Quality Management Strategies and Students’ Academic Performance in the Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT
Strategic quality management has remained one of the principal strategies set in place by the university system to attain the best decision making outcomes in administrative and academic achievement. Quality management is a fundamental strategies coordinated to build an appropriate balance in education inputs. This approach is an evidence-driven process of strengthening the abilities and capacities of individuals, organizations and systems to perform core functions and to continue to improve and develop over time. It is a medium that provides an overarching vision for strengthening all aspects of the university’s programmes. Thus, whatever strategies applies for quality management is, of course, seen as planned activities which focus on increasing and enlarging the capabilities for the attainment of the pre-determined activities of the universities.

Keywords: quality management, academic achievement, strategies, university system

INTRODUCTION
Quality management in the universities is a crucial factor for comprehensive productivity of the academic staff and students. It is seen as a measure of general efficiency, effectiveness and performance of the institutions (Onyene, 2000). Therefore, it is fundamental that universities maintained quality management processes and procedures for the survival of the educational system.
The ultimate aims of quality management strategies are to acquire and organize resources (human and material) to guarantee the achievement of the predetermined objectives of the school. By this, all management functions such as: planning, organizing, supervising, controlling and coordinating are geared towards actualizing students’ performance (Oyedeji, 2000).
In educationally system, performance is medium of ascertaining the extent of achievement in teaching and learning. In this case, it is seen as knowledge attained or skills developed in students. This implies that academic performance is an observed propensity and measured aspect of a students’ mastery of skills or subject content.
The application of quality management within the universities is to ensure that graduates acquire skills and knowledge required to propel societal needs and individuals’ aspiration. In other words, it helps to build the mechanism to assess the quality of students’ admission, quality of academic staff, quality of physical facilities, quality students’ assessment, quality teaching methods and quality of curriculum content. This therefore forms the hallmark of this study.
In the educational sector, quality management is highly related to Total Quality Management. Hence, there are numerous researchers who have formulated frameworks for quality improvements in the
educational sector. These frameworks are called Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), Strategic Quality Management (SQM) or Total Quality Management (TQM). Even though there might be some differences among these approaches, the term TQM is considered to be more general to capture the essence of quality improvements. TQM has been defined as a strategic architecture requiring continuous improvement practices in all areas of usefulness. For Corrigan (1995) it is a management philosophy that builds on organization satisfaction through continuous improvement in the available resources. According to Kaufman (1992), total quality management provides what is required for the accomplishment of organization expectations.

Quality management of the universities reflects on planning, organizing, coordinating and supervising of the various activities for the realization of the predetermined objectives. In other words, it aims at enhancing absolute development of individual capacities in teaching and learning as well as placing premium on the administrative perspectives. On this note, values are placed on control measures that will lead to the actualization of the expected goals of the organization.

**Concept of Quality Management**

Quality management is conceived as quality in every individual, processes, services and products which focuses on improving performance of the institution (Okeke, 2001). As stated by Mgbake (2006) it is an approach to improving competitiveness, effectiveness and flexibility of the organization. In other words, it is fundamentally based on planning, organizing, coordination, budgeting, reporting and supervision.

In another development, quality management is a technique used to communicate to employees what is required to produce the desired quality of products and services and to influence employee actions to complete tasks according to specifications. When quality is designed as the key to an organization’s success, it allows organizations to keep up with current level of production, consumers and requirement for quality programs as well as keeping up with the latest technology.

As a management approach and theory, it emphasizes every aspect of the school businesses as its goals are always long-term development of products and services. In other words, it reflects on breaking down every process or activity for the attainment of high level of productivity of the organization as a whole.

Management’s role in this regards is to develop strategies that is flexible enough to be adapted to every department, aligned with the organizational business objectives as well as basing on customer and stakeholder needs. This implies that once the strategy for quality management is defined, it is always backing up with motivating forces being deployed and communicated to all levels of the organization.

**Concept of Performance**

The New International Webster Comprehensive Dictionary of English Language (2004) defines performance as the act of carrying out an action, executing or doing it. This seems to interpret performance as what is actually done under existing circumstances.

The concept of academic performance is inevitable in any formal institution. It expresses the learning achievement of an individual or a group at the end of an academic programme. It is a criterion for ascertaining the capabilities of a student from which his potentials could be inferred. This implies that academic performance is generally used to determine how well an individual is able to assimilate, retain, recall and communicate his knowledge of what has been learnt.

Agada (2007) defines academic performance as the demonstrated achievement of learning as opposed to the potential for learning. In this case, it is seen as knowledge attained or skills developed in school subjects usually designed by test scores or marks assigned by the lecturers. This implies that academic performance is an observed propensity and measured aspect of a student’s mastery of skills or subject content.

In the educational setting, academic performance is one of the three required aspects of a properly composed learning objective as it denotes an expression of a learner’s attainment in properly stated behavioral objectives. As submitted by Emaikwu (2012), it is an expression of one’s achievement from school based instructions. Thus, students’ academic performance is usually measured in examinations or continuous assessment tests and could be expressed in various ways depending on what the scores will be used for. The various ways of reporting academic performance include: percentages, quartiles, raw scores,
transformed scores, or even as categorical variables such as Excellent, Very Good, First Class, Distinction, A1, B2, C4, F9, etc. This therefore implies that academic performance of a student is a function of many variables. As a vital tool in the measurement of the academic achievements of students during or on completion of a programme, it has become a sine qua non to any formal educational institution. It pertains to scholarly human activities conducted in a formal educational environment.

Concept of Total Quality Management
TQM as addressed by Neves and Nakhai (1993) is the basic tenets of educational system that embedded long-term perspective as it often focuses on management commitment, training, quality as well as improving communication between management and staff. TQM is built on core values even though it is applied based on the different environment of the operations. In general, TQM encompasses many management and business philosophies and its focus gets shifted, based on the scenario where TQM is applied. Whether it is in industry or higher education, TQM philosophy revolves around the customers or students. Hence, its framework is to be built upon a set of core values and concepts. These values and concepts provide foundation for integrating the key performance requirements within the quality framework. A set of fundamental core values forming the building blocks of the proposed TQM framework is: leadership and quality culture; continuous improvement and innovation in educational processes; employee participation and development; fast response and management of information; customer-driven quality and partnership development both internally and externally.

Students’ Admission and Performance of Students
Admission as conceived by the researchers is the acceptance of a candidate on meeting some basic criteria, to study a programme at any level of an educational institution. For the purpose of this study, admission is limited to the acceptance of a candidate who has met the required criteria to study a specific bachelor’s degree programme in the universities. It is the channels, routes or ways through which a prospective candidate could be accepted and given the opportunity to run a programme of his choice or another related programme as deemed fit by the department, faculty or admission authority concerned (Agbo, 2012).

In Nigeria, there are various modes of admissions into bachelor degree programmes. These include: admission through the UTME/PUTME, Direct Entry and the various Non-Degree programmes which have been referred to as preliminary studies programmes in this study. Whatever may be the mode of students’ admission, the management of the universities often therefore drawn certain criteria targeting quality assurance measures. In other words, management designed the guidelines based on the NUC guidelines to harmonize or meet Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) for both preliminary and basic studies (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004).

Presently, there are three categories of students being admitted into university undergraduate programs in Nigeria and they include those that pass through the unified tertiary matriculation examination (UTME) conducted by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), direct entry admission and those who pass through remedial programme being run by individual university respectively (Agbo, 2012). All the three groups have varying academic experiences and hence the basis for differences in their modes of entry into university. There are variations in the ordinary level qualification of the remedial programme students, ranging from no credit to four credit passes.

At various points, admission into the universities is determined by the management of the universities in respects of number of students to be admitted. The admission processes is often guided by number of teaching personnel and facilities available based on the National University Commission yardstick. This is because the commission is determined to make sure that number of students admitted must be proportionate with the facilities as well as the personnel available for the enhancement of the academic performance. Common experiences indicated that where the classroom is over flooded with students, the extent of academic outcome will be affected as the lecturers cannot certainly response to the academic difference in all the students hence leading to retardation in the class activities in some ways.
Supporting the above assertion Ezema (2006) contends that universities use prior academic performance in terms of admission points or different entry qualifications/certificates as a basis for selecting students for admission into the colleges of education, polytechnic schools and universities. These admission points or entry certificates are always of equivalent rating or value, even though they may be awarded by different examination bodies. This scholar also pointed out that the measurement of the students’ admission processes is the most important indicator or determinant of the students’ future academic performance.

**Physical Facilities and Performance of Students**

The basic focus in any higher institution is always on educational facilities and its management because effective and efficient running of the system depends on proper maintenance and use of available structural units and facilities. Ogbodo (1995) defined physical facilities as various paraphernalia which enables skilful lecturers to achieve a level of instructional effectiveness that far exceeds what is possible when they are not available. In the past, little consideration was given to the effect in which educational facilities would have on the learning process and enrolment of students in Schools. It was stated that a well planned and maintained educational facilities will not only enhance good teaching process but also facilitate high level of students’ academic performance.

Onyene (2000) stated that the basic focus is on school plants and administration of facilities because effective and efficient running of the system, proper maintenance and use of the structural units and facilities are quite accurate and imperative. A well designed functional school building provides effective delivery of the school’s curriculum and is positively related to performance of the students (Ogbodo, 1995). Adesina (1981) stated that it is becoming increasingly obvious to our higher institution in Nigeria that their future survival as an educational entity depends to a large extent on the efficient management of available resources.

Educational facilities carry wide meanings which include: school buildings, classrooms and office infrastructures, equipment, library, hostel, blackboard and school records. Its material conditions therefore has to be conductive for all round development of the students’ physical, emotional, social, cultural and moral situation.

Educational facilities are an important factor in school design and drive a host of costly facility. Classroom environment has to be spacious enough and well ventilated to enhance curiosity in the mind of the students. As consented by Oyesola(2000), poorly ventilated classroom makes the students and lectures sick and students cannot perform at their full capacity. A good educational facility will no doubt have positive effect on students’ academic pursuit. Good facilities appear to be an important preoccupation for students’ performance in their academic attitude towards learning.

A growing body of research has linked students’ performance and behaviors to the facilities utilized or available for teaching and learning. As argued by Adeniyi (2003) when school libraries which is a components of educational facilities is filled with collection of books, periodicals, magazines and newspapers, films and filmstrips, videotapes, slides, computers, study kits and other information resources, it certainly motivates or captivates the students and lecturers in terms of the mode of researches.

**Curriculum and Performance of Students**

Curriculum is the total situation through which the school makes behavioral changes in the individuals who passed through it. In other words, it is the sequence of potential experiences set up in school for the purpose of achieving the pre-determined objectives of the school.

The researcher therefore defined curriculum as a planned learning experience prepared under the guidance of a school, designed to prepare individuals for specific skills and knowledge. Based on the nature of society, management of course devised various medium of causing changes in the students in order to meet the demands of the nation. Hence, innovation in education curriculum has becomes
necessary for dynamic nature of knowledge, research findings social/political changes and abundant teaching.

Quality management of curriculum aimed at producing standard of learning among students hence it is designed to portray a practical and comprehensive knowledge development and skills acquisition. It is argued that quality curriculum management plays essentially an integrative functions that reflects on four key areas such as: students and lecturers, curriculum, school values and aims and school as a learning environment (Preedy, 1999).

Thus, curriculum is designed periodically to upgrade and match relevant skills, experiences and knowledge as reflected or demanded by the society. For instance, every course work has a reasonable course description that is relevant to the need of the institutions, society and individuals. This implies that the curriculum is designed to create equilibrium among various needs. Lecturers therefore designed relevant instructional materials in consonance with the specific objectives. This, therefore, ensure that students get most their educational skills and potentialities.

Curriculum management reflects on the knowledge and skills students internalize to contribute to society in a meaningful and beneficial way. As stated by Adeniyi (2003) universities often undergo planning to provide for clear means of identifying balancing in appropriate learning. Hence, management provides a clear over view and sense of direction in ensuring that curriculum planning is related to the school values and ensuring that there is coherence in the received curriculum as it is experienced by the students.

In another development, quality management of curriculum required monitoring, controlling and evaluation which is the basic tenet or shared collaborative activity contributing to the activities of the society. In this case, evaluation which is making of judgment about the value, worth or quality of curriculum provision or processes becomes very fundamental and inevitable (Agada, 2007). Since evaluation involves judgments which depend on values and beliefs about the purposes of education which may differ among various shareholders, management of the universities consistently designed programmes as related to the needs of the organization and individual perspectives.

The researcher also observed that curriculum management courses are aligned by coordinating of teaching and learning processes, grading, tests, projects, seminars. This therefore, forms some of the experimented performance or criteria initiated through the process of quality management. On this note, to improve the quality of university education, the curricular of the academic programme must be standardized and compatible. This will encourage mobility of students learning and development curiosity among lecturers and students for fundamental achievement in the various areas of specifications.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, it was concluded that quality management reflects on monitoring, appraisal, supervision and evaluation of the various instructional programme for the enhancement of students’ academic performance in the universities. It was therefore recommended that there should be constant monitoring of the educational programme to enhance students’ academic performance, persistent supervision of physical facilities, personnel for the realization of the pre-determined objectives as well as accreditation of the available facilities and programme for the determination of the strength and weaknesses.

REFERENCES


