigeria (Adebayo, Oyenike and Adesoji 2009).

Similarly, in India, attendance in higher education has expanded enormously in the past ten years, doubling from 14 million in2007 to 28 million in 2013, what's more, India is figured to have the largest student-aged population globally by 2025, of around 119 million.16 Quality control in the higher education sector in India has slackened behind institutional extension, be that as it may, with a British Council report headlining undue emphasis placed on rote learning, a shortage of qualified faculty, and outdated curricula, leading to students graduating unprepared for employment (as reflected in figure 1), and institutions which lose out to be internationally ranked. (Oxford University, 2017)
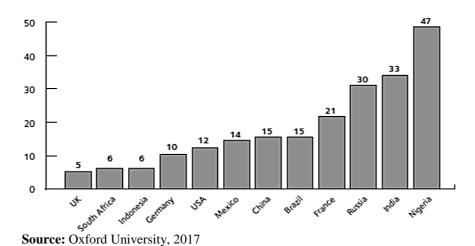

Source: Oxford University, 2017

Figure 1: Recent University Graduate Unemployment Rates in Selected Countries (Percent)

To establish and maintain high-quality standards, the universities and the NUC have a shared responsibility in addressing the following areas: according to Adedipe (2007):

- Minimum academic standard

- Accreditation

- Carrying capacity and admission quotas

- Visitation

- Research and development

- Publications and research assessment
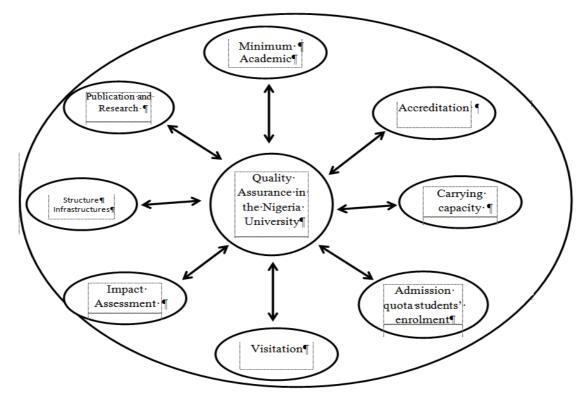
- Structure infrastructures and utility.

Figure 2: Quality Assurance Drivers in Nigeria Universities System Adopted from Adedipo, 2007

- Minimum academic standards shape the baseline for settling in quality university education. Since it prescribes profile of the syllabus, human resources, framework, infrastructures, equipment and related facilities needed for establishing, governing and managing the university.

- Accreditations are the process by which programs are assessed opposed to least academic standard an institution's inclusive academic research and development activities are assessed against recommended criteria (including self -visions and self-produced strategic plan.

- Carrying capacity of a university is the minimum number of students that the institution can support for subjective education based on available human and material resources.

- Visitation to universities is a statutory prerequisite that allows the proprietor to determine the well-being of the university.

- Impact assessment is a specialized form of evaluations aimed at finding out if the core expectations of the establishment of a particular university are being met.

- Research is the reason for the human development as globally determined, such research should be evidenced by publication.

- Structures, infrastructure, and utilities are the main impetus for subjective productivity in any organization: particularly in the university system.

CHALLENGES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

No country is likely to go far beyond the threshold of development, unless it ensures that most of its people receive a good education. And achieving the threshold for sustained development requires that a greater part of the population complete university education of good quality. Adedoja (2010) explained' that access, equity and quality assurance have increasingly and significantly become the strongest parameters for determining the pertinence and usefulness of education, particularly in developing countries where reform administrations in the sector have turned out to be imperative for meeting the education for all and millennium development goals. But, in spite of the importance of access, equity and quality in university education, they keep on posing a serious challenge to the sector, taking note that education, which is vital for national and regional growth should be above all and foremost serve all since it is a human right and a development imperative. It is considered expedient here to x-ray some major factors militating against quality assurance in Nigerian universities. These are:

Enrollment Explosion: There is an upsurge in the students' enrollment in Nigerian Universities. As of September 2004, student enrollment in the 57 universities was 823,210 (Okebukola, 2007), classrooms are over-crowded while laboratories and other learning materials are grossly deficient in view of poor funding which is the cry of most universities. Other indicators that resulting from enrollment explosion are examination malpractice, sexual harassment, sorting, sales of handouts, cultist etc. there is also a delay of the release of results. There is no doubt that enrollment explosion with its indicators will surely affect the quality of education at the university level in Nigeria.

Under-Funding: The contribution of poor funding to lowered quality is huge. The scenario that emerged, especially between 1990 and 2000 is the gross inadequacy of proprietor funding, which pushed university managers to over-enroll poor quality students into satellite campuses and remedial programs, primarily to earn income from tuition (Banji, 2000). Since the beginning of the 21st Century, funding of higher education institution has been on the increase. Despite this, funds are not enough for the institutions because the allocation for owners of these institutions misses the mark concerning what is really required. Federal Ministry of Education (2009) reported that in 2004, the sum of N216, 708,206.00 was needed by the federally funded universities. The Federal Government, however, gave out the sum of N53, 466,287.01 which represents about 24.7% of the budget requested by the universities this low funding makes it hard for assuring quality.

Inadequate Staffing: Deficiency of teaching staff in Nigerian university a reason why there is low-level quality assurance. A report from NUC, (2006) shows that only 16,856 out of 72,704 staff in the federal universities are academic staff. A lot of universities in Nigerian are button heavy in terms of academic staff mix. Senior lecturers and above are few while lecturer 1 and below are more. Many are not interested in Ph.D. and now that private universities have expanded, the situation could get worse.

Challenges of Autonomy: the observed practices in Nigerian universities have shown that the statutory function of the senate has been usurped by the various agencies of the Federal Government that is, the NUC and the JAMB in the area of quality assurance of academic programmes (Ade- Ajayi, 2003).

William (1992), observed that politics of external environment attenuates the requisite autonomy of the universities and this has made it difficult for Nigerian universities to perfect seven principal functions of teaching, certification, and research, storage of knowledge, publication, public service, and enlightened commentary.

Inadequate Physical Facilities: Facilities which enable universities to be run effectively are needed adequately to assure quality. These facilities are necessary for   schools as Ehiametalor (2001) observes students learn better when there are good facilities such as buildings, comfortable seats for teachers and students are available. The university is like a manufacturing organization where plants and equipment must be in a top operational shape to produce results. However, this is not the case in our universities. NUC (2006) report that facilities in Nigerian universities are in poor shape, the available physical facilities are severely overstretched and ill maintained. Hence, with this development, quality seems not to be guaranteed in the Nigerian university system.

Poor Management: Effective stewardship does not rely on the state or on "the market" but on university self-guidance and self-determination. This implies that management in Nigerian universities needs a calm reflection on their present reliance disorder by grasping the spirit of entrepreneurship (Clark, *2005).* It might be argued that such is conceivable in a booming economy, yet at any rate,the Nigerian universities must be believed to be moving in this direction. Furthermore, there have been cases of university administrators who could not account for money released for the institution.

Stevenson (2006) is of the view that in principle, there ought to be no argument to accountability but the problem is the way in which governance handles the ethical expectation that is involved in accountability.

In addition, from the foregoing analysis, it implies that inadequate resources result in reduced quality in Nigerian universities. Inadequate means a situation when resources are not good enough in terms of quality and quantity in an institution of learning. It is a situation of less than enough skilled manpower, funds and physical facilities in schools (Oghuvbu, 2017). When there are limited resources required for the generation of human capital there would be a fall in quality assurance in Nigeria. This is evidenced in the followings

<p align="center">**Table 3: Influence of Inadequate Resources on Quality**</p>

S/N	Item	Score	Percentage	Mean
1	Inadequate and poor quality teachers	3345	75%	3.0
2	Excess staff workload	3390	76%	3.1
3	Inadequate academic materials, poor curriculum contact.	3343	75%	3.0
4	Overcrowded classroom	3434	77%	3.6
5	Inadequate physical facilities	3300	74%	2.95
6	Poor funding	3346	75%	3.00
7	Poor staff welfare	3389	76%	3.02
8	Unconducive learning environment, noncompliance to quality assurance guidelines	3033	68%	2.7
	Total	**26,580**	**74**	**2.98**

Source: Oghuvbu (2008e), Opara (2017), Okome (2014).

- **Poor Funding:** This could result in the failure to provide quality manpower, physical resources decline in the provision of modern facilities and equipment.

- **Inadequate Academic Materials:** Resulting in lack of modern library facilities, the poor communication, poor conduct of examination, delay releasing of result and production of low-quality graduates, etc.

- **Inadequate Human Resources:** This result in ineffective management, large class size, excess workload,

ineffective teaching, and learning etc.

- **Inadequate Facilities:** inadequate facilities affect the kind of teaching and learning, the stress of staff, increase in death rate, overpopulated classrooms and lecture halls.

- **Poor Curriculum Content:** This result in the inability to achieve educational goals and objective, poor application of the curriculum, irrelevant knowledge and skills, the inability of the student to complete a program on schedule, high dropout rates, societal dissatisfaction and poor academic quality. Other causes of the decline in quality as a result of inadequate resources include excess staff workload, poor staff welfare, and non-compliance with quality assurance guidelines (Okome, 2014). The cumulative effects of these factors resulting from inadequate resources contribute to the drop in quality of education as evidenced in the production of graduates without enough knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The facts remain that higher education in Nigeria has been experiencing loss of the facility, crumbling of equipment and plants and incomplete projects because of money related emergencies facing the system. When all these pressures are not meeting with increasing revenues the results are obvious, less increase in efficiency and productivity and diminish quality output (that is, teaching, scholarship and services, reduced working and living conditions for professors, staff and students alike). The meaning of all this is that productivity from this venture process in university education cannot really accomplish the objectives that were set for it (Adewale, Ajayi and Enikanoselu, 2006).

Uvah (2005), concluded that the human resource of any country is its greatest asset. The right quality of human resources in the right quantity, where appropriately deployed, would be able to convert the country's natural resources to useful products and catapult the nation and prosperity. Poor quality university education would therefore deter or at best delay the economic takeoff of Nigeria.

Thus, to assure quality in Nigerian universities, the following recommendations are made:

- The Nigerian Government ought to guarantee that allocation of financial resources in Nigerian universities is established on quality of research and the number of students.

- The apex government ought to guarantee that policymakers think about the full implementation of autonomy of Nigerian universities.

- Government should provide more basic infrastructures to universities and corporate organizations and alumnae associations should also come to the end of the universities by providing more physical facilities for them.

- Lecturers should be spurred through the enhanced salary package and good condition of service. They should be encouraged by the universities to go for further training by sponsoring them for local and international conferences workshops and seminars. Also, lecturers ought to be encouraged to go into quality researchers that will benefit the university system rather than publishing papers with the sole aim of promotion.

- Good planning and management are essential ingredients in the enthronement of quality in an educational establishment. There have been examples of university administrators who could not account for money released for their institutions. A situation like this usually discourages the government, individuals, an even corporate

organization from coming to the aid of management of resources must be ensured on the parts of universities administrators quality assurance is to be achieved and sustained in the Nigeria university system.

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