

**QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES: VERITABLE TOOLS FOR GOAL
ACHIEVEMENT IN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Quality Assurance (QA) as a lexicon in education industry is seen as a mechanism to ensure that the standard of education is maintained in terms of the inputs, processes and outputs. In an attempt to unravel its influence on goal achievement, this paper examined the quality assurance practices as veritable tools for goal achievement in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. In this paper, the concepts of quality and quality assurance, nature and purpose of QA practices, and quality assurance system and goal achievement in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions were x-rayed. Going by the significant influence quality assurance practices have on goal achievement in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria, the paper made recommendations among which are that, the goal of the quality assurance system should be clearly stated, and expectations should be formulated in accordance with the tertiary educational institution plan, in order to build a national commitment to quality, to ensure that each student receives quality,

relevant education, well-coordinated quality assurance system is required; and quality assurance systems must ensure that the entire system contributes to the country's social and economic development. As a result, higher educational institutions must ensure that fair and just admission policies are followed in order to promote equity of access and outcomes.

Keywords: Quality assurance practices, Goal achievement, Tertiary educational institutions

Introduction

Education is important to living as oxygen is to life. Education is one of the key elements of human assets as it gives knowledge and skills that enable an individual to be responsible and independent. In Nigeria, just as elsewhere in the world, education is also an important element of social progress and economic development. Education contributes to human capital development, research and nation building. However, access to quality education is desired and deserved in all facets of human life as it provides all learners with capacities they require to become economically productive, to develop sustainable livelihood and contribute to peaceful and democratic societies as well as to enhance individual well-being.

In Nigeria, tertiary education is seen as the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses. As stated in the National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), cited in Olatunji (2018), the goals of the tertiary education include to:

- i. contribute to national development through high level manpower training;
- ii. provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of Nigerians;
- iii. provide high-quality career counselling and lifelong learning opportunity that prepare students with knowledge and skills for self-reliance;
- iv. reduce skills shortages through the production of relevant skilled workers;

- v. promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service
- vi. forge and cement national unity; and
- vii. promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Tertiary educational institutions pursue these goals through:

- i. quality student intake;
- ii. quality teaching and learning;
- iii. research and development;
- iv. quality facilities, services and resources;
- v. the generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to national goals and enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy;
- vi. access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund); and
- vii. maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate regulatory agencies; and an all-inclusive, credible admission policy for national unity (FRN, 2013).

However, through four major missions, tertiary education helps to promote social and economic development:

- i. The formation of human capital (primarily through teaching);
- ii. The building of knowledge bases (primarily through research and knowledge development);
- iii. The dissemination and use of knowledge (primarily through interactions with knowledge users); and
- iv. The maintenance of knowledge (inter-generational storage and transmission of knowledge) (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, 2008).

Still, the breadth and significance of tertiary education have shifted dramatically throughout time. It was *ab initio* referred to as higher education because it took place in universities and covered teaching and learning in the humanities, sciences and social sciences that required high-level conceptual and intellectual skills in order to prepare students for entry into a limited number of professions as well as

disinterested advanced research and scholarship. However, tertiary institutions were established for a variety of reasons, including to develop a closer relationship between tertiary education and the outside world, including greater responsiveness to labour market needs; to improve social and geographical access to tertiary education; to provide high-level occupational preparation in a more applied and less theoretical way, and to accommodate the growing divergence between men and women (OECD, 2008).

Meanwhile, African Virtual University (2012) suggested that the primary motivation for quality assurance in higher education institutions is “to ensure that institutions effectively and efficiently deliver education, training, research and community services which are of high quality and which produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress” (Machumu & Kisanga, 2014). However, the policies, processes, strategies and procedures used to improve the quality of education at higher education institutions for community services, education management, good governance, and customer satisfaction are known as quality assurance practices. All these significance and benefits of quality education can only be achieved through the quality assurance to engender educational goal achievement. It is against this background that, this paper examined quality assurance practices as veritable tools for the achievement of tertiary educational institution goals in Nigeria.

The Concept of Quality and Quality Assurance in Tertiary Educational Institutions

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010), quality is defined as the standard of anything when compared to other like things and the degree to which something is good or terrible. Quality is described by DuBrin (1997), as cited by Asiyai (2013), as a desirable aspect of a product or service that distinguishes it from the individual seeking the attribute. Conformance to expectation, requirement, excellence and value, as well as loss of avoidance, according to DuBrin, (1997) are all characteristics of good quality. Quality assurance, as Okebukola (2010) pointed out, entered the educational language in the mid-1930s. It is a method of determining the quality of a product or system after it has been processed and wastages have occurred, and all

that is left is to reject or fight correction in the same way. Quality assurance, according to Uchendu, Akuegwu and Nwine (2006), is the activity performed in a tertiary institution to ensure that the standard of education is maintained in terms of inputs, processes, and output. The quality of education is determined by students' achievement on public examinations and the quality of graduates' performance in their careers. When the standard of education is lowered, a slew of concerns arise, including tertiary educational institutions churning out graduates who can barely defend their credentials, indiscriminate contract award at tertiary schools, and the hiring of mediocres, to name a few. However, five types or approaches of thinking about quality were defined by Harvey and Green (1993). Key elements of each of these categories can be summarized as follows, according to Kis (2005):

- i. Exception: distinctive, embodies in excellence, passing a minimum set of standards.
- ii. Perfection: zero defects, getting things right the first time (focus on process as opposed to inputs and outputs).
- iii. Fitness for purpose: relates quality to a purpose, defined by the provider.
- iv. Value for money: a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, measuring outputs against inputs. A populist notion of quality (government).
- v. Transformation: a qualitative change; education is about doing something to the student as opposed to something for the consumer. Includes concepts of enhancing and empowering: democratisation of the process, not just outcomes.

The systematic, controlled and constant attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement is referred to as quality assurance (Vroeijerstijn, 1995 in Kis, 2005). Quality assurance in education, according to Whitely (2001) in Akerele (2007), has evolved into an all-encompassing concept that encompasses all policies, methods and actions used to develop and sustain the quality of education given. As a result, quality assurance in the educational system is a broad term that encompasses a variety of actions aimed at improving the educational system's input, process, and product (Okebukola, 2012). In the educational system, quality assurance refers to the process of monitoring, assessing, and evaluating all elements of

educational activities, as well as conveying the results to all parties involved in order to improve the educational system's products.

Quality assurance is in charge of protecting the public's interest in assuring a high academic standard, as well as informing and encouraging continual development and control in the management of high-quality education provided in educational institutions (Bunoti, 2012 cited in Machumu and Kasanga, 2014). Furthermore, according to Machumu and Kasanga, education quality cannot be separated from internal quality assurance, which entails efforts to improve the internal environment and processes in order to ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning in order to achieve the planned broad goals of education provision. However, in both developed and developing countries, and in both commercial and governmental institutions, quality assurance in higher education has become a significant business. This was why, according to Bosu and Amakyi (2014), population quality and knowledge are the most important predictors of humanity's future welfare. Quality assurance is a system for promoting and improving the quality of education provided.

Quality Assurance Practices in Tertiary Educational Institutions: Their Nature and Purpose

Accountability and improvement are two main goals that quality assurance systems can achieve.

- i. **Accountability** – the summative approach. Accountability is readiness to have one's actions judged by others and where appropriate, accept responsibility for errors, misjudgments and negligence and recognition for competence, thoroughness, excellence and wisdom. Quality procedures for accountability purposes are based on criteria set down by external authorities and institutions. Accountability aims at strengthening external insight and control, with possibility of undertaking external corrective action, if necessary. Quality assurance for accountability purposes implies the use of a summative approach. Where this approach predominates, reports include explicit statements of outcomes and are published (Billing, 2004), and the purpose of the publication is to inform the public of the performance of higher education institutions (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995 in Kis, 2005).

- ii. **Improvement** – the approach that is formative improvement and accountability are linked to differing value judgments and power balances for different groups (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995 in Kis, 2005). Instead of making judgments on previous performance, quality practices for improvement are designed to promote future performance. Quality assurance for the purpose of improvement necessitates a formative approach that focuses on quality improvement rather than control. The reports are intended for an academic readership and the emphasis is on recommendations where this method is prevalent (Billing, 2004).

Quality Assurance System and Goal Achievement in Nigerian Tertiary Educational Institutions

A quality assurance system is a technique of ensuring that an institution is continuously improving what it does and how it does it by regularly monitoring and evaluating performance and collecting data. A quality assurance system is used to ensure that higher education institutions provide high-quality education. Internal and external systems of evaluation are the two types of quality assurance methods used in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Figure 1 depicts the two parts of a quality assurance system.

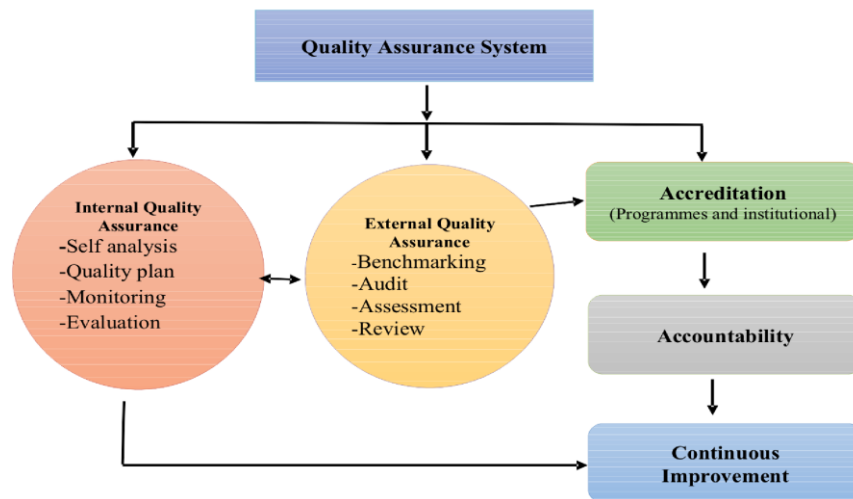


Figure 1: Quality Assurance Practices in Higher Education Institutions
Source: Machumu and Kisanga (2014)

A quality assurance system in higher education institutions can be thought of as a formal organized sequence of activities that combines assessment and evaluation of the current situation, rational decision-making about necessary changes, development of plans to effect such changes, implementation of these plans, and reassessment to determine whether the desired changes have occurred (Machumu & Kisanga, 2014). However, a quality assurance system ensures that the education output (graduate) matches the clients' (stakeholders') expectations. Internal quality assurance (self-analysis, quality plan, monitoring and evaluation), external assurance (benchmarking, audit, assessment and review), accreditation, accountability and finally continuous improvement are all part of the QA system in higher education institutions (Mahfoodh, 2013). Furthermore, tertiary institutions engage in internal quality assurance techniques such as student evaluations, peer review of publications and reflective activities. They also strengthen and enhance the welfare and support system for students, supervise staffs' teaching and students' learning and promote high-quality research and publication (CHE & AfriQAN, 2012). External processes are improved, maintained and overseen by QA agencies in Nigeria. They have been screening students using an electronic system known as the Central Admission Processing System (CAPS), which was introduced by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to ensure that they have the necessary qualifications for admission into tertiary institutions for a specific programme. Furthermore, higher education institutions have been externally reviewed for accrediting purposes, the exercise involves external organs assigning individuals of higher integrity to undertake evaluations on numerous aspects relating to the quality of services provided.

Table 1: Opinions on External Quality Assessment (EQA)

	Government	Higher education institution
Nature of EQA	Summative	Formative
Aims	Accreditation (threshold quality)	Quality improvement
	Accountability to parliament	Accountability
	Steering/planning of higher education: Are the aims of the government with regard to higher education reached?	Self-regulation
	Constitutional assurance of quality	Quality assurance
	Comparison assurance of quality	
	Efficiency	
	Information for students and employers	
Instruments	Inspectorate	Self-assessment
	Performance indicators	Peer-review

Source: Vroeijenstijn, (1995) cited in Kis (2005)

Some Characteristics of Successful Quality Assurance Systems

A quality assurance system must possess some attributes for it to be effective and these can be summarised as follows, according to Kis (2005).

- i. Purposes that are clear.
- ii. Legitimacy.
- iii. Interaction between internal and external processes that is dynamic.
- iv. More focus on internal processes, as well as flexibility and trust in higher education institutions.
- v. Appropriate follow-up procedures and actionable feedback
- vi. Quality control on a regular and cyclical basis, considered as a process.
- vii. Caution and flexibility when it comes to tying results to funding.

Key Agencies and Organisations involved in Quality Assurance in Nigerian Tertiary Educational Institutions

The key agencies and organisations involved in quality assurance in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions are listed as follows.

- i. Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)
- ii. National Universities Commission (NUC)
- iii. National Board for Technical Education (NBTE)
- iv. National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE)
- v. Professional Bodies such as Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), Chartered Insurance Institute of Nigeria (CIIN), Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), Town Planners Registration Council of Nigeria (TOPREC) and so on.
- vi. Proprietors of tertiary educational institutions
- vii. Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education

Variables used by Quality Assurance Agencies in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

In Nigerian tertiary educational institutions, quality assurance entails internal and external processes put in place by the institutions and accreditation authorities, respectively, to assure consistency in all of the educational institutions' functions. According to Asiyai (2013) and Oyebade, Oladipo and Adetoro (2007), tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria have used a variety of indicators to determine the quality assurance of their programmes and institutions. These variables include:

- a) minimum academic standard;
- b) carrying capacity and admission quota;
- c) publications and research assessment;
- d) accreditation of programmes or institutions;
- e) capacity building for teaching and non-teaching staff;
- f) impact assessment;
- g) visitation;
- h) structures, infrastructure and utilities.
- i) monitoring, assessment and evaluation of existing staff strength, students and facilities;
- j) a student and teaching staff exchange programme; and

- k) institutional rankings for undergraduate and graduate courses and programmes;

Quality Assurance Issues in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

The concern over the quality of higher education is a worldwide phenomenon. In Nigeria, like in other sub-Saharan African countries, there is a public concern for quality of programmes offered and products (graduates) as a result of QA practices employed in tertiary educational institutions. To the stakeholders in education, QA practices employed in most tertiary educational institutions do not work properly and its procedures and practices are not well known and conceptualized to the majority of education stakeholders (Materu, 2007). This is evidenced in the most graduates lack the necessary competencies and employability skills, making it difficult to compete in a competitive labour market and to start a new company endeavour for self-employment (Mhalanga, 2008; Kitila, 2013). Yet, there is an open and wide link between graduate quality (target achievement) and quality assurance processes, because no higher education institution can prove to generate high quality graduates without well-coordinated, managing, and maintaining proper QA practices (World Bank, 2003). For example, because some educational institutions lack qualified QA employees, they choose to appoint available staff to fill the post before obtaining basic QA training. Equally, it has been observed that QA officers work in environments that are not serene. They do not have enough office space, working tools, no defined boundary between official duties and other administrative work. All these formed some of the quality assurance challenges in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Nonetheless, Adamu and Addamu (2012) noted that maintaining quality standards in the midst of rapid enrolment expansion is usually challenging for any nation (Saint, 2004), because expansion and quality are often in constant conflict, especially when resources (personnel) are in low supply (Teferra, 2007). Many quality assurance officers have a wide range of activities, including teaching, doing research, supervising student projects, evaluating students' academic progress, attending training and seminars, organizing QA workshops, and conducting evaluation and follow-up. All of these could contribute to QA officers' incompetence, resulting in bad QA methods. In this regard, if QA officers are incompetent, most QA practices will not

be applied properly, and the multiplier effects will be visible on end products (students, publications and services offered to the community and other partners), affecting target achievement.

In addition, low academic performance among students has been a typical occurrence not just in postsecondary institutions, but also in basic and secondary schools. The influx of jobless graduates in society, educated people engaging in illegal activities (drug trafficking, human trafficking, internal fraud, sexual harassment, sexual business), a lack of good initiative and ideas, innovative, creative minds among graduates - all of these are said to be linked to the type of education provided to some of the graduates (Kisanga, 2014; Chetsanga, 2011). Yet, the current situation demonstrates that graduates seeking employment simply went to universities to receive degrees, not to gain true practical skills that will enable them to function professionally in many fields. This runs counter to the idea that higher education is a key driver of social and economic development in every country, and it coincides with a growing demand for quality assurance policies, methods, and practices across the board. This is why, Okebukola (2012) affirmed that QA is becoming a more significant part of higher education in developing nations, as evidenced by the establishment of related policies, institutions and procedures at both the national and institutional levels.

Effects of Quality Assurance Practices on Goal Achievement in Tertiary Educational Institutions

The consequences of quality assurance mechanisms can be seen on three levels: on teaching and learning, on organisation and management issues within higher education institutions.

Impact on quality in teaching:

- i. More emphasis is placed on the institution's teaching function, including talking about teaching, monitoring teaching, and, by extension, the teaching act itself.
- ii. Improvements have occurred in the teaching environment. These include curriculum reforms, higher standards in student assessment and improvement of the assessment instruments, innovation in professional degree programmes,

implementation of upgrading programmes for instructors, particularly in pedagogical aspects.

- iii. There have been positive reactions in the academic hiring and promotion system, with greater criteria for employees, increased encouragement to publish in peer-reviewed journals, and workload revisions.
- iv. Staff quality improvements were made possible via quality assurance mechanisms (Kis, 2005).

Impact on quality in learning:

- i. Academic audits have put improving teaching and learning at the top of institutional agenda. They have also aided in the clarification of who is responsible for enhancing teaching and learning quality at the individual, academic unit, faculty, and institutional levels.
- ii. The relative power of students and academics has been influenced by quality assessment. Students can gain power by contributing their perspectives and experiences to the assessment process, as well as by using the QA system's public findings to make decisions about what and where to study (Brennan and Shah, 2000).
- iii. Quality is about conformity and accountability, and it has not done anything to improve the student learning experience. External quality monitoring in most nations makes no attempt to promote learning quality, but is instead driven by accountability obligations (Harvey, 1997; Harvey and Newton, 2004).
- iv. Academics linked the quality assurance system to increased discipline and the use of technology for validation, monitoring, and external inspection (Kis, 2005).

Impact on organisation and management issues within tertiary institutions:

- i. The allocation of authority in higher education institutions is influenced by external quality assurance. External quality assessment can improve institutional authority by focusing on the exercise of institutional responsibility, scrutinizing internal

- accountability mechanisms and requiring institution-wide policies and effective strategies for implementation.
- ii. External quality assurance is an important contributor to increased bureaucratization.
 - iii. Transparency: External quality assurance in higher education has a noticeable effect on institutional transparency.
 - iv. More managerialism.
 - v. Quality assurance helps to promote coordination and integration within the tertiary education system as a whole (Kis, 2005).

Challenges facing Quality Assurance Practices towards Goal Achievement in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

According to Asiyai (2013), the following factors hindered quality assurance practices towards goal achievement in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria and they are:

- i. Inadequate financing:** Inadequate finance is the most pressing issue that has jeopardized Nigeria's ability to provide quality education. According to Okebukola (2010), apparent underfunding of higher institutions has resulted in the deterioration of existing structures over time, as well as a lack of additional structures to match the extraordinary increase in student populations.
- i. Inadequate teaching staff/poor quality of teaching staff:** A big challenge to the attainment of quality education in Nigeria is the lack of qualified academic staff. Teachers are said to be the hub of any educational system. Teachers determine the quality of education because they transmit educational policies into practice and action. Without adequate number of inspiring, well-informed teachers, fully prepared to meet their responsibilities in schools, one cannot have good education and without good education, is not possible to hope for long to meet successfully, the challenges of a changing world. Ajayi (2007) seems to concur with this assertion when author noted that good teachers are needed for good education which in turn is indispensable for social change, social transformation and national development.
- ii. Poor policy implementation:** Poor policy implementation is a challenge to quality delivery in education. The poor quality

delivery is responsible for the abysmal low performance of graduates of universities in Nigeria, in their world of work and the alarming incidence of examination malpractice.

- iii. Lack of resources:** Quality higher education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources put in place in institutions of higher learning. The lack of infrastructures such as science laboratories, workshops, students' hostels, libraries and electricity will affect the quality of education.
- iv. Lack of information communication technology facilities:** Another challenge to quality attainment in higher education institutions in Nigeria is lack of information communication technology facilities in institutions of higher learning. Information and communication technology in education has been continuously linked to higher efficiency, higher productivity and higher educational outcomes, including quality of cognitive, creative, and innovative thinking (Olatoye, 2011).
- v. Frequent labour disputes and closures of universities:** A big challenge to quality higher education in Nigeria is the incessant staff union disputes and subsequent closures of the institutions. The disruption of academic programmes of institutions of higher learning affects students learning outcomes, since lecturers find it difficult to complete the course work as stipulated from one semester to another.
- vi. Lack of vibrant staff development programmes:** Most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programme for training and re-training of staff. Vibrant staff development programme on a continuous basis will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behaviour, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus, become more effective and efficient in the performance of tasks.
- vii. Brain drain:** A big challenge to the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions is the problem of brain drain. Over the past decades, there has been mass exodus of brilliant and most talented lecturers to other sectors of the economy. Brain drain has led to decline in research outputs from tertiary institutions in Nigeria vis-à-vis the disappearance of research centres in Nigerian universities.

viii. Poor leadership: Poor leadership both at the government level and at the institution level has been a big challenge to quality in university education in Nigeria. Since the nineties, the government of the country has not shown enough commitment to higher education development in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of quality assurance in tertiary educational institutions is to ensure that institutions of higher learning effectively and efficiently deliver quality education, training, research and community services, as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies, all of which are necessary for a nation's social and economic progress. It is worthy to note that no tertiary educational institution can achieve educational goal without effective quality assurance practices because quality assurance is a system for promoting and improving the quality of education provided. It is thus the conclusion of this paper that with effective and efficient quality assurance system in the country, the goal achievement of tertiary educational institutions is certain. Hence, the following recommendations are put forth:

- i. The goal of the quality assurance system should be clearly stated, and expectations should be formulated in accordance with the tertiary educational institution plan, in order to build a national commitment to quality.
- ii. To ensure that each student receives a high-quality, relevant education, well-coordinated quality assurance system is required.
- iii. Quality assurance systems must ensure that the entire system contributes to the country's social and economic development. As a result, higher educational institutions must ensure that fair and just admission policies are followed in order to promote equity of access and outcomes.
- iv. Accountability and quality improvement must be struck in a balanced manner. A quality assurance system's ability to disseminate information to diverse stakeholders is critical from the standpoint of responsibility.

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