

Impediments to Quality Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Abigail Olubukola Irele
Aderinsola Eunice Kayode

Abstract

Education is an important transformative agent in any society. It impacts positively on the citizens in terms of economic, social and political development if the quality of education is high. In recent years, there has been outcry by stakeholders in Nigeria that the quality of education has deteriorated and this has affected the products that are being produced in the tertiary education system in Nigeria. It has been noticed that most of the graduates in all the disciplines are unemployable because they lack skills that can make them to be competent in the labour market. This is due to the fact that tertiary educational system in Nigeria is in shambles because the high standard of quality that was known about the system in the earlier days is no more maintained. This is as a result of certain impediments which have affected the educational system in Nigeria.

This paper discusses what quality is, and the impediments confronting tertiary education in Nigeria in recent times. It proffers solution as on how to overcome these impediments and hence attain a higher quality educational system in the tertiary institutions which will propel the country to have developments in this competitive globalized system.

Keywords: Quality, standard, graduates, disciplines, development, unemployable, labour market

Introduction

This paper will focus mainly on quality in tertiary educational system in Nigeria especially university system. We will define quality in the body of the

paper and quality assurance as well because it is through quality assurance that quality is evaluated and assessed. In other words, the phenomenon of assuring quality is quality assurance. Many previous researchers explained that, quality assurance is an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating assessing, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving the quality of a higher education system, institutions or programmes (Haris, Washizak & Fukazawa 2018; Shen 2015; Vlasceanu *et al.* 2004).

In order to have a standard through which to maintain quality, quality assurance is such that all tertiary institutions must have. Quality assurance has been defined in various ways. It is what has been described as an essentially contested concept because most theorists of education have been arguing on what constitute it (Kalusi 2001). There is no unanimous agreement about the essential features that constitute what quality assurance is. However, from the various definitions quality assurance could be referred to as policies, actions, academic standard which enhance the quality of tertiary institutions generally.

The researchers, Timothy, Akinola and Olowo (2019) noted that quality assurance is an omnibus concept which embraces a whole lot of activities that are put in place to improve the quality of inputs, processes and outputs of higher educational system Quality assurance encompasses instructional materials for teaching, infrastructural facilities, the school environment, quality of instructional delivery, and quality of teachers. Quality assurance is a very important aspect of any higher education and the stake holders have a role to play in maintaining it. Quality assurance sets out the minimum standard for higher institutions which should be maintained and this includes qualifications of lecturers, quality of teaching, expected environments of students, the quality of management in the university system, as well as operating policies, procedures which are properly documented and adhere to in any higher education. It is believed that this will develop into a total system in terms of the management of the universities and it will meet international standards.

Studies have shown that quality assurance could be defined in terms of how good or bad the outcome of higher institutions in Nigeria is in meeting academic standards as well as performance (Asiyai 2020; Asiyai & Oghuru 2009). The article 11 of the world declaration on education views quality as a multi-dimensional concept which embraces all the actions, functions and activities in schools (Shabani, Okebukola & Oyewole 2017). The activities highlighted are: teaching, research, community service, staffing, students, infrastructures and many other paraphernalia of higher educational system.

High quality delivery in higher education is an essential ingredient for effective productivity in the educational sector and as such it is an essential agent that affects economic development in any nation. Higher education must have an inbuilt mechanism which revolves around quality and this quality imparts certain educational values and these values are such that they have positive effects on the educational system generally. When there is a high standard of quality education there is a causal effect on the products that are produced from these higher educational institutions and these products would be able to perform well in the labour market. However, if there is a low standard it will impact negatively on the products and hence these products would not be able to perform in real life situations.

Variables of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance in the Nigerian university system has two dimensions: Internal and External mechanisms which are put in place by the universities and the accreditation agency which is Nigerian University Commission (NUC). The universities themselves have certain standards set out in their mission and vision statements while the Nigerian University Commission (NUC) gives certain standards which universities should have. These constitute what could be called quality assurance. These standards include the following:

- Academic requirements for admission;
- Impact assessment;
- Admission quota; and
- Structures, infrastructures and utilities.

Other measures that are part of quality assurance, are:

- Accreditation of programs of institutions;
- Lecturers/students' ratio;
- Capacity building for teaching staff;
- Library facilities which include book stock and e-library;
- Minimum standard which is considered as bench mark for various programs; and
- External moderation system.

Quality in the university system is an important factor. Before discussing it, it would be important to know what we mean by quality. However, it is not straight forward as it seems. The concept is an elusive one hence it is a contested one. This arose during the ancient Greek period. Plato for instance says that ‘Goodness is not the same as being, but even beyond being surpassing it in dignity and power’ (Plato c. 380 BCE). Aristotle also has this to say about quality, ‘any kind of excellence renders that of what it is the excellence good and makes it performs its functions well’ (Aristotle c. 380 BCE). Plato’s definition is utopian since he believes that any form of quality must copy the ideal form of it than a similar thing that is of poorer quality. Aristotle’s definition is realistic and it comes down to what could be called as fitness to purpose whereas that of Plato is metaphysical. Aristotle’s definition can be measured but that of Plato cannot. In the previous study, a writer on academic enterprise has commended thus on quality; ‘Quality is how do you know what it is, or how do you know it even exist? If no one knows what it is then for all practical purposes it doesn’t exist at all’. He then gave an extended metaphysical discussion of what quality is but metaphysics is of no use in assuring us the quality of anything most especially education. It was also revealed that quality assurance approaches aimed at defending quality, demonstrating quality and enhancing the quality of assurance (Lim 2018; Pirsij 1976).

Quality as a concept is quite different from quality assurance which is also seen as assessment, evaluation, audit, or other forms of monitoring. Quality assurance is about checking the processes of, or outcomes of a quality of a product. In this regard the purpose of quality assurance includes compliance, control and accountability. Quality is the tool which is used through which this purpose is implemented. Quality in this regard is implemented via quality assurance. Quality ensures that there is a compliance with certain criteria which are laid down by the evaluators in arriving at a judgment about the quality of the educational system. The method for doing this is the quality assurance methodology. Quality is also seen as providing the conceptual underpinning for quality assurance processes. There is a close relationship between quality and standard in higher education. In discussions of higher education there is a sort of overlap between quality and standard. Standards are used to measure the quality of the educational system. Standards are used as criteria to judge whether an educational system has a good outcome or not in terms of its mission and objective.

Five Broad Areas for Quality Standards

There are four broad areas in higher education where standards are formulated and assessed. These are academic standards which are related to the ability of students to be able to do certain things at a given level of educational system. The second one is standards of competence which is related to the technical ability of the students. This demonstrates that the students have achieved a specified level of ability. This also implies that certain skills in terms of their profession have been achieved. Service standards are the services that are provided by the educational system to the students. These services include the facilities in which the services are provided. The last standards are organizational standards. Organizational standards according to Harvey are the 'principles and procedures by which the institutions assure that it provides an appropriate learning and research environment. It is also a formal recognition of systems to ensure effective management of organizational processes and clear dissemination of organizational practices' (Harvey 2006).

Quality as Excellence

Quality could also be seen as an excellence. There are three broad aspects in this notion of quality. It is in the first instance perceived as a sort of distinctiveness. The second views quality as having an exceedingly high standard, and the third as having passed a set of required standards. The notion of excellence is that the institutions concerned provides or have certain benchmarks against which certain standards can be evaluated. It is not to say that the benchmarks are objective but they at least have the potential to specify the standards which are to be attained before we can term the institutions as having excellence. In this regard, there are high standards of academic achievement. Quality is also viewed as perfection or consistency. This notion of quality is one that is consistent or without flaws and it is that the product has zero defects. In this regard what it means is that the product that is produced is flawless. However, this notion of quality has been criticized because it has affinity with products in the manufacturing sector which is not the same as educational system. The idea of perfection or consistency is that the institutions have a consistent academic standard year in year out and there is consistency in student grading, accurate records and reliable administrative procedures that are put in place.

Quality as Fitness for Purpose

Quality could also be defined as fitness for purpose of a product or service. According to Harvey fitness for purpose is simply that the product or service does the job which it is designed for. However, some theorists of education have criticized the notion of fitness for purpose because it brings the idea of conformity to certain criteria which has been set by the institution and fitness for purpose in this regard with these institutions' missions and objectives. These missions and objectives imply that anything goes in higher education as long as a purpose can be formulated for it. It is in this regard that educational theorists have introduced fitness for purpose to evaluate whether the quality related intentions of institutions are adequate. In this regard external bodies like accrediting bodies assures that missions and objectives of institutions meet the standards that have been formulated by the institutions and the notion of fitness for purpose comes in because these external determinants determine what is acceptable as a quality criterion. In this regard fitness for purpose of academic standards is judged through accreditation schemes which assures minimum compliance to externally imposed standards such as those prescribed by accreditation agencies. This agency is called National University Commission (NUC) in Nigeria. The institutions are judged by external bodies and in this way, it must comply with national governmental and other accreditation expectations.

Quality of Transformation

Quality has also been seen as a transformation. Transformation here means a qualitative change from one stage to another. Transformation as a process involves metamorphosis from one stage to another and could apply to an organization, individual or process. Harvey and Green (1993) state that in an educational setting 'transformation refers to the enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge when related to higher educational transformation usually refers to the development and change that occurs to a student through the learning process'. Further Harvey and Knight (1996) state that it could also occur to 'changes within an institution so that it is better able to provide transformative learning or research'.

Harvey (2006) cited in Eckel *et al.* (1998) assert that 'Transformation (1) alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying

assumptions and institutional behaviours, processes, and products; (2) is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; (3) is intentional; and (4) occurs over time’.

Quality as Value for Money

One important aspect of quality is value for money. In this specific case value for money is viewed in terms of return on investment or expenditure. The notion implies that there must be accountability in terms of funds that are provided by the funders. In the specific case of tertiary education in Nigeria, the government funded tertiary institutions are accountable to the governments at various levels either at the state level or at the federal level. There are now private institutions which are funded by individual entrepreneurs. The institutions have to be accountable to these individuals who have provided the funds. These are the features of quality and they are important in assessing any tertiary educational system. They impart positively on students if they are entrenched properly in any educational system.

Quality as Empowerment

Empowerment also involves that quality education transforms the students’ abilities for self-awareness of the students. In short empowerment involves developing robust skills and also as earlier pointed out encouraging critical reflection of students. A quality education coupled with standards is important in any tertiary educational system especially in the university. There is a causal link between good quality education and socio-economic development. It is now established beyond doubt that a good quality education ensures that a country or a nation would have a solid economic development because the educational system especially the tertiary educational system would produce competent graduates to propel the development of that country. It is also critical to the construction of knowledge economy and society in all nations.

Reflections

At the present time in Nigeria the quality of education has witnessed a downward trend. Stakeholders in the tertiary educational system have alluded

to this fact. The products that are produced by the Nigerian university system have been found incompetent by their employers after graduation.

The history of Nigerian tertiary educational system started with the establishment of University College Ibadan, Nigeria in 1948. It was affiliated to the University of London in the United Kingdom but it became autonomous later on. This was followed with the establishment of University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria in 1960; University of Ife, Nigeria (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1962; and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria in 1962; and University of Lagos, Nigeria also in 1962. Growth of tertiary institutions continued with the establishment of more federal, state, and privately-owned universities. In the 1980s Nigerian university system had established a high quality educational system comparable to other good quality universities in other parts of the world. For instance, University of Ibadan, Nigeria and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria had established reputations in their research in tropical health and agriculture worldwide. Under successive military regimes in Nigeria, this reputation became soured. On research side there was dwindling research outputs compared to the 1980s. With a population of two hundred million and about two hundred universities, no Nigerian university is regarded as world class. This is in contrast to South Africa with an estimated population of nearly 60 million people, that has a number of top-ranked universities, such as the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Times Higher Education 2019). This situation shows that Nigeria has regressed in terms of her quality of higher education not only in the world but also in Africa. Nigerian tertiary educational systems once served as a pace setters and bench markers, in terms of her quality of education in the West African sub region and Africa generally and was regarded worldwide as having quality education. It is now worrisome that there has been much neglect in terms of quality in tertiary education in Nigeria and these have become impediments and have affected the excellence that was known about the quality of education in Nigeria in the 1980s. The quality assurance system has revealed that some universities are not meeting its own objectives and standards which are enumerated in their programs' policies.

Impediments to quality education in Nigeria have many multifaceted dimensions and these have impacted negatively on the quality of education. The first have to do with funding of university system in Nigeria. Governments at all levels have not met the UNESCO funding of tertiary education which is

26% of GDP. Most universities have not been able to meet their needs because of shortfall in funding. As a result of this research grants are not available in most universities to conduct research. Another impediment is infrastructural deficit such as laboratories for carrying out experiments for science students. There are not enough classrooms to teach students as well as lecturers' offices. Some universities libraries are not well equipped with books as well as e-books and e-journals. There is also an aspect which is the hub of what we have said above: some universities have not embraced technology in teaching the students. There is also not enough Information Communication Technology (ICT) in some of the universities. This has affected quality of education negatively because in this 21st century it is expected that any tertiary educational institution must embrace ICT which will add to the quality of education. There are also shortages of teaching staff in most universities in Nigeria. This has become exacerbated because of brain drain. Most highly regarded scholars have departed the shores of Nigeria to seek for greener pastures in other parts of the world. These highly established scholars would have mentored the younger scholars. This has also affected the quality of education in Nigeria.

The role of tertiary education cannot be over emphasized. It is the fulcrum for economic and social development. The quality of education in Nigeria now has become a topical issue which requires pragmatic solution. In order to have high quality of education in Nigeria, attention must be directed at those impediments that obviate quality education in Nigeria in order to erase them. Most importantly Nigeria educational system must be technologically-based in teaching and learning so that improvement of quality in higher education would be attained.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nigerian educational system will continue to witness downward trend if these impediments are allowed to continue. In this regard the governments at all levels need to fund the educational system properly if Nigeria would want to become one of the largest economies in the world. It has to pay attention to quality education in all ramifications. It is through this that well qualified competent graduates would be produced which would meet the global challenges of a competitive world economy. It is therefore imperative to urgently address the impediments outlined above so that quality

education in terms of quality assurance could be attained in Nigerian tertiary educational system, especially university system.

References

- Asiyai, R.I. 2020. Best Practices for Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Implications for Educational Administration. *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 1 - 12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1710569>
- Asiyai, R.I. & E.P. Oghuvbu 2009. An Empirical Analysis of the Causes and Challenges of Quality in Higher Education in Nigeria in the 21st Century: Possible Solutions to the Decline in the Quality of Tertiary Education in Delta State, Nigeria. *Journal of Sociology and Education in Africa* 8,2: 1 - 13.
- Eckel, P., B. Hill & M. Green 1998. *On Change, en route to Transformation*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Haris, A., H. Washizaki & Y. Fukazawa 2018. Systematic Review of Utilized ICTs in Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and a Case Study of Developing Country. *EAI Endorsed Transactions on e-Learning* 5,18. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.13-7-2018.156639>
- Harvey, L. & D. Green 1993. 'Defining Quality'. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 18,1: 9 - 34.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0260293930180102>
- Harvey, L. & P. Knight 1996. *Transforming Higher Education*. Buckingham, Open University Press and Society for Research into Higher Education.
- Harvey, L. 2006. 'Understanding Quality', Section B 4. 1-1 of 'Introducing Bologna Objectives and Tools'. In Purser, L. (ed.): *EUA Bologna Handbook: Making Bologna Work*. Brussels & Berlin: Brussels European University Association and Raabe.
- Kalusi, J.I. 2001. Teacher Quality for Quality Education. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Philosophy* 8,2: 62 - 72.
- Lim, D. 2018. *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Study of Developing Countries*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Okebukola, P.A. 2005. Quality Assurance in the Nigerian University System. *Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies* 12,3: 1 - 5.
- Asiyai, R.I. (ed.): Challenges of Quality in Higher Education in Nigeria in the 21st Century. *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration* 3,2: 159 - 172. Available at:

https://www.ripublication.com/ijepa/ijepav3n2_07.pdf

Pirsig, R.M. 1976. *Zen and the Art of Motor Cycle Maintenance*. Corgi: London.

Plato. 1994. *The Republic*. Conford, F.M. (trans.). London: OUP.

Sanyal, B.C. 2013. Quality Assurance of Teacher Education in Africa. UNESCO: International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa. *Fundamentals of Teacher Education Development* 5.

Shabani, J., P. Okebukola & O. Oyewole 2017. Regionalization of Quality Assurance in Africa. In *Regionalization of African Higher Education*. Brill: Sense Publishers.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-956-0_6

Shen, G. 2015. Building World-class Universities in China: From the View of National Strategies. *Global University Network for Innovation* 26,10.

Times Higher Education in South Africa 2019.

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-africa>

Timothy, T.O., O.B. Akinola & B.F. Olowo 2019. School Principals' Use of Management Principles: A Veritable Tool for Effective Delivery of Quality Assurance in Osun State Secondary Schools. *Educational Leader (Pemimpin Pendidikan)* 1 - 20.

Vlasceanu, L., L. Grünberg & D. Pârlea 2007. Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions. Papers on Higher Education. Barrows, L.C. & M.D. Viorica Popa (eds.): Bucharest: UNESCO. Available at:

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000134621>

Abigail Olubukola Irele
Institute of African Studies
University of Ibadan
Nigeria
bukkyirele2006@gmail.com

Aderinsola Eunice Kayode
Department of Educational Management
University of Ibadan
Nigeria
aderini2002@gmail.com