Quality Assurance Mechanism in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

The paper examines the quality assurance mechanisms at educational management in Nigeria. The rapid changes in Universities are causing tensions between conflicting values, vision and mission in a number of ways. These tensions include, innovation, standardization, diversity, comparability, autonomy, accountability, rising tertiary enrolment amidst declining budget, academic excellence and employer of labour rating scale of University graduates. These tensions requires concerted action by education stakeholders through quality assurance mechanisms and to enhance performance, information on standards, eliminate unsatisfactory provision and accountability. The paper therefore, examine the concepts of quality, assurance, evaluation of educational management department and guidelines for quality assurance mechanisms. Consequently, quality assurance mechanisms are examined. Finally, the paper makes recommendation and conclusion.

Keywords: Quality Assurance Mechanism, Evaluation and Educational Management

Introduction

The information technology has turned the world into a global village; Institutions are facing the kind of competition that was not envisaged decades ago. The changing roles of university education have necessitated the institutions for quality assurance. As part of the growing trend towards meeting the challenges of globalization, millennium goals, universities had to assume its institutional mission and vision. What is satisfactory to be educational stakeholders today may not be regarded as such tomorrow as their expectations are continuously changing? There has been consistent breakthrough in science and technology over the last couple of decades. This has also affected information dissemination, teaching, research, management and publication.

One ten of management philosophy, which many institutions have adopted as a fundamental strategy, is the concept of continuous improvement. No institution can afford to be competitive, if it does not continuously improve on its products, people and services. In education, there is a broad agreement on a number of issues that define quality. They include higher academic standards, vigorous curricula, skilled and experience teachers, updated textbooks, infrastructural facilities, conducive environment and discipline. Education in Nigeria is faced with problems of frequent strikes and low-out in schools with the attendant closure and disruption of academic programmes, cultism and clandestine secret society activities with the attendant violence, vandalism, sexual harassment, examination malpractices, incidence of inferior and second rate degrees, diplomas and certificates being issued by most educational institutions. The enumerated problem requires drastic change in the educational system. There is therefore, an urgent need for the university-wide approach, and commitment to quality improvement. Quality assurance is seen as a guarantee that required standards are to be met. It is conformance to standards, specifications or requirements, 'fitness for use', 'excellence', 'meeting or exceeding customer expectations', 'right, first time', 'zero-defects' and 'customer satisfaction'.

The Nigeria educational philosophy as stated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) includes a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and bright opportunities.
for all citizens. These goals are geared towards national consciousness, national unit, and dignity of labour. Furthermore, Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) stated the realization of educational objectives through teaching, research, community participation and publication.

**Quality Assurance**

The concept of quality in any educational institution is not easy to define unless in its operational stage. Many stakeholders in higher education see the quality as ambiguous and elusive and thereby making it difficult for researchers to agree at a common understanding. This is essentially so in higher education as compared to industry where clearly definable products with quantifiable qualities exist.

Handy and Attken (1986) conceptualized quality as excellence/exceptional, fitness of purpose, transformation, threshold to the attainment of goals, enhancement of academic ethos and fulfillment of the demands of stakeholders. However, industry has moved from quality to a more proactive process-quality assurance.

Giving the operational definition of quality assurance Awoyemi (2006) emphasize the individual university level, the most common assurance measures are course or programme accreditation, external examiners and teaching appraisal programme. Accreditation is a mechanism for ensuring that planning and facilities for new courses are adequate. Internal or external panels may withhold approval for a programme to be offered; if they are not convinced it can be taught to an adequate standard. By this concept, quality assurance is a process and systems put in place to ensure that a product measure j ump to laid-down specifications and standard. Coulter (1989) sees quality assurance as planned and systematic actions necessary to provide adequate confidence, that, the education provided will meet the needs of clients, a way of evaluating the effectiveness of structure arid processes required to achieve outcomes. For meaningful quality assurance, educational institutions must develop strategic plans which spell out clearly the aims and objectives of the institution as regards teaching and learning. Ford (2006), on the basic principles underlying quality assurance opined management commitment, customer focus and satisfaction, employee empowerment, continuous improvement, organizational culture arid attitude, team work, education and training, communication and measurement.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) identified the goals of tertiary institutions as to:

- Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
- Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- Forge and cement national unit, and
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) further stated that the goals are to be achieved through teaching, research and development, dissemination of knowledge and community service.

**Evaluation of Educational Management Department in Nigerian University**

The philosophy of Educational Management is the acquisition of appropriate managerial skills, abilities and competence such that the prospective educational managers would better understand human behaviour and interrelationships. The philosophy is enhanced by the FGN (2004) through free and democratic society, just and egalitarian society, united, strong and self reliant nation, great and dynamic economy and land of bright and full opportunity for all citizens. To make the philosophy functional, the National Policy on Education (Sections 5 & 9) gave the goals of Higher Education as:

(a) the acquisition, development and inculcation of proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society;
(b) the development of intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environment;
(c) the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community;
(d) the acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments.

Educational Management is also expected to:

(a) provide highly motivated, conscientious and efficient education managers for all levels of the education system;
(b) encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
(c) help Educational Managers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and enhance commitment to National Objectives;
(d) provide educational managers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation, not only in the life of their country but also in the wider world.
(e) enhance teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession to make them adequate for their assignments and to make them adaptable to any changing situation.

**Minimum Academic Standards**

The main objectives of NUC are to grade institutions of higher education and their programmes:

- stimulate the academic environment and quality of teaching and research;
help institutions realize their academic objective;
- promote necessary changes, innovation and reforms in all aspects of the institutions working for the above purpose; and
- encourage innovations, self-evaluation and accountability in higher education.

NUC (1999) came out with manual on minimum academic standards to be met before each programme in any University can be approved. The manual described the modalities to be used before, during and after the exercise. The extracts are as follows:

- Admission Requirements into the First Degree Programme
- Degree Programmes and Courses
- Core/Compulsory/ Elective Course
- Course Titles: Core sources EDU/ Management Course – EDM.
- Evaluation Assessment of Students’ progress is through a combination of the following methods written essay examination: written objective examination; individual and group projects; term paper/presentation. Seminar presentation, oral examination, field experience assessment. Other include open book examinations, laboratory performance and take home examination.
- Scoring and Grading System

The Take-Home Examination mode is an extension of the above, and similar in purpose. However, the task is such that requires many hours/days to complete with the aid of diverse sources.

- Continuous Assessment
- External Examination System
- Staff/Student Workload
- Number of Credit Units for Graduation
- Award of Degree
- Bachelor of Education (Educational Management)
- Personnel
- Appointment and Promotion of Staff
- Academic Staff
- Number of Credit units for Graduation
- Quality Assurance Mechanism
- Assessment Criteria:

Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Education Management
The guidelines for quality assurance include the following:

1. Mission and Vision
2. Educational Programme and Principles
3. Assessment of Students
4. Students:
   5. Academic staff/ Faculty:
   6. Educational Resources:
   7. Monitoring and Evaluation of Programmes and Causes
   8. Governance and Administration — organisation structure:
   9. Continuous Renewal:

Quality Assurance Mechanism
The term quality assurance refers to mechanisms and processes used to lead to the maintenance and improvement of quality assurance. It also has come to mean a guarantee or certification that particular standards are being met. Thus, quality assurance is largely about the systematic management procedures and processes adopted to ensure achievement of a given quality or continued improvement in quality. To inculcate the spirit of high standards and quality into the university education and programme, a system of quality assurance mechanisms came into existence through the National Universities Commission. These are: Accreditation, ranking, performance indicators, benchmarking and programme verification.

Accreditation
This is a major quality assurance process done through the National Universities Commission. This is a system of evaluation academic programmes in line with the laid down minimum academic standards. The focus of accreditation is comprehensive examining the mission, resources ad procedures of a higher education or programme.

NUC (1999) stated the objectives of the accreditation as:

- To ensure that at least the provision of the minimum Academic Standards documents are attained, maintained and enhanced.
- To assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programmes have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization.
- Certify to the international community that the programmes offered in Nigerian Universities are of high standards and their graduates are adequate for employment and for further studies.

There are four procedures for the accreditation of programme in Nigerian Universities. There are, Application and selection of Universities for accreditation, Self-study of an institution, Initial evaluation of self-study report and on-site visit by an evaluation team (External Assessment), Accreditation action and public release of accreditation information.

The cycle of accreditation at Universities is about five years. Accreditation results are either full accreditation, interim accreditation and denied accreditation. The report of accreditation of academic programme, University of Ilorin, Nigeria resulted 74.7%. the analysis for the programme shows

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<th>Category</th>
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<td>Academic content</td>
<td>20(87.0%)</td>
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<td>Staffing</td>
<td>27(84.4%)</td>
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<td>Physical Facilities</td>
<td>12(60.0%)</td>
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<td>Funding</td>
<td>3(60.0%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library</td>
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<td>Employer’s Ratio</td>
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The analysis claimed the level of goal achievement for the academic programmes. The results of the accreditation are used by the Government for supporting Universities financially as providing subsidies, scholarships or research funds. University autonomy and for useful data for development and growth of Universities.

Performance Indicators
These are quantitative measures that attempt to assess the achievement of higher education institution, systems and their constituent parts. It has a great value in pointing to achievements. It helps institutions to monitor their performance and help more the public agenda among from single dimension of ranking or ratings. The academic excellence indicators system (AEIS) emphasizes student achievement and other academic indicators as the basis for accountability ratings of institutions. The performance indicative as revealed by Texas Education Agency
Goh (2000) sees quality assurance mechanisms in four major functional areas as:

- teaching and learning experience;
- research
- staff management and
- communication

Teaching and learning (Mechanism): This is measured through external examiners (securitizing examination papers, reviewed marked scripts and comments on the general results such as objectivity and consistency of students. He also advises on matters relating to teaching, curriculum development, research and other academic mature.

Boards of Examiners: They moderate examination scores, recommend prizes and other awards and determine the different classes of Honours to be assigned.

Feedback: Various avenues are in place to assist the University improve its design, development and delivery of educational processes. Some mechanisms of feedback are:

- student feedback on the quality of teaching which has been a practice for more than a decade now;
- peer review
- video recording of lectures
- employers and alumni feedback and
- department consultative committees

Staff Management: Measure taken in staff management include recruitment of staff, annual assessments. Recruitment of staff is carried out with the utmost vigour. Candidates are identified through advertisements and recommendations and in case of Vice Chancellor appointments, search committees. The annual assessment of faculty members is an integral element of a system to ensure a high quality of teaching, research and administration. It is used as a mean to determine if a faculty member is suitable for salary adjustment or promotion through the academic rank.

Research Mechanism

Research is the process of finding out the solutions to identified problems in a particular discipline. It is the scientific process that is both mystery and a discipline. Research is a systematic observation of events or reality in order to establish the validity of an idea. Abimbola (1995) define research as a systematic way of gathering information that will lead to the solution of problems relating to the processes and conditions of education, educational research comprises historical, philosophical, diagnostic, experimental, comparative and normative survey studies. The primary function of research is to increase the knowledge of the problem under study so as to know what is not known before. A function of educational research, therefore is to increase the knowledge of educational phenomena and practices to enable take important decisions. Research is to bring about overall progress and development in the education sector. Research is to continuously strive to improve educational practices in the areas of curriculum planning and development, instructional planning, instructions and supervision, evaluation of instruction, teachers, students and environment.

In order to improve the research and development in the country and enhance quality assurance of staff effectiveness, Okebukola (2004) launched the first Nigeria Research and Development with the objectives of:

(i) to exhibit innovative research projects and their outputs from Nigerian universities;
(ii) to provide opportunities for networking and collaboration among institutions;
(iii) to provide a forum for industry to select research outputs for further development;
(iv) to provide avenues for attracting support for ongoing development-oriented researches for the organized private sector and international development agencies.

Ranking of Universities

NUC ranks the Nigerian Universities based on the quality of their programme. This is to encourage the leading institution in the ranking to maintain and enhance their lead and those at the lower rank to work hand and remedy their deficiencies and improve the quality of their programmes to meet the required standards.

Okebukola (2008), on the world-wide University ranking for whom and by who listed series of ranking schemes as, Time Higher Education – Qs Ranking, Academic Ranking of World Universities, Webometrics Ranking, Professional Ranking of World Universities, News week Ranking, Performance Ranking of Scientific Paper for World Universities. Sulemon (2008), on the criteria for determining world class universities, as published Centre for World Universities, Shanghai, china, included equality of education, quality of faculty, research output and per capital performance.

Publication Mechanism

Publication occurs where is high pay off for academic staff. Perceptive students try to learn under the best men and the way to evaluate the best in academic is by the quality and quantity of a man’s writing. Deans or Vice chancellors, when looking for the strong man to fill a prestigious chair, usually look at publications for guidance. On the significance of publications to academic staff in Nigeria, section 2 (33) of the University Revised Regulations
Governing the Conditions of service (1994) state:
Two copies of publications cited in support of recommendation for confirmation of appointment shall he deposited in the Registry, at least seven days before the date of the meeting at which the recommendation is being considered. (P.13)

Publication Assessment Criteria
Okebukola (2005) emphasized the assessment criteria used, and the weighting attached as
- Evidence of Peer Review: (5)
- Evidence of Editorial Board membership acceptance: (5)
- Evidence of active participation of such experts: (1.0)
- Evidence of regularity of publication: (10)
- Evidence of quality of editorial policy, including world-renowned Abstracting and Indexing Services: (20)
- Quality of Editor; (10)
- Samples of published editions since inception: (10)
- Format and printing quality: (10)
- Institutional spread of contributing articles and authors: (20)

Total: 100%
Okebukola (2005) further stated that a total of 138 journals were received by April 11, 2005. The distribution is given in Table 1:
The inceptional, mid-term and current editions of the journals were assessed. In the ease of one-volume output the total score was 80 which was then converted to percentage. The assessment score were used to rate the journals into four groups:
A: International Standard (minimum 60%) ****(FOUR STAR).
B: Prospective International Standard (50-59%) *** (THRUK STAR).
C: Local Standard (20-49%) *(ONE STAR)
D: Super Local Standard (under 20%).

Of the 138 journals, only 4 (representing 2.8%) qualified for inclusion in group A (International Standard); 10 (representing 7.2%) belong to group B, (Prospective International Standard): 112 (representing 18.2%) belong to group C. (Local Standard); and 1 ! (representing 8.0%) belong to group D (Super Local Standard).

Programme Verification
This includes, verifying the readiness of University which intends to establish a fresh programme. This is done by verifying the claim and its resources readiness through physical inspection usually conducted by a team of NUC staff and invited experts in the discipline concerned.

Recommendations
The dissemination of quality assurance information to concerned parties should be made and the improvement of
the attitudes and value of personnel should be made until QA becomes their tradition and culture.
Universities must protect their freedom to be innovative and experimental if they are to respond to the enormous changes taking place. Networking will be the driving force of common standards and these will evolve from the experience of Universities acting collectively, and interacting with national quality agencies.
Attention should be paid to the development of the best qualified experts involved in instructional, scientific research activities, technology transfer and other productive services. The need for teacchnical assistance to develop quality standards is urgent, particularly as regards regulation of e-learning and cross border delivery of tertiary education.

All higher education institutions should accept and implement the principles of quality assurance and accreditation in order to guarantee uniformity of academic standards. There is urgent need for the internationalization of higher education institutions. Universities must adopt criteria for recruiting developing and maintaining qualified lecturers with appropriate background, experience and ethical standards. Job descriptions for lecturers must be clearly specified. Lecturers must evaluate regularly by way of improving the quality of teaching, research and maintaining high educational standards.

Quality Assurance Unit should conduct periodic surveys of the opinions of graduates and employers on the work of their University. Research in areas such as this is an important part of the quality exercise, if the University intends to remain relevant and responsive. Quality assurance should be introduced immediately as a course in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The course should not be restricted to any particular faculty but should be a compulsory course for all disciplines. Raising the level of student academic integrity should be among the nation’s Universities priorities. Government and national agencies are advised, to consider reviewing tertiary education findings policies such that allocation of public resources to higher institutions is linked to quality factors as a strategy for encouraging institutions to undertake quality improvements.

Students should be motivated by providing them with a healthy learning environment (Modern classroom, well-stocked libraries, online educational materials and living quarters), and assists the needy with affordable loans and grants to finance their education.

Conclusion
In view of the crucial importance of higher education to national development, quality assurance has assumed greater significance in the various dimensions of teaching/learning activities. Along with the expansion relevance, diversification and internationalization, the shift of emphasis to quality improvement has been a major policy issue as well as worldwide trend in higher education.
Quality assurance needs an international dimension, transfer of knowledge, sharing of information, mobility of teachers and students, international joint research projects and interactive networking. The future of higher education in relation to quality assurance includes the e-learning University, business and community, collaboration and restructuring, human resource development, diversity,
accountability, research, widen participation and continued expansion. Quality assurance is measured therefore, measured in terms of certain specifications, so as to achieve competition customers’ satisfaction, standardization, accountability, prestige and status and credibility. Quality assurance mechanisms includes self evaluation, benchmarking, ranking, accreditation, surveys of students graduates, employers and professional bodies, peer review by a panel of experts.

Finally, tools for quality assurance are identification of goal practice, setting standards, incentives for improvement, audit of progresses, assessment of outcomes and benchmarking.

REFERENCES
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### ANNEXURE

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