

Improving Educational Outcomes at Nigeria's Government Owned Universities by Boosting Internal Quality Assurance

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ABSTRACT: *Rather than appearing out of thin air, high-quality education is the result of persistent work on the part of all those involved in the field. The purpose of this article is to have a conversation on how Nigerian public universities may better implement internal quality assurance processes. It begins with a discussion of what quality is and how it can be guaranteed. Next, we'll talk about why it's important to stress quality in public colleges. The report concludes with an analysis of key internal challenges that must be resolved to guarantee educational excellence.*

KEY WORDS: quality assurance, education, internal, quality, Nigerian universities

INTRODUCTION

It cannot be denied that education plays a crucial role in shaping a person's future. Education is crucial to a country's development on all fronts, including the political, social, economic, and technological. Nations are motivated to invest in education because of the benefits they will reap. Beyond financial commitments, countries also make concerted efforts to ensure that their educational investments pay off. It is well-known that educational standards are crucial in determining the extent to which a country benefits from such expenditures. Because of this, the problem of quality, especially in higher education, has captured the attention of stakeholders and refused to let go.

Beckett and Brookes (2016) list rapid student growth, rising public spending on higher education, the demand for better public services, rising competition within the educational market for resources and students, the tensions between efficiency and quality, and rising public demand for the accountability of higher education as some of the causes of the rising concern for quality assurance within the expanding global higher education system.

When it comes to providing high-quality education, Nigeria's public universities have largely failed. The causes of this situation are not hard to fathom. The number of colleges and universities has grown exponentially in recent decades. The National Universities Commission

(NUC) website reports that as of June 2012, there are 37 Federal Universities, 37 State Universities, and 50 Private Universities in Nigeria. Difficulties arise from factors such as a lack of resources (both financial and human), a loss of talented faculty members, frequent strikes by student and faculty unions, a lacklustre management philosophy, shoddy facilities, questionable testing techniques, a growing student body, and so on.

Okigbo (2020), an author who has written extensively on the topic of higher education, is quoted by Ayodele and Abiodun (2018), who argue that the Nigerian University system has rapidly progressed from infancy to adolescence to near maturity and then decay. It is not as if there's no chance at all. The federal government has resolved disagreements with campus unions and is working to increase funding for higher education. Nigeria's National Universities Commission (NUC), the independent statutory organisation charged with ensuring high academic standards across the country's institutions of higher learning, isn't resting on its laurels.

The Commission has created and is currently reviewing undergraduate Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards from 2007, monitors resource assessment before to programme approval, performs undergraduate programme accreditation exercises, and has begun the process for institutional accreditation. The Commission has recently (on July 12, 2022) presented and disseminated the Postgraduate Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards in order to initiate accreditation of Postgraduate programmes in Nigerian universities. The NUC and the government are two examples of external agencies whose activities are geared towards quality assurance. The fact is that the entire effort may be useless unless the external efforts are matched by a purpose-driven internal quality assurance procedure.

The purpose of this article is to have a conversation on how Nigerian public universities may better implement internal quality assurance processes. Quality and quality control are introduced first. The next section explains why it's important for public colleges to maintain a high standard of education. Finally, the internal concerns that must be addressed in order to guarantee educational quality are examined.

Quality and Its Assurance: An Overview

There is no universally accepted definition of quality because it is interpreted in a variety of ways. That's why it can be difficult to agree on a single definition of quality. Yet, usually it is measured against some kind of standard. Quality, according to the British Standard Institution (BSI), is "the sum of the product's or service's attributes that have some bearing on its or its user's capacity to meet stated or implied needs" (BSI, 1991). Quality in higher education can be hard to pin down since different stakeholders have different ideas about what should be considered high-quality programmes. Five distinct definitions of quality are presented in the updated edition of the widely cited (Harvey and Green, 1993) by Harvey (2006), as quoted by Harvey and Stensaker (2008).

Superiority in every respect; unmatched quality. High academic standards are a common metric used to assess quality in this context. If all of the criteria are satisfied, then quality has been

achieved. High standards of excellence or uniformity. Quality, according to this definition, means achieving perfection on the first try. For the most part, it is thought that the concept of quality in this context does not relate to a learning environment, with the exception of the trustworthiness of academic judgement and management information.

Quality defined as suitability for use. Thus, quality is measured by how well it serves its intended function, which in turn is tied to the needs of the target audience and their level of contentment. Cost-effective quality. In this context, quality is measured by ROI. This term emphasises the importance of responsibility in the classroom.

A shift in perspective towards quality as a dynamic process. In this view, education is viewed as a means of bringing about a positive and empowering change in its recipients. Attainment of educational goals and enhancement of the teaching and learning process are at the heart of quality assurance in education. According to Stand (2018), "quality assurance" is a "constant process" by which an institution can ensure that the standards and quality of its educational provisions are being maintained or developed. The following are some of the aspects that Middlehurst (2021, p. 28) identifies as being under the purview of quality assurance:

- Regulation (legal frameworks, governance, responsibilities and accountabilities etc) (legal frameworks, governance, responsibilities and accountabilities etc).
- Educational procedure; this includes everything from "admissions," "registration," "enrolments," "curriculum," "assistance for leaving," "evaluation," and so on.
- The curriculum's structure and material (validation and approval frameworks, levels and standards etc). The term "educational opportunity" (consumer protection, students experience, complaints and appeals etc).
- Qualifications, transcripts, certificates, security, portability, and acknowledgment are all examples of outcomes.

Hence, quality assurance is a methodical process of checking that the conditions necessary for the achievement of educational objectives are being met. It is up to the institution to decide whether or not to use an external quality assurance approach. To ensure that educational institutions are meeting the basic academic standards or the required professional standards of the programme, external quality assurance typically comprises a review by an authorised agency or professional body. The purpose of this exercise is to check on the progress made towards maintaining and raising quality.

The term "internal quality assurance," on the other hand, is used by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) (2006) to refer to a university's or program's internal policies and mechanisms for ensuring that they are meeting their goals and the standards for their field or specialty. Were it not for quality assurance in higher education, why would Nigerian universities exist?

The supply of qualified workers essential to Nigeria's economic growth has been hampered by a reduction in the quality of education provided by the country's public universities. Any

concerted effort to guarantee high standards in the educational sector is unquestionably the way to go. Only countries that invest heavily in their education system can hope to compete well in the global knowledge and economy economies. As a country, Nigeria has no choice but to go forward and not fall behind.

Third, stakeholders' disappointment in Nigerian public universities stems from their failure to meet their expectations in this area. One indicator of this is the rising popularity of sending children to private universities, either in the United States or abroad (particularly in nations like Ghana) among affluent parents. Certainly, enough cause for worry to work towards restoring public faith in the quality of education provided by public institutions of higher learning. Delivering a high-quality education is crucial in today's globally interconnected world because it is the only way to guarantee that Nigerian university degrees will be recognised, and that Nigeria's students will be able to adapt to any workplace.

Ensuring the quality of education provided gives public institutions an opportunity to defend their budgets and negotiate for more money. Quality assurance is essential if Nigerian public universities are to succeed in luring international students for study, forming partnerships and alliances with other universities both inside and outside of Nigeria, and reaping the benefits of these relationships to industry. Given her standing, it is a truth that Nigerian colleges have not joined the ranks of the world's top institutions of higher learning. One of the criteria for this rating is the quality of the research produced. Quality assurance in research-oriented universities is essential if the country is to undergo a technical and innovative development.

What Should Be Done to Boost Internal Quality Control?

The regulations of the university include provisions for internal quality control. In universities, the Senate serves as the highest governing body, with authority over all internal quality control procedures. The university Senate is responsible for a number of internal quality control functions, including admissions regulation, departmental and faculty-level programme regulation, examination regulation, and the appointment of external examiners. While these checks and balances help ensure consistency, it is clear that achieving high standards in education still takes significant effort and commitment on the part of all those involved. If the institution wants to continue to improve the delivery of educational services and the attainment of educational goals, it must address internal difficulties that have been identified by the administration, faculty, and students. The purpose of this article is to reawaken the passion of university administration to pay notice to some problems that influence the efficiency of internal quality assurance efforts and the overall quality of education but are typically ignored by public institutions.

Adapting one's outlook on quality-related issues: A university's perception of itself is crucial. This representation is what determines how people will think of the institution and, ultimately, how much they will respect it. The first step in developing a positive sense of identity is to instill a commitment to quality in the minds of the faculty, staff, and students at the institution. It means buying into the university's mission and goal as an idea. Interestingly, when a university hires new employees, they don't make any special effort to brief them on the

institution's mission, history, and future goals. If students don't know what the university's goal is, how can they be expected to contribute fully? Quality education delivery will be challenging to achieve as long as faculty and staff are uninterested in the university's vision and mission. Asking tough questions through critical self-evaluation, assessing the efficacy of the internal regulatory framework at both the departmental and faculty levels, acting swiftly when problems arise, learning from the good practises of other institutions, and making an effort to provide a quality enabling environment are all necessary for any university serious about improving quality internally. Management must take the time between each academic year to assess the university's accomplishments, pinpoint its flaws, and develop a plan to address them before the next school year begins. I urge you to make a concerted, ongoing effort aimed at enhancing the quality of your work overtime.

Second, a reorientation towards ethics is required since public colleges in Nigeria are the incubators of a wide range of unethical practises. What a convoluted and intractable problem. Some academic employees lack moral rectitude and have no qualms about engaging in immoral behaviour, such as turning a blind eye to exam cheating, giving students inflated grades in exchange for cash or sexual favours, plagiarising others' work, failing to show up for class, and so on. Even among the pupils, there are stragglers. They participate in cult activities, cheat on exams, miss class, steal from the school cafeteria, destroy school property during protests, and more. Wherever these types of unethical actions are tolerated, quality cannot be achieved. Several of these misconducts can be prevented if staff and students are properly oriented on acceptable conducts, particularly at the time of entry into the university.

It is important not to skim over the orientation process for new employees or students because this can provide unscrupulous actors a chance to infiltrate the system. Moreover, workshops and seminars on ethical issues should be held on a regular basis to address these concerns. The administration of the institution needs to have the courage to carry out judgement and justice, regardless of who is involved, whether it be faculty or students. Erring employees and pupils should be punished promptly, as delays often give the perpetrators confidence to continue the unethical acts.

Third, we adhere to our carrying capacity. In most Nigerian public universities, especially state-owned ones, the urge to produce more revenue through expanded student enrolment has taken precedence over concern for carrying capacity in curriculum implementation. Increasing the standard of education requires taking into account not only the number of students who use the current infrastructure, but also the available manpower in the academic department. When universities overfill their enrolment caps, hire excessive numbers of adjunct faculty, and force full-time professors to teach additional courses, it's no surprise that education quality suffers. Maintaining a steady population density within the confines of the available infrastructure and workforce can be achieved by adhering to the carrying capacity.

Fourth, better management and growth of employees: A common misconception in Nigeria's higher education system is that more advanced degrees inevitably translate to better teachers. Getting a graduate degree can help someone break into the academic field, but it won't make

them into good teachers. Employment practises wherein new hires are given courses to teach with no orientation or coaching must halt. Similarly, even the most seasoned faculty members can benefit from training, since keeping their skills and knowledge up-to-date is crucial to enhancing the quality of their work. Teaching evaluation is another area of academic staff management that is often overlooked. Some faculty members, for instance, instruct the same classes year after year with zero feedback on their performance. This justifies the continued use of out-of-date textbooks and lecture formats. We can no longer afford to disregard the benefits of evaluating our teaching through channels like peer review and student feedback. Once again, there needs to be a place for people to talk about the best ways to do things within the organisation. The shortage of qualified faculty has become more glaring as a result of the fast proliferation of universities in Nigeria. Due to an inadequate number of faculty members, two trends have emerged that are counterproductive to the upkeep of university standards. The first is "moonlighting," or the practise of academics working part-time at multiple institutions while also maintaining a full-time employment at one. The efficiency and quality of service provided by the workforce is negatively impacted by this practise. Any employee who accepts an adjunct appointment without management consent should face repercussions. The second factor is the fact that some universities have been appointing academic employees to ranks they do not have the experience to function in in order to meet the demand of NUC on staff mix or to entice academics to join their institutions. This approach may help with a pressing issue, but it will inevitably lower the standard of education.

The academic department's staffing needs and the established criteria for recruiting are the only factors that should ever enter into the hiring process for any employee, but notably the academic cadre. It's general known at this point that administrations at universities frequently give in to pressure from many sources and hire faculty members who are unnecessary to the departments they serve. Sometimes these people lack the requisite qualities to be considered academics, and they become a burden the institution cannot rid itself of since they are unremovable. If this continues, quality will inevitably suffer.

Getting students involved in the quality assurance process: Universities place a high value on the quality of their "inputs" into the learning process, meaning that they care deeply about the students who enrol at their institutions. A student must take the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), pass the post-UTME (which is normally organised internally by the admitting university), and have the necessary O-Level marks to be accepted into college. When it comes to education in Nigeria, this is about as far as most students care about quality going. In Nigeria, only a small fraction of schools has made any real attempt to involve students in their own quality assurance procedures. This runs counter to the norm in many wealthy countries and even some emerging ones. Gains from student involvement in the quality assurance process include receiving helpful feedback on the quality of instruction and the courses taken, increasing the likelihood that students will adopt the university's quality culture, and giving students a sense of agency and ownership over their education. Their participation enhances not only their own education but also the growth of the educational system. As a result, the university's efforts to enhance quality fall short, especially in the areas of teaching and learning, which have received insufficient attention from students. As a result, it is crucial

to provide effective channels for student participation in the internal quality assurance process at Nigeria's public universities.

Examining the Course Load Sixth While talking about curriculum, relevance is of utmost importance. Any course material that doesn't meet the demands of the people receiving this education and the larger community is deemed insufficient. Nigerian universities must improve the quality of their curricula in light of recent developments in education both domestically and internationally. The declining quality of graduate output and academic standards in Nigeria is not news. This, in addition to the difficulties brought about by technological advancements and the globalisation of the educational system, necessitates that colleges and universities regularly assess the content of their courses. Fulfil all righteousness committees are responsible for the antiquated course offerings in Nigeria's state universities.

Universities typically form curriculum review committees, but they frequently lack the rigour necessary to carry out their critically essential mission. It's crucial that courses be kept fresh and relevant. In order to maintain a curriculum's currency and relevance, it is imperative that administrators at all levels give it careful consideration.

Most public institutions in Nigeria suffer from a severe lack of all types of educational facilities, making better administration of existing ones a top priority. Yet, the real issue is the quality of their administration and upkeep. Some public university administrations have caught the "Nigerian illness" of disdain for government property and a lackadaisical attitude towards upkeep. Because of these incompetent management teams, the available educational resources have been allowed to deteriorate in the name of lack of funds. Public universities often show signs of neglect and bad maintenance attitudes, such as leaking roofs, unclean buildings with fading paint, poorly maintained laboratories, etc. The second aspect of this facility-related issue is the low priority given to developing new physical facilities, despite the fact that existing ones are over-stretched and over-used, leading to rapid decline in state of the facilities. In order to reduce the number of unfinished university construction projects, careful strategic planning of facility expansion is strongly recommended. It is just as important to keep an eye on the condition of university buildings and, more importantly, to spend money wisely.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has huge advantages that any forward-thinking university administration must utilise. For the convenience of their students, most public colleges in Nigeria now have websites and online registration systems (called "portals"). It is encouraging to see some use of technology, but this isn't nearly enough. It's common knowledge that a company can't survive without good data management. Records management is a major issue at many of Nigeria's public universities. Inadequate historical documentation, a disorganised collection of staff and student data, and a lack of transparency in financial matters are only some of the issues that can be addressed by using modern information and communication technology (ICT). The process of storing, retrieving, and utilising data will be simplified.

It is argued here that the process of incorporating ICT into universities should not be done randomly, even though this paper may not detail all the issues with the university system that the integration of ICT will assist ease. Creating an ICT policy is the first step towards realising the potential of ICT to boost quality. After this, a comprehensive strategy should be developed to direct the initiatives that follow.

CONCLUSION

There are internal and external causes that have contributed to the reduction in quality education at Nigeria's public universities. Throughout this study, we examined a few of the internal variables that can hinder quality control. It is unrealistic to think that the issues that plague universities in Nigeria can be fixed immediately. Yet, there are problems that can be fixed by the administration of the university. Further effort is needed to fix the problems this research identifies. And if the internal obstacles to quality assurance are removed, colleges will be better prepared to deal with the external ones.

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