Quality Assurance in Managing Higher Education

Abiona, Olufemi Adebayo
olufemi.abiona@yahoo.com; 08023079943
Department of Educational Management,
Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan.
P. O. Box 29922, Secretariat Post Office, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Introduction

Quality assurance in the management of higher education in Nigeria is a task that must be accomplished. Scholars in the education discipline continue to argue and ponder whether the quality of education in Nigeria is falling. In order to ascertain the past, present and future standard of education in any country, quality assurance mechanisms should be used to determine the state of the educational activities. Quality assurance refers to ways of ensuring that the quality of a service or product conforms with approved standards, during the processing or implementation stage. At the processing or implementation stage quality assurance ensures the use of high standard materials, appointment of qualified and competent staff, job allocation to the requisite and appropriate staff and timely completion of assignments. Abiona (2019).

Furthermore, Lucey (2014) commented that quality assurance comprises administrative and procedural activities implemented in a quality system so that requirements and goals for a product, service or activity will be fulfilled.In educational affairs, quality assurance is the degree or ability to which tertiary institutions in Nigeria conform to the established standards. Quality assurance in education in Nigeria is also the adequacy of the teaching, learning and research activities to the needs of the recipients and that of the nation in general. Hence, adequacy of various input resources will certainly exercise tremendous influence on quality assurance in Nigeria education system. Education stakeholders including students should play their expected role and realize that it is part of their own responsibility to pursue the quality assurance agenda.

Higher Education in Nigeria

Education is a vital instrument of change in any society. Higher education or tertiary education is the education given after post basic education in institutions such as Universities, Polytecnics, Colleges of Education and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, School of Health Technology, National Teachers' Institutes (NTI), Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs) and inter-university centressuch as

Nigeria French Language Village and National Institute of Nigerian Languages. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014) National Policy on Education (NPE) stressed that the main policy objectives in education in Nigeria, is to raise the quality of education at all levels in order to make the products of the system more useful to the society and to maintain education as one of the prime engines for development.

Nigeria's education system encompasses three different sectors. These are: basic education, which is for nine years; post-basic or senior secondary education, which is for three years and tertiary education which is for four to six years, depending on the program of study. At the tertiary level, the education system consists of a university sector and a non-university sector. The latter is comprised of polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education. The tertiary sector as a whole offers opportunities for undergraduate, graduate, and vocational and technical education.

A major feature of university education in Nigeria is the quest for autonomy. Osokoya (2017) commented that university autonomy in Nigeria, as in other places, is the freedom to select its students and staff and to determine the conditions under which they remain in the university. Autonomy of tertiary institutions enables them to set standards for award of certificates, design appropriate curriculum, take decisions on funds allocation and disbursement, as well as make decisions on internally generated resources. However, it appears that some tertiary institutions are not maintaining the high standards expected from them. Hence the need for putting in place quality assurance mechanisms, to monitor and enforce the management of higher education institutions to adhere to acceptable standards in their conduct of higher education activities.

Developed countries keep on promoting strategies that lead to the development of their educational systems. The development of a country's natural resources is dependent on the quality of the manpower produced by its educational sector. Education helps in the positive development of human potentials, the human talents, the human intellect, the human attitude and the human skills. Education increases the quality of work ethics and the productivity of the citizens of a country.

National Policy on Higher Education

The National Policy on Education (NPE) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014) contains articles that the focus on managing higher education in Nigeria with quality assurance principles. According to article 81 a - f of the NPE:

The goals of Tertiary Education shall be to:
   a) contribute to national development through high level manpower training;
   b) provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of Nigerians;

c) provide high quality career counseling and life-long learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;

d) reduce skill shortages through the production of skill manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market;

e) promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service;

f) forge and cement national unity; and

g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

In order to achieve the above tertiary education goals, article 82 a –d of the NPE further states that:

Tertiary education institutions shall pursue these goals through;

a) quality student intake;

b) quality teaching and learning;

c) research and development;

d) high standards in the quality of facilities, services and resources;

e) staff welfare and development programmes;

f) provision of more practical-based curriculum relevant to the needs of labour market;

g) Generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills andcompetencies that contribute to national and local economic goals which enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy….

The above policy statements show that, in terms of educational planning for the quality assurance of higher education in Nigeria, adequate and apt provisions have been made in the NPE. All stake holders should therefore endeavour to adhere to the implementation of the content of the NPE, as it relates to higher education.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance in education is the process of maintaining accredited high standards in the production of graduates who are competent to deliver quality services to members of the society.All stake holders, who are directly or indirectly involved in educational matters, have specific contributions to add to the process of maintaining quality assurance.Quality assurance in an educational system requires that the various sectors in the educational system have the ability to provide the needs, demands and services required by theend-users. It should be noted that quality assurance in education refers to

271

the quality of available instructional materials for teaching, equipment, facilities, school environment, students, curriculum, and method of instructional delivery and competency of teachers.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2014) stated that quality standard in the education are goals or targets to which learners, teachers, staff and school administration aspires to attain. It is a multi-dimensional concept involving the various functions and activities of education. Such functions and activities include teaching, research, staffing, students, buildings, facilities and equipment, service to the community and academic environment. Consequent upon the above, quality assurance is the ability of education to satisfy the aspirations of the society in which it exists. In order to maintain the standard of quality required, there should be guide, rules and regulations that would be used to control academic matters. Such guide,rules and regulations for ensuring quality assurance in the academic matters include the following criteria embarked upon during accreditation exercises: quality of students ratio, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding and adequate library facilities.

Challenges Militating Against the Realisation of Educational Goals in Nigeria.

There are various challenges confronting higher education in Nigeria. Falaye (2016) in his reference to Bamiro&Adedeji (2010) opined that some of the age long problems of education in Nigeria, be it basic, secondary or tertiary education, have made it very difficult for the government and other stakeholders to realize their expectations from the educational sectors. These challenges include:

   i.   inconsistency in educational policy;
   ii.   lack of continuity in governance;
  iii.   poor funding;
   iv.   poor planning;
   v.   non conducive teaching environment;
   vi.   inadequate facilities, tools and equipment;
  vii.   brain drain;
 viii.   insufficient competent teaching force
   ix.   poor skills in research; and
   x.   High student-lecturer ratio.

The eradication or reduction of the above negative issues is part of the reasons why quality assurance is necessary to sanitize the higher education system in Nigeria.

Importance of Quality Assurance in Managing Higher Education

Quality assurance is very important in the educational setting because approved standards for the conduct of academic affairs have to be put in place and implemented accordingly. In order to make the higher educational system responsive and more functional to the students and the society in general, there is need to monitor the practices in the system, especially in recent times when much financial commitments are needed as input. Parents and guardians of higher education students have to struggle to provide needed financial resources for their wards to complete their academic programmes.

The following are some additional reasons why quality assurance is important for improving the standard of education in Nigeria. Quality assurance will:

    a. serve as an avenue for internal control strategy in education;

    b. ensure the maintenance of high standard of the students produced by higher education institutions;

    c. assist in monitoring and supervision of educational activities,particularly the aspect of teaching and learning;

    d. help to determine and streamline the quality of teachers' input;

    e. assist to determine the quality and quantity of resources as well as facilities needed for smooth operations in our school systems;

    f. help to determine the adequacy and suitability of the learning environment for the comfort of teachers and the students; and

    g. Ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education.

There are various agencies that monitor and regulate the activities of higher education in Nigeria. According to Amadi (2014) the supervisory roles of the federal government agencies involve ensuring efficiency and effective management of both human and material resources, through the combined processes of advice, guidance, encouragement for stimulation and improvement of the entire educational system. The Federal Ministry of Education (FME) is the umbrella body that oversees all the practices and functions in the educational settings in Nigeria. The FME completes its monitoring and regulation activities of higher education through several government parastatals and agencies. Some of the agencies specifically set-up for the enforcement of quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria are the following:

    a. National Universities Commission (NUC)

    b. Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund)

    c. Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB)

    d. National Board for Technical Education (NBTE)

e. National Business and Technical Education Board (NABTEB)
f. National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE)
g. National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration(NIEPA)
h. Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC)

The major functions of the Federal government parastatals and agencies highlighted above are to ensure that the higher education institutions comply with quality assurance requirements. One of the ways of ensuring and enforcing maintenance of quality assurance in managing higher institutions is through the conduct of accreditation exercise.

Accreditation Exercise for Higher Education Institutions
The conduct of accreditation exercise in managing higher education is a veritable means of enforcing high quality and standards in the affairs of tertiary institutions. The periodic accreditation exercise carried out for higher education institutions in Nigeria by quality assurance regulatory bodies is one of the measures of monitoring, evaluation and maintenance of high standards. All the activities that are conducted at the tertiary levels of education are reviewed during accreditation exercises. Aspects checked include procedure of staff appointment and promotion; students' records, qualification and admission process; the institutions' faculties and departmental handbooks, rules and regulation guide; records of past examination question papers; examination results and external examiners' reports.

The institutional compliance with fiscal rules and regulations are also monitored during accreditation exercise conducted for higher education institutions. The quality assurance agency in charge ensures that funds disbursement and accountability are prudent and transparent. Internal control mechanisms and the auditing procedure are equally checked to ensure that necessary approvals are obtained for all transactions.

Higher education institutions in Nigeria are not accredited or allowed to conduct teaching and learning if there is no evidence of appropriate physical infrastructural facilities. Facilities that should be provided by higher institutions include staff offices, lecture rooms, laboratories, toilets for staff and students. Other facilities that should be provided include departmental library and faculty library with adequate seating capacity as well as current text books, journals, magazines and allied reference materials.Provision of safety and sanitation materials, such as fire extinguishers, sand buckets, water buckets and waste baskets are ensured during accreditation exercise.

The above verification for compliance with approved standards, carried out during the conduct of accreditation exercises, goes a long way in ensuring that higher education institutions aremanaged with acceptable quality assurance.

Quality Assurance in Stages of Educational Management

Managinghigher education for quality assurance involves all stages of educational management. At the planning stage, efforts should be made to ensure that all the financial and material resources will be available as and at when they are needed in the education process. During the organization and supervisory stage, quality assurance should be applied in job allocation and delegation of authority. Approved quality assurance check list should equally be used to ascertain the level of compliance with standards during monitoring and evaluation. Hence quality assurance should be inculcated in the planning process, organizing, supervision and coordinating, commanding/directing, controlling and evaluation of all aspects of the education activities.

Enhancing Management of Higher Education through Quality Assurance Strategies

Top managers and administrators of higher education ought to continue developing modern strategies that would enhance quality assurance in the management of tertiary institutions. The Federal Ministry of Education (FME 2010) cited in Aworanti (2012) listed the following strategies towards quality assurance in education.

- Review and disseminate new quality assured steps in handbook and quality assurance instrument that provide standardized and uniform reporting mechanisms.
- Professionalism and continuous professional development in education by training, accrediting and certifying practitioners.
- Strategic plan to strengthen the relationship and synergy between federal, state inspectors and local government education authorities and supervisors.
- Enhance the effectiveness of examination bodies.
- Introduce, strengthen and expand e-learning.
- Provide guidance and counseling services to improve students' life and experiences.
- Conducting and monitoring of learning achievement/national assessment.
- Tertiary institutions fully up graded to centre of excellence through ETF intervention projects by way of monitoring implementation of the projects.
- Review and enrich curriculum across all levels of education, this is by way of establishing expert committee to review and upgrade colleges of education, polytechnics and university programmes in line with the demand of the economy.

- Establish Entrepreneurship Development Education in tertiary institutions.
- Capacity building for teacher librarians to improve service delivery in school libraries.
- Launch ICT in education policy in the teaching of computer education in schools.

Principles of Quality Assurance

The implementation of quality assurance in higher education has to comply with accepted principles. Jumare (2017) enumerated the following nine principles as some of the measures of implementing quality assurance.

a. Quality assurance guidelines must be made available to all stakeholders.
b. The guidelines must be in conformity with work guidelines of the organization.
c. There must be assessment scale for better and unbiased scoring.
d. There must be sanctions on members that faulted quality assurance rules.
e. There should be motivation to hard working staff.
f. Quality assurance activities must be open to public criticism.
g. Quality assurance must treat staff with fairness,respect and courtesy.
h. Quality assurance must have confidentiality where necessary.
i. There must be proper documentation of quality assurance activities.

Adherence to the above quality assurance principles is highly recommended for the maintenance of acceptable standards of the products of higher education institutions.

Benefits of Quality Assurance

The positive contributions of quality assurance to the successful management of higher education cannot be overemphasized. Quality assurance, otherwise described as Total Quality Management (TQM) according to Ebtua (2018) is a strategy for continuously improving performanceat every level and in all areas of responsibilities. It is a combination of fundamental management technique, existingefforts and specialised technical tools under a disciplined structure focused on continuously improving of all processes. Ebtua (2018) identified the following as benefits of quality assurance in all spheres of the educational system.

a. Increase teacher's participation in decision making, hence enhancing the feeling of ownership of decisions and directions once charted.
b. Forces education managers to create leadership skills position to enable teachers and management replay on power within position to obtain results.
c. Provides a technique of enhancing services to users in a period to similar resources.

d. Helps to break down constraints or blocks between teachers, education managers and students which enhance communication within the school system.

e. Incremental changes lead to continuous improvement

Conclusion

Quality assurance ensures the use of high standard materials, appointment of qualified and competent staff, job allocation to the requisite and appropriate staff and timely completion of assignments.Adequacy of various input resources will certainly exercise tremendous influence on quality assurance in Nigeria education system. The periodic accreditation exercise carried for higher education institutions in Nigeria by quality assurance regulatory bodies is one of the measures of monitoring, evaluation and maintenance of high standards. The conduct of accreditation exercises, goes a long way in ensuring that higher education institutions are managed with acceptable quality assurance.

Suggestions

a. There is need for putting in place quality assurance mechanisms, to monitor and enforce the management of higher education institutions to adhere to acceptable standards in their conduct of higher education activities.

b. Education stakeholders including students should play their expected role and realize that it is part of their own responsibility to pursue the quality assurance agenda.

c. Top managers and administrators of higher education ought to continue developing modern strategies that would enhance quality assurance in the management of tertiary institutions.

d. Verification for compliance with approved standards, carried out during the conduct of accreditation exercises, by quality assurance agencies for ensuring that higher education institutions are managed with acceptable quality assurance, should be intensified.

e. The principles of quality assurance should be strictly adhered to by all stake holders engaged in the activities of higher education, for the maintenance of acceptable standards of the services and products of higher education institutions.

f. Quality assurance should be inculcated in the planning process, organizing, supervision and coordinating, commanding and directing, controlling and evaluation of all aspects of educational activities.

References

Abiona O. A. (2019). Quality Assurance: Managing Education for Improvement of

Vocational Technical Institutions in Nigeria. Accepted for Publication in the Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning.

AmadiM. N. (2014).*Organisation and Management of Schools in Nigeria: Past and Present.* Vitaman Educational Books, Lagos, Nigeria. 205.

Aworanti, O. A. (2012). *Quality Assurance in Business Education.* A Lead Paper Presented at the 24thAnnaual Conference Organised by the Association of Business Educators of Nigeria at the Federal Polytecnic, Oweri, Imo State.

Ebtua, E. E. (2018). Implementing Total Quality Management in Nigeria Educational System: The Philosophy of Participatory Management.*Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning.*Published by NAEAP, Ilorin, Nigeria. V0l 18, No 3

Falaye, F. V. (2016). Issues in Nigerian Graduate Employability Chllenges: Curriculum Review as Way Forward. In Akinwumi, F. S. and Olaniyan, D. A. (Eds) *Global Perspectives in Education.*His Linage Publishing House, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Federal Ministry of Education (FME 2010) cited in Aworanti (2012). *Quality Assurance in Business Education.* A Lead Paper Presented at the 24thAnnaual Conference Organised by the Association of Business Educators of Nigeria at the Federal Polytecnic, Oweri, Imo State.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014).*National Policy on Education.*6th Revised Edition. Lagos.   NERDC. 39

Jumare A. M. (2017). *An Introduction to Educational Management and Ethics.* Concept Design and Prints, Zaria, Nigeria. 101.

Osokoya I. O. (2017).*History and Policy of Nigerian Education in World Perspectives.* Laurel Eduactional Publishers Ltd., Ibadan, Nigeria. 127.

Lucey T. (2014). *Management Information Systems.*Cengage Learning Higher Education Special Edition, Publisher Brendan George, USA. P. 216