

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: PERCEPTIONS OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Nigeria like other countries of the world recognize education as the major instrument for effecting national development. Education is imperative for social, economic and political development of Nigerian. These goals of education can be fully attained if quality delivery is rendered in higher education. Higher education of good quality is critical for Nigeria to become globally competitive. This paper identified and discussed the challenges in higher education in Nigeria. The authors recommended that Nigeria government should meet up with the 26 percent education spending as recommended by UNESCO improve quality of lectures, improve condition of service for staff, internal quality assurance etc. Besides, reform in existing higher education institutions in Nigeria can be attained via collaborative effort between government and other stakeholders on education.

Key words: Quality, higher education, Global challenges, teaching and learning.

There is no gain in saying that basic education has become inadequate to meet the challenges of the growing world not only in Nigeria but also in the entire global village. The demand for higher education, has therefore become imperative and is rapidly increasing geometrically (Fabiya & Oladipo, 2008). The global perception agrees that for economic and social development to be derived effectively, there is the need for advancement in and application of knowledge.

Higher education also referred to as post secondary or tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Universities and those Institutions offering correspondence courses (Federal Ministry of Education, 2004). Defining higher education in terms of the levels and functions of the educational experience offered, Berneth (1997) sees higher educational institutions as unique institutions which is differentiated from others in terms of research and its managers are designated as Provost, Rector and Vice-Chancellor.

Higher education has been recognized as a fundamental instrument for the construction of a knowledge economy and the development of human capitals all over the world (world bank 1999). According to peretomode (2008), higher education is the facilitator, the bed rock, the power house and the diving force for the strong socio-economic, political, healthier and industrial development of a nation. World Bank (1999) argued that higher education is fundamental to all developing countries if they are to prosper in a world economy when knowledge has become a vital area of knowledge. The quality of knowledge which is generated in institutions of higher learning is critical to global competitiveness. It is only quality education that can sharpen the minds of the individual and help transform the society economically, socially and politically. Countries can achieve sustainable development by improving through training in higher level, the skills of their human capitals. From a global perspective, higher level manpower training has been recognized as a primary tool for national development. Such high level educational provisions enables the citizens to acquire skills and techniques which are ploughed into human productivity, creativity, competence, initiative, innovation and inventiveness (Ehramelor, as cited in Odibo, 2012).

Accordingly, section 8(59) of the national policy on education 2014, state that the goals of tertiary education are to:

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

Section 8 (60) of the Federal Ministry of Education also stated that higher education in Nigeria should vigorously pursue these goals through

- ✓ Teaching
- ✓ Research and development
- ✓ Knowledge generation and dissemination and international cooperation
- ✓ Dedicated services to the communities through extramural and consultancy services.

All these stated goals are closely related to quality education because every experience of man counts as education. Despite the immense benefits of higher education to nation building as pointed out by the above goals, their achievements have remained a mirage. According to Bamifo (2012), higher education in Nigeria like other system of education especially in developing countries is going through a series of challenges. Saint, Hartnelt & Strassner (2003) also observed that the potential of higher education system in developing countries to fulfill the responsibility is frequently thwarted long standing problems. These multi-faceted problems have inhibited goal attainment, which have led to draw backs in development and have created fear and doubt about the quality of higher education in Nigeria. This paper looked at the theoretical framework of quality education, global challenges and made possible recommendations.

Quality and Quality Assurance: A Theoretical Framework

Quality is a slippery concept, which implies different things to different people (Preffer and Coote, as cited in Daluba, (2015). It is that which best satisfies and exceeds customer's needs and wants (Artzt, as cited in Odiba, 2012). Quality can be said to lie in the eyes of the beholder. This is because the consumers, who make the judgment on quality, do these by reference to the best comparable performance.

Quality refers to the standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things like it: how good or bad something is, that is, to be of good/poor/top quality or of a high standard. In this context, it is associated with the monitoring and evaluation component of education to see whether the outcome is good and of the intended standard. In view of this, topical issues in Nigerian education system today centre around the quality of education imparted to the citizenry and the relevance of that education to the life of the individual in particular and the nation in general.

There is the general feeling that the quality of education imparted with curricula that are limited to parochial concerns may no longer be adequate in the face of prevailing global situation. The curricula they contended have out lived their usefulness and thus have little relevance to the needs, aspirations and values of today's Nigeria and her education system. Hence, quality factors for education are indispensable, for excellence in education is required for the development of the human resource base needed to catapult Nigeria into an enviable position in the global community.

Quality assurance on the other hand, is about consistently meeting product specification or getting things right first time, every time. Quality assurance in the university system implies the ability of the institutions to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to quality of skills acquired by their outputs (Ajayi and Akindutire, 2007). Equally, it can be said to be the ability of the universities to meet certain criteria relating to academic matters, staff-students ratio, staff mix

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by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding and adequate library facilities. Quality assurance is a key component of successful internationalization, mechanism for building institutional reputation in a competitive local and global arena and necessary foundation for consumer protection (National University Commission, 2007).

Quality is the ability or degree with which a product, service, or phenomenon conforms, to an established standard, and which make it to be relatively superior to other. With respect to education, this implies the ability or degree with which an educational system conforms to the established standard and appropriateness, of the inputs available for the delivery of the system. (Fadipe as cited in Gbenu, 2012) Quality in education, therefore means the relevance and appropriateness of the education programme to the needs of the community for which it is provided.

Quality control, as defined by Olagboye as cited in Thorm-Otuya & Inko-Tariah (2016) is the arrangement made or the mechanism put in place to maintain the degree of excellence of a product or service. Applied to education, it means, the mechanism by which an education system ensures that the service it delivers or intends to deliver serve the purpose for which it is intended. It centers on the means by which an educational system ensures that the service it provided remains relevant and appropriate to the needs of the society. It involves series of operational techniques and activities which include all actions taken in order for the quality requirement to be met. Indices for quality assurance in education include:

- ❖ **Learners:** Their entry behaviours, characteristics, and attributes including some demographic factors that can inhibit or facilitate their learning;
- ❖ **The teachers:** Their entry qualifications, values, pedagogic skills, and professional preparedness.
- ❖ **The teaching/learning process:** Including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment.
- ❖ **Flow of operational fund;** its adequacy and regularity. The interplays of these and other related factors will go a long way in determining the outcome of any educational programme.

However, Zelvys (2004) perceived that the concept of quality has been one of the most important concepts in contemporary educational terminology. Many educationists have attempted to define the quality of education and educational assurance. Alele – Williams (2004) defined quality assurance in any educational institution as that which indicates the pre-eminence and special features that makes the institution distinct from other forms of institution.

Amaele (2005) enumerated two aspects of quality in education, which are both internal and external. The internal aspect is the implementations of the school objectives while the external aspect deals with the implementation of national objectives which are pre-requisites to the achievement of quality in any educational institution.

Quality Assurance Measuring Parameters

Quality of education could be measure in terms of quality of input, quality of output, quality of content and quality of process.

- ✓ **Quality of resource input:** It is often said that no education can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teacher is the most important of all the inputs that go into educational provision. This is because education of the highest quality requires teachers of the highest quality. Education in Nigeria today seems to lack, not only quality programmes but also dedicated and high quality teachers. Most of the teacher education institutions including Faculties of Education turn out teachers that are deficient in content and methodology. As a result, are unable to teach effectively which has an effect on the quality of education imparted. There is thus, the need for the Government to review and overhaul the curriculum for Teacher education at all levels of Nigerian education in order to meet the demand of global community. Government, as a matter of urgency, needs to embark on Quality Teacher Programmes. Special attention needs to be paid to the quality of candidates being admitted to the teacher education programme.

✓ **Quality of output:** The quality of education does not depend only on resource inputs, but also on the output, which includes academic achievement on tests scores and progression and pass rates. The Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) project, a nationwide study conducted between 1994 – 1996 and the report published in 1977 by the Federal Ministry of Education, with the support of UNICEF and UNESCO. The result of the study indicates that an average public primary school child in Nigeria can neither read, write nor calculate properly.

If the consequences of the above scenario is to be reversed, in order to meet the challenges of globalization, Nigeria must therefore, begin by giving greater attention to the entire sector, i.e our pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational foundation and tertiary levels. All stakeholders in education should endeavour to play their roles doggedly to ensure quality education in Nigeria.

✓ **Quality of process:** This implies student/teacher interaction, level of learner participation and engagement in learning. In an earlier study, Ali and Akubue as cited in Daluba (2015) found that teachers dominated the lessons and posed few open-ended questions. Group work which encourages discussion is rarely encountered, and only 10% of teachers used continuous assessment. Okebukola (2010) observational studies showed that boys are given greater opportunities than girls to ask and answer questions, to manipulate materials and to lead groups. In science classroom interaction, girls were also given less time on practical work than boys.

✓ **Quality of content:** The curriculum content of our educational system had been criticized as being overloaded, and does not sufficiently attend to the needs of the Nigerian learner. The data from the Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) project has also shown that there is a wide gap between the intended curriculum and the achieved curriculum. What is required in our system is a re-ordering of the curriculum content (the intended curriculum) and an enrichment of the achieved curriculum and the implemented curriculum with focus on relevance and functionality. The achieved curriculum is the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are achieved or learned while the implemented curriculum is the translation of curricula into reality in classrooms, laboratories, workshops, play grounds and other settings for learning, while not losing sight of the language provisions in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). Following this, there should be a flexible curriculum. Such curriculum must be relevant to both individual learners needs and societal needs at large.

Global Challenges of Quality Education in Nigerian

Several factors pose as challenges of quality in higher education in Nigeria in the 21st century. These factors are highlighted and discussed below:

Inadequate funding: Funding is the most critical challenge that has threatened the attainment of good quality higher education in Nigeria. Onokerrhoraye as cited in Odiba (2012) maintained that a major constraint to attaining academic excellence in Nigerian universities is financial constraints which made many academics and non academics to be working under difficult circumstances. Many institutions of higher learning in Nigeria were unable to build lecture halls, students hostels, equip laboratories and workshops and payment of staff salaries, research grants, allowances and medical bills. Even the FGN/ASUU Re-negotiation Committee (2009) realized as widely acknowledged that the key to the survival of Nigeria in the global community lie in the country's ability to produce applied and theoretical knowledge in science, technology and humanities. Despite all efforts made the Nigerian government have not showed enough commitment towards adequate funding of higher education.

Poor policy implementation: The Poor policy implementation is a challenge to quality delivery in education. The poor quality delivery is responsible for the abysmal low performance of graduates of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in their world of work and the alarming rate of examination malpractice. Anyakoha as cited in Gbenu (2012) argued that our policies are written by knowledgeable writers who have foresight and believe strongly in what they write for the future but

the problem comes when it comes to translating theory into policy by implementers. However, several factors could be adduced as inhibitors to smooth implementation of educational policies and thereby resulting to poor quality delivery. Such factors as government underfunding of education and injudicious utilization of available funds by implementation agencies Vice Chancellors, Rectors, Provosts, Deans of Faculties, Heads of Department etc. When funds meant to deliver quality education is misappropriated or embezzled, the education which the learners receive becomes worthless. Okoroma, (2001) noted that money the government votes for running the institution does not get to the institutions and the little that gets there is normally wasted by education managers. Additionally, in Nigerian institutions of higher learning little attention is paid to teaching effectiveness of academic staff. The “publish or perish” syndrome which places more emphasis on research makes lecturers to be more committed to research.

Lack of information communication technology facilities: Another challenge to quality attainment in higher education in Nigeria is lack of information communication facilities in institutions of higher learning. As part of her educational reform effort, Nigerian government adopted information technologies in all levels of education since information technology integration in educational practices is meant to improve teaching and learning, enhance higher education research, enhance collaboration among peers and improve quality of education. Unfortunately, in most institutions of higher learning in the country, there is acute short of computers, multi-media projectors, electronic white boards, and automation of lecture halls and lecturers offices. Even majority of the institutions are not linked with functional internet connectivity. Through such internet search, information and relevant school practices which are unknown to teachers and students and which cannot be found in textbooks, can easily be downloaded for use Information and communication technology in education has been continuously linked to higher efficiency, higher productivity and higher educational outcomes, including quality of cognitive, creative, and innovative thinking. Despite the role of information communication technologies in enhancing teaching and learning, researches abound in support of lack of information communication technology tools in institutions of higher learning in the country Asiyai, (2010).

Inadequate teaching staff /poor quality of teaching staff: A big challenge to the attainment of quality higher education in Nigeria is the lack of academic staff. Teachers determine the quality of education because they transmit educational policies into practice and action. As rightly pointed out by Ukeje as cited in Akubuike & Okolie (2013) without adequate number of inspiring, well-informed teachers, fully prepared to meet their responsibilities in our schools, we cannot have good education and without good education, we cannot hope to meet successfully, the global challenges of a changing world. Ajayi (2007) agreed with the above when he posited that good teachers are needed for good education which in turn is indispensable for social change, social transformation and national development. Despite the importance of teachers in the attainment of good education, institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are short of lecturers to adequately handle teaching and learning activities. Where there is inadequate teaching staff and poor quality of lecturers, the attainment of good quality in higher education is difficult.

Frequent labour disputes and closures of universities: A big challenge to quality higher education in Nigeria is the incessant staff union disputes and subsequent closures of Universities. Closure of the institutions affects staff productivity and the realization of educational aims and objectives. Asiyai (2010) revealed that they were too many strikes, some of which lasted up to 6 months, and/or even one year. The disruption of academic programmes of institutions of higher learning affects students learning outcomes, since lecturers find it difficult to complete the course work. In most cases a semester’s course work is sandwiched to few weeks during which lectures are rushed to accommodate the time lost to strike. This type of academic rush is a big threat to attainment of quality in higher education in Nigeria. Adeboyeie, (2003) in his study noted that the higher the level of crisis,

disruptions and hostility, the lower the level of productivity, standard and quality of the products of the system.

Lack of resources: Quality education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources put in place in institutions of higher learning. The lack of infrastructures such as science laboratories, workshops, students' hostels, libraries and electricity will affect the quality of education. For good delivery, these facilities must meet the minimum standard specified by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Council for Colleges of Education (NCCE). For quality teaching and learning, the class size must be small for effective students/teacher interaction. Unfortunately, most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, the lecture halls are overcrowded with majority of the students standing at the corridors during lectures. The undesirable conditions of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have been worrisome to many scholars (Asiyai, 2010 and Odetunde 2004). Students of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are learning in dilapidated buildings which are poorly ventilated, illuminated, furnished and environmentally depressing and disabling situations. These are threats to quality attainment in higher education in Nigeria.

Lack of vibrant staff development programmes: Vibrant staff development programme on a continuous basis will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behaviour, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus become more effective and efficient in the performance of their tasks. In this era of knowledge explosion and emergent knowledge based economy, staff development should be the priority of any nation. Peretomode, (2007) argued that the weakness of post graduate programmes of some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria require a strong staff development Programme for staff. He maintained that universities are staffed by lecturers who are not familiar with the topography of educational landscape and have never been expected to formulate their own philosophies of education or their own views about teaching and learning. Similarly, Adeogun, (2006) noted that an employee who is not trained and exposed to continuous retraining in the modern methods and new discoveries in his or her field will soon become irrelevant to the organization. Due to lack of opportunity for retraining and non mentoring of junior lecturers by professors, the junior lecturers are not exposed to new ideas, facts, theories and research findings in higher education.

Poor leadership: Poor leadership both the government level and the institution level have been a big challenge to quality in higher education in Nigeria. Since the nineties, the government of the country has not shown enough commitment to higher education development in Nigeria. One of the several indices for proper evaluation of government commitment to educational development in any country is budgetary allocation and disbursement to education. UNESCO had recommended 26% budgetary allocation to education based on GNP but the amount allocated to education by Nigerian government has continued to be smaller when compared to other African countries. Additionally, poor leadership of some Nigerian university administrators has been a bane to the attainment of quality in education in Nigeria. Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria exist because they are goals to be achieved. These goals can only be attained when the human resources within the system are properly managed for their positive impacts on productivity. The duty of a leader is to reduce problems within the system in order to enhance efficiency. Research has shown that most staff disputes in Nigerian institutions of higher learning are attributed to the high handedness and tyranny of some administrators of the institutions (Obiegbu as cited in Thorm-Otuya & Inko-Tariah, 2016). This unhealthy situation could lead to strained relations between university staff unions and management, increased hostility and aggression and increased mutual suspicion which are all threats to mutual co-existence for the attainment of good quality in institutions of higher learning.

Brain drain: Over the past decades, there has been mass exodus of brilliant and most talented lecturers to other sectors of the economy. Some of the lecturers left Nigerian universities to join the business world, some joined politics while others left Nigeria for better services. As succinctly posited by Asidyai, (2010) many experienced and young lecturers are fleeing Nigeria from the frustration of university life into more rewarding and more challenging sectors of the economy and even to overseas countries. Brain drain has led to decline in research outputs from institutions of higher learning in Nigeria vis-à-vis the disappearance of research centers in Nigerian universities. Research brings about improvement in teaching and learning but when there is exodus of brilliant and seasoned academics from institutions of higher learning, the quality of education delivery is threatened.

Cultism and other vices: Higher education institutions in Nigeria are under siege, barded and almost ruined by secret cults (Onoyase and Onoyase 2005). As a result of the activities of cult groups and kidnapers' majority of students, lecturers and their families live in perpetual fear. Some of these cult groups indulge in armed robbery, rape, assassination and infrastructure destruction. They cheat in the examination openly and threaten lecturers when caught. The tensions induced on members of higher education institution communities as a result of the activities of these secret cult groups and kidnapers tend to generate negative impacts on quality of higher education in Nigeria. Students' unrest is another challenge of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. This is a threat to quality education.

Conclusion

In the last three decades, higher education in Nigeria has witnessed a significant growth in terms of expansion of access through increase in enrolment and establishment of additional higher educational institutions. However, it is saddening to note that many of the indices that can guarantee qualitative higher education are not taken into consideration in the country's quest to meet quantitative target. It has been observed that political factors are the main motives behind many of the expansion policies, especially in the University system. The supply of education services in Nigeria is market blind. Admission policies of university are not related to labour demand requirements, nor to individual student interest, but mainly to secondary school grades. The result is pressure on the available limited resources thereby resulting in downward pressure on staff salaries together with deteriorating working conditions. The effects include high degree of brain-drain among the academic staff, incessant strikes, students riots, poor policy implementation, etc. All these have contributed to a precipitous fall in the quality of higher education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

To address the global challenges of quality in higher education in Nigeria, the following are recommended are made:

1. Government should place high premium on education by meeting up the recommended 26% educational spending prescribed by UNESCO, to help revitalize the higher education system.
2. To improve quality, lecturers and non academic staff should be motivated to make them more dedicated, devoted and committed and effective in their jobs.
3. Enabling environment should be created for staff through improved conditions of service, provision of basic infrastructures, virtual libraries and information communication technologies and internet connectivity.
4. Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria should employ more lecturers to match the student's population. Institutional policies should be revised to ensure that more emphasis is paid on teaching effectiveness of lecturers for better quality education.
5. Reform in existing higher education institutions in Nigeria can be promoted through deliberate collaborative efforts by government, business sectors, civil society and the academia. This could help to reinvent Nigerian higher education system for better quality delivery in research, teaching and community services.

6. Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria should set up internal quality assurance and monitoring of lecture units to enhance good quality delivery.

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