

QUALITY ASSURANCE INDICES AS VERITABLE TOOLS FOR ASSESSING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper focused on quality assurance indices as veritable tools for Assessing Educational Programmes in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions. It clarified the three concepts and made brief description of existing standards and guidelines against which quality is judged using input, process and output framework. The strategies identified and discussed for achieving Education for sustainable development in tertiary institutions include supervision, inspection, accreditation and accountability. Other internal and external strategies identified for assuring quality of assessment and evaluation of educational programmes are balancing formative and summative assessments, monitoring and evaluation. The challenges posed by the use of the strategies were identified and suggestions made on how to overcome them. It was recommended that with appropriate implementation of the guidelines and adoption of the identified strategies, the quality of Nigeria education programmes will be maintained and promoted.

Keywords: Assessment, education, educational programmes, quality assurance, tertiary institution

Introduction

The term quality focuses on the worth of an item and means different things to different people. It is often defined in higher education as “fitness for purpose”. Quality in higher education is defined by Uvah (as cited in Ogunleye, (2013) as “multi-dimensional concept embracing all functions and activities of a university including teaching, academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, building, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment”.

Quality Assurance on the other hand, is mechanism used to evaluate the efficiency and appropriateness of educational programmes in learning institutions so as to ensure the delivery of high quality education. Babalola (2004) defines quality assurance as a proactive means of assuring quality inputs, quality outcome and quality academic achievements. This further explains that quality input refers to the worth of teachers, trainees, textbooks, technology of delivery and tasks or curriculum. Quality of process deals with the teaching and learning process that involves plan, delivery methods, classroom organization and control, student-teacher interaction, students’ participation, assessment and evaluation. Quality of outcome and outputs involves the educational programme achievement and attainment, value added through education, results of internal and external examinations. Quality environment involves the work of all environmental factors and sanitation. Since education is seen and regarded as services to the society and such a predominant force in our society. The services it renders must be good and qualitative, good services doesn’t just happen by chance; it must be planned and managed from the design to the delivery, from maintaining efficient operations to ensuring that the quality is both high (Ojo 2013).

Quality assurance also refers to continuous process of evaluating the quality of a system, institution or programme. It focuses on enhancing and improving the process that is used to achieve the outcome and directed towards certifying or guaranteeing the quality of an item. It therefore implies that judgement is made against some specified standards of an institution, organisation or professional body. Quality assurance is that which deals with the proactive means of assuring quality inputs, quality outcomes, quality academic achievements of students and the environment before things get out of hand (Olutola, Galadanchi, Olatoye & Ihechu, 2022). According to Ogunleye (2013), quality assurance is a planned and systematic review process of how goals of an institution are being achieved, enhanced and sustained.

Assessment and evaluation are closely related to research and also play an important role in national development. They are considered as integral and indispensable aspects of all human endeavour (Nworgu, 2010), and a veritable tool for decision making in education and other disciplines. It is apt to reflect on trends and challenges in quality assurance in assessment, evaluation in Nigeria for better understanding and building of competencies needed for survival in the global age of knowledge economy. The essence of assessment is to ensure quality, improve teaching methods and students' performance. The present quality of education in Nigeria is a serious concern to all the stakeholders in educational setting (Olutola & Olatoye, 2020).

Tertiary education programme is an organized education involving advanced teaching and learning. Tertiary education is an educational system that deals with the activities of teaching, activities of research and provision of community services. Tertiary education was defined by the Federal Republic of Nigeria in her national policy on education (2013) as the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnic, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes.

The national policy went further to outline the goals of Tertiary Education to include: contributing to national development through high-level manpower training; providing accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians; providing high-quality career counselling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work; reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market; promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service; forge and cement national unity; and promote national and international understanding and interaction (National Policy on Education, Revised 2013). Tertiary Educational institutions shall pursue these goals through: Quality student intake; quality teaching and learning; research and development; high standards in the quality of facilities, services and resources; staff welfare and development programmes; provision of a more practical based curriculum relevant to the needs of the labour market; generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to national and local economic goals which enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy; a variety of flexible learning modes including full- time, part time, block release, day-release, and sandwich programmes; access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund); Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) that is well structured, coordinated and supervised; maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate regulatory agencies; an all- inclusive credible admissions policy for national unity; supporting affordable, equitable access to tertiary education through scholarships and students' loans; inter-institutional co-operation and linkages; and dedicated services to the community through extra-mural

and extension services (FRN, 2013). The realization of the objectives of tertiary education hinges on effective supervision and quality assurance programme and that is why the federal government established regulatory bodies.

Ogunode, Akinlade, and Abubakar (2021) and NEEDS (2014) opined that the Nigerian government to guarantee the quality of education and quality assurance in Nigerian higher education, the Federal government established different agencies and commissions to supervise the activities of higher institutions in the country. The commissions include; the National Universities Commission [NUC], the National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE] and the National Board for Technical Education [NBTE]. These regulatory bodies are to ensure internal quality assurance in the various tertiary institutions. However, these departments or units of quality assurance departments are faced with many problems. These problems are militating against their effective service delivery. This paper clarifies each of the concepts, identifies and discusses quality assurance indices as veritable tools for effective assessment of tertiary institutions for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Quality Assurance Indices in Tertiary Educational Programmes

To ensure a qualitative education in tertiary educational programmes, Babalola (2004) posits that the following indices can be taken into consideration. These include: quality educational inputs (human and material resources), educational process (supervision, inspection, accreditation and accountability). Others include; monitoring and evaluation which needs to have a strike balancing in quality assurance of tertiary educational programmes and educational outcome (the achievement and attainment of objectives).

Assuring Quality in Educational Inputs

Inputs in tertiary institutions are physical material, and human resources. The physical and material resources include curriculum, instructional materials, and facilities like classrooms, examination halls, laboratories, and ICT infrastructure. Human resources include students, teachers and other support staff and services. Quality assurance of these inputs should be guaranteed by professional bodies and regulatory agencies like the NUC, NCCE and NBTE. It is believed that quality of inputs and process will enhance quality tertiary educational programmes outcomes achieved. The assessment process in the educational programmes involves teaching and learning, which include utilisation of the resources, assessment techniques and use of formative assessment to monitor learning in order to ensure the objectives of educational programmes are achieved. Also, Formative assessment is designed to monitor learning progress during the course of instruction (Olutola & Owolabi, 2019).

Input is one of the veritable indicators of quality assurance in tertiary educational programmes. This indicator is primarily measure the development and the use of resources to facilitate teaching and learning. The indicators revealed whether the planned financial, material, and human resources are being delivered in the planned quantities, at all levels of the system. Information on input indicators is relatively easy to obtain since inputs are often countable by nature, and management processes involve keeping records of many inputs automatically. One challenge may be the differences between producing inputs and ensuring that they are available for sustainable development of the tertiary educational programmes. For example, the learning materials/students ratio may be measured in terms of the availability of the human and material resources in the institutions.

Assuring Quality in Educational Process

It is important to understand that quality assurance process regulate both the external and internal activities of an educational institution. The Nigerian tertiary institution regulatory bodies are saddled with the responsibility of achieving quality in tertiary education through its supervision and inspection, monitoring and evaluation, accreditation and accountability of academic programmes and course content and admission amongst others. When quality education is delivered high enough to meet set

standards, the products of education should be able to perform well in the world of work and in real life situations.

Supervision and Inspection in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions

Supervision is essential in order to monitor the execution of the curriculum making sure that the curriculum is carried out at a zero level defect. Through supervision, an educational programme in tertiary institutions is assisted to grow by going in line with the minimum standard. Institutions that do maintain the standard also need to be supervised in order to continue to maintain the high standards. As a result of supervision, tertiary institutions develop confidence in their ability to run their available courses. Supervision deals with overseeing those who are responsible teaching, learning, resource utilization and management in the process of educating a student. It has also been described as a process of stimulating growth and a means of helping educational programmes to achieve its excellence level. Supervision in tertiary institutions therefore is a vital process and combination of activities which is concerned with the entire educational programme and its improvement.

Supervision in higher educational programme is like accreditation which is carried out for approval to offer certain courses for certificate or to be upgraded. This activity is carried out once in every five years for higher institutions for ensuring quality and continuous improvement of higher education. At the higher education level, both teachers' and students' achievement hinges on the quality of their work. Manseur (2018) says that "academic supervision refers to supporting and guiding students in the research process to fulfil an academic qualification." Thus, academic supervision is the process in which a student (undergraduate or postgraduate) guided by a teacher, engages in research. Academic supervision also supports the improvement of students' research activities. Academic supervision not only helps students 'coursework but also research work at an undergraduate or postgraduate level. Affero et al. (2014) note that academic supervision remains an inter-related process for both the supervisor and supervisee and effective supervision can advocate the supervised student's development in order to enable him/her to produce a quality outcome. This statement emphasizes the role of academic supervision in improving both students' and teachers' proficiency which eventually contributes to the feature of academic research. Without proper academic supervision, it is difficult for the student to produce such quality research work.

On other hand, inspection is more penetrating and piercing than supervision. It is job – focused and scientific in approach. It involves close examination, check, scrutiny and assessment of available facilities and assessment of available resources in an institution with a view to establishing how far a particular institution has met prescribed standards. Therefore, quality Inspection is the process of evaluating and verifying if the inspected human and materials resources in tertiary institutions conform with the specified requirements. There is a best way to achieve this by giving a quality inspector. Quality inspectors usually carry out a pre-established checklist which is based on the specifications of the tertiary institution. They inspect the human and material resources available to check where they are fit for the specified requirements for quality assurance. The results of the inspection are then compiled into a report that indicates whether or not the requirements conform to the minimum standards.

Internal and external quality assessment are expected to achieve the same goal which is maintaining high standard and quality education as stipulated by the National Policy on Education. The school supervision lays emphasis on activities of staff in relation to teaching process, but school inspection evaluates a school as a whole and as a designed place of learning. School supervision and inspection are both guided by rules, regulations and policies slated or implied in the national policy on education.

Quality Monitoring and Evaluation of Tertiary Institutions

Monitoring and evaluation of quality assurance in higher education will cover such areas as governance, management of the higher education, quality of teaching, research and publications, students' enrolment, relationship with the host communities, utilization and management of resources. Monitoring and evaluation will provide the stakeholders in higher education (i.e. the students, the government, Alumni Associations, the civil society, the private sector, NGOs) with much desired extent to which the institutions are meeting the objectives of their establishment. Monitoring and evaluation will build greater transparency and accountability in terms of use of available resources in assuring quality in the institutions (Abe, 2012).

Monitoring and maintenance of quality education in Nigeria is done through internal assessments by the institutional supervisors or external assessment by inspectors. They plan, organize, direct, coordinate, evaluate and control all teaching-learning processes to ensure that they are properly done according to procedures, rules and policies stipulated by the federal government at the national level. All efforts of the supervisors and their staff are to ensure that the process of teaching-learning progresses well and that standards are maintained. The inspectors from the state and federal ministries of education visit the schools to carry out external assessments to ascertain that educational standard is maintained and that resources are appropriately utilized. In Nigeria, the federal government has authorized certain bodies (NUC, NCCE and NBTE) to be responsible for quality control of higher education.

Quality Accreditation and Accountability in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions

Accreditation of academic programmes is one of the quality assurance mechanisms initiated to regulate academic standard and enhance quality higher education for sustainable development in Nigeria. But the dwindling quality of our higher education has become a matter of great concern to the nation, whether the accreditation exercise actually achieves its purpose (Akpan, & Etor, 2016). Accreditation standards and guidelines in Nigeria educational system is aimed at strengthening programme for quality assurance and quality improvement. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in Washington, US defines accreditation as a process of external review used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and educational programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement. However, the extent to which each tertiary institution accepts and fulfils the responsibilities inherent in this process is a measure of its concern for freedom and quality in higher education and of its commitment to strive for and achieve excellence in its endeavours (Obadara et al 2013).

Okebukola (2006) viewed accreditation as a process of examining the availability and adequacy of resources, merit rating of resources and programmes in order to enhance quality of output. This means that accreditation involves the process of ensuring that curricula, physical facilities, personnel, funds and so on meet the needs of the tertiary institutions to achieve its stated philosophy and objectives. Hence, it is a measure of quality of academic programmes and it is aimed at strengthening academic programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement. Accreditation according Obadara and Alaka (2013) is a process that aids institutions in developing and sustaining effective educational programmes and assuring the educational community, the general public and other organizations that the accredited institution has met high standard of quality and effectiveness. It is a measure of the quality of academic programmes on acceptable minimum standard provided by the accrediting agency.

Accreditation according to Akpan, et al, (2016) is a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize an institution and/or its programmes for quality standards and need for quality improvement. The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded the published standards (set by an external body such as a government, national quality assurance agency, or a professional association) for accreditation, and whether it is achieving its

mission and stated purpose. The process usually includes a self-evaluation, peer review and a site visit. Accreditation is the establishment or of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme or module of study (Akpan, et al, 2016). From the above, programme accreditation can be defined as a mechanism designed in the tertiary institutions to ensure that academic programme offers are of standard and meet various policies and quality of national and international standard.

Educational programmatic accreditation normally applies to programmes, departments, or schools that are parts of an institution. The accredited unit may be as large as a college or school within a tertiary institution or as small as a curriculum within a discipline. Most of the specialized or programme accrediting agencies review units within an institution of higher education (Obadara et al, 2013). Generally, accreditation of institutions and programmes takes place periodically for improvement and quality assurance in nation's universities, therefore it:

1. verifies that an institution or programme meets established standards;
2. assists prospective students in identifying acceptable institutions;
3. Assists institutions in determining the acceptability of transfer credits;
4. helps to identify institutions and programmes for the investment of public and private funds;
5. protects an institution against harmful internal and external pressure;
6. creates goals for self-improvement of weaker programmes and stimulating a general raising of standards among educational institutions;
7. involves the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning;
8. establishes criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation; and
9. provides one of several the considerations used as a basis for determining eligibility for federal assistance, (Okojie, 2008; Obadara et al 2013).

Institutional accreditation normally applies to an entire institution, indicating that each of an institution's parts is contributing to the achievement of the institution's objectives, although not necessarily all at the same level of quality. The accrediting Commission (NCCE), for example, performs institutional accreditation, as other national accrediting agencies do, such as the Board (NBTE). In Nigeria, specialized accreditation is a voluntary process and institutions choose to apply for accredited status. If accredited, such an institution agrees to abide by the standards of their accrediting agency and to regulate itself by taking responsibility for its own improvement (Obadara and Alaka 2013).

Assuring Quality Accountability in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions

Accountability in education can best be defined as the proper keeping maintaining and utilization of all the school records about the academic administration, infrastructure and even the financial records of the school, in order to attain effective service delivery. According to Dangara (2016) Accountability, in the School system is usually linked to the management of the scarce resources of education to ensure prudent utilization of available resources for the accomplishment of the stated goals of education. The integration of accountability in the education management process helps to improve service delivery and control indiscipline in the organization thereby increasing efficiency in the systems.

A central aspect of 'accountability' in any form is that of 'rendering an account' of what one is doing in relation to goals that have been set or legitimate expectations that others may have of one's services or processes, in terms that can be understood by those who have a need or right to understand 'the account'. Quality procedures for accountability purposes are based on criteria set down by external authorities and institutions. They aim at strengthening external insight and control, with possibility of undertaking external corrective action, if necessary. Quality assurance for accountability purposes implies the use of a summative approach. Where this approach predominates, reports include explicit statements of outcomes and are published (Billing, 2004). The purpose of the publication is to inform

the public of the performance of higher education institutions (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995). This approach is common in countries, such as the UK, where there is a considerable institutional autonomy (Billing, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on system theory. Systems theory hold that an organization is a social system made up of integrated parts. The theory was propounded by a biophysicist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1920. The system was seen as a series of interrelated and interdependent parts in such a way that the interaction of any part of the system affects the whole system. That is, one part of the system must interact and depend on the other parts around it to function effectively. The system theory is relevant to tertiary education system because tertiary education system (school) is a system and the concept of interaction and interdependence of parts with the sub-system like all other social systems has identical properties with the other system. The theory is of immense help to this paper because tertiary education as a system has objectives and it is made up of sub-system. The sub-system includes teaching programme, researching programme, community service and programme accreditation. These sub-systems relate and are inter-dependent on each other to functions together to realize the objective of tertiary education.

Conclusion

The quality of tertiary education reflects in the performance and competence of its products; those that have acquired education through it such as its graduates. It is no doubt that the situation of higher education in Nigeria is faced with diverse challenges and has fallen below the standards and objectives on which it was built. Therefore, for restoration and sustainability of quality education in Nigerian tertiary institutions, a robust quality assurance model is needed to ensure internal and external evaluation and decision making to entire process of the educational programme.

Recommendations

Based on the researchers' findings, it was recommended that with appropriate implementation of the quality assurance indices and adoption of the identified strategies, the quality of Nigeria higher education programmes will be maintained and promoted.

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