
Quality Assurance in Nigeria University Education for Sustainable National Development

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Abstract

Quality assurance in university education for sustainable national development is inevitable. This is because it is only through quality assurance that university can produce graduates that are competent to display some elements underlying development. Quality assurance is an important strategy for achieving improved university education quality and efficiency. Thus, the paper reviewed the concept of quality assurance. The paper also discussed the need for quality assurance in university education, challenges facing quality assurance in Nigeria university education and strategies for building quality assurance in university education for sustainable development. The paper concluded that quality assurance body should endeavor to have effective institutional quality assurance policy, regular accreditation exercise, regular self-assessment, academic audits, attitudinal change and establishment of quality assistance unit in universities as strategies for achieving quality university education that will promote sustainable development. Finally the paper provided some recommendations to meet the needs and challenges facing quality assurance in Nigeria university education which include among others, that regular supervision and appraisal of university education programmes should be conducted to confirm compliance to quality assurance procedures, this will help in identifying areas that needs remedial actions in implementation process.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, University Education, Sustainable Development, Nigeria

Introduction

The place of university education in the aspect of sustainable human and material development of any nation cannot be over stressed because of its usefulness in the society and vital position occupied in the Nigeria education

system. University education serves as a medium through which citizens acquire skills, knowledge, attitudes, ability, competencies and the cultural norms of a society that are needed for sustainable national development. In other words, university education contributes to the advancement of knowledge, and is expected to provide needed human capital with enhanced skills that can stimulate technological development and high productivity in the economy.

In recognition of the crucial role of university education towards the national development, the federal republic of Nigeria (2013) clearly stated that university education shall make optimum contribution to national development by:

- a. Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation.
- b. Making professional course contents to our national requirements
- c. Making all students, as parts of a general programme of all-round improvement in university education to offer general study courses such as history of idea, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism. It further stated that university research shall be relevant to the nation's development goals. Basically, the above motives of the Nigerian universities towards development are usually pursued through teaching, community service, staff development programme and dissemination of knowledge to both government and industries. However, the continuous increase in students enrolment in Nigeria universities without corresponding infrastructure, funding and manpower has reduced the quality of educational services delivery at the university level. Thus, the standard of university in Nigeria can be revived through quality assurance. Quality education equips people with the ability that will enable them explore the world and manipulate it for their survival and establishment (Njoku, 2016). In addition, quality education ensures that teaching and learning in university meet certain standard. Similarly, Iniobog (2013) established that quality education has been the backbone of development in most countries of the world, because it propels both economic and social emancipation of a nation. Quality university education, therefore, can be achieved through quality assurance. According to Harman cited in Omebe (2015) quality assurance is a systematic management and assessment procedure adapted by higher education institutions and systems in order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements. Manafa (2019) defines quality assurance as strategy used to obtain effective teaching and learning for the achievement of educational objectives and goals.

Sustainable development according to Manafa (2020) is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental system. Quality assurance in university institution therefore

becomes very imperative tool for sustainable development because it is through quality university education that highly qualified manpower can be produced.

Concept of Quality Assurance

Basically, quality assurance in education is regarded as process of putting in place suitable structures of planning, coordinating, monitoring, assessing, evaluating, reporting, motivating and reassessing of the resources, inputs and transformation process (teaching and learning) to produce better outputs (students) that meet set standard and expectation of the society. Quality assurance in higher education refers to setting standards for the various process and activities that lead to the production of graduates by the training institutions (Civar, 2005). According to UNESCO (2012), quality education is characterized by:

- i. Learners who are healthy, well nourished and ready to participate in learning and supported by their families and communities
- ii. Environment that are healthy, safe, protective and gender sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities
- iii. Content that is reflected in skills for life etc
- iv. Processes through which trained teachers use child centered teaching approaches in classrooms, schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities
- v. Outcomes that encompass knowledge and attitudes linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society

in addition, Ayeni (2012) reiterated that quality assurance in education has to do with setting standard, for the various process and activities that lead to the production of graduates by the training institutions. These process and activities includes entry requirement, programmes duration, course content, quality of teachers, infrastructure/facilities, school environment from holistic perspective and examination items, supervision, moderation of result and grading system. Similarly, Igborgbor(2012) states that quality assurance are all the measures taken to ensure that the educational system is better achieved to meet the needs of the society. It is the degree with which a product, services or phenomenon conforms to an established standard, and which makes it to be relatively supervisor to other (Oyewumi and fatoki, 2015). Therefore, ensuring quality in education requires the right quantity and quality in everything that goes into the teaching learning process or system as input and process (Okoye and Ashibogwu, 2018). Thus, quality assurance in university education aims to maintain and enhance the quality and efficiency education that will produce highly qualified man-power needed for sustainable national development.

The Need for Quality Assurance in University Education

The need for quality assurance in Nigeria university education is highly desired in order to ensure quality teaching and learning that would produce quality graduates that are relevant for sustainable development in Nigeria. Adegbesan (2010) outlines the major needs of quality assurance in our educational system in Nigeria to include:

- a. To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in education
- b. To assist in monitoring and supervision of education
- c. To determine the quality of the teacher input
- d. To ensure and maintain high standard of education at all levels
- e. To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control
- f. It would ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilize and
- g. To determine the number of classrooms needed based on the average class size to ensure quality control of education

In addition, quality education is inevitable to sustainable development. For any nation to develop economically, socially, technologically and politically quality education needs to be put in place. In view of the above, Federal Ministry of Education (2014) reiterated that education quality assurance in Nigeria is paradigm shift from the formal practice of school supervision and inspection to a monitoring and evaluating process that provides a new operative mode of evaluation. This is carried out according to set standard that brings about improvement in teaching and learning. The strategic aim of quality assurance is therefore to prescribe standards and ensure that inputs, processes and out puts of the system meet these standards. However, the need to develop quality assurance in the university education system is obvious for many reasons, these include:

a. **Poverty level in Nigeria:** Poverty level in Nigeria needs divine intervention through quality university education. Education remains a major factor for eradicating poverty and providing high level human capital for national development. Quality university education gives the individual the opportunity of living within and contribute to the economic development of his society. Thus, in producing the graduate, quality university education takes cognizance of the dynamics of the labour market, equips its graduate with occupational skills and competencies to enable them be self-reliant thereby reduce the problem of poverty among the citizens in the society.

b. **The Nature and Output of Graduate:** In recent times, universities and student population have increased exponentially, but the quality of graduates has failed to meet the labour market expectations and international competitiveness. Majority of these graduates also fail to secure jobs due to inadequate preparation for labour market and low absorptive capacity of the market (Babalola, Adedeyi

and Erwat, 2007). Therefore, the nature and out put of graduates in Nigeria universities is signifying that unless positive measures are taken to address the problem, the future of development in Nigeria is blinking. Hence, these is the need for enhancing quality university education that would bring about sustainable development.

c. **Facilities Available in the Nigeria University:** Facilities available in Nigeria university are inadequate compare with students population. Facilities available in the Nigerian universities therefore requires positive measures like quality assurance that would bring about positive changes to the poor status of facilities available in the university.

d. **Skills and Knowledge Required for Development:** Skills and knowledge needed for development can only acquire through quality education. According to World Bank (1999) university education is fundamental to the creation of a knowledge economy in all nation. Generally, one of the fundamental objectives of universities is to promote national development through intellectual inquiry, and the transmission of specialized knowledge. It Is only quality university education that can produce graduates that are competent in the area of knowledge, skills, experience, and qualifications, personnel integrity, confidence, organizational culture, motivation, team-spirit and quality relationship needed for sustainable development.

e. **Accountability:** Quality assurance is needed in Nigeria university education for accountability. University education is Intensive with huge investment that needs to be subjected to continuous accountability for proper management and improved quality. Therefore, all Nigerian universities should embrace the culture of quality assurance in order to improve the quality of teaching, learning and research. In this regard, Adegbesan (2010) opines that quality assurance is related to accountability both of which are concerned with maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems and services in relation to their contexts, of their missions and their stated objectives.

f. **Maintenance of Good Standard:** There is need for quality assurance in Nigeria university education for maintenance of good standards as many people believed that lack of proper maintenance of quality assurance in the management of academic programmes, perhaps explains why graduates of tertiary institutions are described as half baked, unemployable and incapable of contributing toward the society wellbeing. Also in this era of globalization, high competition for the global economy as well as massification of education calls for maintenance of quality assurance in university education. Thus, university education in Nigeria needs to embrace the culture of quality assurance in order to redeem its image without compromising the standards would enable the graduate. Good standard to demonstrate certain abilities in making decision initiating goals, inspiring others to act in understanding and analyzing problems and finding solutions to them.

Strategies for Building Quality Assurance in University Education for Sustainable Development

The relevance of quality assurance in university education for sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. Quality education basically promotes development, thus, achieving quality university education does not happen by chance but achieved through implementation of well thought out strategies that can upgrade the university education standard and improve quality of its products. Amongst the strategies needed to guarantee the desired quality of education is to build quality assurance mechanism into the learning process (Thorm-Otuya and Inko-Tariah, 2013). Similarly, Nnorom and Gaius-Oke (2013) enumerate some quality assurance strategies as minimum academic standard, accreditation, carry capacity and admission quota, visitation, impact assessment, research and development, publications and research assessment and structures, infrastructure and utilities. However, some strategies for building quality university education for sustainable development in Nigeria are discussed below:

a. Provision of Institutional Quality Assurance Policy: Quality assurance policy is one of the vital strategies for building quality assurance culture in Nigeria university education. Thus, university management in Nigeria needs to provide quality assurance policy which explicitly displays their commitment for quality. The enabling policies should set the philosophy, vision and systematic procedure for student admission, staff recruitment, delivery of courses, curriculum development and the overall effectiveness of the university system (Ibara, 2011). Similarly, the methods for implementing quality assurance policy should also be included in policy statement. In addition, monitoring procedures that would ensure policies implementation, evaluation and periodically review should be included in the policy. In line with the above view, Federal Ministry of Education (2014) established that quality, and standards must be derived from a coherent policy framework, which provides clear directives and guidelines as well as principles, assumptions, structures, roles and responsibilities.

b. Accreditation: Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institutional programmes meets a threshold standard and qualities for a certain status. Obtaining accreditation may have implications for the higher education institution itself (e.g permission to operate) and/or its students (e.g eligibility for grants) (woodhouse, 1999). The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources, and procedures of a higher education or programme (Dill, 2000). Accreditation of programmes and institutions is carried out in order to ensure all the programmes in the institution of learning meet the requires standard. The purpose of accreditation is to improve the quality of education. Therefore, the accreditation in university institutions should be strengthened because a lot is seen each time being put in place practically as the professionals (accreditors) come around for accreditation exercise (Inspection).

Besides, some universities are usually not prepared for the National Universities Commission (NUC) accreditation visits and in most cases personnel and facilities are hurriedly put in place to get their programme accredited (Uche 2011). Accreditations should therefore be engaged in thorough monitoring to ensure that most of the institutions that used to do window dressing are uncovered.

c. Assessment: Assessment is a major component of the culture of continuous improvement. Assessment is an evaluation that makes graded judgements about quality, in this respect it goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary judgment (Dill, 2000). It asks “how good are your output”? and it provides the basis for having an insight of quality and enables educational institutions to understand its strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of improving their services. According to Ibara (2015) the self-assessment process would enable universities to examine the quality of its operations and identify areas in which improvement can be made for the future enhancement of educational services delivery.

d. Audit: Academic audits are carried out at the institution level. It is a systematic way of reviewing the quality of education in an institution of learning. It is a process of evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution programmes to verify compliance with specified standards. Hence, a quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives (Woodhouse, 1999). Standard New Zealand cited in Woodhouse (1999) defines quality audit as a three part process, checking:

1. The suitability of the planned quality procedures in relation to the stated objectives,
 2. The conformity of the actual quality activities with the plans, and
 3. The effectiveness of the activities in achieving the stated objectives.
- However, unlike accreditation or assessment, audits do not aim at making a comprehensive review of higher education institutions or programmes resources and activities nor do they directly evaluate the quality of teaching or learning. Rather audits focus on those processes implemented by higher education institutions in order to assure and improve the quality teaching and learning (Dill, 2000).

e. Attitudinal Change: Attitudinal change is one of the effective strategies of achieving quality education in Nigeria. Hence, developing quality assurance for sustainable development necessitates a paradigm shift in the prevailing circumstance of regarding public service as no man`s job or no man`s money, a scenario that breeds indiscipline and luke warm disposition to assigned roles in the university. For example, academic staff should not engage in unethical and dishonesty practices in discharging their responsibility and at the same time students also need a change of attitude as regards to their conducts as some of them do normally go after lecturers for undeserved favour. Quality assurance

involves attitudinal change and reorientation, therefore, it is important to carefully explain the quality trends in the institution during orientation for new students.

f. Establishment of Quality Assurance Unit in University: Establishment of quality assurance unit in universities is a component of quality education, thus, to achieve quality university education, a quality assurance unit need to be set up by universities in Nigeria to monitor and evaluate academic programmes, teaching as well as learning environment. Quality assurance unit is inevitable to university education as the entire gamut of the university operation revolve around quality education delivery. In supporting this view, Udom (2002) opines that quality consciousness among employees is a consequence of quality assurance policy which is very rare in Nigeria institutions of Learning. The roles of the quality assurance unit among others should include:

- Assessment of human and material resources available to academic programmes
- Liaising with external quality assurance agencies to keep abreast of latest development and innovations
- Monitoring the input process and output of the system
- Evaluation of academic programmes
- Organizing workshops and seminars for academic
- Interfacing with the academic planning units and curriculum committee of the university for innovation in curriculum design content and organization
- Monitoring of graduates for feedback information on their performance from employees (Ibara, 2015).

Challenges facing Quality Assurance in Nigeria University Education

Quality assurance in Nigeria universities is facing a lot of challenges. These challenges seem to be common to all universities irrespective of their types and ownership. Some of these challenges are:

- Tendency to increase access without much attention to quality issues
- Rapid expansion without adequate strategic plan to ensure quality
- Unethical practices by parents, students and staff at various stages in the process of admission, administration, instruction, examination, supervision, certification, graduation and absorption into the labour market
- Poor accountability and transparency in governance
- Shortage of academic staff in some fields
- Double commitment by some lecturers
- Lack of enforcement of sections
- Inadequate infrastructure and infrastructure decay
- Human capital flight or brain drain
- Lack of sustainable funding (Babalola, 2011:13)

It glaring to note from the above that these problems stretch right across the input, process and outcome elements of quality education. Thus, unless concerted

efforts are put in place at ensuring quality in these crucial areas, the ultimate goal of providing quality university education in Nigeria would be unrealistic.

Conclusion

Quality assurance in Nigeria university education is fundamental to national development. Intellectual potentials of citizens which are developed through university education makes them to be key contributors not only to the national but global economic, social and political development. Quality university education will no doubt create a lot of benefits. It is obvious that quality assurance involves putting in place appropriate structures human and material resources in order to ensure that minimum standards are attained in the university institutions. It is on this note that quality assurance body should endeavor to have effective institutional quality assurance policy, regular accreditation exercise, regular self-assessment, regular academic audits, attitudinal change and establishment of quality assurance unit in university as strategies for achieving quality university education that will promote sustainable development.

Recommendations

In order to actualize a quality assurance university education in Nigeria, the following recommendation are made:

1. Universities should have more viable student admission policy to ensure that only those that qualified are admitted into the universities. This is because poor input could affect the outcome of products.
2. University education should be well funded to enable the sector conveniently implement its projects in line with global acceptable practices
3. Regular supervision and appraisal of university educational programmes should be conducted to confirm compliance to quality assurance procedures. This will help in identifying areas that need remedial actions in implementation process.
4. There should be regular capacity building training for staff through seminars, conferences and workshops to broaden their knowledge with new skills and improved innovations that guarantee improved quality services delivery in the university education system.
5. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should mandate universities in Nigeria to establish quality assurance units and provide quality assurance policy that will guide their operation.
6. University management should encourage periodical review of curriculum based on the NUC guideline in order to incorporate new needs of the global economy and labour market that will sustain national development

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