



The Need for Quality Assurance Improvement Mechanisms in University Education in a Globalised Era

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Abstract

Globally, quality assurance is designed to improve the educational processes of an institution. Before the adoption of quality assurance in education, there seems to have been a continuous decline in the quality of educational products. This steady trend calls for improvements to the mechanisms or operations of quality assurance so that quality education can be achieved. In other words, this paper exposed the indices or pointers that need to be improved to ensure quality education processes and products at IAUE University. As a concept that involves the systematic review of educational programmes to maintain and improve quality and efficiency, quality assurance requires the redesign of mechanisms that involve tools, processes, and the professional development of lecturers in the university. If these mechanisms are not improved, it could be cumbersome to achieve the common objective of improved teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of achieving the best outcomes for learners. However, global and societal changes have affected the education system, which now places the need to brace up the task of quality assurance through improved basic facilities, teaching and learning processes, lecturers' working conditions, development programmes, funding, and curriculum as indicators for improving quality assurance in the university.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Improvement Mechanisms, Instructional Process, Working Condition, Development

Introduction

Educational programmes in schools are intended to ensure the positive development of individuals in society. In the work of Akpan and Ita (2015), education is a process that involves the systematic delivery of instruction (teaching and learning) and training that equips individuals for the future. From this assertion, it is clear that education is a systematic process that calls for quality delivery in the education system, for quality assurance is what gives rise to quality education. Quality assurance in higher education includes processes, policies and programmes that maintain standards. According to Montenegro (2018), quality assurance and improvement are achieved through the self-evaluation of the education system. In explaining self-evaluation, he emphasised that the university should review and assess its performance in study programmes, teaching conditions and staff academic work at least once a year. Contemporarily, the quest for university education is rising globally; hence there must be corresponding efforts to absorb the massive yearnings. For this reason, Adegbesan (2011) noted that the government of most countries of the world, including Nigeria, has often raised corresponding educational programmes with the purpose of fostering quality education through quality assurance. Consequently, the National Policy on Education (NPE) (FRN, 2013), in line with the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), supports the view that educational quality and service delivery should be improved for the social and economic transformation of society through quality assurance processes. Therefore, it is imperative to note the changes quality assurance has achieved thus far in the society in repositioning Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals (Igbireweka et al., 2022). Ideally, quality assurance in Nigerian education is a fundamental and contemporary phenomenon. However, its relevance and appropriateness are yet to meet the desired goal. In the work of Montenegro (2018), quality assurance is a holistic method of identifying and resolving problems within the educational system in order to ensure continuous quality improvement. From this assertion, it is deduced that the operations of quality assurance in the university are

intended to serve as a change agent in repositioning our university for global competitiveness. It is on this premise that the paper seeks to discuss the need to improve quality assurance mechanisms in managing university education.

Concept of Quality Assurance

The contemporary global education system demands quality and standards to achieve set objectives and societal goals. In trying to manage the challenges in Nigerian universities, the responsibility falls to the Nigeria University Commission (NUC), which, through the accreditation exercise, plays the role of quality control at the macro level. At the micro level, universities try to self-evaluate through checks on facilities, teaching and learning processes, lecturers' working conditions, development programmes, funding, and curriculum quality assurance units. The recognition of this fact led the Nigerian government to put up a policy on education to achieve laudable and progressive national objectives. According to the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), education is compulsory for all citizens of Nigeria, but must be of high quality to meet the recent global and societal needs. Therefore, in every hitherto existing society, the importance of quality education in nation building cannot be overemphasised. The need to improve the assurance of quality education becomes a clarion call to question the rate of mass failure and the porous education system. A system that is not accessed for improvement could be confronted with low academic performance, absenteeism and indiscipline. Adedayo and Mustapha (2018) in their joint assertion noted that the decline in education quality for national development could be traced to a lack of improvement in quality assurance.

Quality assurance is recognised as being accountable for maximising the effectiveness and efficiency of educational processes, programmes, and services in relation to stated goals and objectives (Ajayi and Adegbesan, 2007). Quality assurance involves a series of operational techniques and mechanisms to meet standards. Ensuring educational quality is a contemporary and fundamental global phenomenon. This is why quality assurance is designed within educational institutions to improve processes and learning outcomes. According to Moses and Nze (2013), quality assurance entails all the processes and procedures that support the activities of higher education. Furthermore, quality assurance involves measures adopted to ensure that university education is better and able to keep pace with emerging societal and global demands. This quality can be achieved by designing continuous improvements in methods and educational processes within an institution. It is fundamental to note that quality assurance involves a series of operational techniques and activities undertaken to meet standards; the entire process is designed to ensure the operational effectiveness and efficiency of university education in accomplishing the mission and expected objectives. Quality in the teaching environment is encompassing, since education seems to be a predominant force in our society; therefore, the services have to be qualitative. But quantitative services aren't by chance, rather they are achieved through planned processes. To support this claim, Babalola (2004) presumes quality assurance as an active means of ensuring quality inputs, quality outcomes, quality academic achievements, and an enabling learning environment, or quality of process. He further explains quality of inputs, referring to the worth of teachers, trainees, textbooks, facilities, and the curriculum. Quality of outcomes involves academic achievements and goal attainment, including internal and external examination outcomes. And quality of process is the standard of the teaching and learning process, which involves lesson content and plans, teaching methods, classroom management and organisation, interactions, and evaluation. It is therefore deduced that the mechanisms put in place to maintain excellence in educational programmes are quality assurance, which involves a series of operational techniques.

Need for Improvement in Quality Assurance

Education utilises an individual's abilities, potential and skills for self-fulfilment and the development of the immediate and global society. Education is supposed to be comprehensive, functional and relevant to the rising needs of society (UNESCO, 2012). However, societal innovations have necessitated an upgrade to ensure the sustainability of university education. The need for improvement now requires a systematic approach to planning changes and innovations to remain in line with expected academic performance and achievements. It is geared towards raising standards to enhance student outcomes as well as strengthening the university's capacity. The need for quality assurance improvement cannot be overemphasised, as it enhances the quality of teaching and learning processes. Supposedly, the quality assurance team is to make a positive impact on lecturers and facilities, which will produce effective teaching and learning experiences, whose end result would be positive learning outcomes. Montengro (2018) posited that quality assurance improvement is concerned with the processes schools undergo to raise standards. As it involves the changes and strategies adopted to improve students' performance. Interestingly, quality assurance improvement is the means through which universities achieve organisational development. However, the European Commission (2017) identified the following as the need to improve quality assurance in the university system;

1. For proper monitoring and supervision,
2. To determine quality of lecturers and their inputs.
3. To maintain expected standard of university education
4. To ensure that the curriculum is of the expected standard.
5. To assess learning facilities
6. To ensure financial resources are available and prudently managed.

Apparently, the Nigerian government recognises the need for adequate human and material resources to enhance socio-economic development. Hence, university education is seen as a prerequisite for the nation's wealth creation. Consequently, university education transforms society; this is where quality assurance comes into play for quality education and outcomes. Nigerian universities are below the expected standard, resulting in a significant impact on human capital development. Moreover, contemporary global society is advancing innovations that create a need for improved facilities, learning environments, funding, curriculum content, and lecturers' development. Thom-Otuya and Inko-Tariah (2016) argue that improving education is a distinct approach aimed at enhancing student outcomes and strengthening the university's capacity. Given the challenges universities face in this global era, and with reference to innovative technologies, it is pertinent to improve student education in this new world order.

Facilities Improvement for Quality Assurance in University Education

It is now a continuing concern regarding the availability of facilities in Nigeria's educational system. Of course, Nigerian universities are not exempt from this problem of poor facilities. To support this claim, Uche (2014) observed that infrastructural facilities in universities, including laboratories, hostels and quarters, libraries, offices, classrooms, among others, are insufficient, thereby undermining efficiency in teaching and learning. Due to inadequate provision of facilities such as hostels, students now live off campus. This has been a deplorable condition that continues to affect students' learning outcomes, as most of them deviate from academic focus due to societal distractions. The non-availability of hostel facilities hinders effective control of students' behaviour and the achievement of quality education delivery.

Undoubtedly, facilities play a pivotal role in ensuring quality in education. Oshionebo and Ashangi (2013) identified educational facilities as indicators of an institution's worth and readiness to deliver quality education. In their joint assertion, educational facilities in universities include classrooms, hostels, staff quarters, workshops, laboratories, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centres, libraries, health centres and sports facilities. It is therefore imperative for educational stakeholders, particularly those in charge of university management, to ensure that facilities are available and continually improved to achieve predetermined goals and instructional objectives in this era of innovation. A cursory look at defaced and obsolete facilities raises the question of how such conditions could make present university graduates competitive and fit for employability. It is crystal clear that educational facilities in Nigerian universities are insufficient to meet global expectations. It is therefore relevant for quality assurance to seek improvement by sourcing from other institutions and online to obtain contemporary updates on facilities that suit university education, because lecturers and students need an enabling atmosphere in discharging their social obligations and duties. However, improved facilities through routine checks by the quality assurance unit are a prerequisite. Thus, there should be rehabilitation, renovation and development of facilities across all universities, and quality assurance should champion the idea. To address the need for improvement, there should be up-to-date checks and a culture of maintenance to avoid wastage and dilapidation: quality assurance should provide students with modern hostels and learning facilities. This will consequently lead to improved quality of education. According to Ahmed (2003), most schools in Nigeria lack basic materials for learning, thus hindering the fulfilment of educational objectives. A school with inadequate classrooms and facilities, such as chairs, desks, libraries, textbooks, laboratories and workshops, may not achieve the desired quality. So quality assurance should continuously collaborate with other educational agencies and philanthropists to aid in improving the learning environment by providing equipped educational technology centres and other essential learning facilities, as a way of boosting lecturers' passion to teach and students' passion to learn. Improved facilities in the university cumulate to quality outcomes for students.

Concept of Improved Instruction Process (Teaching and Learning)

The concern for quality in educational delivery in Nigeria, as in other countries around the globe, is not a new idea. The magnitude of this demand is increasing, yet the level of dynamism in the instructional process is questioned. As a contemporary issue tied to the globalisation of the education system through Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it demands exposure to international standards to keep pace with this new world order. Such

competitive quality delivery has to align with programme and content delivery, focusing on the entire framework of the teaching and learning process. This is another means of minimising brain-drain in our universities in comparison with global educational competitions. Therefore, the quality assurance department, through its regulatory roles, evolves more stringent and quality assessment to cope with this growing concern. Interestingly, one can teach and learn globally through the use of ICT. It is now noted that teaching and learning in the university should make sufficient efforts to ensure high quality, as expected in this globalised era (Okoli, 2018).

- Furthermore, Olusegun (2017) analysed the need for improved quality instruction as follows: improved quality instruction or teaching is measured when the lecturer chooses to be dynamic in lecture delivery, not just reading PowerPoint slides.
- Improved quality instruction involves critical thinking to evoke student's interest.
- It involves use of modern technology to aid the process.
- Improved instruction happens when the instruction is delivered by a competent instructor rooted in content and facilitating in the process to bring out the best from the students.

Need for Improvement on Lecturers Working Condition and Development

It is an established fact that an enabling working environment engenders efficient and effective teaching. In other words, lecturers' working conditions have a direct effect on the quality of delivery in university education. The environment in which they work can result in low- or high-quality teaching. Opoh et al. (2014) noted that lecturers lack dedication to work because of the decline in the standard of teaching conditions. It is now confirmed that lecturers do not really get what they deserve, especially in public universities. Lecturers are key facilitators of innovative teaching, so if they do not have the right conditions to carry out their expected functions, this results in deteriorating educational outcomes. In any existing organisation like a university, lecturers' development is to accomplish personal and organisational goals. In line with this, development is a process of stimulating actions that help to accomplish goals (Amadi, 2022). However, lecturers' development is a form of empowerment to uplift careers, which involves strategies employed by university management through quality assurance for the purpose of providing a conducive teaching environment so they can show dedication in performing their teaching obligations to improve quality education delivery. Amadi (2022:918) emphasised that recent events have proved that the atmosphere for the pedagogical process is not conducive for teachers to deliver their educational experience as supposed. Ofojebe (2010) also opined that lecturers' working conditions are of crucial importance to their delivery outcomes. Undoubtedly, lecturers' working conditions are declining, and there is poor development among lecturers. Therefore, there is a strong link between lecturers' working conditions and development. Furthermore, lecturers' working conditions and development are not only about facility improvements and training; they also include good salaries, promotions, rewards and recognition (Opoh et al., 2014). When lecturers are given adequate attention to the above, quality will be added to the university educational system. The onus lies on the unit that is supposed to checkmate lecturers' working conditions and development and make modifications to improve what exists for the better. As such, this credible analysis is the role of the quality assurance department of the university, for these factors stimulate lecturers' greater performance, which results in quality education delivery.

Need for Improvement in Funding

According to Opoh et al. (2014), as cited in Amadi (2020), funding schools is one of the problems confronting Nigeria's education in this global society. Contrary to the 26% allocation recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Nigeria has never met this standard, as its allocation has been drastically low, perhaps due to poor allocation to the education sector. In support of the above claim, Uche (2014) notes that Nigeria has been condemned for underfunding the education sector. The scholar further asserts that since 2012, the federal government has been allocating less than 9% of funds to the sector, whereas university education, in particular, needs substantial funding to execute its academic functions. Little wonder, then, that Amadi (2020:731) opined that schools may hire out their compounds for wedding receptions or their fields to other schools as inter-house sports venues for fundraising. The scholar also adds that school funding doesn't seem to be the government's responsibility alone; school administrators are also involved in funding schools. It is now an established fact that quality assurance must demonstrate capacity to manage limited funds and push further to the government to lift the current shortfall. Inadequate budgetary allocation means that most technological and innovative courses are not offered in universities due to a lack of facilities arising from poor funding. The result is a collapsed system, a poor quality of teaching and learning, and a decline in educational standards. It is imperative for quality assurance to evolve innovative funding strategies, as underfunding of universities has contributed adversely to poor academic

performance. Therefore, quality assurance should intervene to ensure that university education funding is adequately sourced to avoid the imminent collapse of the system.

Need for Improvement in Curriculum

The curriculum has to correspond to the skills, attitudes and knowledge expected in society, indicating a global desire for curriculum improvement. The curriculum is a formal academic plan for achieving academic goals (Achuonye, 2008). Given this, quality assurance should ensure the availability of functional, innovative, contemporary, globally accepted curricula for university education, so that our university can strive towards favourable global educational standards. It is the concern of quality assurance to emphasise entrepreneurial and ICT education to satisfy the desires of present society. This will provide students with the skills and knowledge to fit into the global labour market. Quality assurance should participate in broader curriculum development to satisfy the needs of individuals and global society. Ukpai and Okoro (2011) recognised that there is presently a need to restructure inadequate curriculum reforms to address an ever-dynamic society. Oshionebo and Ashangi (2013) stressed that reforming university education should be a collective responsibility of the stakeholders therein, including quality assurance. This will ensure world-class standards ready to compete with global expectations and societal development. It is noted that the curriculum should contain new educational goals, which involve the inclusion of new courses. The essence of curriculum improvement is to bring about change in the desired direction for the learner and society. Ukpai and Okoro (2011) recognised the ever-changing curriculum as requiring constant review for improvement, with steady shortcomings and criticisms. The argument or question could be a result of an overloaded and out-of-date curriculum, which becomes inevitable due to changes in society. As society is progressing, there is a need to improve the existing curriculum content to fit into the dynamism. This is the sole purpose of quality assurance. They sought to keep the university adopting and adapting to trending issues for global competitiveness.

Conclusion

Quality assurance is the systematic and assessment procedure adopted by the university to monitor and manage the educational processes involved in the university. It is a mechanism used to evaluate whether pedagogy is keeping pace with societal and global trends. Due to the fact that societal and global expectations are insatiable and goals are rarely met, also due to a lack of constant improvement in university education, quality assurance needs to be proactive to remain in line with the global forces of demand and supply. The absence of improved facilities, teaching and learning processes, lecturers' working conditions and development programmes, funding and curriculum hinders educational quality, bringing about negative consequences in this contemporary global society.

Suggestions

The following suggestions were made based on the discussions.

1. Quality assurance need to develop more synergy with the university stakeholders to ensure regular improved facilities to enhance education delivery for global competitiveness.
2. There is need to enhance improved teaching and learning processes through routine checks within the campus for global education standard.
3. Quality assurance should improve in ensuring lecturers working condition and programmes to meet up societal global demands.
4. Need for improved funding should be prioritized for whatever Nigeria university need to meet the expected global standard hinges on adequate funding.
5. Curriculum content should constantly match with what is expected in globalized education.

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