QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: A DRIVING FORCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Quality assurance is a holistic approach covering all the processes in tertiary institution in order to serve the students and other stakeholders in expected quality standards. The success of quality assurance system depends on the support of the management. This paper examines the current academic and policy literatures surrounding quality assurance in tertiary education. Within the content is a superficial look at strategies for quality assurance in tertiary institutions. Among these are: quality assurance in education, modification of the curriculum, assessment, strategic planning, accreditation to tertiary institution and her programmes, human resource availability, information and communication technology adoption and effective supervision. The development of any nation depends on the quality of its education therefore; conscious effort should be made to ensure quality at every level. This paper look at education as a very significant tool for sustainable development. Through tertiary institution, one is prepared to adapt to social, political, technological and economic challenges. Quality assurance is the way to ensure that students acquire the needed skill and talent in order to face the list challenges of life.

Keywords: Quality assurance; tertiary institutions; driving force; sustainable development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education in Nigeria is viewed as an instrument for national development and social change. It is essential for the enhancement of quality life. Perhaps, it is on the basis of this that the National University Memo (FRN,) [1] state that Nigeria aims at providing education that is qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society. This calls for quality education at all levels in the country to meet the aspirations of individuals and the society, especially in this era of knowledge driven society and global competitiveness. Quality is a diversified concept, which encompasses how learning is organized and managed, the content of learning and the level of achievement in terms of outcomes and what goes on in the learning environment, [2]. Quality assurance is an important component of successful internationalization and mechanism for building institutional reputation in a competitive local and global arena, and necessary foundation for consumer protection [3]. Quality assurance on the other hand, is about consistently meeting product specification or getting things right the first time, and every time. Quality assurance in the tertiary institutions implies

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the ability of the institutions to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their outputs [4]. Equally, it can be said to be the ability of the universities to meet certain criteria relating to academic matters, staff-student ratios, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding, and adequate library facilities.

Education for sustainable development allows every human being to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. Nayar [5] opined that sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Nayar [5] further stressed that sustainable development promotes critical thinking and decision making in a collaborative manner. In Nigeria, Tertiary institution or higher education has been described as the system that provides post secondary school courses and also engages in research [6]. Nigeria sees tertiary education as the “education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and mono-technical including those institutions offering correspondence courses” [1]. University education in Nigeria is aimed at producing high level manpower to man the various sectors of the Nigerian economy. To achieve this goal, the universities need to carry out quality students’ intake, quality teaching/learning processes, quality research and provide quality infrastructural facilities, services and resources. The primary aim of the tertiary institution is to awaken or quicken the human potentials. These potentials according to [7] are developed through:

i. Enculturation and progressively equipping the individual, the socio-cultural skills that should enable one to fit neatly into one’s immediate society.

ii. Acculturation, progressive exposure to outside influence from which one can intelligently borrow to expand the horizon provided by one’s immediate society.

iii. Intellectual skill acquisition, for the pursuit of self-development through the acquisition of knowledge in a variety of forms and by a variety of means.

iv. Affective traits development, progressively improving on the imbibed attitudes, values, and other behavioral traits that facilitate one’s relationships with fellow human beings as well as one’s capacity for continuous self-employment.

v. Manipulative and psychomotor skills development, progressively awaking the physical powers of the individual, and progressively working towards a perfect coordination of activities of the body with those of the mind.

vi. Inculcation of lifelong learning skills (also called learning-to-learn skills), a constellation of activities, habits, mind-set, etc that predispose one to develop the spirit of inquiry and a perpetual thirst for knowledge. These important points mention are inter-related and have no terminal point.

Therefore, they must all work together for the all-round development of the individual and who contributes to the larger society. Babalola and Adedeji [8] noted that the wealth and poverty of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Those who are poorly educated lives a quiet desperation consequently submits to the deceit of politics of patronage, thuggery which poise threat to sustainable development in Nigeria. It is through this measure that this paper will look at strategies that will enhance quality assurance in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The Nigerian government in the bid to ensure quality in tertiary institution established commission like the National Universities Commission (NUC) National Commission for Colleges of Education, (NCCE), and National Board for Technical Education (NABTE). These commissions and Board are mandated to ensure quality education in Nigeria tertiary institutions. More so, the higher the quality of man power turned out by institutions, the faster the rate of growth, development and great achievement of a nation’s educational goal. In other words, the lower the quality, impact turn out to negative on the development of a country.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

The need for quality assurance in Nigerian schools cannot be overemphasized in order to ensure quality of teaching and learning. Musinguzi [9] defines quality assurance as the mechanism put in place to guarantee that education is fit for purpose. [10] Opined that quality assurance in the university system implies the ability of the institution to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their outputs. They maintained that it can be said to be the ability of the universities to meet certain criteria relating to academic matters, staff-student ratios, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding, and adequate library facilities. It has been explained that adequacy of various inputs in the university system, in terms of quality and quantity, exercises tremendous influence on quality assurance in the university system.
The National Universities Commission [11] defines quality assurance as the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained. As part of the efforts to ensure qualitative university education in Nigeria, the Commission was particular about ensuring accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian universities in order to produce graduates who are relevant to the Nigerian economy. Emphasis was laid on quality of academic staff and students to be admitted and employed respectively. The commission is committed to improving the quality of university programmes through injection of requisite inputs as well as assuring quality process and output based on the decree 49 of 1988 that widened its scope. The National Universities Commission is charged with the responsibility of ensuring the quality of higher education in Nigeria. In pursuit of its mandate, the Commission evolved a system of programme accreditation to ensure conformity with minimum academic standards and to enhance quality.

Elton [12] refers to these as the quality ‘A’s: Accountability, Audit, and Assessment’ and suggests that these are concerned with the control of quality and the people who control quality. The particular mechanisms for assurance are usually imposed by external bodies, such as university management and most commonly include accreditation, external examiners and quality audits [13]. As a control tool therefore, the focus is predominantly on the extent to which the procedures and conditions that are perceived to result in appropriate levels of quality are followed within institutions or programmes and are effective in meeting their purpose [14]. Prioritized dimensions of quality therefore include quality as consistency, quality as fitness for purpose, and quality as value for money. As these external bodies also assure that a minimum threshold of quality is maintained, quality as exceptional is also a relevant dimension. Teachers therefore, are more likely to be concerned with quality as transformative where it is an ongoing process that includes empowerment and enhancement of customer satisfaction [15]. The emphasis for them here is therefore not only on quality assurance, but additionally on quality enhancement which aims at an overall increase in the actual quality of teaching and learning often through more innovative practices [13].

A suggests by [12] that this approach focuses on the quality ‘E’s: Empowerment, Enthusiasm, Expertise, and Excellence. Mechanisms to be adopted by the teachers are likely to include self evaluation practices and student surveys. As students are viewed as an integral part of the learning process, this approach tends to be more formative in nature and therefore more likely to lead to continual quality improvement efforts. The involvement of teachers is also more likely to result in a culture of quality being embedded within programmes. However, these measures are representational of a comparatively limited number of teachers and where self-evaluation practices are employed; there can be a tendency to paint a rosy picture especially when linked to appraisal or tenure decisions. Target Areas in Quality Assurance has become an internationalized concept. The NUC reported the first attempt 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. No African universities were ranked, including Nigeria. Since this development, the NUC has heightened its efforts in standardizing the quality of university education in Nigeria.

Kisailowska cited in [10] noted that quality assurance principles are certain form of naming and ordering the actions that are necessary for assuring quality, for instance in teaching, it is internally measured and evaluated at a given university, and also externally, during an accreditation process. It involves a self-study, peer review and a reporting system. Internal quality assurance, on the other hand, refers to the internal polices and mechanisms of a university or programme for ensuring that it is fulfilling its purpose as well as the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline, in particular [10]. As a result of this, quality assurance principles are to be used as indicators to ensure compliance. It is noteworthy, that quality assurance principles regulate both the internal activities of an educational institution.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality Assurance is a condition that leads to the achievement of transparency. It will ensure the quality of the academic (teaching, curriculum etc) and structural (buildings, computers etc) provision of courses and it will allow an objective review of their quality. The transparency should be dialectical, meaning that the quality assurance should make institutions transparent, but also that the quality assurance in itself should be transparent, allowing the outcomes to be shared by the participants (actors). As students we particularly want to overcome the obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement of students, recognition of courses and qualifications and guarantee the ‘fitness for purpose of our education’ and ensure that the outcomes of higher education meet our expectations.
4. MODIFICATION OF THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum is expected to respond positively to modern trends of event through emphasis on innovative knowledge and skills which are variously referred to as ‘daily living skills, survival skills and life coping skills’ [16]. The world is not static in nature but dynamic and change is a constant phenomenon in the world, therefore, the education industry which is the most dependable for interpretation and adaptation of the constant changes in the world turn out a lot of graduates every year who are expected to identify and solve problems, establish good working relationships with others and organize and manage themselves responsibly, collect and evaluate information, communicate in different ways, use science and technology effectively and the capacity to develop a consistent world-view [17]. Courses are modified and new courses are introduced to enable student acquire lifelong coping skills through science processes which include observation, experiment, generalization and prediction. The modification of the curriculum enhances the holistic development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains for quality productivity and meaningful integration into the society for sustainable living. The introduction of courses like general studies (GST), entrepreneur education, and vocational education among others are indices of curriculum modifications in tertiary institutions.

5. ACCREDITATION OF TERTIARY INSTITUTION AND THEIR PROGRAMMES

The phenomenal growth of tertiary institutions in Nigeria is unparalleled anywhere in the African continent. The growth has been in terms of increase in students’ population and then number of tertiary institutions themselves. These citadels of learning which means of social mobility, self-development and skill acquisition are expected to play major roles in the fulfillment of Nigeria philosophy of education through training and research to ensure quality of their institution. It is therefore imperative for faculty members, facilities, and examination and grading system to be subjected to scrutiny by a team of professors in that discipline, selected from different tertiary institutions by the different commission or board like NUC, NCCE, and NBTE, who are charged with responsibility of monitoring the activities of the various tertiary institutions. The accreditation exercise is usually carried out every two-five years. During the exercise, the programmes that are irrelevant are eliminated while programmes that are relevant and of good quality are given full accreditation status [3].

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION

Quality assurance is a prerequisite for accreditation. Higher education intuitions are constantly evolving and changing, accreditation is based on an evaluation done at a specific point in time, normally with reference to a specific area of the institutions (a course or facility). This normally leads to the awarding of certificate or recognition that the institution or part therefore meets certain standards. When accrediting, quality assurance should be the guarantee that the standard measured in the accreditation process can be upheld in the long term. Thus accreditation cannot be said to be complete unless the three steps outlined in the Quality Assurance and Accreditation policy are enacted and the process is seen as ongoing. The importance of accreditation for students can be stated in three points:

1. Accreditation provides students with programs, which are clearly defined and appropriate. Accreditation provides added assurance that the program in which students are enrolled or are considering enrolling is capable of achieving what it sets out to do.
2. Accreditation facilitates the mobility of students because it provides the higher education institutions with independent approval of the various programs at other institutions where a student can come from. This can lead to development of pre recognition of degrees.
3. Accreditation must facilitate the recognition of degrees in other countries and thus facilitate mobility of graduates.

7. STRATEGIC PLANNING OF PROGRAMMES

Strategy for quality assurance in Nigeria tertiary institution according to Etuk [18] is strategic planning of programmes. Etuk stated that strategic planning requires that heads of departments, deans of school/faculties state the objectives of their academic programmes, its contribution to economic development with regard to their graduates in terms of their capabilities when they are out of school. They should also use Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis to access their programmes. Strategic planning in tertiary institutions will attract funds from government and other agencies if the programmes are relevant and given accreditation. Funds have been a very crucial and fundamental concern to the government and managers.
of tertiary institutions. Strategic planning of programmes can induce generation of revenue from both internal and external sources, since government alone cannot fund their tertiary institutions sufficiently, it is imperative for these institutions to adapt strategic plans to earn her sustenance.

8. ADOPTION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The invention of new applications based on information and communications technologies (ICTs) has had two economic effects up to now. These applications have transformed education system, creating values and transformation of tertiary school system and increasing economic growth through quality improvements. Fundamentally, this is a laudable area of need in ensuring quality in tertiary institution is the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Information is an indispensable part of the contemporary world, not only has it brought about rapid technological, economic transformation, and globalization, the tertiary school system depend on it to cope with the worldwide information need. Within the school system, ICT adoption promotes teaching and learning for instance, in recent times, the multimedia internet-based technologies have provided opportunities for teaching and learning at a distance. ICT also facilitates the Management Information System (MIS) into the administrative processes; on-line libraries provide access to current books, journals and other information resources through global networking. A study by [19] on computerization of MIS and administrative effectiveness in Nigeria Universities holds that MIS has helped to facilitate decision-making for effective administration, classroom and individual student’s management, resource management and generation of data. It also helps to generate additional information concerning problems, opportunities and challenges, inclusive also, is its contribution to the development of on-line screening and registration of students. This paper also considers the impact of ICT technologies coming into application in the workplace today in light of the economic and technical forces behind ICT application up to now.

9. CONCLUSION

Education is regarded as the very significant tool for development of the nation. Through tertiary institutions, one is prepared to adapt to social, political, technological and economic challenges. Quality assurance is the means to ensure that students acquire the basic skills and talent in order to achieve academic development. Sustainable development can only be achieved if an uneven attention is given to education to ensure its quality, seeing that it is the bedrock of any transformation and sustainability. In order to ensure a peak performance by these institutions of higher learning, there is need for modalities that will enhance quality output since the Nigerian government has relied on academic dons to come out with reforms in every sector. The educational sector is the largest enterprise whose function remains indispensable. It is the centre for research, human resource development and highly dependable to proffer solutions to global needs therefore, quality assurance in this industry cannot be compromised.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the study, recommendations were made as follows:

1. Structures, infrastructures and utilities are an essential driving force for quality assurance in any organization, there is need for tertiary institutions to utilize it for sustainable university system.
2. Impact assessment and evaluation should be carrying out in tertiary institutions so as to find out if the core expectations of the establishment of a particular institution are being met.
3. There should be periodic visitation to universities which is a statutory requirement that empowers the proprietor to ascertain the well-being of the university so as to ensure quality assurance.
4. Accreditation is the process by which programmes are evaluated against set minimum academic standards and institutions comprehensive academic research and development activities, NUC should ensure strict compliance to this directive by institutions in Nigeria.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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