

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND DELIVERY IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The products of every educational system will usually be a reflection of what was invested into it in terms of quality. Tertiary education has become susceptible to low quality in almost all aspects. The paper was worried that the knowledge being generated and disseminated to students in tertiary institutions lacks the expected quality. Since students generally cannot know more than the teacher has offered, it implies that the institution must be turning out low quality graduates. To confirm this thesis a library research was under-taken. The information explored shows that quality is not assured in tertiary institutions in Nigeria in the areas of information generation and dissemination. A number of factors account for this; lack of current materials to aid research, heavy teaching load, heavy teaching and administrative load, lack of funds and equipment for research. This situation has adverse implications for the development of the country. The paper recommends, among others, that education should be adequately funded, service conditions of lecturers should be improved, research facilities should be made available, excessive teaching load should be discouraged and academic freedom should be non-negotiable.

Introduction

Several decades ago society was primarily in the state of nature. It was an era of primitiveness in which man's subsistence was dependent on the generosity of nature which provided him with his simple needs and with less efforts. Knowledge which Guralnik (1974, p.781) also refers to as understanding, learning, familiarity, awareness, etc, was lacking to explore and exploit the numerous opportunities available in nature. The dictum that knowledge is power is well known. Man's initial ego denied him of coming to terms with the requisite knowledge or understanding to appreciate and benefit from nature. The understanding of science brought man in closer cooperation with nature which facilitated the advancement of society in many frontiers. Abd-Ru Shin (1993) confirms this thesis. According to him, the knowledge of which has changed the world dramatically only became possible when man started conforming to the laws of nature. In other words, obedience to nature is the true source of knowledge. Abd-Ru-Shm (1993, p. 10) defines knowledge as what the brain can conceive but worries that the perceptive capacity of the brain is very limited. This fact has the potential of man's ability to generate and deliver knowledge even in institutions of learning.

Dewey (1966, pp. 340 - 341) makes a similar thesis when he proposes his theories on knowledge. He states thus:

While the content of knowledge is what has happened, what is taken as finished and hence settled and sure, the reference of knowledge is future or prospective. Knowledge furnishes the means of understanding. Knowledge determines a new experience and results in a mental reward. A perfect knowledge represents a network of interconnections that every past experience would offer a point of advantage to get new problems solved.

The product of education is knowledge. Knowledge differs from belief, opinion or imagination. It is backed up by certainty. To know a thing means you are sure of it. Wokocho and Okujagu (1999) have provided the following detailed information on the subject of knowledge.

Types of Knowledge

Two basic types of knowledge exist, namely:

1. Knowing that - this is propositional knowledge, data knowledge.
2. Knowing how - this is dispositional knowledge, manual work or skill such as knowing

how to sew, make chairs, repair items, et cetera.

Other forms of knowledge include;

- (a) Knowledge by acquaintance i.e by direct experience - this is empirical knowledge.
- (b) Knowledge by description such as information contained in a book in which the author was present and participated in the event.
- (c) A prior knowledge - this is knowledge mediated through thinking, logical relationship.

Conditions of Knowledge

There must exist certain conditions before a claim of knowledge can be tenable. They are:

- 1, Certainty
- 2, Evidence
- 3, Belief

Sources of Knowledge

1. Empirical Knowledge

This is knowledge that is confirmed by the evidence of the senses - hearing, smelling, feeling, tasting. Empirical knowledge is important to modern science. Empiricism involves direct experience, observation, experimentation, mathematical symbols, derivative calculation, graphing, et cetera. These facilitate deductions which lead to firmly established knowledge.

2. Rational Knowledge

This form of knowledge is acquired by the exercise of our intelligence unaided by observations. This involves inductive and deductive methods of reasoning by which conclusions that are logical are drawn.

3. Authoritative or Documentary Knowledge

This is a form of knowledge acquired through someone who had had a direct experience through long periods of study, reading, observing and experimenting. Such knowledge is often documented and its efficacy is also often not questionable. The producers of documentary knowledge are accepted as authorities even though knowledge by authority remains a basic secondary source of knowledge.

4. Knowledge by Intuition

This form of knowledge is acquired through sensation, suspicion, extra-sensory perception, telepathy, thought transfer, feeling, premonition like electromagnetic impulses, radio waves, et cetera. Intuitive knowledge are insights or intuitive facts in the hearts of men. They are also facts picked out of experiences shared with others through intersections or associations.

5. Revealed Knowledge

It is a form of knowledge characteristic of religious and cultural based societies. The main source of revealed knowledge is God. Some people are inspired or have revelation from God to pass certain information to others. For example, the Bible and Koran were written by Christians and Muslims through the inspiration and-revelation from God.

Tertiary Institutions and Knowledge Generation and Delivery

Universities and other higher institutions are central to the development of any society. They are charged with the provision of the high-level manpower necessary for planning and implementation of development programmes. For this purpose the National Policy on Education (1998) assigned the following major functions to tertiary institutions:

- (i) teaching;
- (ii) research;
- (iii) dissemination of existing and new information;
- (iv) the pursuit of service to the community;
- (v) being a storehouse of knowledge

For the purpose of this paper, we shall re-order the above mandate with some modifications as follows:

- (i) research that generates quality knowledge; , (ii) teaching that produces quality graduates;

- (iii) quality storage of knowledge and dissemination of old and new information;
- and (iv) implications of these activities to national development

It is without any iota of doubt that tertiary institutions are carrying out their mandate as prescribed by the National Policy on Education. However, we are not sure of how effectively this is being done. This is the problem of this paper. Since effectiveness has to do with efficiency or producing the desired result, quality assurance in the various activities of tertiary institution will be an important reference point in this work.

Quality Assurance Explained

Quality is simply defined as "the degree of excellence which a thing possesses". Assurance, on the other hand, means "sureness, confidence, certainty" (Guralrick, 1974), Akinola (1990) in line with Guralnik (1974) agrees that standard and quality have a common phenomenon. Standard measures quality. The exposition by Udoh (1989, p. 142) gives support to this reasoning:

We talk of standard as the level of measure to which members of a group have to conform and by which performance of each member is to be judged. Standards come in when the degrees or levels of excellence are indicated for the achievement of purposes. We therefore speak of standard as the desirable level of attainment.

The words quality and standard have often been used interchangeably to describe the problems of education in Nigeria. Many authors and observers like Adewuya (2002) have noted that the quality of education has continued to deteriorate. Although this line of reasoning has become prevalent even among highly educated people, it may be illogical that if the quality of education falls, it must necessarily affect its instrument of measurement represented by standard. However, our interest here is on quality assurance. According to Tawari (2002), quality assurance is a before and during the event process. Its aim is to prevent faults from occurring in the first place. Accordingly, quality is designed into the process from the beginning to ensure that the product or service meets a predetermined specification. In the words of Crosby (1979), the aim of quality assurance is to provide "zero defect" products or services by getting things done right at the first time and every time. Quality assurance provides that the work force and not inspectors take responsibility for ensuring quality. The provision of a quality assurance system facilitates the certainty of the quality of goods and services. A system with quality assurance specifies exactly how production would take place and to what standards (Tawari, 2002).

Quality Improvement in Tertiary Education

The work of Tawari (2002) was on quality improvement in the management of tertiary education. In line with her reasoning, quality framework should meet the special requirements of education. In this regard, the delivery of learning to students, the primary customers of the process, must form the central focus of any quality improvement initiatives. The author believes that quality improvement is the answer to the problems of tertiary education. She believes that putting quality first is a right approach to addressing most educational problems.

According to the same source, quality in education is what makes learning a pleasure and a joy. It takes a quality experience to create an independent learner. Since students study and learn in a system, the job of the lecturer is to work on the system, to improve it continuously with their help. As these actions are taken, quality will obviously improve.

Quality Principles

Quality is paramount to this paper as it influences the kind of knowledge generated and disseminated. Senge (1991:64&65) provides the following quality principles that can give impetus to the activities of education.

1. Quality in education is guided by a shared vision that is based on core values.
2. Quality in education accepts everyone where they are and begins their development from that point.
3. Its emphasis is on co-operation and collaboration, not competition.
4. It recognizes the differences among people
5. Quality in education recognizes that achievement and individual development are products of motivation.
6. It does not humiliate or chastise students for poor performance but rather supports and

nurtures them.

7. Quality in education uses teams to enhance effectiveness in the education environment.
8. Quality focuses on managing the educational environment rather than the individual to get the desired results
9. Quality in education brings about educational systems that produce win-win-situations.
10. Quality in education gives everyone responsibility for quality.
11. Quality in education is a long-term process based on holistic thinking.
12. It recognizes that work process redesign is a key component in achieving quality.
13. Quality in education relies on sound educational theory, research and pedagogy to plan and implement educational programmes.

Quality Research and Quality Knowledge

An indisputable fact about every human system operated with a reasonable degree of honesty is that the system produces results that approximate the inputs. In other words, "Garbage in, Garbage out". Much of the knowledge available to tertiary institutions is generated through research. The quality of such knowledge is influenced by the resources available to the researchers who also double as teachers. For nearly two decades now, Nigerians have worried over the quality of knowledge generated and delivered to students at all levels of education and especially higher education. Falua (1989) pathetically describes the condition of education thus:

The Primary schools have virtually decayed. The Secondary schools are congested. Both Colleges of Education and Polytechnics exist under their own shadows. The Universities are generally in shambles. The conditions could hardly be otherwise. Inspectors of education have now withdrawn to the Secretariats. The teachers remain even frustrated.... In the circumstance, the quality of the educational services at all levels has fallen. Consequently, most certificates only possess face validity.

A research by Sesay (1986, p.10) lists the impediments against qualitative knowledge seeking and generation. They include:

1. Lack of current materials (books, journals, magazines, etc.)
2. Heavy teaching load >
3. Heavy teaching and administrative load
4. Lack of funds/equipment for research

This subject of quality knowledge generation and dissemination is extensively addressed by Adesina (2005:20) in *the Guardian Newspaper*. Many of the salient points made are reproduced below. The newspaper reacts to the observation of the National Universities Commission (NUC) that low quality of academic journals are being produced by university academics. This implies that the knowledge being generated and disseminated by these academics is of low quality. Before locating and placing the problem in perspective, Adesina (2005, p.20) x-rays some of the functions of universities thus:

Universities are the fountainhead of knowledge, the centers of scholarly research and teaching. Academics, along with their students, are the tools through which universities advance the frontiers of knowledge. Academics perform their duties through research and disseminate the results of their research through teaching and publishing. The research of academics should involve both critical analysis of substantive issues as well as offer solution to problems. Their research should feed directly into the material they teach their students; it should be disseminated to their peers and the international community through publication in scholarly journals, working papers, textbooks, newsletters, research notes, and presentations at conferences and workshops.

The author proceeded to enumerate some of the impediments that prevent academics from fulfilling their mandate or expectations. However, he started with conditions that are necessary for meeting that mandate.

Conditions Plausible

1. In order for academics to discharge their responsibilities professionally and qualitatively, *the* environment in which they operate should be conducive for the pursuit of knowledge,
2. Academics should not work under extraneous circumstances, restrictions or coercion.
3. Universities should be adequately funded.
4. Academic research, writing and teaching should be unfettered and should not be constrained or impeded by preconceptions of any kind.
5. Academics should have the tools and freedom to do their work.
6. Academic freedom is a necessary pre-condition for the proper performance of the educational responsibilities of academics. Academic freedom is guaranteed all over the world to enable academics the freedom "to investigate their respective fields of knowledge and express their views without fear of restraint or dismissal from office.

Impediments

1. Educational institutions are grossly under-funded.
2. Arising from under-funding, facilities such as classrooms, library books, teaching aids (audio-visual), etc are inadequate or lacking.
3. Academics are overburdened with teaching responsibilities, which are out of proportion to their responsibilities as researchers and teachers.
4. Unmanageable student-teacher ratios.
5. The academic profession is no longer attractive because of poor conditions of service and this has led to brain-drain to other sectors that offer more satisfaction.

These impediments cannot guarantee the attainment of academic excellence which must translate into quality knowledge generation, quality teaching and quality graduates.

Implications for National Development

The world is ruled by great ideas. It has moved from the Stone Age to an era of sophisticated technology. Various facilities for the comfort of man have been developed and made available. Quality ideas leading to quality knowledge have facilitated these achievements. Quality education is therefore of great essence. Education is an instrument par excellence. It liberates people from poverty and ignorance (Okoroma, 2004).

An epileptic type of education that lacks quality is antithetical to national development. Ukeje (1966, p. 155) agrees with this when he states that "education is for life and for living. It is an investment in people which pays untold dividends to the society, when that investment is not made or is made inadequately the society suffers a loss". In confirming that investment in education in Nigeria has been inadequate resulting in low quality, Eze (2004: 103) has this to say:

The combined effect of both a decline in the level of fund commitment and the forced expansion in education facilities caused a decline in the quality of education services provided in the country. Thus, the education sector was plunged into long years of neglect and ml

Nigeria's educational system is in a state of confusion and it appears no one has a solution to the problem. The British form of education was more theory-based but assured some quality. Its recipients could defend the theory-based certificates they acquired theoretically. The National Policy on Education (6-3-3-4 system) fashioned after the American model was seen as the gate-way to Nigeria's industrial revolution because of its emphasis on practice. At the inception of the policy Ukeje (1985:8) was so excited that he noted that "the 6-3-3-4 system is more than a structure. It is a new process, a new orientation, and a new activity, which hopefully will lead to new individuals and new and bright future". Twenty-four years of experimenting with the policy has not brought any ray of hope. Rather, the quality of education in all its ramifications is at its lowest as confirmed earlier by Falua(1989).

All these imply that Nigeria will continue to depend on foreign technology because her present system of education does not guarantee quality assurance in knowledge generation and dissemination.

Recommendations

The information gathered from this study lead to the following recommendations.

1. Every one (the teacher, students, administrators, parents, government functionaries) has a role to play in assuring quality in education in all its ramifications. None should gloss over this important role.
2. Nigerians must return to those core values of the past such as hard work, honesty, fairness, principle of the common good, discipline, and shared vision. These can facilitate commitment in the generation of quality knowledge and dissemination in tertiary institutions.
3. Falua (1989) has given a deplorable picture of the entire educational system in Nigeria. It has almost broken down and lacks no quality of any meaningful measure due to neglect. This must be corrected.
4. The major problem of education in Nigeria and the quality assurance issue is inadequate funding. In order to generate quality knowledge and disseminate same, there must be adequate funds for research and the provision of essential facilities such as classrooms, library books, teaching aids (audio-visual).
5. Academics should not carry excessive teaching load to enable them embark on meaningful research that generates quality knowledge.
6. The teaching profession should be made attractive so that qualified staff can be attracted, remain and show commitment.
7. Quality assurance in knowledge generation and delivery hinges on academic freedom. The quality of knowledge available to any society depends on the degree of freedom its academics have to source for knowledge and disseminate it unfettered.
8. As no society can develop beyond the quality of its educational system, it is expected that the quality of the educational activities in tertiary institutions has great implications for the development of Nigeria. Consequently, if the society must develop meaningfully, its educational system must be over-hauled to assure quality.

Conclusions

The information available in this paper make the following conclusions apposite.

1. Conditions necessary for quality assurance in tertiary education are not available in Nigeria as at present.
2. Knowledge generation and quality assurance are mutually exclusive due to lack of adequate resources and plausible conditions of service for teachers of tertiary institutions.
3. Information disseminated to students has consequently continued to be of poor quality resulting in poor quality graduates who only render poor quality services to society.
4. Since knowledge is power and responsible for every nation's development, it implies that Nigeria will remain under-developed for a very long time unless a revolution in her educational system takes place.

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