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11 QUALITY ASSURANCE: BASIS FOR EXCELLENCE, LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Dr. Ojo Oludare David & Ibrahim Isiaq Kayode

Abstracts

The major concern in education in the present disposition is how standards can be maintained and improved upon. There is a global emphasis on the quality of commercial goods and services, hence the need for quality assurance in education. One major key that can bring about excellence and innovation in the education enterprise is Quality assurance; it is an instrument for measuring quality in education, which will have impact on teaching and learning, the curriculum, core guidance, safety and the quality of learning environment. This paper examined the concept of Quality assurance, its component and the role of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in Quality assurance. It looked at the tools in achieving quality and excellence, roles of leaders in setting exemplary leadership styles and co-operation of all areas of the school system to bring about desired impact. The paper opined that when all stakeholders in the process of Quality assurance exercise are involved, it will bring about robust analysis in terms of the strengths and weaknesses in the education enterprise which will lead to excellence improvement and innovation where necessary. Recommendations and conclusions were made to guarantee efficient and effective curriculum delivery and good educational management and make our institutions excel in a globally competitive environment.

Introduction

Quality assurance (QA), "is at the centre of the existence of any respectable institution" (Balogun, 2011). This is more evident of the universities such that the university plays a pivotal role in human, institutional and national development. No individual, corporate organisation or government can afford to toy with it without consequences. The transmission of knowledge, through the core activities of teaching, learning, and research within the university community cannot be underestimated because it brings in the capability for excellence, leadership and innovation in the system. Quality assurance in the education sector of any nation cannot be overemphasized because of its great importance to the field of education and the country as a whole. It plays a crucial role in achieving the set goals of any nation since education is believed to be the bedrock of development in any nation Bada & Oludare (2014)

Quality assurance(QA) is a programme for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project, service or facility to ensure that standards of quality are being met. Ojerinde (2008) introduces an interesting dimension when he views quality assurance as being much more

than a process or a mechanism. To him *"it is an attitude or ethics which influence every aspect of the organisation's activities."* That is, a mind set to accept that anything can be made better in excellence, leadership and innovation.

Component of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance may not be properly understood without showing its link with the concept of quality. Quality is not a modern concept, and it has been used through the ages and through different civilizations. For example, the ancient food gatherers had to learn which food is good to eat and which is not, and hunters had to explore which tools are the best for their purposes. Also, the concept of quality was used in various civilizations such as Egyptian, Greek, Roman and other cultures. For instance, quality in the ancient Egypt was "a sign of perfection", as the Egyptians were responsible for establishing the pyramids and the foundation such as these involved an attention to the quality in architecture Elshennawy, (2004).

Of more relevance, in education is the concept of quality as it emerged in Higher Education in the early 1980s "from its more familiar industrial and commercial settings". However, in that era when people spoke about quality, they spoke of it in a "lofty and abstract terms" because at that time, there was a high level of consensus about the issue of academic quality.

There was an assumption that some universities throughout the world, such as Harvard or Oxford, were in themselves the benchmark of quality without any further definition of the ingredients of quality. This is what Green (1994) called "the traditional concept of quality". Subsequently, in the 1990s, the issues concerning quality, changed greatly and came to be seen as something which could be defined and measured. It was revealed that the quality discourses of the 1980s and 1990s reflect the various, ambiguous and often accountability-related demands of the period. It was said that the one way of discussing quality in the 1990s was with a concerned voice "quality was sick and in need of care, although quality could also act as a cure for its own sickness", this referred to the fragile nature of quality and suggested a need for regulation and control. By the 2000s, quality was taken for granted and not particularly defined or questioned, as quality was considered as something of a force-of-nature movement and irresistible, the meaning of quality is arrived at through the alignment of both external and internal stakeholders' perspectives and expectations.

The meaning is then safeguarded with mechanisms external to the tertiary education institutions thereby producing external quality assurance to represent external stakeholders' expectations. This means that external quality assurance narrows the circle containing the meaning of quality for tertiary education institutions, which implies that tertiary education institutions must define their quality within the established meaning of quality which is subject to change based on changing trends in tertiary education. This helps to direct the resources available to tertiary education institutions to

focus on societal priorities. Any change to the priorities must be done through negotiation and settlement among stakeholders by providing a logical proof of practical impact on society. In order to ensure effective enactment of the meaning of quality, tertiary education institutions must also establish internal mechanisms to narrow the circle containing the meaning of quality for the various internal actors of the institutions thereby producing internal quality assurance. This also means that all internal actors within the institutions must also focus on institutional priorities, and changes are made only after consultation and agreement.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance is the process of maintaining standards in products and services through inspection or testing of samples. Okebukola, (2010) noted that quality assurance is an umbrella concept for a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of inputs, process and outputs of higher education system. In line with this, quality assurance entails the quality of available instructional materials for teaching, equipment, facilities, school environment, pupils, curriculum, quality of instructional delivery and quality of teachers. Quality assurance is designed to prove and improve the quality of an institutions methods, educational products and outcomes, Romina (2013). Everyone has a role to play in ensuring quality assurance in education. One of the key building blocks of quality assurance in education is the development of minimum standards as in qualification of teachers, the quality of teaching in institutions, expected educational achievement of students, the development of a more rigorous leadership management and providing innovation process in education so that the entire sector develops stronger operating policies and procedures which are well documented and adhered to.

Quality assurance has a number of indicators. According to UNICEF (2002), there are five key components of quality assurance indicators, namely: (a) What learners gain; (b) Quality Learning Environments; (c) Quality Content; (d) Processes that support Quality; and (e) Outcomes from the learning environment. Other quality assurance indicators include: (i) learners' behavioural characteristics, attributes and demographic factors, (ii) teacher's professional competencies/pedagogic skills, (iii) teaching processes, curriculum and learning environment, (iv) outcomes of education Cheng (2001) and Ehindero (2004). Furthermore, quality assurance could be carried out using six quality assurance indicators, viz: learning resource inputs, instructional process, teachers' capacities development, effective management, monitoring and evaluation, and quality learning outcome. If these standards are achieved in the university they paved the way for quality leadership skills and innovations in students and lecturers.

Quality Assurance Modalities

1. **Internal quality assurance**
2. **External quality assurance**

Internal quality assurance: is examined when the policies, mechanisms and processes and indeed the attitudinal changes enumerated earlier are effected internally (by the institution) to ensure compliance with standards, accountability and fitness of purpose, it is said to be internal quality assurance Oladosu (2012). For example, in Nigerian Universities, at the approach of accreditation by National Universities Commission, there is usually monitoring and evaluation of the entire system and processes by Academic Planning Department and the completion of self- study instruments done by Colleges, the Registry, the Bursary and other units; the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) oversees the polytechnics; and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) takes charge of the Colleges of Education.

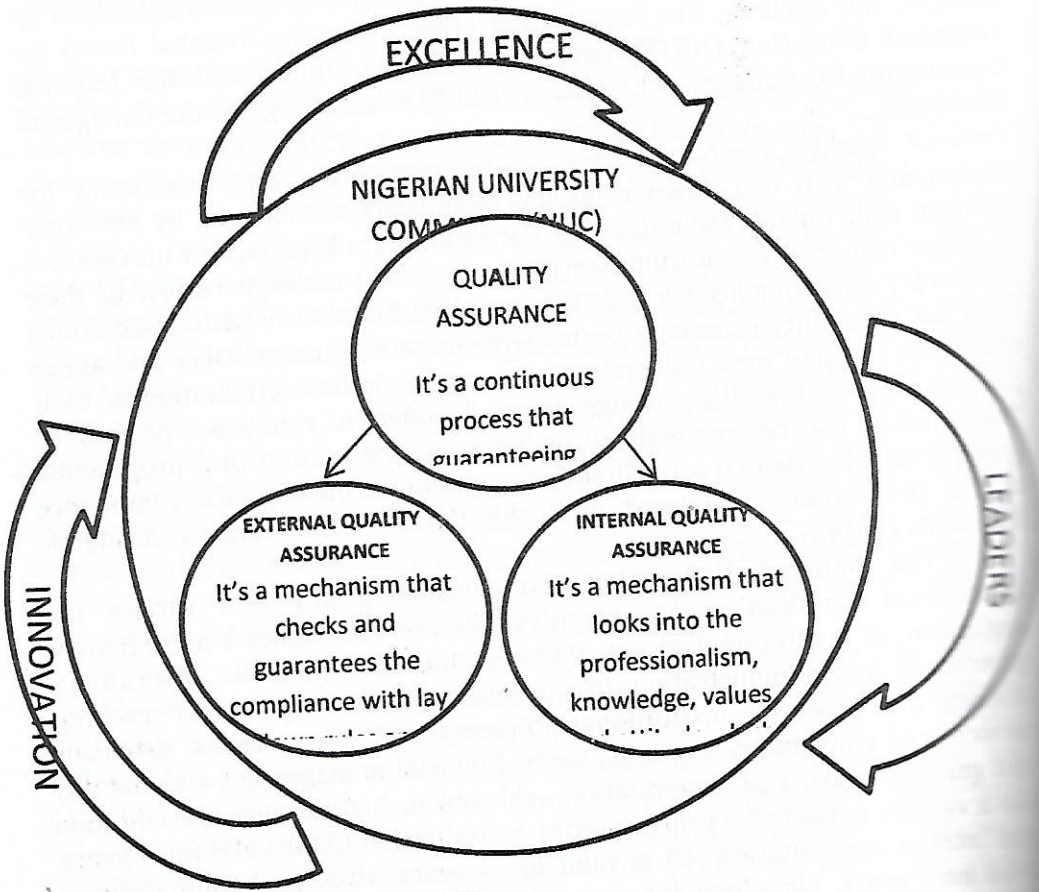
External quality assurance :This is the monitoring and evaluation for compliance with laid down rules and standards carried out by statutory agencies from outside the university. For example, in Nigeria, new universities undergo resource verification exercises; they also undergo review of their temporary operating licence. This is to monitor compliance with expectations with the possibility of issuing permanent operating licence. Over and above that, both old and new universities undergo periodic accreditation of their programmes by the NUC through selected panels of renowned professors. These panels can recommend full or interim accreditation to a programme (programmes) or deny it accreditation depending on the degree of compliance of the programme concerned with the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS).

The National Universities' Commission (NUC) also carries out institutional accreditation of universities. The exercise makes a more holistic evaluation of institutional vision, mission and strategic goals, institutional governance and administration, institutional resources, quality of teaching, learning and research, institutional efficiency and effectiveness, extension services and consultancies, transparency, financial management and stability and general ethos. Full accreditation achieved in institutional accreditation has a validity period of 7 years, interim accreditation (A) is valid for 5 years, and interim accreditation (B) is valid for 3 years while probation status is valid for 2 years. Time lines for remedying identified deficiencies are usually discussed with the NUC and remedial measures monitored accordingly.

Indeed, professional organizations like the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), etc., also carry out accreditation of professional programmes and courses run by universities to ensure compliance with professional standards. Sunday and Anaele (2014). Also External quality assurance is the responsibility of bodies outside tertiary education institutions which could be governmental bodies and/or independent professional bodies. In Ghana, we have the National Accreditation Board (NAB) as a governmental external quality assurance body, and independent professional bodies such as the Dental and Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the

National Teaching Council, and many more that define stakeholders' expectations of quality in relation to tertiary education institutions. These bodies usually carry out their functions through standard setting and enforcement which sometimes the mandates of state bodies established by Acts of Parliament.

National Universities Commission and Quality Assurance



Quality Assurance and the NUC

In 1962 the National Universities Commission (NUC) was established operated from the office of the prime minister. NUC became a statutory body in 1974. Its main objective was the coordination of the activities of the university system to ensure national unity and uniformity in academic standards. At the take-off of NUC, its function was mainly advisory, as well liaising amongst universities, government departments and ministries. The National Universities Commission also acted as a channel for government funding of universities, (NUC, 1988).

The role of the National Universities Commission in Nigeria is overseer and regulator of the functions and activities of the Universities

should be seen in this light. The NUC has developed guidelines, parameters and Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) to assist the academic planning process and to ensure its integrity and quality.

The universities in Nigeria continued to grow in terms of number and programme offerings. It must be noted however, that between 1980s and early 1990s, the number of universities had increased to thirty seven (Imam, 2003). By 2010, the number of universities increased astronomically bringing the total number of approved universities to 104; out of which are 27 Federal universities, 36 States universities and 41 private-owned universities (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria- TRCN, 2010). The phenomenal growth in number of universities has increased the coordinating task of the National Universities Commission.

However, to ensure that Quality Assurance in the system was not compromised for quantity the NUC is to carry out verification and accreditation of all the programmes established by the universities senate; this is to assure that universities meet Minimum Academic Standards (MAS). This also entails ascertaining that universities do not over shoot their admission quota and the carrying capacities. In addition, the NUC is to assure that universities observe in the admission exercise basic entry requirements and those academic contents of programmes meet specified standards for award of degrees. Furthermore, it is to ensure that universities achieve the academic staff mix and teacher/student ratios for all academic programmes. Finally, NUC is to ensure that there are adequate human resources, materials and physical facilities for the establishment of new programmes in the universities (NUC, 2004).

Quality assurance and Excellence

Quality assurance and excellence see to the integrity of programmes and the credibility of the certificates issued by the institutions of higher learning. Quality assurance and excellence makes universities competitive both at the national and international levels. Every university incorporate teaching and research in her students as a mode of excellence, and especially, the production of high level manpower that is disciplined, "mentally alert and intellectually developed in enriching leadership skills and promoting innovations".

Quality assurance and excellence helps to protects students from inferior quality programmes, inefficient leadership delivery and lack of innovational skills in the Universities whereby it sees to the monitoring of lecture units to enhance good quality delivery that maintains the integrity of programmes and the credibility of the certificates issued by the institutions of higher learning.

Tools in Achieving Quality and Excellence

1. Programme assessments
   During a programme assessment, students, alumni and relevant bodies should have assess to the entire study programme. By canvassing these groups, the attempt to assess all aspects and stages of the programme: from students' initiation into university education, will provide them the right through, when they finish their studies and enter the labour market.
2. Self-Assessments and External Reviews
   External reviews and their preparation and processing are key elements of the quality assurance. In a self-assessment report, members of staff related to a given programme reflect on its strengths and weaknesses and indicate how any problems will be tackled. These self-assessment reports serves as a starting point for the external review committee which visits and reviews the programme and publish out the result.
3. Curriculum Review
   This is a periodic procedure that ensures programmes place enough emphasis on all aspects of quality education when developing a new programme or overhauling an existing programme, and includes certain rules about how to draw up a curriculum review file. This system looks at how to overhaul the curriculum and their plans are then approved by the faculty, the Education Board and the Board of Governors (Senate).If only a small number of changes are proposed, then these can be approved at faculty level.
4. Assessment of the Programme and Study Time Measurements
   Programme components are assessed by means of student surveys. Feedback is then given to lecturers, enabling them to improve their courses where necessary.One of the elements of a programme's assessment is 'the ability to complete a course within the allotted time' student workload, measured as the total time that a student needs to spend on that course. The University uses methods such as theoretical analysis and time registration to track students' working hours, with the aim of optimising each programme's workload.

Leadership and Quality assurance

The roles of leadership skills in quality assurance are crucial to improving mutual trust. Keep in mind that a leader always deals with people with their individual characteristics and capabilities, problems and individual perceptions. We cannot divorce people from leadership and leaders have a responsibility to serve. Leadership in quality assurance requires a shared and supporting approach. It requires cooperation, the ability to manage quality, a well-structured organisation and the support of all stakeholders in higher education.

Leaders in quality assurance are to set an exemplary example. Most importantly, quality assurance is about protecting and promoting the interests of the students. Quality assurance must always be done in a positive and

supportive manner. Ruling by fear can never be acceptable. If learning institutions fear quality assurance they will resist it and perhaps even try to destroy the system. Quality assurance should be conducted with the intention of enhancing the learning experience and to protect the image of the learning institution as well as the individuals involved in the institution especially the protection and promotion of the interests of the students.

In addition, leaders in quality assurance are to establish a constructive quality culture, i.e. to replace the resistance that people might have to quality assurance with a spirit of cooperation and trust. Leaders in quality assurance are strongly situational. Therefore, quality assurance always needs to be done in the right context, taking into consideration, the type and number of courses they offer, method of application, numbers of students to be admitted and the profile of those students.

Innovation and Quality assurance

Quality assurance and innovation are important objectives of the education policy of any institution. To strengthen the quality culture within the institution, all stakeholders are involved in education policy, quality assurance and innovation which has a number of processing tools, resources and policy bodies which have been created, with the common aim of supporting the facilities.A key tool for supporting innovation in education at the institution is the Fund for Educational Development. Every year institution always provide resources that allow the faculties to innovate their education and to work on certain priorities in their educational policy For innovation to be be meaningful, it must focus on the following:

Assessment Policy

The institution and agencies are to provide the students with necessary skills intake, accessibility to instructional materials and research tools. Lecturers on the other hand will be able to develop an assessment method which will make the institution a creativity and research centre for new discoveries.

Digital and Blended Learning.

Innovation and quality assurance deal with the ideal development of a programme. In order to and meet with international standard, digital and blended learning will bring about skill acquisition and creative thinking on the part of the students. It will also lead to new discovering and better ways of doing things.

Fund for Practicals

Fund is a major factor in bringing about quality and innovation. This includes the renovation of and investment in practicals, and human development. Equipment for teaching and learning aids for practical training will go a long way for innovation and excellence. Furthermore, the fund for practicals aims at encouraging the cooperation and collaboration between faculties, and the policy making capacity of the faculties.

Conclusion

Quality assurance is a legitimate tertiary education policy which is required to safeguard and enact stakeholders' expectations of quality in tertiary education. The quality assurance concept originated from industry where it was used to refer to statistical methods of monitoring and controlling processes. This is to ensure that firms operate at full potential to produce conforming products. This helps to focus on prevention of waste, to ensure an external accreditation system, an audit system, and cause and effect analysis, in order to minimise cost at an accurate result, Quality assurance has come to represent all mechanisms put in place to guarantee and enact stakeholders' expectation of quality in tertiary education

As universities increase with varying structures of ownership in Nigeria and as they subscribe to international standards and in view of the unprecedented demands of students for access to tertiary education, stakeholders ensure that the general public should be constructively engaged in order to be assured that the universities, including the privately owned ones, are meeting national and international standards. Quality assurance isused broadly to cover all key concepts such as quality inspection, quality control, total quality management, quality audit, quality assessment, and accreditations

Recommendation

In attaining quality assurance, staff of tertiary institutions is expected to be high caliber academics. Be of good morals, capable of teaching, conducting research and engaging in community extension activities. Through continuous research and publication of articles, it will enhance the training process and promote the development of problem-solving skills in lecture rooms.

Enabling environment should be created for staff through improved conditions of service and provision of basic infrastructures. Virtual libraries and information communication technologies and internet connectivity should be set up. Strategies for internal quality assurance and monitoring of lecturers to should be available to enhance good quality delivery.

In accessing quality, lecturers and non lecturers should be motivated in terms of regular training to make them more dedicated, devoted, committed and effective in their jobs. Institutions of higher learning should ensure that more emphasis is paid on teaching effectiveness of lecturers for better quality education.

There is the need for more energetic advocacy for quality assurance in the university system. Quality assurance should, among other responsibilities, include regular monitoring and evaluation of infrastructure to avoid decay, degeneration and disuse. A vigorous and purposeful programme of continued teacher training and professional development should be instituted to promote excellence that will sustain as an integral part of quality educational programme. In achieving quality assurance, academicians and students should

show interest in the community activities programme which will enhance the developmental skills in leadership building.

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