Managing Quality Assurance for Improving Higher Education in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This paper discussed managing quality assurance for improving higher education in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges. Higher education in Nigeria has been designed to train and develop the nation's manpower with relevant skills, knowledge and attitude that can contribute to national development. This notwithstanding, higher institutions of learning in Nigeria had been enmeshed with so many inadequacies and crises that had rendered it somewhat deficient in actualizing its lofty goals and objectives. This paper however, briefly examined the concept of quality assurance, quality assurance for improving higher education, issues and challenges to quality higher education in Nigeria. The study would be of immense benefits to the government, management of tertiary institutions, academic and non-academic staff, students, multi-national, private organizations and the society. The paper therefore, conclude by suggesting the following recommendations; that governments should appropriate a mandatory minimum 26% of its national budget to the education sector, multi-national and private companies operating in the country should be strictly monitored to pay the mandatory 2% of their annual profit to the education tax fund, government should review upwards the remuneration and working condition of staff as a means of motivating them to greater productivity, to employ more academic staff that are computer literate to match the rising intake of students in tertiary institutions, develop policies that would encourage staff development for increase productivity among others. All these put together would in no small measure improve the quality of higher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Quality assurance, Higher education, Improving, Issues and Challenges*

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian higher education is bedeviled with too many short-comings that had become a clog in the wheel of higher education governance, thereby causing great concern because of the low quality of its outputs that are unemployable and unproductive in the labour market. This development however, may not be unconnected with the quality of its lecturers, infrastructures and instructional facilities among others, that are available to these institutions of higher learning. The over-growing concern of the low quality of the products of these institutions necessitated the need for concerted efforts on the part of stakeholders, government inclusive to address the mirage of problems confronting the positive growth of higher education in Nigeria. Asiyai (2014) opined that only quality education can sharpen the minds of the individual and help transform the society economically, socially and

politically. Continuing, Asiyai in Asiyai (2015) noted that, the quality of knowledge which is generated in institutions of higher learning is very critical to national competitiveness.

Technically speaking, higher education in Nigeria has crucial roles to play in ensuring that its beneficiaries acquired relevant skills and knowledge that can make them employable and productive in today's knowledge-driven society and economy. This confirms the sayings of Sharma in Tajudeen (2014) that unemployment grows because people do not have the right skills. In other words, inculcating the right skills is the functions of higher education which is aimed at producing qualify manpower for the growth of the nation's economy. Sharma (2013) lamented that efforts to guarantee employment of graduates are not yet included in the courses offered in higher education programmes and sadly enough, the required skills that would

facilitate employment are lacking in these graduates being produced yearly.

Unfortunately, the increase in higher institutions in Nigeria has not been able to change the narrative rather it has remain impossible to impact quality education in the beneficiaries, the society and the nation's economy. Hence, the need to adopt an effective quality assurance measures for strict monitoring and supervision of academic activities and programmes of tertiary institutions for improving quality and standard.

The quality of manpower a nation has, determines to a large extent the quality of its national development. To this end, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) outlined lofty and laudable goals and objectives for the improvement of higher education under section 8 as follows:

1. Contribute to National development through high level relevant manpower training;

2. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society;

3. Develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their local environments;

4. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful member of the society;

5. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;

6. Forge and cement national unity; and

7. Promote national and international understanding and interaction, p (59).

The policy statement went further in section 8(60) to state that higher education in Nigeria should vigorously pursue the goals through:

1. Teaching;

2. Research and development;

3. Knowledge generation and dissemination and international cooperation; and

4. Render dedicated services to the community through extra mural and consultancy services.

In the light of the above, it is evidently clear that government so desired to achieve an improved higher education system in terms of its quality input, process and output that would meet acceptable standard globally. This however, brings to the fore, the issue of quality assurance in higher education system in Nigeria. There is no doubt whatsoever, that improving the quality of higher education is highly dependent on the effective implementation of quality assurance mechanism in the overall administration, monitoring and supervision of its policies and programmes.

CONCEPTS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

Quality mean different thing to different persons. Some say, that quality is in the eye of the beholder. Quality can also be seen as the ability with which a product, service or phenomenon conforms to an established standard and which makes it to be relatively superior to others. In his view, Ekong (2006) assert that quality builds knowledge, live skills, perceptions, attitude and values. Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) defined quality as a measure of how good and bad the product of higher education institutions in Nigeria are in terms of their academic performance and meeting established standard. Quality in higher education is the worth of input, process, and operations available to the system, such as, lecturers, instructional facilities and evaluation procedures which in turn translates to output that meet desired standard and societal expectation (Asiyai, 2013).

According to Igwe (2007) quality in higher education is seen to cut across policy formulation to implementation of educational process covering the scope of curriculum; teaching/learning process; resources and facilities; students and teachers; and the environment. Baird in Asiyai (2015) viewed quality of higher education to relate to the development of intellectual independence. He then, recommended collaborative action research solution for improving quality, stressing that institutions of higher learning must take the lead in fostering improvement in quality of education at all levels. In this wise, higher education can be said of quality when it produces a complete person that is intellectually promising, morally sound, psychologically or emotionally stable, physically and socially developed to the benefit of self and the society. It is therefore right to say that education without quality is even worst and more dangerous than no education at all. This implies that when quality education is delivered its guarantees standard of product in terms of its employability and productiveness in the knowledge-driven society and economy.

Quality assurance as a concept helps in the coordination of school activities designs to improve the quality of input, process and output of education (Okebukola, 2012).Ajayi and Akinduture (2007) noted that quality assurance is about the consistency in meeting product specifications or getting things done right the first time and every time. Furthermore, Oduma (2013) stated however, that quality assurance in Nigeria education system implies the ability of the various arms (especially tertiary institutions) to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills required by their outputs. The ability to maintain constant monitoring and supervision of quality assurance policies and procedures is critical to the actualization of the goals and objectives of university education especially in this present knowledge – driven economy (Giami and Nwokamma, 2019).

The need for quality assurance in our education system cannot be over emphasized. In order to make the system more responsive, more meaningful and more functional to its beneficiaries and the society in general, there is need to begin to redress the administrative practices in the system especially now that the beneficiaries are no longer finding it easy to cope with the economic circumstances of life. This demands that the government and other stakeholders in the system should be proactive in order to ensure quality teaching and learning in higher institutions of learning. In his submission, Adegbesan (2011) highlighted the importance of quality assurance in improving the quality of education in Nigeria as follows:

1. Quality assurance serves as an indispensable component of quality control strategy in education.

2. It will ensure and maintain high standard of education at all levels.

3. It will assist in monitoring and supervision of educational activities especially that of teaching and learning.

4. It will equally help to determine the quality of teachers input.

5. It will assist to determine the resources as well as facilities needed for smooth operations especially from time to time in our school systems.

6. It helps to determine the adequacy of the learning environment for the comfort of both the teacher and the students.

7. It would also ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized, p (9).

QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is referred to as post-secondary or tertiary education. This kind of education is given to students after secondary education by institutions such as, the universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, monotechnics and those offering correspondence courses. Higher education is designed to give the beneficiaries desirable skills, knowledge and attitude that would make them self-reliant, functional, employable and productive, thereby impact meaningfully to self, the society and growth of the nation's economy.

Emeasoba in Emeasoba and Ezeani (2017) opined that quality assurance ensures that the right things are done the right way. Adding that, the aim of quality assurance is to improve the quality of education for all students. Quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria is divided into internal and external mechanism. According to Akporehe and Osiobe (2016) internal mechanism of quality assurance is to enhance quality of delivery of programmes in tertiary institutions which include: governance, employment of competent staff, provision of facilities, capacity building of staff, monitoring/supervision, evaluation, inter and intra institutional collaborations and nature of students admitted into the tertiary educational system. They also noted some of the roles quality assurance plays in the tertiary institutions as: good financial resource management by educators, continuous monitoring of new knowledge creation, updating of curricula, teaching methods and learning approaches to ensure that their graduates have skills and knowledge relevant for current and future labour market needs, increasing private sector participations and systematic evaluation. Oduma (2013) enumerated some internal mechanisms adopted in the pursuit of quality assurance for improved higher educations in Nigeria as follows:

Review of School Curriculum

Education curriculum as well as general standard of education should be reviewed to reflect the needs and aspirations of the recipients as well as the society. The curriculum therefore should match the minimum academic standard.

Monitoring

This refers to the process of collecting data at intervals about ongoing projects, school teaching and learning activities as well as programmes within the school system. The aim is to constantly assess the level of performance with a view of finding out how far a set of objectives are being met.

(Iii) Instructional Supervision: This should focus on efforts at bringing about improvement in the quality of instruction. It should involve all staff especially those in the academic domain. Instructional supervision should be a way of advising, encouraging and stimulating staff.

(Iv) Facility Inspection: This usually involves an assessment of available facilities and resources in an institution. This could be cultivated and internally coordinated from time to time. The essence of which is to establish how far the school or the various departments meet prescribed standard. It should be more of self-assessment rather than externally induced exercise.

Staff Quality Control

Staff quality is an essential pre-requisite in the issue of quality assurance. There is need therefore to continue to encourage staff training and development strategies. The qualification and experience of teachers matters a lot in their subject delivery. On this note, they should continually be assisted to continue to undergo refresher courses, workshops, seminars and conferences especially in their areas of specialization.

Establishment of Minimum Academic Standard

There is need to ensure that minimum academic standards (MAS) are established for each level or cadre of the education system i.e. the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

This is very important as the minimum standard will serve as the bench mark for operation. All institutional operations (private or public) will be in conformity with the minimum academic standard. The administration and implementation exercises of the MAS will be the responsibility of the respective arms of the education system. Thus, at all levels, it will be ensured that the bench mark minimum academic standard is maintained and adhered to.

Students Support and Mentoring Services

There should exist in each institution effective students' affairs and counselling scheme. This division should be responsible for student's personal support and guidance. This should involve students' advisers on procedures governing general academic issues such as transfer, appeals, change of courses etc. students advisers should be trained and be responsible for students' mentoring scheme.

Effective Records Management System

Each school should maintain effective records management system capable of providing information and data for management decisions at all times. Management information system for each school should be properly configured and customized to serve the information needs of the institutions. Both students and management information for public consumption should be disseminated timely, and as appropriate as possible. Effective financial records are also vital for prudency and accountability in expenditure.

Equitable Disbursement of Fund

Quality assurance demands adequate funding. If government is poised to provide adequate fund, the school management should ensure that such funds are disbursed and utilized by various units and arms in the school for the achievement of the collective goals and objectives of quality assurance in the school system.

Provision of Quality School Equipment and Supplies

All school equipment, supplies and physical structure especially for instructional laboratory and demonstration purposes should be of high quality and to the comfort of the teachers, pupils and students. Where need be, all contracts of supplies should as much as possible be awarded to reputable and expert educational supplies contractors. Contracts for educational supplies and facilities in the pursuit of quality assurance should never be used to patronize political loyalists.

Encouragement of Private Sector Participation

Private sector participation or industrial linkage is an essential element in ensuring quality assurance in education, as a matter of government policy; this should be made to be feasible. Private sector participation or industrial linkage would help to expand the input sources of education resources. It will equally make education to become more relevant to the recipients as well as the society in general. The private sectors or the industries should be made

to be part of the school curriculum restructuring as well.

Evaluation

This is a formal process carried out within a school setting. It is based on available data which are used to form conclusions. It could be formative or summative. The aim of evaluation as a quality assurance strategy is to see how the system can be assisted to improve on the present level of performance.

Still on improving the quality of higher education, Asiyai (2014) noted that the lecturers can also contribute meaningfully in the improvement of higher education through involvement in collaborative action research with employers of labour. Stressing further that such research must have bearing with the needs of students and the society. The lecturers can do this effectively through the following means:

1. Adopt a good work ethics and habit;

2. Encouraging team work, innovation and creativity among students;

3. Ensuring effective classroom management and control during instruction;

4. Creating positive learning environment or climate so that students can actively be involved in learning process to ensure in them a permanent change in desirable behaviour;

5. Promotes a classroom atmosphere that motivates self-directed and cooperative learning;

6. Communicating with students during learning process;

7. Ensuring that they attend their lectures regularly and timely;

8. Ensuring that lectures are student-centered;

9. Teaching effectively using active learning strategies;

10. Avoiding unethical conducts such as plagiarism, poor teaching, aiding examination malpractice and missing students' scores;

11. Conducting research that can help improve instructional practices; and

12. Monitoring and evaluating students learning.

On the other hand, external quality assurance is the mechanism adopted by the accreditation bodies such as; National Universities Commission (NUC) for Universities, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Teachers' Institute (NTI) for Colleges of Education. To achieve improved higher education in Nigeria, these bodies over time have employed measures to determine the quality assurance of programmes in institutions to meet acceptable standard globally. Adepoju (2007) identified these external quality assurance measures geared towards improving higher education to include:

1. Accreditation of programmes or institutions;

2. Monitoring, assessment and evaluation of existing staff strength, students and facilities;

3. Capacity building for teaching and non-teaching staff;

4. Exchange programme for teaching personnel and students;

5. Institutional ranking in terms of undergraduate and post-graduate courses and programmes;

6. Prescription of benchmark and periodic review and production of documents on minimum standard; and

7. External modification system.

However, part of the agenda of these bodies is to create an all-inclusive evaluation of institutional vision, mission and strategic goals, teaching quality, learning and research, institutional efficiency and effectiveness, institutional resources, institutional control and management among others to guarantee standard (Giami and Nwokamma, 2019).

CHALLENGES TO QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

Inadequate Funding

Higher education in Nigeria is enmeshed in serious financial crises that had inhibited its growth and development. This however, is attributed to the fact that the government is the sole financier of education in Nigeria. Contributions made by multi-nationals, companies, private donors, students and revenue generated internally by institutions have not been enough to improve its funding. Amadi in Idialu (2017) noted that in spite of efforts by different government of the federation to provide funds for higher education, and the huge amount expended, higher education still lacks fund to implement various programmes of the

institutions. No doubt, shortage of fund inhibits efforts at improving the quality of higher education in Nigeria. It is with funds that educational resources and facilities are procured in the required quality and quantity for effective teaching and learning, and for the administration of the institution for optimal result. Presently, government rarely release subvention to higher education for its running cost and maintenance of existing infrastructures, let alone erect new ones. Adequate funding of tertiary institutions is very expedient as it assist in reducing the expenditure on students and parents on the acquisition of tertiary education in Nigeria. It also helps in the provision of quality learning infrastructures. These include hostels, laboratories, workshops, libraries, classrooms and other facilities that are needed to provide a suitable teaching and learning environment for both teachers and students (Olorunleke, 2013).

This development is becoming so pathetic that despite the importance of higher education to the training of the nation's skilled manpower for the growth of its economy, the budgetary allocation to education sector is on the decline steadily. Statistics from the Report Nigeria (2012) confirm this assertion, when it noted that Nigeria's budget for education in 2013 was 8.4%, far below UNESCO benchmark of 26% .However, it was noted that it is the lowest among her neighbours. For instance, Ghana had 31%, Lesotho 17%, Burkina Faso 16%, Botswana 19%, Uganda 27%, Kenya 23%, Cote d'Ivoire 31% and South Africa 25.6%.(Okoli, 2016).The inability of tertiary institutions to generate internally the mandated 10% for its administrative cost and failure by companies to adhere strictly in the payment of the stipulated 2% of their annual profit to the education tax fund has further endanger the improvement of higher education for the actualization of its lofty and laudable goals and objectives.

Lack of Adequate Infrastructure

Infrastructures in tertiary institutions are grossly inadequate and as such affects the quality of academic activities. The high demand for higher education among citizens had given rise to students' explosion in tertiary institutions of learning. However, there is no corresponding increase in the provision of infrastructures such as classrooms, hostels, office space for academic/non-academic staff, furniture, modern technology equipment, ICT facilities, well equipped libraries, laboratories and workshops, etc, to cater for this increase for conducive

teaching and learning. Odia and Omofonmwan (2007) attributed this scenario to underfunding of the sector in the country in general and the neglect of the maintenance of the physical and instructional facilities and as such, living conditions have deteriorated in many of these institutions, classrooms, libraries and laboratories are nothing to write home about, and all these led to a decline in academic standards. In their contribution, Odeh, Tyokyaa, Aernyi and Ameh (2016) noted that students in some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are learning in dilapidated buildings which are poorly ventilated, poorly illuminated, poorly furnished and environmentally depressing and disabling situations, with lecturers sharing small offices. This situation was further amplified by Okebukola in Odeh et al (2016) in a need assessment survey carried out by the National University Commission (NUC)which reported that only about 30% of Nigerian students' population has adequate access to classrooms, workshops, lecture halls, laboratories and libraries; that is due to deficient libraries in terms of currency and number of books, journals and electronic support facilities, inadequate academic calendar resulting from staff unions industrial action premised on low salary, wage/welfare package and students' unrest (sic) often time related to inadequate facilities and lack of practical experience. These factors are all threat to improving quality higher education in Nigeria.

Poor Remuneration for Academic Staff

This is one lingering crisis that had consistently demoralized the productivity of lecturers especially in federal tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is on record that lecturers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria are the least paid in Africa. This position was affirmed by Amadike in Idialu (2017) when he noted that poor remuneration is responsible for the poor attitude to work of staff; they go about doing their own business instead of concentrating on how to improve the quality of teaching and learning in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Coupled with this challenge, is the issue of work load, which is as a result of shortage of staff. Academic staffs especially in federal universities are over-burdened with excess work load arising from the number of undergraduates/post graduates supervisees allotted to each supervisor per session, in addition to the courses to be taught and they are also expected to do research. The question is what time do they have to do all these? The stress arising from excess work load

has been attributed to the frequent death of lecturers especially in the University of Port-Harcourt, Nigeria. Little wonder, this had been the reasons for the too many industrial actions embarked upon by academic staff unions in tertiary institutions. For instance, according to Osun Radio in Dimunah (2017) it stated that ASUU went on strike for 5months in 2000, 3 months in 2001, 2 weeks in 2002, 6 months in 2003, 3 days in 2005, 1 week in 2006, 3 months in 2007, 1 week in 2008, 4 months in 2009, 5 months 1 week in 2010, 3 months in 20011 and 5 month 20 days in 2013. Not even the agreement reached and signed in 2009 by the union and federal government on "Earned Allowance" could help forestall these strikes being embarked upon by the union because the federal government on its part is not being proactive in ending this problem all on the excuse of "No Money" as always being alleged by government. Hence, they have been fulfilling this agreement with the union in tranches with the recent part payment paid in 2019 and yet the matter is far from being over.

Lack of Staff Development Programme

In this present day knowledge based economy, the constant training and retraining of staff by tertiary institutions to enhance the knowledge, skills and attitude of staff is germane to the improvement of quality education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Unfortunately, this is lacking in tertiary institutions as noted by Asiyai and Oghuvhu (2009) that the lack of staff development programmes accounted for the decline in the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. It is an established fact, that employee who undergoes continuous training and retraining in modern methods and discoveries in his or her field will become more productive and as such add value to the organization. Continuous staff training and development (CSTD) in managing the Nigerian tertiary education for national transformation is an imminent need in Nigeria and for this reason, policy makers and all education stakeholders in Nigeria need to consider giving adequate attention to CSTD by embarking on advocacy projects and programmes that will boost CSTD in the tertiary institutions as an instrument/tool which will serve as a preventive measure for curbing academic deficiencies, low quality, malfunction of the system, poor management inefficiency, ineffectiveness, low performance of the teaching force, students and poor standards/instructional delivery in Nigeria

tertiary institutions (Ofojebe and Chukwuma, 2015).

Ineffective Use/Deployment of Modern Technology

The 21st century emerged with its own challenges in the educational scene especially in the higher education. Okoli (2015) noted that the 21st Century is a knowledge-driven society where individuals perform several skills at the same time. It is also known as the ICT-driven era. Everything is computer-based. Teaching and learning ought to reflect the modern day technology. In other words, teachers are supposed to be trained, retrained and equipped to teach in modern design classrooms with modern technological equipment and adequate ICT facilities. This will go a long way to prepare the students to survival and compete favourably with their counterparts from other climes. The need for paradigm shift to match the 21st century spirit where teachers and students in tertiary institutions are well enlightened and computer literate would no doubt, improve the quality and standard of tertiary education in Nigeria. This however, will cushion the effect of unemployment and under-employment of graduates from higher institutions in Nigeria, as it would also help in producing entrepreneurs who will manage their own businesses and create wealth for the betterment of the Nation. Unfortunately, the realities on ground in tertiary institutions are so appalling as many teachers and students in tertiary institutions are not ICT compliance and as a result it affects to a large extent the quality of education and the graduates.

Curriculum Review

The need for curriculum developers to revisit the curriculum of tertiary education with the view of reviewing its content and add some courses that would meet and solve the 21st century challenges and transform the nation's economy to compete favourably with other world economies is very expedient. There is no gain saying that the present curriculum being used for tertiary education is archaic and of no benefits to it beneficiaries, the society and the economy. Little wonder, it products are not self-reliant, employable and productive.

CONCLUSION

This article discussed issues in managing quality assurance in improving higher education in Nigeria. The paper highlighted the rot in higher institutions of learning occasioned by poor

funding, lack of adequate infrastructure and instructional facilities, poor remuneration for academic staff, shortage of staff especially academic staff, lack of staff development programmes, ineffective use and deployment of modern technology, obsolete curriculum among others are factors impeding the quality and improvement of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The nexus therefore, between these challenges and improvement of higher education in Nigeria is centered much on inadequate funding. This can be achieved through active participation by the government, multi-nationals, companies, private bodies and parents in the funding of tertiary institutions. Meanwhile, the need for school management to redouble its drive to increase its internally generated revenue cannot be over-emphasized. Only then can the inadequacies highlighted can be addressed, thereby creating an enabling environment that would be conducive for teaching and learning, promote research and scholarship among staff and high level productivity among lecturers and students for the improvement in the quality and standard of higher education in Nigeria.

THE WAY FORWARD

To address the issues of managing quality assurance in the improvement of higher education in Nigeria, the following are recommended:

1. The National Assemblies should as a matter of urgent national importance, make a law mandating the Federal and State governments to appropriate minimum 26% of their annual budgets to education without which the budget will not be approve and also, put in place modalities to ensure that multi-nationals and other companies operating in the country pay the mandatory 2% education tax with a caveat that defaulters will have their license revoked.

2. Government should review upwards the remuneration package and working condition for staff of tertiary institutions especially academic staff as this would halt the migration of staff to overseas and other jobs for better pay.

3. Management of tertiary institutions should put in place policies that would enhance their capacity to generate internally more than the mandatory 10% revenue for its administrative cost as approved by regulatory agencies to make for the availability of more fund to cater for other needs of the institutions.

4. Management of tertiary institutions should develop policy that would encourage staff development whereby staff especially academic staff will be sent to seminars, workshops and conferences to update their skills and knowledge in modern research and technology in their area of specialization for enhanced productivity.

5. There should be deliberate efforts between government and management of tertiary institutions to employ more competent and computer literate academic staff to match the recent students' explosion in the institutions of higher learning.

6. Management of higher institutions should partner with private agencies for the installation of internet services and upgrade the bandwidth for wider coverage as to guarantee an enabling teaching and learning environment for improved quality in research and scholarship especially among academic staff.

7. Reforms to review existing curriculum in institutions of higher learning should be done periodically such that it would meet the demand of the 21st century knowledge-driven society.

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