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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USE OF INTERNAL MEASURES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSRACT

This paper x-rayed the factors influencing the use of internal measures for quality assurance in public universities in Nigeria. Quality assurance is a major discourse in all most the whole education system all over the world. So many measures have been put in place by many countries of the world including Nigeria in order to ensure quality in their university education system. The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in order to ensure quality university education introduced the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) and accreditation through its agency, National Universities Commission (NUC). However, despite the efforts by the Nigerian government through its educational agencies to ensure quality education most especially in the university system, there is still persistent decline in the quality of university education. Thus the need for various university managements to augment the efforts of the government towards ensuring qualitative university education by using various internal measures such as students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness, effective guidance and counseling services among others. This paper therefore reviewed among others the internal measures used by universities to ensure quality education and the factors influencing its use for quality assurance in public universities in Nigeria. It was recommended among others that university management in Nigeria should ensure appropriate follow-up of internally organized quality programmes.

Keywords: Quality assurance; Measures

INTRODUCTION

The provision of the much needed manpower to accelerate the growth and development of the economy has been said to be the main relevance of university education in Nigeria (Ibukun, 1997). Similarly, section 5 subsection A of the National Policy on Education (2009, p40) states that university education shall make optimum contribution to national development by:

> 'intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation; making professional course contents to reflect our national requirements; making all students, as part of general programme of all-round improvement in university education to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism'

It is in recognition of this that the Nigeria government commits immense resources to ensure the provision of university education for its citizens and also tailored their policies towards ensuring that education is made accessible to the generality of its citizenry. In the past years, Nigeria once served as the hub of university education in the West African sub-region and indeed in Africa as a whole. However, the quality of university education in Nigeria has declined drastically in recent years. The decline can be deduced from the standings of Nigerian universities in the current 2016 web metric rankings of universities in Africa and in the world. According to the ranking, there is no university in Nigeria ranked among the first 2,000 universities in the world and also there is no university in Nigeria ranked among the first 20 universities in Africa. In as much as one cannot be absolute about the quality implied in the rankings, however, it does show a trend of relative qualities among countries.

The decline in the quality of university education has raised a question at the extent to which quality is being assured in the system, owing to the fact that ensuring that quality education is handed down to students has become one of the central issues accorded priority in the recent educational reform going on worldwide. Quality assurance therefore seems to be the mechanism used in achieving quality education at all levels. Quality education according to Mosha (1997) as cited in Anachuna (2015) is measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment. Quality assurance in the university system implies the ability of the institution to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to quality of skills acquired by their outputs (Ajayi & Akinditure, 2007). To ensure quality university education, there is need to develop and utilize effective internal quality assurance measures. Internal quality assurance measures refers to the internal policies of a university or programme for ensuring that it is fulfilling its purposes as well as standards that apply to higher education in general or the profession or discipline in particular (International Institute for Educational Planning, (IIEP), 2006). It is therefore pertinent for the individual universities from inception to design and implement various internal quality assurance measures to ensure that certain agreed standards of performance are met. Such measures include; external examination, evaluation of students' learning experience; teachers' quality; ensuring quality student intake among others (Mbakwe & Okeke, 2007).

So many factors influence the use of internal measures towards quality assurance. Such factors include among others; organizational capacity, organizational structure and

contextual factors. Anachuna (2015) found among others that internal measures were not adequately used in universities in south east Nigeria for quality assurance. Igbogbor (2012) maintained that certificates obtained in Nigeria are now subjected to further tests outside the country and further emphasized that the educated and the wealthy Nigerians now send their children to other African countries to get what they adjudge to be better education. This tends to negate the tenets of university education which is essentially an institution established to produce quality workforce for national development. Assuring quality in the Nigerian university education system is therefore indispensable if excellence is required for the human resource base needed to catapult Nigeria into an enviable position it ought to occupy. Hence, it becomes imperative for individual universities to use various internal measures to ensure quality education in their respective institutions. Unfortunately, a lot of factors are militating against the effective use of these internal measures for quality assurance in Universities in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study on the factors influencing the use of internal measures for quality assurance in public universities in Nigeria was necessitated.

Concept of Quality Assurance

The concept of quality assurance varies from that of providing a distinctive, special or even exclusive product or service to meeting or conforming to predetermined specifications and standards, to value for money or to fitness of purpose (Adedipe, 2007). Bisong (2000) is of the view that the educational enterprise has to do with establishing and maintaining standards. Standards are usually set for educational institutions by the society generally and by the educational authorities at different levels. According to Whitely (2001), quality assurance in education has become an all-

embracing concept that includes all policies, processes and actions through which the quality of education provided is developed and maintained. Lysons (1996) maintained that quality assurance was derived from the organizational concept of Total Quality Management (TQM), which is defined as a way of managing organizations so that every job and every process is implemented correctly, first time and always.

Walklin (1992) defined quality assurance as the avoidance of non-performance by pre-empting failure through proper planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation. The Commonwealth of Learning (1999) also defined quality assurance as an approach to organizing work that sets in place systems to check that everything is working according to plan. In their own view, Ajayi and Akindutire (2007) posited that quality assurance in the university system implies the ability of the institutions to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to quality of skills acquired by their outputs. Similarly, Okebukola (2004) maintained that quality assurance in universities in Nigeria is a continuous process of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning activities that will be achieved through employing mechanisms that are internal and external to the universities. Furthermore, Ajayi and Adegbesan (2007) argued that quality assurance is related to accountability, both of which are concerned with maximizing effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems and services in relation to their contexts, of their missions and stated objectives. Ehindero (2004) posited that quality assurance focused on the:

- Learning entry behaviours, characteristics and attributes including some demographic factors that can inhibit or facilitate their learning

- The teacher entry qualification, values, pedagogic stalls, professional preparedness, subject background, philosophical orientation, among others
- The teaching-learning processes including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment
- The outcomes, which are defined for different levels in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes including appropriate and relevant instruments to assess these objectives.

Quality assurance in universities can therefore be said to be the ability of the universities to meet certain criteria relating to academic matters, staff-students' ratio, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, adequate library facilities, adequacy of various inputs in the university in terms of quality among others. Quality assurance is a key component of successful internationalization mechanism for building institutional reputation in a competition, local and global arena and necessary foundation for consumer protection (NUC, 2004). Assuring the quality of educational provision is a fundamental aspect of gaining and maintaining credibility for programmes, institutions and national systems of higher education world-wide (Nigeria inclusive). Quality assurance is designed to prove and improve the quality of institutions methods and educational products and outcomes.

Oderinde (2004) enumerated two aspects of quality assurance in education, which are internal and external. The internal aspect is the implementation of the school objectives, while the external aspect deals with the implementation of national objectives. A systematic and consistent quality assurance system helps to establish an institutions good reputation and image. It includes defined standards of achievement, documented

procedures for all identified processes, established ways of responding to issues and clear accountability for outcomes. The result is greater, public confidence, more satisfied students, efficient processes and staff who are confident in their jobs. Students are more likely to experience better quality instructions, learning materials and interactions with the institutions and its staff, leading to enhanced learning outcomes. Fadokun (2005) summarized quality assurance in education as a programme, an institution or a whole education system. In such a case, quality assurance encompasses all those attitudes, objectives, actions and procedures that through their existence and use, and together with the employment of internal measures, ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each programme.

Concept of Measures

The organization for Africa universities noted that one way to guarantee that higher education is sensitive to national situations and offers value-for-money education is to constantly and efficiently assure high standards in the provisions of the institutions that deliver higher education. To formally achieve this, a number of institutions and measures that ensure comprehensive training and best practices have been set up. Fadokun (2005) and Idogo (2012) maintained that quality assurance in Nigeria higher education consists of internal and external measures. External quality assurance measures according to Fadokun (2005) refers to the actions of an external body, which may be quality assurance agency or another body different from the institutions which assesses its operation or that of its programme in order to determine whether it is meeting the standard that have been agreed upon. Kalkwijk (1988) affirmed that external quality assurance is the action of an independent body to assess the quality of

performance of a university. Idogo (2012) maintained that external quality mechanism is constituted by accreditation conducted by the statutory regulatory agencies and the professional bodies. Accreditation is an instrument used to guarantee the quality threshold (Westerheijden &Empel, 2010). It is a special form of quality assessment process, in which higher education institutions, degree types and programmes are systematically evaluated according to the previously formulated standards by an authorized agency. The institutions or programmess will then get a formal approval to exist within the higher educational system after accreditation process has been completed successfully. In affirmation, Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (2005) maintained that external quality assurance is mainly carried out through the instrumentality of accreditation. It therefore follows that external quality assurance measures in the university system refers to the review by an external agency, be it a national quality assurance agency or a professional body like NUC, which evaluates the operations of a university or its programme to ascertain the level of compliance with set standards.

Internal quality assurance measures on the other hand are a kind of a buzzard among many higher education institutions (Boele, 2007). Even those who have a strong desire to introduce an effective system of internal quality assurance in their institutions, developing an effective system of internal quality assurance is still a big question to quite many educational managers today. There are so many definitions of internal quality assurance from authors to authors. However, they all are more or less similar in the concept. According to Martin and Stella (2007), internal quality assurance is the policies and mechanisms implemented in an institution or programme to ensure that it

is fulfilling its own purposes and meeting the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the discipline in particular. Similarly, (IIEP, 2006), referred internal quality assurance measures as the internal policies and mechanisms of a university or programme for ensuring that it is fulfilling its purpose as well as the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession, or discipline in particular. In addition, Nguyen (2012) posited that internal quality assurance measures is the overall management system which is implemented in the university to carry out the quality policy for ensuring that university fulfill its purposes and meet the standards set by external elements. ADDA (2010) maintained that internal quality assurance in the specific context of higher education institutions is the totality of systems, resources and information devoted to setting up, maintaining and improving the quality and standards of teaching, scholarship (students learning experience), research and service to the community. Furthermore, Cheng (2001) maintained that internal quality assurance measures are the efforts for improving the internal environment and processes such that the effectiveness of teaching and learning can be ensured to achieve the planned goals. Gonzalez (2008) elaborately reviewed internal quality assurance systems as the systems which are aimed at enabling the institutions to manage and control their quality related core-activities.

It can therefore be inferred that the individual university is responsible for establishing a system based on institutional resources to manage quality related activities and ensure quality improvement in institutions. Internal quality assurance measures therefore are aimed at improving and ensuring the methods and processes of teaching and learning met the planned education aims. Universities possess required regulatory framework

for the attainment of high academic standard. Universities in the efforts to assure quality from inception design and implement various internal measures to ensure that certain agreed standards of performance are being met (Fadokun, 2005). Internal quality measures are fully oriented to institutional quality improvement (Kalkwijk, 1998). It concentrates on academic issues, incorporates every institutional activity and collects institutional information and evidence to ensure quality within the institution.

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Ensuring quality education is the primary responsibility of the universities, and it has cost experts much effort trying to examine its nature, the effective internal quality process and influential factors that affect its use at local level (Nguyen, 2012). There are some success factors that can promote the internal quality assurance process in the university institution. These factors is characterized into three dimensions; organizational structure, organizational capacity; and contextual factors (Nguyen, 2012).

Organizational Structure: Sursock (2011), EUA (2006), and Battle (2011) maintained that one of the key influential factors for a well-functioning internal quality assurance system is the appropriate organizational structures for quality assurance, particularly the devolution of responsibility and the degree of centralization in the university. As indicated in the final report of the quality assurance for the higher education change agenda project (EUA, 2009) as cited in Nguyen (2012). Quality assurance activities should not be considered as a separate activity of specific person (s) but that concern for quality should be the responsibility of everyone in the

university, (Nguyen, 2012), posited that there not only the senior mangers (Vice-chancellors, Dean of Faculties, and Head of Departments among others) are responsible for the institutional quality, but also, there should be the involvement of staff and even students. According to Sursock (2011), this perception of institutional quality is linked to definitions of democracy and effects the way quality measures is introduced into the university institutions. This situation leads to the assumption that the university structure with clear responsibilities and accountability lines at all levels of the university will ensure the quality assurance process to be simple and easy for closing all the feedback loops (Sursock, 2011). Harvey and Green (1993) emphasized the importance of devolution of responsibility for quality in institution. According to them, the organization is reduced to a system of interrelated nodes and it is the responsibility of each node of an organization to ensure that its output fits the required inputs of receiver nodes. Similarly, Meal (1995) maintained that the devolved responsibility of the senior managers for the university's basic organizational unit (alternatively the faculty) and each faculty is responsible for a portfolio of courses, research programmes and community services. Sursock (2011) further explained the devolution of responsibility internally assuring quality as the situation that the responsibilities is devolved to the lowest possible level and that the senior management team will just involved only in case of serious problems. Quality assurance mechanisms can only be developed as argued by Sursock (2011) if responsibilities are shared and accountability lines clear at all local level.

Another element of organizational structure which can affect the use of internal quality assurance measures according to Nguyen (2012) is the degree of centralization in

organization. A quality structure can be organized at the central institutional level, but can also be organized in a decentralized way (EUA, 2006). Lueger and Vettori (2008) posited that decentralized system rely on sharing decision-making power and monitoring duties to the ones who establish quality within a university. They argued that with this approach, quality standards are mainly regarded as a participative instrument for organizational development oriented towards flexibility. Therefore, decentralized structures have the advantages of ensuring a greater sense of ownership locally; however, there will be a tendency that these structures could end up working at cross purpose in terms of the whole institution (EUA, 2006). (Nguyen, 2012) maintained that the centralized quality assurance system often establish rules based on the standard set by external stakeholders. One popular means of achieving this centralized quality system according to Lueger and Vettori (2008) is the implementation of threshold standard as the minimum basis for future improvements in institution. However, as argued be Sursock (2011), it is essential that students and staff feel at home in their faculties and departments, which argues for "an optimal" balance between the need for a strong institutional core and a degree of faculty responsibilities, between the need for an institution wide quality assurance approach and some local variation in faculties. In other words, quality system should be defined centrally but flexibly so that each faculty and department can supplement the main system with its own guide lines, and thus ensuring the ownership. With this way, the university members can develop local measures of quality assurance based on the overall framework. As supported by Leuger and Vettori (2008), within such a framework, while the "good-practice-standard and broad-objective-standard can

provide orientation, the minimum-threshold-standards would giving up a purely formal approach.

Therefore in terms of decision-making structures for an effective use of internal quality assurance measures, it is advisable that the institutions should seek the balance between centralization and decentralization, which should be based on notion of institutional effectiveness and a clear division of responsibilities as suggested by EUA (2003). The optimal balance between centralization and decentralization in deciding the institutional quality system will be beneficial in helping institutions set the overall institutional strategy while the faculties develop their own strategies in close articulation with the institutions' vision (EUA, 2003). It follows therefore that the organizational structure, particularly the degree of centralization and decentralization and devolution of responsibility in the university are factors that influence effective use of internal measures for quality assurance in universities.

Organizational Capacity: it is said that even though quality assurance system is never built from scratch, the usual implementation process is according to Leuger and Vettori (2008) a linear one; new tools and procedure are developed and therefore some conditions are needed in order to support organization to adapt to these new tools and procedure. In terms of the organizational capacity, the commitment of the institutions' leadership, the well organized data collection and analysis (staff's expertise), and resources are considered as institutional influential factors that can influence the use of internal measure towards ensuring quality education in the university system (EUA, 2006).

Nguyen (2012) argued that leadership institutions are very important factors influencing the success of internal quality assurance process. Leadership is needed to explain the essential of internal quality process by clarifying the responsibilities, developing framework and ensuring the appropriate follow up of internally organized quality reviews. EUA (2006) stated four important functions of the institutional leadership to include; setting the overall institutional strategy and coordinating its implementation; monitoring and communicating quality assurance centre; developing relations with the staff and monitoring quality and integrate quality monitoring results in the decision-making process of the institutions. Similarly, Sursock (2011) posited that leadership is essential to provide university with the initial steer and the broad framework of quality assurance mechanisms. He further maintained that leadership is needed to facilitate internal debate in order to trigger the intrinsic motivation to implement internal quality assurance measures and to make sure that quality assurance processes do not end up being bolted on. Furthermore, as was stated in EUA (2006), the ambiguity and the multi-facet mission of institution which might lead to contradictory strategy is a specific challenge for higher education institutions; and communicate clear priorities and guidelines and include them in the institutional overall policy plan (Nguyen, 2012). Leadership is not only needed at the senior management level because of the fact that quality assurance process actually mainly happens at the faculty and department levels. The commitment of bottom-up leadership will play a more important role in sustaining the process of internal quality system. From the top, the senior leadership (Vice-chancellor) will be responsible for initial steer like monitoring, making decisions or facilitating the process, and the lower level leadership

(Dean/head of department) will take the lead in developing the quality system process. In order to manage the process of internal quality assurance in institutions effectively, it is crucial that leadership at all levels of the university is pushing in the same direction and able to persuade the staff that they are important players in achieving in achieving the strategic orientation of the institutions. The issue of information is also considered as very important to the success of quality assurance in the university (EUA, 2006). It therefore follows that the staff's expertise in quality assurance is vital in allowing the institutions to monitor effectively the areas of strengths and weakness and to develop the appropriate actions in response to the university's requirement. Nguyen (2012) maintained that quality assurance officers are required to have capability in collecting and analyzing the key institutional data in order to support institutional planning and management and quality assurance processes. In addition to factors of leadership, in data collection and analysis, the availability of financial and human resources (including staff development scheme) is also an influential factor towards the use of internal measures for quality assurance. Witte (2008) indicated that quality assurance costs resources; particularly the institutional commitment to the issues of quality requires a continuous investment in financial and human resources.

Sursock (2011) and EUA (2003) argued that as quality must taken as a concern by all staff members, it is important to invest in staff development in order to avoid internal quality assurance arrangement becoming punitive in the self-evaluation process at institutional level. There may be a situation that staff may feel threatened if the evaluation is perceived as an appraisal process rather than a opportunity for improving performance. Therefore, professional development programme in this case can help

staff gain process as a treat to individual career development (EUA, 2003). Additionally, Sursock (2011) stated that for providing staff with assistance in improving their teaching or introducing innovative pedagogies, professional development schemes can ensure that staff will perceived quality assurance process as useful rather than just sanctions. Consequently, professional development is considered as a major requirement for enhancing the quality of staff and raising the quality awareness so that the quality assurance process can be implemented effectively at local level. Nguyen (2012) argued that staff development programme is quite expensive because it always requires appropriate human and financial resources and even some changes in equipment and facilities. Some institutions as a result seem not to pay much attention on this issue of staff development, thereby causing some barriers for the effective use of internal measures to ensure quality.

Contextual Factors: The difference in the use of internal measures towards ensuring quality education among universities may partially ascribed to contextual factors besides being potentially by the factors of organizational structure and capacity. Blackmur (2007) argued that since higher education has many characteristics, public always wants to seek to determine some of these characteristics for certain performance expectation. Quality assurance as further analyzed by Blackmur (2007) involves the process that the interest party may seek confidence on the desired quality, therefore, he maintained that there will be a problem of defining and setting standard in the regulation of higher education quality, leading to the confusion on whether the quality regulation is conducted by the government or by universities or by the combination of both. Likewise in the case of assuring quality Nigeria university system, it is assumed

that top-down system of adopting internal measures towards quality assurance, which is implied in the power vested on the senate of the institutions to establish the quality assurance centers, may just result in the extrinsic motivation of institutions to implement internal quality assurance system. In other words, due to the pressure from the government, the implementation of quality assurance in institutions may not be understood as the way it is supposed to be, leading to the ineffective implementation of quality assurance at the local level. Furthermore, the need for quality assurance training in the universities is one of the factors that can help the university to set up an effective quality assurance system (ANU, 2010). Materu (2007) argued that for the importance of quality assurance knowledge, it is necessary to include training of self-evaluation and self-reviewer who would also be available to serve in accreditation set up by national quality assurance agencies to support universities in developing a strong internal quality assurance system. Nguyen (2012) suggested that the national agencies (NUC for example) should support the development of quality assurance at the institutional level by providing methodologies, method standards, and organizational models for use by universities in their internal quality assurance process in order to help universities to implement the accreditation requirements set by the government through it (NUC). Based on this fact, the degree of training universities receive in terms of conducting internal assurance to be the second contextual factor that may cause differences in internal quality assurances implementation among Nigeria universities.

Accreditation often comes with institutional autonomy (Westerheijden & Empel, 2010). Institutions' degree of autonomy is therefore an organizational capacity that possibly influences the use of internal measures for quality assurance in universities

(Nguyen, 2012). Institutional autonomy according to EUA (2003) is the precondition for promoting internal quality. Sursock (2011) posited that institutional autonomy is one of the key factors in the capacity of institutional to define quality and the purposes of their internal quality assurance processes in order to develop quality monitoring of their activities in a meaningful way. This as maintained in EUA (2003) will imply a stable funding and legal environment and the capacity for managing staff. Reichert (2008) further posited that if institutional autonomy is given, it can effectively contribute to professionalization of university leadership and management. Tight (1992) as cited in Hayden and Lam (2007) elaborated six specific freedoms associated with institutional autonomy to include the following; freedom to make their own staffing decisions; freedom to select their own students; freedom to decide on their own curriculum; and freedom to assess and certify the academic programme of their own students. The extent to which any university institution lacks autonomy is clear when some of the freedom identified by Tight is considered (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

Implications of the Study

This study have many implications to the educational sector and as it concerns the educational stakeholders and to the university education system in particular. The inadequate usage of internal measures due to some factors towards quality assurance in public and private universities in the south-east implies that the quality of university education in the zone may continue to decline. This is obvious in that no educational system can grow beyond the skills and knowledge of the teachers and one cannot give what he or she doesn't have. Obstacles to the adequate use of internal measures for quality assurance in the areas of teachers' quality, student intake, guidance and

counseling services and in the evaluation of students' learning experiences implies that if it goes on unabated, the quality of university graduates in the zone will continue to be poor. This will result in the inability of graduates not to be gainfully employed after graduation as they will not possess the necessary skills required of them by the employers since they were not adequately admitted, properly guided and evaluated while in school as undergraduates. This in turn will result to increase in the number of unemployed graduates roaming the streets.

Conclusion

Measures have been put in place by the government towards ensuring qualitative university education in Nigeria. However, there is still a persistent decline in the quality of university education in Nigeria. The wide spread and acceptance of individual universities adopting and using internal measures for ensuring quality education among the developed and the developing of the world is a clear indication of usefulness of internal measures towards quality assurance. However, many factors such as organizational capacity, organizational structure and contextual factors influence negatively on the university usage of internal measures for quality assurance in Universities in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In view of the forgoing, the following recommendations were made:

1. Universities management in Nigeria should set up quality assurance centres in their respective institutions
2. University managements in Nigeria should ensure appropriate follow-up of internally organized quality programmes

3. The university managements, dean of faculties and head of departments in universities in Nigeria should clarify responsibilities among the members of staff
4. University managements in Nigeria should integrate quality monitoring results in the decision making process of their institutions
5. Professional development programmes should be organized for the members of the academic staff by university managements in Nigeria

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