



## **Managing Quality Assurance For The Transformation Of University Education In Contemporary Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The rise in knowledge economy globally has reawakened the demand for a more vibrant and quality university education system in Nigeria that would meet the ever growing needs of individuals, stakeholders and the society at large. This however has resulted to the proliferation of universities in the country (both public and private). The increase in the number of universities, both public and private, has not been fulfilling due to the seeming lack of quality and management's inability to strictly implement quality assurance policies of the institutions to the letters. This paper therefore, discussed briefly the concept of quality, quality education, quality assurance, university education and its quality, quality assurance: panacea for the transformation of university education, the role of National university commission (NUC) in quality assurance, quality assurance: synergy between NUC and the university and challenges of quality assurance in university education. This study would be of immense benefits to the universities management, academic and non-academic staff, students, stakeholders, National universities commission (NUC) and Federal Government. The paper concluded by suggesting among others, the following recommendations that, policy document regulating the activities of universities should be reviewed continuously to meet the expectations of stakeholders and also cater for the present realities globally; the NUC should constantly interface with government for increased funding of Nigerian universities for the provision of adequate infrastructure and facilities to enhance conducive teaching/learning environment. Finally, management should institutionalize the policies of quality assurance among staff for effective monitoring, evaluation, sustenance and improvement of institution's programmes for quality or optimal output. These recommendations if implemented would be helpful in the transformation of university education in contemporary Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Quality Assurance, Transformation, NUC, University Education

### **INTRODUCTION**

The ultimate goal of every organization is to render quality services to the society for continuous patronage and public confidence. Education in this regard is not left out. Ajayi and Adegbesan (2007) viewed quality as the total of the make-up of a process, product or service on its performance, in customer's or client's perception of that performance. It is not just the make-up of a complete product or service rather it incorporates an emphasis on the internal procedures and outputs and comprises a decline of waste and the improvement of productivity. In this regard, quality is said to be achieved when the expectations of stakeholders are met by the institutions or organizations.

According to Fadokun in Okoro and Agugum (2017), quality can be characterized by three interconnected parts, such as;

- 1) Efficiency in the meeting of its goals,
- 2) Significant to human and environmental settings and needs,
- 3) Something more which means the search for new ideas, the quest for excellence and encouragement of creativity.

Quality in education therefore, should reflect the needs of individual and society at large. Quality of education is as important as the life of a nation's economy. This is why government is the major provider of education to its citizenry. Education as capital intensive can only be funded by government since it is so essential for the manpower requirement of a nation for the development of its economy. The possibility of achieving this is dependent on the quality of its education system especially the university education. There is no doubt that the quality of education provided at all levels impact much to the well-being of the individual, society and government and so, its importance cannot be over-emphasized.

Mosha (1986:34) posited that quality education can be; "measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment". In the same vein, Olaleye and Oyewole (2016) noted that the quality of university education is often a reflection of the performance of university graduate in the labour market which is also dependent on the quality of academic programme offered by the various universities.

In affirmation therefore, quality education can be described in terms of the quality of input, process and output. The students, teachers, materials, facilities represent the input, the curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, monitoring and supervision among other activities (process). All these put together determine the quality of the graduates in their contribution to national growth and development (output).

#### **The Concept of Quality Assurance**

The monitoring and supervision of quality assurance policies and procedures is critical to the actualization of the objectives of university education especially in this present knowledge-driven economy.

Harvey in Stander (2016) defined management of quality assurance as the management of various approaches in which quality assurance is executed to ensure quality by means of accounting, control, compliance and improvement (or enhancement).

In this context therefore, management of quality assurance can be seen as a strategic measure deployed to enforce the internal and external quality assurance policies and procedures of an organization (institution) for effective accountability towards the actualization of institution's set goals and objectives.

According to Lockett (2006) quality assurance is defined as;

"A systematic internal and external management procedures and mechanisms by which an institution of higher education assures its stakeholders of the quality of its systems, processes, products and outcomes and of its ability to manage the maintenance and enhancement of quality. This term usually subsumes the meanings of quality assessment, quality management and quality enhancement" (P. 14).

Lockett (2006), however identified two types of quality assurance, namely; internal and external. Both are important aspects of the governance and management of the university education. Internal quality assurance is focused on safeguarding and building capacity to ensure quality mechanism is put in place to achieve institution's objectives. While external quality assurance addresses the issues of accreditation, regulating and monitoring of governance and management issues through policies and regulation document prepared by the National University Commission (NUC).

#### **Internal Quality Assurance of University Education**

Cheng in Stander (2016) opined that internal quality assurance focused on the efforts of improving the internal environment and processes, with the purpose of achieving academic goals.

Internal quality assurance is ensuring that policies and mechanisms implemented in an institution or programme actualize its own purpose, meeting the standards that apply to university education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular.

The activities of internal quality assurance involve stages that are meant to appraise the system and likewise its processes to determine the weaknesses and possible remedial measures for possible solutions to address institution's problem for optimal results. For example, during accreditation by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in some Nigerian universities, the Academic Planning Department is wholesomely evaluated and monitored through a step by step process while the remaining is done by self-study instruments by Colleges, the Registry, the Bursary and other units. The normal situation has been the non-follow-up attitude of NUC in the constant appraisal of universities internally thereby making the universities to feel reluctant and wait for another accreditation under a hasty mode. Institutional policies, mechanisms, processes and certainly the attitudinal changes form a congruent which when effected internally guarantees compliance with standards, accountability and fitness of purpose; it is seen as internal quality assurance. More so, the process of monitoring quality and ensuring that standards are sustained and improved upon is the product of internal consistency in assessment and evaluation of institution's policies and procedures (Oladosu, cited in Okoro and Agugum, 2017)). Sadly enough, internal quality assurance activities only get attention when NUC accreditation exercises are forthcoming and are quickly set aside after the statutory exercise. This non-challant attitude on the part of management has resulted to drop in institution's standard, quality, research scholarship, teaching and learning among others.

#### **External Quality Assurance of University Education**

External quality assurance is the monitoring and evaluation of compliance to stipulated rules and standards carried out by statutory agencies from outside the university. It scrutinizes the appropriateness of purpose and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes used by the statutory agency, with an examination of the system's structure, its documentation and the evaluation of quality done by the institution. It also examines the compliance of tertiary institutions with requirements of license holders under these regulations, where appropriate; likewise, any conditions or restrictions imposed. It comprises suitable investigatory mechanisms to guarantee financial probity, the legal representative and make sure that persons occupying leadership positions are right and suitable persons to deliver extra on higher education programmes. For example, new universities in Nigeria submit to resource verification exercises and undergo appraisal of their temporary operating license as this is to monitor compliance with prospects and the possibility of issuing of the permanent operating license. Also, both old and new universities go through periodic accreditation of their programmes by the NUC through selected panels of renowned professors. The exercise creates an all-inclusive evaluation of institutional vision, mission and strategic goals, teaching quality, learning and research, institutional efficiency and effectiveness, institutional resources, institutional control and management among others.

It is therefore clear, that the non-existence of internal and external quality assurance measures will lead to the disappearance of the aims of producing experienced, skilled and proficient manpower that will be in the governance of the country and grow the nation's economy for the overall benefits of the citizenry.

#### **Concept of University Education and its Quality**

The university is the highest rung of education in Nigeria. No wonder, every secondary school graduate struggle to gain admission in to the university. This mentality is so entrenched due to the general perception among Nigerians that only a university degree can promise a good future. The demand for university education has reached an unprecedented level, so that twice the current number of universities in the country will be required to fill this need.

The essence of university education is to produce human capacity that can drive the nation's economy and contribute to the growth and development of the society meaningfully. University

education is to educate and develop future leaders with the technical skills for economic growth and development of a nation. Nigerian universities are therefore, not excluded from this as its main purpose is the provision of manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development of the country (Okhuelegbe and Ohia, 2019). The goals and objectives of university education as outlined by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) as follows:

- a) Contribute to National development through high level relevant manpower training.
- b) Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society.
- c) Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.
- d) Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- e) Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
- f) Forge and cement national unity, and
- g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction (p.50-51).

In spite of the noble objectives of university education, these objectives are far from being actualized due to some challenges militating against it. The resultant effect of these challenges to the quality of Nigerian universities was aptly captured thus; that the academic environment are deplorable, inadequate classroom space, lack of 21<sup>st</sup> century technological equipment, library full with obsolete books, buildings are dilapidated, lack of office space for lecturers, lack of money for research, no overseas training for teacher and worse still, quality assurance is only in name. Stressing further, that Nigerian universities do not meet international standards and that any university worth the name should meet such standards (Okoli, cited in Okoli, 2016).

There is no gain saying that, the quality of Nigerian universities has been under severe attacks from stakeholders due to the quality of graduates being turned out on yearly basis by many of these institutions, many of whom have been classified as not employable and those employed are subjected to series of rigorous training just to make them fit for the positions they are being employed for. The declining quality of Nigerian university education has impacted negatively to the society and the nation's economy as many of its graduates are unable to secure jobs, let alone contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the nation's economy. These may have led many to get involved into crimes, such as; cyber-crime, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug/child trafficking among others just to put body and soul together as they usually claim. Unfortunately, these criminal activities have increased the level of insecurity to an alarming rate, thereby threatening the economy of the nation. It is evident that the insecurity in the country posed serious threat to both foreign and local investors. As a result of the unconducive business environment created by insecurity, many investors and business owners have relocated to other neighbouring African countries and equally, investors intending to come in to do business are afraid of coming in to the country to invest.

The most pathetic situation that is so embarrassing is when no Nigerian university has been ranked among the best 100 universities in Africa for over some decades now. Yet attempts to reverse this trend are not forthcoming. Government's attitude towards funding education is not encouraging as it has failed to increase her yearly budgetary allocation of 26% to education as recommended by UNESCO. Attitude of politicians, wealthy business men and women and other well to do in the society sending their children to overseas for university education leaving only children of the average and poor to attend Nigerian universities are not helping matter either, as these have further worsened the state of university education in Nigeria. Hence, the urgent call to reposition the Nigerian university education in this contemporary age for greater result.

#### **Quality Assurance: Panacea for the Transformation of University Education**

Quality assurance is a proactive measure used in ensuring quality in any organization or institution. The standard of university education cannot be guaranteed if strict implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures of the institution is not being carried out effectively. The essence of linking quality assurance to education is to facilitate educational transformation

and enhance human productivity (Okoro and Agugum, 2017). Little wonder, Garba (2014) observed that quality assurance in education, is aimed at preventing quality problems and assures that product of the system conform to standard. According to Harvey in Adu-Opong (2014) quality assurance *is* based on three main principles: control, accountability and improvement.

- **Accountability** usually requires meeting the preferences of stakeholders.
- **Control** means that the institution does not merely control the expenditure of resources but also shows how high quality is achievable with the existing resources.
- **Improvement** enables the institution to get necessary input, refine the process and raise the standards of output in order to meet the goals set.

Quality assurance involves a host of activities designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the university education system. It ensures accountability in respect of the investment of public funds on education. The input segment includes students, teachers, curriculum and facilities. While, the process emphasized on teaching/learning interactions, internal efficiency, research, evaluation procedure and management practices. The output itself is the quality of graduates as well as the system's external efficiency (Olayanju, 2016).

On his part, Adegbesan in Okoro and Agugum (2017) listed some strategies whereby quality assurance can achieve transformation in university education in Nigeria as follows;

- i. Helping to determine the quality of teachers' input.
- ii. Assist in the monitoring and supervision of educational activities especially that of teaching and learning.
- iii. Helping to determine the resources likewise the facilities needed for smooth operations especially that of teaching from time to time.
- iv. Assisting in determining the adequacy of the learning environment for the comfort of both the teacher and the students.
- v. Ensure that available financial resources could be wisely and carefully used.

The benefits of quality assurance to the transformation of university education are unimaginable as they also include among other things;

- a. The upholding of the reliability of programmes and the worthiness of the certificates issued by higher institutions of learning.
- b. Providing confidence to teachers themselves.
- c. Quality assurance makes universities to be competitive both nationally and internationally. Every university is mandated to teach and do research and mainly, the making of high-level manpower that is well organized, rational and intellectually developed to change the world".
- d. Quality assurance measures and strategies determine the proper aligning of a given university on a right path and the availability of the drive to develop on output and finally become better if not best.
- e. Quality assurance keeps students away from substandard quality programmes, poor curriculum delivery and from unfriendly academic environments (Adegbesan, cited in Okoro and Agugum, 2017).

The above benefits of quality assurance would undoubtedly play critical role in the transformation of university education in this contemporary age. As it also ensures professionalism among lecturers, improved quality of teaching/learning, enhanced students' academic performance as a result of high teachers' productivity, and is being able to sustain the standard in institutions.

#### **The Role of National University Commission (NUC) in Quality Assurance**

The national universities commission is the regulator of university education in Nigeria. It regulates all the activities of public and private universities in Nigeria. The NUC accredits programs of university education in the country. It ensures that only accredited programs are run by universities. The NUC is charged with ensuring quality and quality assurance in Nigerian

universities. The NUC has a quality assurance unit that is responsible for using international best practices on quality assurance in university education. The NUC demands accountability from universities and checks the overall effectiveness and efficiency of program offered and all activities of Nigerian universities. The NUC sets the minimum standards regarding qualification of teachers, the quality of teaching in institutions, number of students to be admitted and the universities carrying capacity. As a way of improving quality, the NUC regularly monitors the activities of universities and conducts a need assessment exercise (Asiyai, 2015).

The NUC also advises the Federal government on the financial needs of the universities, channels all external aids to the Universities, receives, allocates Federal Government grants to Federal Universities (Okojie, 2007). According to Ibukun (2007), the main objectives of the NUC are to ensure the orderly development of university education in Nigeria, to maintain its high standard and to ensure its adequate funding. Okojie (2007) outlined the activities of NUC in improving the quality of university education in Nigeria to include:

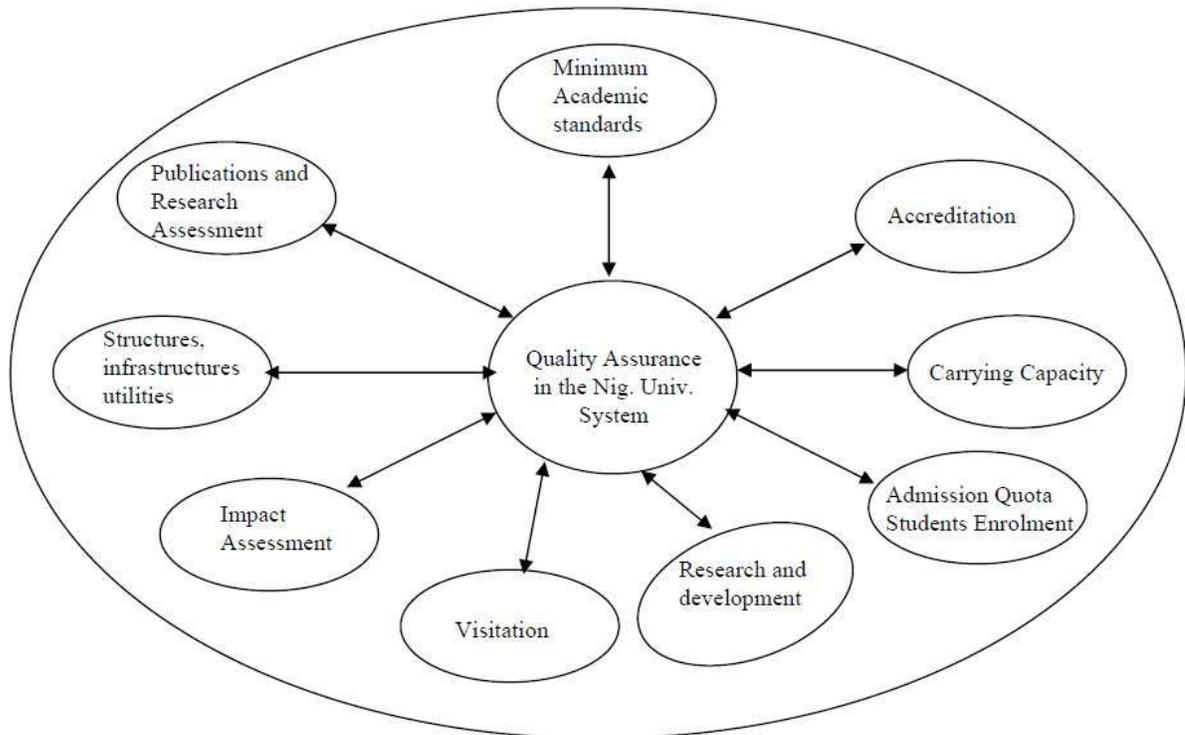
- i. Accreditation of courses.
- ii. Approval of courses and programmes.
- iii. Maintenance of minimum academic standards, and
- iv. Giving guidelines for setting up of universities.

The activities of the NUC notwithstanding, university education in Nigeria is yet to find its bearing in terms of quality and development of manpower capacity to drive the nation's economy.

#### **Quality Assurance: Synergy between NUC and the University**

Since the focus of quality assurance is to prevent problems and weaknesses in the organizational systems and to continually strengthen and improve performance, the need for synergy between the NUC and universities is necessary as this would enhance the standardizing of quality university education in Nigeria. Adedipe (2007) identified key areas where this synergy between the NUC and the universities called for attention. They are;

- Minimum academic standards
- Accreditation
- Carrying capacity
- Admission quota and Students Enrolment
- Visitation
- Impact assessment
- Research and development
- Publications and research assessment
- Structures, infrastructures and utilities



*(Quality assurance drivers in Nigerian University System adapted from Adedipe (2007)).*

1. Minimum academic standards form the baseline for entrenching quality university education, since it prescribes a profile of curriculum, human resources, structures, infrastructures, equipment and associated facilities required for establishing, governing and managing the university.
2. Accreditation is the process by which programmes are evaluated against set minimum academic standards and institutions comprehensive academic research and development activities are evaluated against prescribed criteria (including a self-visited and self-produced strategic plan).
3. Carrying capacity of a university is the maximum number of students that the institution can sustain for quality education based on available human and material resources. Admission into Federal institutions is based on merit, catchment and educationally disadvantaged States.
4. Visitation to universities is a statutory requirement that empowers the proprietor to ascertain the well-being of the university.
5. Impact assessment is a specialized form of evaluation aimed at finding out if the core expectations of the establishment of a particular university are being met.
6. Research is the driving force for human development as globally determined; such research should be evidenced by publications.
7. Structures, infrastructures and utilities are an essential driving force for qualitative productivity in any organization, particularly in the university system.

#### **Challenges of Quality Assurance in Nigeria University Education**

The challenges militating against quality university education in Nigeria is multi—dimensional in nature. In the words of Babalola (2001), Nigerian universities are currently in crisis. He further stressed that there is less money to spend on teaching, research and community services. Libraries are ill equipped, laboratories lack essential apparatus, classrooms are dilapidated and office accommodations are a mirage. Many Nigerian universities even lack lecturers in the right quantity and of proper quality. The experience of Nigerian universities not meeting their

expectations especially in terms of quality teaching and research is attributed to lack of adequate funding that has clearly impaired the productivity of teachers that had resulted to helplessness, frustration and recriminations among teachers in their attempt to change the status quo (Kayode, 2002).

The following challenges are seen as factors hindering effective implementation of quality assurance in Nigerian university education and are discussed below:

**Inadequate Funding:** Funding is the livewire for the survival of any organization. University education is not left out as funds are needed for its internal effectiveness. Daily administration of university education is capital intensive. Significant financial investment is needed in providing and maintaining infrastructure – such as facilities, staff salaries, residential housing and overhead. Universities education in Nigeria enjoys its financial support largely from the government with little support from its internally generated revenue. These notwithstanding, the reality in hyper-inflation and economic down-turn with other competing sectors of the economy expecting its allocation from same source, has made it practically impossible for the government to do much. This accounted for the shortage of funds to Nigerian universities. Hence, cries for the acute under-funding of these universities. This ugly situation prompted the incessant strikes embarked upon by ASUU, NASU and students' unrest. Inadequate funding of Nigerian universities is evident in the uncondusive teaching and learning environment, lack of infrastructures, overcrowded classrooms, lack of office space for lecturers, poor remuneration, neglect of staff welfare and no grants or incentive for research among others.

**Increase Demand for University Education:** The population explosion in the country have given rise to increase demand of university education which is seen as the only means of securing white collar jobs. The public perception on universities education necessitated the urge by which students seek admission into the universities. The demand for admission into Nigerian universities has reached an unprecedented high level so much that twice the current number of universities in the country, will be required to fill this need. Unfortunately, facilities on ground are grossly inadequate to accommodate the number of students seeking to be admitted. This development contributed negatively the quality and standard of university education in Nigeria, since excess enrolment usually leads to overcrowded classrooms, uncondusive teaching and learning environment, examination malpractices, cultism and sorting for high grade among others.

**Inadequate School Facilities:** School facilities generally are the building and the entire grounds or premises of an educational institution as well as other fixed or movable items of furniture which facilitate effective teaching and learning (Obasi & Asodike, 2007). Many universities lack adequate school facilities. The inadequacy of these facilities demotivates teachers and students in their quest for excellence. In affirmation, the NUC (2006) report that the state of physical facilities in many of the Nigerian universities are in poor shape, the available physical facilities are severely overstretched and ill maintained and worse still, the lack of maintenance culture is worrisome and pathetic. This development, is seriously affecting management effort in the universities to guarantee the quality expected from the system both locally and internationally.

**Shortage of Manpower:** The quality and quantity of manpower (both academic and non-academic staff) available in the institution determined the internal effectiveness of its quality assurance policies and procedures in terms of proper monitoring, evaluation and supervision. The number of academic staff is in short supply especially federal universities and affecting the quality of students turn out on yearly basis. In agreement, the NUC (2006) report shows that only 16,856 out of 72,704 staff in the federal universities are academic staff. Unfortunately, the trend presently may not be far from the past. The need for employment of more quality academic staff to change the narrative is very necessary to remedy the situation for optimal result.

### **Conclusion**

University education transformation in contemporary Nigeria is tied to the effective implementation of institution's internal and external quality assurance policies and procedures.

Only this, can guarantee the rising standard and quality of university education in Nigeria universities that would be acknowledged internationally. Therefore, universities management, must at all times involve heads of departments in the daily decisions and administration of the institution. This approach would help promote and sustain continuous monitoring, supervision, assessment, evaluation, and accountability in the system.

### **Recommendations**

University management and the National University Commission (NUC) should share ideas that would help in strengthening quality assurance and reposition the fortune of university education in this contemporary era through the following means:

- Policy document regulating the activities of universities should be review continuously to meet the expectations of stakeholders and also cater for the present realities globally.
- The NUC should constantly interface with government for increased funding of Nigerian universities for the provision of adequate infrastructure and facilities to enhance conducive teaching/learning environment, effective teaching.
- Management of universities should be open in its day to day administration by involving heads of various departments as this would enhance their commitment to the actualization of institution's goals and objectives.
- Management should institutionalize the policies of quality assurance among staff for effective monitoring, evaluation, sustenance and improvement of institution's programmes for quality or optimal output.
- Management should employ professional and qualified teachers to fill existing vacancies; upgrade teachers' quality through constant provision of in-service training, re-training, and research.

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