QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examined quality assurance in higher education institutions and graduate employability in Nigeria. It is a known fact that higher education is at the centre of human resource development. In Nigeria the human resources being trained by these higher education institutions cannot bring about the kind of development that is desired. In a situation where relevant skills are not imparted into the students, this has caused most graduates from our higher education institutions to be employable. According to National Bureau of Statistics (2014), Unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 23.90 percent in 2011 from 21.10 percent in 2010. The average of unemployment rate in Nigeria is 14.60 percent in 2010, reaching an all time high of 23.90 percent in 2011 and a low record of 5.30 percent in 2006. If that is the case, the university must probe into the cause(s) of unemployment in Nigeria. That is why the researchers take into consideration the idea of quality assurance as it affects graduate employability. It was concluded that if Nigeria is to grow economically and technologically, the word ‘quality’ must not be compromised. Based on this, the study recommended that Nigerian government must ensure that there is a kind of education that can effectively link to students’ needs, develop students’ intellectual capacity in all ramifications toward national development.

Keywords: Quality, Assurance, Employability, Unemployment, Higher Education

Higher education is at the centre of human resource development. In Nigeria, tertiary education brings about the manpower needed in the nation’s economy. It is in the university that professional and high skilled personnel such as Engineers, Administrators-Managers, Accountants, Surgeons and Para-Medics, Lawyers, Scientists, Technicians and Lecturers among others are trained and developed. Then, if that is the position occupied by the higher education institutions, there is a need for quality assurance effort in the system.

Education is obviously the basic instrument for economic growth and technological development of any given society. Governments recognize this and
continue to commit immense resources to ensure the provision of education for their citizens (making education a social service), and also tailored their policies towards ensuring that it is made accessible to their citizenry. The world’s workplace today is becoming increasingly geographically fluid across national, regional and international borders due to economic globalization. Based on this, knowledge has manifested as an economic commodity which has in turn placed pressure on the present national systems to ensure they are placed competitively in the international marketplace. Hence, qualitative higher education is acknowledged essentially as a vital driving force for the socio-economic growth and technological advancement of nations. The importance of Nigerian tertiary education and university education in particular is aptly spelt out by the Federal Government of Nigeria in its National Policy on Education – NPE(2013) document inter alia:

‘To contribute to National development through high relevant manpower training; To develop and inculcate proper value for the survival of the individual and Society; To develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their level and external environment; To acquire both physical and intellectual Skills, this will enable individual s to be self – reliant and useful members of the society; To promote and encourage scholarship and community services; To forge national unity and to promote national and international understanding and interaction……….’

Similarly, Section 8 Sub A (64) of the NPE (2004) 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 contents to reflect our national requirements; making all students, as part of a general programme of all round improvement in university education to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.’

Sub–Section 65 also states that university research shall be relevant to the nation’s developmental goals. It is expected that these goals shall be pursued through: teaching, research and development; visible staff development; a variety of modes of programmes including full-time, part-time, block-release, day-release, sandwich etc; access to training funds; maintenance of minimum educational standard; inter-institutional cooperation; and dedicated service to the community. Anything short of the mission towards the achievement of these goals will result to lack of quality. That is why this study tends to look into the issue of ‘Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Graduate Employability in Nigeria.’

Anho (2011) noted that the Nigerian Institute of Personnel Management(NIPM) observed that the quality of graduates in Nigeria is on a rapid decline especially in the area of valuable skills including; communication, technical abilities, human interaction, social, conceptual and analytical capacity. He noted further that the National University Commission (NUC) in 2000 organized a curriculum review debate in collaboration with other stakeholders in the education and observed graduates who left schools between 1995 and 2000; they found out that standards have actually declined in those critical
skills. Consequently, the NUC in its statutory responsibility embarked on conducting comprehensive curriculum review exercise to address current and future high level manpower needs, so that the products from the system can actually compete well with their counterparts around the globe.

The mechanism for improving and sustaining quality and high standard in the universities has been set by the Federal Government of Nigeria (Anho, 2011). However, the actual implementation is vested in the Senate of individual university. Anho(2011) summarized some of the Specific Functions of the Senate as follows:

‘The establishment, organization and control of campuses, colleges, faculties, departments, schools, institutes and other teaching and research units of the university, and the allocation of responsibility for different branches of learning; the organization and control of courses of study at the university level and the examinations held in conjunction with those courses including the appointment of examiners both external and internal; the award of degrees, diploma, certificates and such other qualifications as may be prescribed in connection with the examinations held or may be held; the appointment of external examiners.’

With this in each university, it is assumed that the internal quality is actually on course.

Graduate Unemployment Situation in Nigeria

The global economic recession and continuous increase in the rate of unemployed youths have triggered the attention of world leaders on the need to develop manpower that will translate the eradication of poverty. In September 2000, 189 leaders across the globe met at the Millennium Summit and committed themselves (and their respective counties) to the “mighty eight goals” known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is unfortunate that at the close of a decade after the goals (MDGs) was set, a significant number of African counties are lagging behind and squarely faced with the challenges of achieving the global desire. Nigeria, one of the countries in the sub-Saharan Africa, is specifically battling with the ever increasing rate of unemployment (Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi, 2011).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2014), unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 23.90 percent in 2011 from 21.10 percent in 2010. Unemployment rate averaged 14.60 percent from 2006 to 2011, reaching an all time level of 23.90 percent in 2011 and a record of 5.30 per cent in 2006. The figure below shows the graphical illustration of unemployed rate in Nigeria.

**Table1: Unemployment Rate in Nigeria (2006-2011)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Previous</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23.90</td>
<td>21.10</td>
<td>23.90</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>2006-2011</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Yearly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria
Concept of Employability

There is general consensus that employability refers to a wide range of attributes and competencies that enable the job seekers to gain and maintain employment such as, but not limited to the following:

- Communication Skills
- Logical, analytical and problem solving skills
- Personality, confidence, and integrity
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Innovation and creativity
- Team spirit

Employability is a difficult concept to define— it is a multi-dimensional concept and there is a need to distinguish between factors relevant to obtaining a job and factors relevant to the preparation for work (Lee, 2011). Employability is not just about students making deposits in a bank of skills (Morley, 2001). Knight (2001) and Yorke (2001) consider the concept of employability to be a “Synergic combination of personal qualities, skills of various kinds and subject understanding”.

Therefore there are two concept of employability (Lee, 2011), there are:

- The educational conception relating to the ability of employability of graduates to tackle ‘graduate’ jobs. This is related to the notion of ‘capability’. This means that employability of graduates relates to their being equipped for a job and capable of being employed, rather than job acquisition.
- The ability of the graduate to get a job – any job.

Harvey (2004) defined employability as the ‘capacity to acquire and maintain employment’. Weligamage (2009), on the other hand, maintains that the English term ‘employability’ encompasses a combination of characteristics such as personality, knowledge and skills a successful employee should posses. The definition of employability given by higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) is generally accepted. Thus, the term ‘employability’ refers to a set of achievements-
skills, understanding and personal attributes- that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workplace, the community and the economy.

Model for Embedding Employability in Curriculum

The career EDGE model postulated by Dacre pool and Sewell (2007) shares the holistic approach to curriculum design. The mnemonic ‘Career EDGE” aids recall of the five key components at the lower tier of the model. The model incorporates a philosophy of reflection and evaluation, encouraging Personal Development Planning as a ‘highly appropriate’ vehicle for this element to be in operation. Figure 3 outlines the career EDGE model:

The career EDGE Model of Employability

Attempts to use a broader framework for employability take into consideration the roles of both individual characteristics and labour market conditions. According to
Shukran and Morshidi (2009), there are three interrelated components that influence employability. They are:

a. Individual factors that include attributes (e.g. basic social skills), competencies (e.g. motivation, confidence), transferable skills (e.g. literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, communication, adaptability, team working skills), and educational attainment qualifications.

b. Personal responsibility that relates to the individual’s social and household circumstances (e.g. family and caring responsibilities, access to resources.

c. External factors that cover labour demand conditions (e.g. macro economic factors, vacancy characteristics, recruitment factors) and enabling support factors (e.g. accessibility of public services and job – matching technologies).

Taking this into consideration, employability is thus an outcome of multiple factors, and dialogues on employability need to include more stakeholders in addition to higher education institutions and students.

Higher education institutions should strive to promote quality. In fact, five elements should be in mind when promoting quality in education. They are the teachers, the students, the curriculum and the government with aims and goals via policy, order and directives. These can be aligned with other factors including learners’ achievements, teaching and learning approaches, both academic and administrative staff professional development, instructional innovation as well as the nature (physical, cultural, political and social) of the higher education institutions.

What is Quality?

According to Akinsola (2010), quality is the degree to which a product, service, or phenomenon, conforms to an established standard, and which makes it to be relatively superior to others. It is also seen as the degree of excellence of a product or service (Fadokun, 2004). Quality is about passions, pride and fitness for use.

The source of quality in education would include well maintained buildings with all required gadgets being conducive to learning, outstanding lecturers, high moral values, excellent examination results, specialization, the support of parents, business, local community and non-governmental organization’s support, adequate facilities, the application of the latest technology, strong and purposeful leadership, care and concern for pupils or students, a balanced curriculum (that is, the curriculum that matches the employers’ demand in the labour market).

Evolution of Quality

According to Kisanga (2014), quality in education as connected to internal quality assurance is referred to as efforts toward improving the internal environment and processes such that the effectiveness of teaching and learning can be ensured to achieve the planned broad goals of educational provision. The concept of quality is perceived differently, as there are different fields of study that address the same issue such as management, engineering/technology, health and even manufacturing sector.
Both the concepts of quality and quality assurance are not new. It is other side of technological advancement we are now experiencing and proliferation of higher education institutions, popularization of higher education, its enhancement and improvement. Taking these into consideration for instance, it was observed that the middle age universities had no libraries, laboratories (that is science laboratories, language laboratories etc) and museums.

However, higher education of the 21st century is still an offshoot of the middle age universities, such as those universities in Bologna and Paris that have the same atmosphere of faculties as others in the world. In Nigeria for instance, the University of Ibadan which is arguably regarded as the first university in Nigeria has its root in the University of London created during the colonial period as University College, Ibadan. After independence in 1960, it transformed to a fully fledged University. The fundamental structure, governance and organization are the same, and the historic commitment to maintain standards of institutional quality and accountability, particularly with regard to programme review, evaluation and assessment, is unbroken. Those days, professors and high rank academics, were responsible for safeguarding institutional quality (Machuniu and Kisanga, 2014). For instance, Popes and Princes were used to control the institutional standards of the middle age universities by granting charter to higher education institutions that fulfill criteria of being chartered.

As time went on, around 18th century, the German contribution of the conception of a university as a research institution, which redefined their quality and accountability of universities was witnessed. During the year 1950s, the US accreditation system was leading among other system of higher education and their graduates were receiving competitive advantage in labour market. The system is undergoing modification and changing time to time and now is quality assurance.

**Quality Assurance in Higher Education**

Quality assurance has been perceived differently by different scholars. Historically, the notion of quality assurance in higher education is dominated largely by the formal tradition of accreditation in Europe, United States and even Nigeria (where National University Commission (NUC) is in charge of the universities, National Commissionon Colleges of Education (NCCE) is incharge of the colleges of education for their accreditations and National Board of Technical Education (NBTE) is in charge of polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of technology for their accreditations. In the US for instance, the state of affair grew rapidly in power and prestige starting in the 1950s focusing on institution, professional or specialized accreditation in fields such as law, engineering, technology, teaching and medicine. Quality assurance in this regard is multifarious and sometime vaguely defined by its practitioners.

Explaining further on the need for quality assurance in higher education, African Virtual University in Machumu and Kisanga (2014) argued that the underlying rationale of quality assurance in higher education is to ensure that institution effectively and thy efficiently deliver education, training, research and community services which
produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress.

Quality assurance according to (UDSM, 2007) means measures, or a set of measures taken by an institution to satisfy itself and demonstrate to its clients that has constant capacity to keep its promise to deliver goods and services of the desired standard. Malifoodh(2013) argued that quality assurance recognized the autonomy of institutions and seeks to enhance their capacity to operate in responsive way. It can be noted that individual university have responsibility of assuring the quality of their graduates for public concern and not private venture to win the market.

Allele-Williams (2004) defined quality assurance in any educational institution as that which indicates the pre-eminence and special features that makes the institution distinct from other forms of institution. Middlehurst (2001) described the scope of quality assurance which including the following dimensions:

- Regulation (Legal framework, governance, responsibilities and accountabilities etc).
- Educational process (admission, registration or enrolment, curriculum design and delivery, support for learning, assessment etc)
- Curriculum design and content (validation and approval framework, levels and standards etc).
- Learning experience (consumer protection, students’ experience, complaints and appeals etc).
- Outcomes (qualifications, certification, transcripts, security, transferability, recognition/currency and value etc)

In summary, Middlehurt saw quality as a grade of achievement, a standard against which to judge others.

**Quality Assurance Measure**

Nowadays, many countries around the world are very concerned with quality assurance (QA) since it can benefit all parties involved such as producers, clients and assessors. Many business organizations and institutes involved with education have tried several quality assurance models to suit their needs. The products of education especially higher education such as graduates, research and service outcomes, like other industrial products, require quality assurance process to ensure that products are of good quality and satisfy their stakeholders. These education products can affect societies and communities in many ways (Poththong and Song-Eiam, 2009). For instance, graduates who lack practical skills may perform poorly in their work-place and may lead to their unemployment. Poorly performing graduates may be caused by poor curricula or ill-organized teaching and learning process. Therefore, in the developed countries, most education institutes have established Quality Assurance Systems as part of their missions to achieve their visions and achieve success.
In the efforts of the National University Commission (NUC) to ensure quality standard in Nigerian universities for instance, during the 2006/2007 accreditation and admission exercises discovered gross inadequate availability of human and non-human resources as well as dilapidated, decaying and almost non-available infrastructural facilities in majority of the universities (Anho, 2010). The NUC noted that the accreditation exercise of 2006/2007 involved the evaluation of 1,343 undergraduates degree programmes in 48 universities comprising 25 Federal, 20 States and three private universities including five colleges of education (now more than that in 2014). The NUC memorandum issued further revealed that 42.5% of the university programmes earned full accreditation status, 40.9% earned interim accreditation while 7.6% were deprived accreditation for failing to meet the prescribed minimum academic standards.

Then, if the situation of the accreditation was so in 2006/2007 when the universities were comparably small to what we have now, it is therefore worth mentioning that the present universities are facing more problems than before. This is because, instead of the government to improve on the funding and the provision of facilities to the old ones, the government is establishing new ones which implies that they will also be battling with the problem of trying to make such universities of high quality standard. The diagram tagged figure 2 is the quality assurance drivers in Nigerian university system, indicating areas to be considered for quality assurance.
Figure 2: Quality Assurance Drivers in Nigerian University System  
Source: Adedipe (2007).

- Minimum academic standards form the benchmark for entrenching quality university education.
- Accreditation is the process by which programmes are evaluated against set minimum standard.
- Carrying capacity of any higher education institution is the maximum number of students that the institution can sustain for quality education based on available human and material resources without compromise to the set standard.
- Visitation to universities is a statutory and legal requirement that empowers the proprietor (called visitor) to ascertain the well-being of the university.
- Impact assessment is a specialized form of evaluation aimed at finding out if the core expectations of the establishment of a particular university are being met.
- Research is the driving force for human development as globally determined, such research must be publishable.
- Structures, infrastructure, and utilities are essential for the qualitative productivity of the university system (Oyebade, Oladipo and Adetoro, 2013).

Quality Imperatives of HEIs at Making Graduate Employable  
Akinsolu (2010) was of the opinion that the importance of values in all higher education institutions makes the motive for taking a quality stance complex and diverse. The four quality imperatives are the drives or motivating force that challenge any institution that seeks to take a proactive stance on quality issues. The following quality imperatives will be viewed in line with the education system operation:  
1. The moral imperative  
2. The professional imperative  
3. The competitive imperative  
4. The accounting imperative

The Moral Imperative: This lies behind the proposition that the clients of the higher education service (that is, students, parents and the community) deserve the best possible quality of education. It is the duty of educational administrators to have an overriding concern for giving out the best possible educational opportunities.

The Professional Imperative: This is closely linked to the moral imperative. This implies a commitment to the needs of the students and obligation to meet their needs by employing the most appropriate pedagogical practices. All educators have a professional duty to improve the quality of education, so teachers and administrators have a burden to deliver services of the highest standard in the best tradition of their profession.

The Competitive Imperative: This is the link with the competitors. Educators must meet the challenges of competition in this dispensation by working to improve the quality of their products, services and delivery mechanisms. Total quality management
(TQM) becomes relevant to the survival of any organization because it is a customer-drivers process, focusing on the needs of clients and providing mechanism to respond to the needs and wants. The act of focusing on the needs of the customers, which is at the heart of quality, is one of the most effective’s means of facing competition and serving it.

The Accounting Imperative: The schools, colleges and universities are part of the communities and service education is meant for the benefit of the community, there is a need for the education system to strive in meeting up the community’s political demands from education to make the education system more accountable and publicly demonstrate the high quality of their products.

Conclusion
This study has revealed the essence of quality assurance in higher education towards graduate employability in Nigeria since education is seen as the basic instrument of economic growth and technological development of any given society, it is pertinent to say that for Nigeria as a nation to grow both economically and technologically, quality education cannot be compromised. This is why the importance of Nigeria tertiary education and university education in particular is well spelt out by the federal government of Nigeria in its National Policy on Education (2013). It intensified further that the university research shall be relevant to the nation’s developmental goals. In other words, quality research output would eventually bring growth and development to every aspect of our lives. If there is a quality university education, the products of the system would be of high quality.

Recommendations
In order to contribute meaningfully to the nation and world at large, the higher education institutions have to be ‘organizationally healthy.’ A structural adjustment in the existing system is however needed to meet the present challenges. Thus, government must ensure that there is:
1. Education that effectively links to student needs, develops students’ intellectual capacity to become responsible citizens, and contributes to the nation’s competitiveness;
2. Research and graduate programmes serving as the incubators for the development of the capabilities to foster an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy; and integrating state of the art technology to maximize accessibility to and applicability of advanced knowledge;
3. A system contributing to the development of a democratic, civilized, inclusive society, meets the criteria of accountability as well as responsibility to the public and
4. Comprehensive financial structure nourishing participation of stakeholders (including local government) which directly linking new investment with recurrent budget in the subsequent years of any fiscal year.
5. Adequate accreditation exercise of our higher education, aiming at improving the quality standard of the system.
6. Effort at ensuring that the curricula of institutions of learning meet up with the demands of the employers of labour.

References


Quality Assurance In Higher Education …


