

QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS IN NIGERIA TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, THE CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD IN ACHIEVING VISION 20:2020

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Abstract

The importance of quality education in nation building cannot be over emphasized. This is to say quality assurance is seen within the context of function i.e. how much value has been added to the knowledge, skills and abilities of learners regardless of their initial level of competence. As such, there have been several calls on the educational managers on how to make the educational system to be more vibrant in the quality of its products after mass failure and half-baked products from various educational institutions in the country. Indeed, establishing good quality assurance in our educational system will help in achieving those policies on education under vision 20:2020. However, this paper, discusses the concepts and thematic areas of vision 20:2020 in general, quality assurance mechanisms, the state of quality assurance in Nigeria, the challenges and way forward.

Education has been described as the bedrock of every society and tool for nation building. For qualitative education to be achieved in a nation, the principal actors of learning who are the teachers and learners and the environment must be cooperatively organized. The teacher must be adequate in quality and quantity, the students must be well trained and facilities must be provided as well (Sunday, 2010). Taking our higher institutions as an example, which has recorded poor quality in the product over the years has a lot of implication for our national development. Indeed, the belief in the efficiency of education as a powerful instrument of development has led many nations to commit much of their wealth to the establishment of educational institutions at various levels. According to Ajayi and Ekundayo (2007), the funds allocated to higher education should not be considered as mere expense, but as a long-term investment of immense benefit to the society as a whole. As such, a vision in the Nigerian, context is an image or concept in the imagination of our political leaders. It is not reality but something that could guide decisions and actions to make it happen. Therefore, vision 20:2020 is a grand concept adopted by the Nigerian government and its goal is to make Nigeria one of the twenty most developed economics in the world by the year 20:2020. However, Falana (2008) feared that in the past the country has been turned into a huge laboratory for all kinds of socio-economic and political experiments using some sorts of slogans which had transited to nowhere. Therefore, vision 20:20:20 will be a programme of illusion if government fails to create visible and enabling programmes within the challenges of private and public education, funding, research and other activities that have become crucial to sustaining the goals, objectives and aspirations of our country.

Indeed, in meeting the challenges of vision 20:2020, the state of quality assurance in Nigerian education system is an issue which cannot be toyed with as education is one of those instrument for promoting the socio-economic, political and cultural development of any nation. Therefore, the Federal Inspectorate division of the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) is directly responsible for quality control and ensuring desired standards in institutions below the tertiary level. There is need for checks and balances by regular and effective supervision and inspections of schools. So, the concern for quality has been at the core of the motivating forces for reform in education.

The Concepts and Thematic Areas of Vision 20:20:20

“By 20:2020 Nigeria will be one of the 20 largest economies in the world, able to consolidate it’s leadership role in Africa and establish itself as a significant player in the global economic and political area” (<http://www.ny2020.otg>). The United Nations has recommended that African Nations should allocate 26% of their national budget to education and with our National Domestic Product (GDP) and the income from the oil sector in a good shape; Nigeria can sustained a comprehensive educational plan that can help to actualize vision 20:20:20. However the sustain record, of corruption and human right violations and abuses continue to undermine our potentials as a nation. A country that is prepared to become one of the twenty economies in a competitive world has to muster the

political will to fix its basic infrastructure, promote the rule of law and human rights, combat poverty and confront menace of corruption. So, it is not out of tune to talk of quality assurance in our educational system for visionary Nigeria.

Concepts

Nigeria's economic potential is well recognized. It is the biggest economy in the West African sub-region. Given the country's considerable resource endowment and coastal location, there is potential for strong growth. Yet Nigeria has realized very little of this potential. Previous efforts at planning and visioning were not sustained. The history of economic stagnation, declining welfare and social instability, has undermined development for most of the past 30 years.

But in recent years, Nigeria has been experiencing a growth turnaround and conditions seem right for launching a sustained and rapid growth; justify its ranking amongst 11 countries. These are the countries identified by Goldman Sachs to have the potential for attaining global competitiveness based on their economies and demographic settings and the foundation for reforms already laid. The previous administration has declared the intention to pursue the vision of placing Nigeria among the 20 largest economies in the world by 20:2020 and the current administration is committed to the attainment of this vision (<http://www.nu2020.otgll>).

Thematic Areas

The proposed thematic areas for the National Technical Working Groups (NTWGs) are as follows: Agriculture and Food Security; Business Environment and competitiveness; corporate Governance; Culture, Tourism and National Reorientation; Education; Employment; Energy; Environment and sustainable Development; Finance; Foreign Policy; Governance, Health; Housing; Human Development; ICT; Judiciary and the Rule of Law; Manufacturing; Media and Communication; Mining and Steel Development, Niger Delta and Regional Development; Political System; Science, Technology and Innovation; Security, SMEs, Sport Development; Trade and Commerce; Transport; Urban and Rural Development; Water and Sanitation, each of the thematic areas is composed of about 20-25 technical experts who are renowned in their fields (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). So, the belief in the efficacy of education as a powerful instrument of development has led many nations to commit much of their wealth to the establishment of educational institutions at various levels.

Quality Assurance

The term quality could be perceived from different angles of human endeavors. For example, quality of a product is one that has no defects and meets the taste of its customer. In essence, it must be understood that there are different approaches to quality and that each of these approaches emphasized one feature or the other.

In education, quality is looked at "Transformation". This is to say quality assurance is seen within the context of a function i.e. how much value has been added to the knowledge, skills and abilities of the learners regardless of their initial levels of competence Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP), 2002. Indeed, in strategizing for quality assurance the concept of monitoring, inspection and supervision must be fully taken into consideration at all times in our educational system with regards to education, the International Institution for Educational Planning (IIEP) visions quality from different perspectives. The first is from internal criteria of the system such as profile expiration and the external criteria which are the fitness and relevance of such an education to its environment.

Similarly, Ajayi and Adegbesan (2007) argued that quality assurance is related to accountability both of which are concerned with maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems and services in relation to their contexts, of their missions and their slated objectives. In the write up, quality in education can be seen or defined as the level of excellence in performance or the strength of the quality in the contexts, inputs, process transactions and output

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(Nocha, 2002). In other words, the phrase "Quality Assurance" within the context of our education system, emphasized quality of behavioural transformation on the part of the learner with the school system.

Quality Assurance Mechanism

For the education industry to carry out the functions of development, quality human capital must be involved, through the acquisition of appropriate skills and knowledge, there is need for checks and balances through regular and effective inspection and supervision of our schools (Nwogu, 1980). In other words, there must be mechanism in place for assessing the quality and or performance of school services, programmes and projects by officials of the Ministry of Educations or its agencies that are specially established to fulfill these responsibilities. In essence, there must be ways and means of ensuring quality control and maintenance of standards.

Unfortunately, our inspection services at all levels have not lived up to expectation. This situation is not unconnected with a number of issues and challenges. To address this abnormality therefore, the following mechanism could be put in place.

1. Adequate Funding
2. Efficient transportation system
3. Adequate and qualified school inspectors
4. A pragmatic policy on recruitment and development of quality control officials.
5. Regular capacity building programmes for school inspectors and supervisions with the view to enable them keep pace with the challenges in the education sector.
6. Availability of the right tools, enabling environment and effective legal backing. The following should also be seen as characteristics of an effective quality assurance mechanism. They are:
 - (i) Effective quality management system
 - (ii) Periodic audit of the operation of the system
 - (iii) Periodic review of the system to ensures that our changing requirements are met.

In general, for performance in a school system to be acknowledged as excellent, the following indicators of quality education must prevail in the school system.

1. **Quality teachers:** This refers to the teachers qualification, pedagogical skills motivation, curriculum offering, internship, number and specialization to mention but a few.
2. **Quality learners:** Refers to pupils/students who are ready and highly motivated to learn
3. **Quality teaching:** This must be child centered and skill based approaches.
4. **Quality context:** It refers to the relevant curriculum adequate and relevant materials for literary numeracy and essential knowledge and skills for life.
5. **Quality learning environment:** The school must be child-friendly. There must be policies and practices that discourage humiliation, harassment, violence, corporal punishment, substance abuse and available of: adequate classrooms, clean portable water supplies and well-kept sanitation facilities.

Needs for Quality Assurance in Nigerian Schools

According to Sunday (2010), the need for quality assurance in Nigerian schools cannot be overemphasized in order to ensure quality of teaching and learning. However, he pointed out, that, the following are the major needs of quality assurance in our education system in Nigeria.

- (i) To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in education
- (ii) To ensure and maintain high standard of education at all levels

- (iii) To assist in monitoring and supervision of education
- (iv) To determine the quality of teacher input
- (v) To determine the number of classrooms needed, based on the average class size to ensure quality control of education
- (vi) To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control\
- (vii) It would ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judicially utilized.

State of Quality Assurance in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward

The Federal Inspectorate of the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) is directly responsible for quality control and ensuring desired standards in institutions below the tertiary level. There is need for checks and balances by regular and effective supervision and- inspection of schools. To achieve this goal, the government at all levels have been spending and doing everything possible within their limited resources to ensure that the set educational standards are maintained and the desired goals achieved (Nocha, 2002).

In spite of all these efforts however, there has been a general dissatisfaction on the state of education in Nigeria which is indicative of a drastic erosion of the quality of our educational system. In other words, this is a pointer to the fact that the education sector has suffered a lot of set-back due to associated factors which include; in adequate infrastructure, poor planning policy and lack of commitment among others. For example FME (2006) reported that an average of 13.8 and 20.72% of candidates who sat for West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO) between 2000 and 2006 had five credits including Maths and English respectively. Also, with the latest reports, in the last three years the figure has reduced drastically which led to the setting up of a stakeholders meeting in education by Mr. President in 2011 to come out with a way forward.

It was in respect of this poor performance that the employers of labour also complained about low performance of graduates from the Nations Institutions of Higher Learning. Unfortunately, the inspectorate services at all levels have been plagued by a myriad of issues and challenges which have grossly affected the discharge of its primary responsibility of quality control and maintenance of set standards in schools.

Some of these challenges could be succinctly enumerated thus:

- (i) Inadequate funding of school inspection and supervision
- (ii) Inadequate number of trained personnel
- (iii) Recruitment of low quality inspectors
- (iv) Most quality control personnel do not possess the desired specialized skills and knowledge to enable them keep pace with the challenges
- (v) Absence of the right working tools and the desired enabling environment
- (vi) Lack of regular service training and workshops for the officers
- (vii) Lack of harmonized inspection instruments that would guarantee uniformity in evaluating standards in schools
- (viii) There is no effective information management system in place for the purpose of establishing linkages for networking and facilitating the work of quality assurance agents at all levels
- (ix) Lack of functional transportation system to ease school visitation and other logistical challenges.

The Way Forward

Inspite of these challenges the government at all levels, have stepped up efforts at enhancing quality assurance services in schools. This is as a result of various strategies put in place to strengthen the inspectorate, some of these are:

1. **Monitoring:** It refers to the process of collecting data at intervals about ongoing projects programmed within the school system. The aim is to constantly assess the level of performance with a view of finding out how far set objectives are being met (Ehinder, 2001).
2. Presently, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) is reviewing and harmonizing inspection instruments so as to generate a National Evaluation Instrument (NEI) that will guarantee uniformity in evaluating quality standards.
3. So also the FME in collaboration with Foreign Partners like DFID (Department of Foreign and Inter-national Development) have produced a draft on National Education Quality Assurance Policy (NEQAP) and Education Quality Assurance Handbook for Nigeria (EQAHN) with the view to ensuring quality standard in our education.
4. The FME is presently putting in place a proposal to have a National Inspectorate Management Information System (NIMIS) for the purpose of establishing network connections so as to ease the work of education quality assurance agents at all levels.
5. Instrument designed for evaluation of quality standards in schools should be harmonized to ensure uniformity during evaluation/assessment. The aim of evaluation, a quality assurance strategy, is to see how the system can be assisted to improve on the present level of performance (Formative) (Ijaiya, 2001).
6. Feed-back mechanism must be properly put in place. It is sad to note that results of evaluation/assessment exercises are not fed back into the system and are therefore not used to improve performance. In other words more often than not, results of such exercises (e.g. monitoring/inspection/supervision) are not made available to relevant stakeholders, consequently hampering the much needed improvement.

Conclusion

This paper examined the concepts and thematic areas of vision 20:2020 as a whole and also discussed the state of quality assurance in Nigerian Educational Systems where it is seen that reports and recommendations forwarded to school and to governments by the officials of the inspectorate services must be taken seriously and implemented if our desire to be among the 20th most developed countries in the world is to be achieved. It was in this vein that recommendations were made. It must however be noted that assurance for quality education is a total holistic process concerned with ensuring integrity of outcomes. Thus, the responsibility for quality assurance however rests with the school managers and this is expressed through its relationship with other stakeholders in the school system. Quality assurance recognizes the autonomy of educational institutions and seeks to enhance their capacity to operate in a responsive way. It is recommended that the FME should collaborate with the foreign partners like DFID to have a draft on National Education Quality Assurance Handbook for Nigeria (NEQAHN) with the view to ensuring quality control in our education. Government and significant others in the education industry must therefore be determined to implement the vision 20:2020 with all the indices of quality assurance in our educational journey for national development.

Recommendation

- (i) Education curriculum and standards of education in Nigeria should be reviewed, and standards of education in Nigeria should be reviewed to reflect the needs and aspirations of the society.
- (ii) There is need to harmonize the internal and external criteria of quality assurance raising standard of excellence of the education systems.

- (iii) There is need to improve or employ modern teaching methods and techniques in the classroom.
- (iv) A more developed and reformed curriculum content is highly desirable. There is also need for curriculum evaluation to allow innovations and new techniques/methods to be incorporated.
- (v) Effective supervisory system should be injected into the system.
- (vi) Full professionalization of teaching in the country to set a standard under which a qualified and well trained teacher must operate is highly imperative.
- (vii) Government should endeavour to properly fund education institutions in the country to meet the expectation of the society.

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