

Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of accreditation on quality assurance in Nigerian universities. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. A sample of 74 universities out of 124 universities in Nigeria presently (22 federal owned and 22 state owned, and 30 private universities) was drawn using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Also, simple random sampling was used to select 20 respondents (including teaching and non-teaching staff, who are in charge of the data needed for the study) were selected from each university, which amounted to 1480 staff. The study developed and used two sets of questionnaire tagged “Accreditation Procedures and Minimum Academic Standard Questionnaire (APMASQ), and Quality Assurance Questionnaire (QAQ)” with correlation coefficient (r) of 0.73 and 0.69 respectively and complimented with secondary data from NUC records. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed to analyse the data. While the null hypotheses developed for the study were tested at .05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there is significant relationship between accreditation and resource input into Nigerian universities, quality of output, quality of process, and no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of academic content. It is therefore recommended among others that human capacities should be built in the area of quality assurance so as to ensuring quality in Nigerian universities. Also, accreditation exercises and conducts should be properly manipulated and supervised without playing politics so as to achieve education standards, quality and effectiveness for purpose of accomplishing goals of university education in Nigeria.

Key words: Quality assurance, Quality, University education, Accreditation, Standards, Quality improvement.

1. Introduction

Quality assurance (QA) has been an issue at the forefront of educational system concerns for the past decade. It is the set of planned and systematic actions necessary to provide appropriate confidence that a product or service will satisfy the requirements for quality. Also an important part of defining the end-product of any educational system is the specification of its quality related features - which the system must then aim to deliver. Quality assurance is a global term used to incorporate the quality policy, quality management and quality control functions, which combine to assure the client that the product will be consistently manufactured to the required condition. Its aim is to achieve and assure quality through the adoption of a cost effective quality control system and through external inspections and audits. Quality assurance is a way of measuring, improving, and maintaining the quality of any human activity that has a value. It may be academic, sports performance, business, or economy. Quality assurance is a means of ensuring that the best practices are encouraged in a social system.

Quality, as a concept, has been defined differently by different stakeholders. This is because it is multi-dimensional and mean different thing to different stakeholders. Quality can be defined as “fitness for purpose”. It encapsulates the concept of meeting commonly agreed precepts or standards. Such standards may be defined by law, an institution, a coordinating body or a professional society. In the diverse arena of higher education, fitness for purpose varies tremendously by field and programme. Quality refers to the standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things like it: how good or bad something is, that is, to be of good/poor/top quality or of a high standard. In this context, it is associated with the ‘monitoring and evaluation component of education’ to see whether the outcome is good and of the intended standard. Quality is the ability or degree with which a product, service, or phenomenon conforms, to an established standard, and which makes it to be relatively superior to others. With respect to education, this implies the ability or degree with which an educational system conforms to the established standard and appropriateness, of the inputs available for the delivery of the system (Fadipe, 1999). Quality in education therefore means the relevance and appropriateness of the education programme to the needs of the community for which it is provided.

Quality assurance on the other hand, is about consistently meeting product specification or getting things right the first time, and every time. Quality assurance in the university system implies the ability of the institutions to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their

outputs (Ajayi and Akindutire, 2007). Equally, it can be said to be the ability of the universities to meet certain criteria relating to academic matters, staff-student ratios, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding, and adequate library facilities. Adequacy of various inputs in the university system, in terms of quality and quantity, exercises tremendous influence on quality assurance in the university system.

Quality assurance is a key component of successful internationalization; a mechanism for building institutional reputation in the competitive local and global arena and a necessary foundation for consumer protection (NUC, 2004). Quality assurance for this paper is defined conventionally as fitness for purpose in the university education, as meeting or conforming with generally accepted standards as defined by quality assurance bodies and appropriate academic and professional communities. It is also viewed as a planned and systematic review process carried out by organization, institution, or programme to determine if acceptable standards are being met, maintained and enhanced. It guarantees confidence in a programme of study given by an institution that standards and quality are being maintained and enhanced (UNESCO, 2006).

Kisailowska (2002) noted that quality assurance principles are a certain form of naming and ordering the actions that are necessary for assuring the quality, for instance of teaching, it is internally measured and evaluated at a given university, and also externally, during an accreditation process. As a result of this, quality assurance principles are to be used as indicators to ensure compliance. It is noteworthy that quality assurance principles regulate both the external and internal activities of an educational institution. Assuring quality means:

- pointing to and naming the elements that are decisive to the evaluation of an educational process or other assessable elements;
- defining the procedures for acting, appointing person and working out the documents necessary for the correct execution of tasks relating to a given entity;
- setting quality indicators; and
- analysing quality on a regular basis with the use of appropriate tools.

A tertiary institution is only as good as the quality of its teaching staff - they are the heart of the institution that produces its graduates, its research products, and its service to the institution, community, and nation. Every nation and its university graduates are competing in an environment shaped by its own local and national needs, as well as international expectations and standards. The impact of the latter is increasing. As a result, the success and competitiveness of graduates in tertiary institutions will be affected by those standards and expectations.

There is no doubt that the quality of higher education determines the quality of human resources of a country. One of the major objectives of the universities is to produce a qualified, skilled and globally competent workforce for the labour market of business and industry, which is a critical factor to national growth and development. Since no nation can develop beyond the quality of its higher education. Recent developments such as increasing student enrolments; reduced state funding for public higher education; increasing number of private providers; internationalisation cross border education have also influenced the purpose and functions of higher education (Hayward, 2006). The need for global competitiveness is another recent development that has impacted higher education. In Nigeria, some of these recent developments are reflected in mission statement of the National Universities Commission (NUC), which is the regulatory body established to oversee the administration and delivery of higher education in Nigeria: 'to ensure the orderly development of a well coordinated and productive university system that will guarantee quality and relevant education for national development and global competitiveness (NUC, 2009).

Accreditation 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.

Accreditation standards and guidelines in Nigeria educational system is aimed at strengthening programme for quality assurance and quality improvement. It is a process that aids institutions in developing and sustaining effective educational programmes and assures the educational community, the general public, and other organizations that the accredited institution has met high standards of quality and effectiveness. 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.

According to United States Department of Education (USDE), there are two basic types of educational accreditation, one identified as "institutional" and one referred to as "specialized" or "programmatic". 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 (NUC), 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. Accordingly, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) grants exemption to graduates of accredited institutions from its professional examinations. Specialized or 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 university 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.

As stated above, the concept of quality assurance is the ability of education institutions to meet the need of the user of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their products, that is, students. The quality of an academic programme becomes a universal concern because the product of one university invariably becomes an employee in another university or other cultures' industrial setting. Also, degree obtained at the end of training in a university is intended to ascertain the level of competency (Ijeoma and Osagie, 2005).

The National Universities Commission (NUC, 2006) defined quality assurance as the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of, education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained. As part of the efforts to ensure qualitative university education in Nigeria, the NUC was particular about ensuring accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian universities in order to produce graduates who are relevant to the Nigerian economy. Emphasis was laid on the quality of academic staff and students to be admitted and employed respectively. The Commission is committed to improving the quality of university programmes through injection of requisite inputs as well as assuring quality process and outputs based on the decree 49 of 1988 that widen its scope. The National Universities Commission is charged to embark on accreditation of quality assurance in Nigerian universities.

Quality assurance can be either an external or internal process. External quality assurance refers to the review by an external agency (e.g. a national quality assurance agency) or body (e.g. a professional body), which evaluates the operations of a university (institutional) or of its programmes to ascertain the level of compliance with set minimum standards. External quality assurance is mainly carried out through the instrumentality of accreditation and involves, as indicated earlier, a self-study, peer review and a reporting system. Internal quality assurance, on the other hand, refers to the internal policies and mechanisms of a university or programme for ensuring that it is fulfilling its purposes as well as the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline, in particular (IIEP, 2006). Indeed, most universities from inception design and implement various internal activities to ensure that certain agreed standards of performance are being met. Examples of such are the external examination system, self-assessment system, student-lecturer assessment etc.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to empirically establish the correlation between accreditation and quality assurance with the aim of using its findings to make useful recommendations on how to strengthen Nigerian university programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement.

3. Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed and tested in the course of this study to find solutions to the problems under investigation.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of resource input into Nigerian universities.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of output of Nigerian universities.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of process in Nigerian universities.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of academic content in Nigerian universities.

4. Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. A sample of 74 universities (22 federal owned and 22 state owned and 30 private universities) out of 124 universities (37 federal, 37 state, and 50 private) in Nigeria presently was drawn using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Also, simple random sampling

was used to select 20 respondents (including teaching and non-teaching staff, who are in charge of the data needed for the study) from each university, which amounted to 1480 staff. The study developed and used two sets of questionnaire tagged “Accreditation Procedures and Minimum Academic Standard Questionnaire (APMASQ)”, and “Quality Assurance Questionnaire (QAQ)” with correlation coefficient (r) of 0.73 and 0.69 respectively and complimented with secondary data from NUC records. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed to analyse the data. While the null hypotheses developed for the study were tested at .05 level of significance.

5. Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented in the Table 1 below according to the hypotheses generated for the study.

The Table 1 above shows the relationship between accreditation and the dependent variable: quality assurance measuring parameters tested in the study. It reveals a significant relationship between accreditation and resource input into Nigerian universities ($r = 0.48, p > 0.05$), quality of output ($r = 0.42, p > 0.05$), quality of process ($r = 0.37, p > 0.05$), and no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of academic content ($r = 0.14, p < 0.05$). Since the observed r - values of the first three parameters is greater than the tabulated r - values, the null hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 are rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between accreditation and resource input into Nigerian universities, quality of output, and quality of process. While the last null hypothesis is accepted since the observed r - value of the parameter is lesser than the tabulated r - value. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of academic content.

The findings revealed that there is significant relationship between accreditation and resource input into Nigerian universities, quality of output, quality of process, and no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of academic content. It should be noted that quality of education could be measured in terms of quality of input, quality of output, quality of content and quality of process. Therefore, these parameters were used by the study to assess quality assurance.

Quality assurance is a set of activities or procedures that an organization undertakes to ensure that standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service. Its goal is to create reliable systems by anticipating problems and designing procedures to avoid as many errors and faults as possible (Kisuniene, 2004). It is a systematic management and assessment procedure adopted by higher education institutions and system in order to monitor performance against objectives and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements. This present findings are in agreement with the findings of Green (1994), who observed that an aggregate of actions and measures taken regularly to assure the quality of higher education products, services, or processes, with an emphasis on assuring that a prescribed threshold of quality is met will go a long way in revitalizing nation’s university system.

On the quality of input into Nigerian universities, it is often said that no education can rise above the quality of its teachers. The teacher is the most important of all the inputs that go into educational provision. This is because education of the highest quality requires teachers of the highest quality. Currently, there is student population explosion in Federal and State Universities due to over enrolment without expansion of facilities (see Table 2 below). To ameliorate the situation, 6 new federal universities were established, one in each geo-political zones of the country. Also, more private universities have been granted license to operate. Classrooms are over-crowded while laboratories and other learning materials are grossly inadequate because of insufficient funding which is the cry of all the universities. The UNESCO had recommended a standard budget allocation to educational sector to stand as 26% but there is never a year in the history of this country that 26% of a national budget is allocated to education.

Quantity and quality of academic staff is another element of major concern. The teacher/student ratio is always nothing to talk of; even the ratios by discipline are far from encouraging especially in the humanities and some science-based disciplines (Okebukola, 2010). The most unfortunate about the academic staff is that their population is heavy at the bottom. Senior lecturers and above are few while lecturer 1 and below are more. Many are no longer interested in Ph.D and now that private universities have increased, the situation is going to be worse. All these are the focus of accreditation exercise.

The quality of education does not depend only on resource inputs, but also on the output, which includes academic achievement on tests, scores and progression and pass rates; in other words, the internal and external efficiency. The dimensions for quality in the output are measures of achievement, attainment and standards (Maduewesi, 2005). Achievement refers to what students really learnt in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired. Attainment refers to the number of students who complete the prescribed academic programmes and obtain the qualifications. Standards are the official learning objectives, that is what society

expects of products of a given school system. Out of the three, a measure of achievement which is most relevant to this research also offers the most promising source of policy-relevant information. From the national survey jointly carried out by National Universities Commission and Education Trust Fund, there were series of comments made on the account of complaints of the deteriorating standards of graduates from Nigerian universities in various fields of knowledge in the survey. The disciplines included administration, agriculture, arts, education, engineering, social sciences, veterinary medicine and medical sciences, (NUC, 2004). The outputs were found to be deficient both in communication skill and professionalism.

The quality of process implies student/teacher interaction, level of learner participation and engagement in learning. Repetition and drop-out rates are indicators of inefficiency in an education system. Carry-over syndrome is taken to be normal by Nigerian university students. Other indicators that show it is not well with the process of Nigerian university education are issues of examination malpractice, sexual harassment, sorting, sale of handouts, cultist etc. There is also delay of release of results in some universities. Outputs of educational research are nothing to boast about in today's Nigerian universities as teachers bemoan dearth of research grants. Community service which is another indicator of efficiency is at very low ebb. Not much is heard of in this area (Omoregie, 2005).

The curriculum content of our educational system has been criticized as being overloaded, and does not sufficiently attend to the needs of the Nigerian learner. The data from the Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) project, a nationwide study conducted between 1994 – 1996 and the report published in 1997 by the Federal Ministry of Education, with the support of UNICEF and UNESCO has also shown that there is a wide gap between the intended curriculum and the achieved curriculum. However, this criticism has been challenged because the curriculum content of our institutions compares favourably with those in other countries. What is needed in our system is a re-ordering of the curriculum content i.e. (the intended curriculum) and enrichment of the achieved curriculum and for the implemented curriculum to focus on relevance and functionality. The achieved curriculum is the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are achieved or learned while the implemented curriculum is the translation of curricula intentions into reality in classrooms, laboratories, workshops, playgrounds and other settings for learning, while not losing sight of the language provisions in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004). Following this, there should be a flexible curriculum. Curriculum rigidity must give way to 'curriculum liberality'. Such curriculum must be relevant to both individual learner's needs and societal needs at large.

Another cause of anxiety about Nigerian University education is the instability in the system characterized by the truncation of academic sessions and the epileptic closure and reopening of universities occasioned by recurring and sometimes protracted strike actions by staff (academic and non-academic) and students. Between 1995 and 2003, 28 months were lost in the academic calendars without a make up (Ramon-Yusuf, 2005). One wonders the quantity of content of curriculum currently being taught.

Despite the fact that during the accreditation exercises, the institution provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission. Yet, this study records no significant relationship between accreditation and the quality of content. This may be unconnected with the fact that measure of the content demands many factors and requirement which may not be adequately assessed with questionnaire.

Generally, accreditation of institutions and programmes takes place periodically for improvement and quality assurance in nation's universities, therefore it:

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

Accreditation exercises have been carried out in Nigeria after the Federal government has approved the

minimum academic standard. The first exercise was conducted in 1990 and 1991 and this involved 837 academic programmes across Nigeria University. A second comprehensive exercise was inducted between January and March accreditation in 2000 in both exercises, and according to Okebukola (2002), more than one thousand academic programmes were accredited in all Nigerian universities. The Universities Commission also accredited 1,343 programmes in 2005 in 48 Universities and five Colleges (NUC, 2005). No doubt that accreditation exercise in Nigerian universities has helped to improve the facilities and the quality assurance report which stressed the situation analysis of the universities has also helped universities authorities to work on areas where there are challenges.

6. Conclusion

Accreditation of universities be it institutional or programme is a way of examining the state of the institution in relation to where it out to be. It is a quality assurance process. It is the primary means by which universities and programmes assure quality to students and the public. Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or programme meets at least minimal standards for its faculty, curriculum, student services and libraries. Accredited status is conveyed only if institutions and programmes provide evidence of fiscal stability.

In Nigeria, the Federal government through the Ministry of Education and accrediting agencies (NUC and NBTE) sustain a cooperative relationship whereby government relies on them to confirm the quality of institutions and programmes in which students enrol using federal student aid funds. The Federal and State government fund their respective institutions while privately owned tertiary institutions are funded by the promoters. Sponsorships and donations from foreign agencies are available to institution and students only if the institution's programme is accredited by recognised accrediting institutional and specialised agencies. Accreditation is important to students for a smooth transfer of courses and programmes among universities. It is viewed carefully and is considered an important indicator of quality. Accreditation status of an institution or programme is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and when deciding whether to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education.

7. Recommendations

In light of the above findings, the following recommendations are proffered. Human capacities should be built in the area of quality assurance so as to ensuring quality in Nigerian universities. Also, accreditation exercises and conducts should be properly manipulated and supervised without playing politics so as to achieve education standards, quality and effectiveness for purpose of accomplishing goals of university education in Nigeria. Quality assurance should be a continuous process aimed at encouraging attitude change and teamwork and the inculcation of a value that acknowledges the student as the best judge of quality deserving the best possible service.

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Table 1: Relationship Between Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Variable	N	Df	Observed(r)	Tabulated(r)	Remark
Resource Input	74	72	0.48	.229	Sig.
Quality of Output	74	72	0.42	.229	Sig.
Quality of process	74	72	0.37	.229	Sig.
Quality of academic content	74	72	0.14	.229	NS.
Accreditation (Constant)	74	-	-	-	-

P < 0.05

Table 2: Enrolment Growth in Nigerian Universities between 1999-2009

Academic Session	No of Applicant	No Admitted	% Admitted	No of Unplaced Applicants
1999/2000	418, 292	64, 368	15.39	353, 924
2000/2001	416, 381	45, 766	10.99	370, 615
2001/2002	714, 548	90, 769	12.70	623, 779
2002/2003	994, 380	51, 845	5.21	942, 535
2003/2004	1, 046, 950	105, 157	10.04	941, 793
2004/2005	841, 878	122, 492	14.54	719, 386
2005/2006	916, 371	65, 609	7.16	850, 762
2006/2007	803, 472	123, 626	15	679, 846
2007/2008	911, 653	119, 195	13	792, 458
2008/2009	1, 054, 060	127, 082	12	926, 978

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board, 2008

Table 3: The Accreditation Performance of Academic Programmes in the Universities

Year of accreditation	Number of programmes accredited	Accreditation Status		
		Full	Interim	Denied
1990/91	837	185 (22.1%)	572 (68.4%)	79 (9.5%)
1999/2000	1,119	128 (11.4%)	801 (71.6%)	190 (17%)
2005/2006	1,670	748 (44.8%)	810 (48.5%)	112 (6.7%)
2007	872	599 (68.7%)	247 (28.3%)	26 (3.0%)

Source: NUC Records 2007.

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