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ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

By

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Abstract

The study is an assessment of quality assurance practices in secondary schools in Ebonyi state: Implications for sustainable knowledge economy. The study arose because of poor quality products of secondary schools in Ebonyi state which negate the fundamental objectives of secondary education. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The design for the study was descriptive survey. The population for the study comprised all the 273 principals in public secondary schools in Ebonyi state and 71 quality assurance evaluators. The sample for the study was 344 respondents representing 100% of the population for the study. The instrument for data collection was the researcher developed "Assessment of Quality Assurance Practices Questionnaire (AQAPQ)". It was validated by three experts. Two in Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability indices of the instrument were determined using Cronbach alpha. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics. While mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions using a mean score of 2.50 as benchmark for items, t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that principals of secondary schools have significant roles to play to ensure that quality assurance

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practices are adhered to in student admission policy and strategic management and planning. It was recommended among others that the criteria for admission of students must be specified and adhered to strictly without undue and unnecessary external interference.

Keywords: Assessment, Quality assurance practices, Sustainable knowledge economy.

Introduction

The main function of secondary education is to prepare students for useful living within the society and also for higher education. Secondary education was, therefore, established to prepare individuals for job performance in the civil service, business organizations and enterprises through the inculcation and acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills. These dual functions of secondary education bring about economic and social developments that are necessitated by the advancement and application of knowledge acquired at this level of education.

The broad aims of secondary education within the overall national objective as contained in Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013:14) are to prepare the individuals for:

- a. Useful living within the society; and
- b. Higher education.

However, in specific terms, secondary education shall:

- provide all primary school leavers with an opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious and ethnic background;
- offer diversified curriculum to cater for the difference in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- develop and project Nigerian languages, art and culture, in the context of world's cultural heritage;
- inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
- foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
- raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims, and live as good citizens; and
- provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, industrial commercial and economic development (FRN, 2013).

In order to realize these laudable aims and objectives of the secondary education system which will contribute to sustainable knowledge economy, quality assurance should be entrenched in the system.

Quality assurance is a way of preventing mistakes or defects in manufactured products and avoiding problems when delivering solutions or services to customers. Babalola (2004) defined quality assurance as a means of ensuring that the best practices are encouraged in a social system. This suggests that quality is seen as a degree of excellence while quality assurance is seen as a system of assuring that the quality of output meets the required standard at all times. The concern for quality has been at the core of the motivating forces for reforms in education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2006), in the same vein, stated that quality assurance in education is the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained.

Ehinder (2004) identified the objectives of establishing quality assurance in schools as follows:

- to serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in education;
- to ensure and maintain high standard of education at all levels;
- to assist in monitoring and supervision of education;
- to determine the quality of the teacher input to determine the number of classrooms needed based on the average class size to ensure quality control of education;
- to determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control;
- it would ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

If all these factors are met, the school system will be highly productive. The principal aim of quality assurance practices in secondary schools is to ensure the attainment of the objectives of the National Policy on Education. Secondary education is meant for every Nigeria citizen to be equipped to break the façade of unemployment through the development of self as a precursor to a meaningful contribution to the development and sustenance of a knowledge based economy.

Ani (2007) identified the following as the areas where quality assurance practices are applied in secondary education.

- maintenance of infrastructure;
- students' admission policy;
- strategic management planning;
- supervision of instruction;

- curriculum implementation; and
- students' learning environment.

The attention of this paper will at this juncture be focused on students' admission policy and strategic management planning.

All schools have admission policy. An admission policy contains criteria to be used as a caveat to admit students and others into a programme. An admission policy also provides other information such as requirements, reserve list procedures, deferring entry etc. Admissions can vary from one academic year to another. Prior to the adoption of the British system of Form six in 1950, there was no uniform quality assurance mechanism for the secondary schools. Each college adopted a technique it deemed most appropriate and acceptable to it. Each college had to set up its own academic standard, determine the admission and graduation requirements, and formulate its own policies regarding the monitoring and supervision of academic standards. The concomitant effect of this was a multiplicity of curricular with varying degrees of task difficulty and thus the absence of a uniform quality assurance mechanism as each of these schools was concerned with satisfying the interest of its establishing body (Nwogwugwu, 2003).

In pursuit of harmony and common standard of secondary education, five years duration of secondary education was adopted during the colonial era. The modus operandi of secondary education programme comprising admission policy, appropriate curriculum and approval guidelines were all to ensure quality and standard of the programme. Ojaleye and Ebeh (2002) pointed out that there is existence of positive relationship between entry qualification and students' performance. Such relationship, according to Alabi (2014), was required in order to secure a good match between the abilities and aptitudes of applicants and the demands of the programme.

Ehimetalor (2005) and Obanya (2007) expressed disenchantment for the admission policies of the government when they observed that the quota system of admitting candidates into government owned institutions gives room for inequality which affects the much talked about standard of education. According to them, there is no definite cut-off line for all candidates as a candidate from a particular local government may score high and may not be offered admission because there are many others from the same local government with higher scores. On the other hand, another candidate from another LGA who score as low as 35% is admitted because only a few candidates from the LGA scored above 35%. This system seems to negate some of the major national objectives such as 'free and democratic society; just and egalitarian society' as highlighted in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013). The points elucidated so far indicate that the process of admitting students into Nigerian secondary schools has some in-built problems that prevent the most qualified candidates to be offered admission. This situation, consequently, affects the quality of

secondary education products. There is need, therefore, for strategic management planning to surmount these problems in secondary education.

According to Bilesanmi (2006), strategic planning is the process of setting goals, deciding on actions to achieve those goals and mobilizing the resources needed to take those actions. The primary tasks of schools in strategic planning are to understand the school environment, define institutional goals, identify available options, make and implement decisions and evaluate actual performance. Thus, strategic planning aims to exploit the new and different opportunities of tomorrow, in contrast to long-range planning, which tries to optimize for tomorrow the trends of today (Drucker, 2005).

Most schools currently engage in long-range planning, but they can fruitfully augment that work by using strategic planning and thereby enhancing their ability to steer a course in a changing external environment. According to Onyishi (2007), strategic management planning deals with how one can use current and future resources to ensure the best life-line of an organization to move well in the future. Strategic management planning of the school is based on the belief that the successful development of the school is the result of finding the right fit between its internal strengths and weaknesses and the external opportunities and threats stemming from the school environment. The main assumption is that, in order to be effective, school management must be responsive to their environment, which is continuously changing. They must place emphasis on understanding the changes and adapting their decisions accordingly. Consequently, a careful scanning of the environment is important not only at the stage of making initial diagnosis for preparing a plan, but also, and even more so, at the stage of monitoring the plan implementation (Aguba, 2009).

Strategic planning cannot succeed without the commitment of the plan implementers and the different stakeholders. Commitment can only be obtained if people identify with the plan, so that they are motivated to produce the expected result (Obanya, 2005). Strategic planning should, therefore, not be carried out in isolation by the management alone, but rather as an inclusive process in which the implementers and stakeholders are actively involved in one way or the other. If organized in a participatory way, the preparation of the strategic plan in itself creates a privileged moment for opening new line of communication and dialogue for promoting understanding and ownership of what is being planned for and disseminating a spirit of strategic thinking throughout the whole education sector.

Statement of the Problem

The goals of secondary education are to prepare students for useful living and higher education. It is the products of this level of education that feed tertiary

institutions which sharpen them for social, economic and political engagements in the nation. It is against this background that assessment of quality assurance practices in secondary schools is of paramount importance if the educational objectives of secondary school are to be realized.

Education stakeholders in Ebonyi state have attributed this situation to the nature of quality assurance practices that prevail in secondary schools. Although there is a curriculum, but other areas like students' admission policy and strategic management planning are neglected and this hinders the achievement of secondary education goals.

These quality assurance practices which include students' admission policy and strategic management planning have been relegated to the background by school administrators. It is against this background that an evaluation of the practices in secondary schools in Ebonyi state has become imperative. The problem of this study is, therefore, to determine the extent of quality assurance practices that prevail in secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess quality assurance practices in secondary schools in Ebonyi state. specifically, the study sought to determine the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to:

1. determining students' admission policy into secondary schools.
2. Identify strategic management planning in secondary school.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent are quality assurance practices adhered to in students' admission policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi state?
2. To what extent is quality assurance reflected in strategic management planning in secondary schools in Ebonyi state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and quality assurance evaluators on the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to in students' admission policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi state.
2. There is no significant difference in mean rating of principals and quality assurance evaluators on the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to in strategic management planning in secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey which was used to determine the number of principals and quality assurance evaluators for the population. It was also used to get the number of schools for the study.

The study was conducted in Ebonyi state. The population for the study comprised all the 273 principals in public secondary schools and 71 quality assurance evaluators in Ebonyi state (Secondary Education Board, Ebonyi state, 2022). The total population, therefore, is 344. The sample for the study comprised of all the 344 principals and quality assurance evaluators drawn from the 344 public secondary schools in Ebonyi state. This represents 100% of the population for the study.

The instrument for data collection is a questionnaire titled “Assessment of Quality Assurance Practices Questionnaire (AQAPQ)” developed by the researcher. The items are on response scale of very high extent (4), high extent (3), low extent (2) and very low extent (1).

The validity of the instrument was determined by three experts; two in Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument was pilot tested on twenty principals and quality assurance evaluators in Enugu state. The internal consistency of the instrument was computed using Cronbach alpha. The reliability coefficient index of the instrument was 0.79.

The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher with the help of three research assistants. It was collected the following day. This was to ensure that the selected respondents go through it very well and to avoid mistakes on the part of the respondents. Out of 344 distributed, 327 were successfully retrieved. The questionnaire was designed to elicit necessary information from the respondents on the assessment of quality assurance practices. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Mean was used to answer research questions. Any mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted and adjudged great extent while any mean score below 2.50 was not accepted and therefore adjudged low extent. Standard deviation was used to determine how principals’ and quality assurance evaluators’ responses varied, while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One

To what extent is quality assurance adhered to in students’ admission policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi state?

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Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Principals and Quality Assurance Evaluators on Adherence to Students' Admission Policy in Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State.

Items		N=327						
S/N		VHE	HE	LE	VLE	X	SD	DEC.
1	Criteria for admission of students are adhered to.	19	32	79	197	1.61	0.89	LE
2	Only qualified students are admitted.	21	43	116	147	1.81	0.90	LE
3	Admission is granted based on catchment area.	109	121	5	2	3.58	0.56	HE
4	Only pupils who complete primary education are admitted into secondary schools.	187	133	6	1	3.55	0.55	HE
5	The required age for admission is adhered to.	235	41	95	156	1.86	1.01	LE
6	The result of aptitude test is used for admitting students.	8	33	88	198	1.54	0.77	LE
7	Principals resist external interference in students admission.	34	42	95	156	1.86	1.01	LE
Grand Mean						2.33	0.97	LE

Out of the 7 items in table 1, the respondents agreed with 2 of the items (3 and 4) to a high extent with mean scores of 3.58 and 3.55 respectively. They, however, disagreed with the remaining 5 items (1,2,5,6 and 7) to a low extent with mean scores of 1.61, 1.81, 1.86, 1.54 and 1.86 respectively. Their standard variation scores are small indicating that there is little variability in the respondents' responses. The grand mean

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is 2.33. going by the decision rule, the answer to research question 2 is that quality assurance is adhered to in students' admission policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi state to a low extent.

Research Question 2

To what extent is quality assurance reflected in strategic management planning in secondary schools in Ebonyi state?

Table 2; Mean Rating and Standard Deviation scores of Principals and Quality Assurance Evaluators on Reflection of Quality Assurance in Strategic Management Planning in Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State.

S/N	Items	N=327					SD	Dec.
		VHE	HE	LE	VLE	X		
8	The principal constitutes a management committee in the school to manage management issues.	125	108	69	25	3.02	0.95	HE
9	This team meets regularly.	153	102	68	4	3.24	0.82	HE
10	The school designs different strategies for school success.	138	102	81	6	3.14	0.85	HE
11	Parents are involved in the management of the school.	2	8	83	234	1.32	0.55	LE
12	Academic award are used as incentives for students.	211	97	17	2	3.58	0.62	HE
13	Teachers are motivated.	114	105	86	22	2.95	0.94	HE
14	In-service training is available for teachers' development.	98	95	81	53	2.73	1.06	HE
15	Training and retraining programmes are available.	268	42	9	8	3.74	0.63	HE
Grand Mean						2.97	0.74	HE

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Table 2 revealed that of the 8 items on the extent to which quality assurance is reflected in strategic management planning in secondary schools in Ebonyi state, the respondents affirmed that they do so as their mean scores for 7 items (8-10, and 12-15) are to a high extent, while item 11 is to a low extent. The grand mean is 2.97. Their standard deviation showed little variation. Going by the decision rule, the answer to research question 2 is that quality assurance is reflected in strategic management planning in Ebonyi state secondary schools.

Hypothesis one: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of principals and quality assurance evaluators on the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to in students' admission policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Table 3: t-test Result of Principals and Quality Assurance Evaluators on the Extent to which Quality Assurance Practices are Adhered to in Students' Admission Policy in Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State.

Variables	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-cri	Dec.
Principals	276	1.08	0.89				Do not
				325	0.55	1.96	Reject
Quality Ass. Evaluator	51	0.86	1.06				H ₀

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value is 0.55 while the critical t-value is 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This means that t-calculated is less than t-critical. This also means that no significant difference was found in the mean scores of principals and quality assurance evaluators on the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to in the students' admission policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and quality assurance evaluators on the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to in strategic management planning in secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Table 4: t-test Result of Principals and Quality Assurance Evaluators on the Extent to which Quality Assurance Practices are adhered to in Strategic Management Planning in Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State.

Variables	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-cri	Dec.
Principals	276	3.85	0.53	325	1.47	1.96	Do not Reject
Quality Ass. Evaluator	51	2.12	0.37				H ₀

Table 4 above indicates that calculated t-value of 1.47 is less than the critical t-value (1.96). Based on the criteria for making inferences, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and quality assurance evaluators on the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to in strategic management planning in secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

Discussion

In research question one, the respondents agreed that quality assurance practices are adhered to in students' admission policy in Ebonyi state to a low extent. The t-test result for the hypothesis indicated that no significant difference was found in the mean scores of principals and quality assurance evaluators with regard to the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to in students' admission policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi state. This finding agrees with the assertion of the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) conception of secondary education as the form of education after Primary Education. In order that students attend school regularly and on time, catchment area is considered. The result also agrees with the wrong admission policy practiced in some schools as highlighted by Ehiamezor (2005) finding where quota system admission policy of government owned educational institutions gives room for inequality which affects the much talked about standard of education. There seems to be no definite cut-off line for all candidates. Admission into any institution should be meritorious and not through any other short-cut. The result is also in agreement with the findings of Asuru (2012) on the major cause of examination malpractice as due to poor admission policy of unqualified candidates who are granted admission into schools.

Furthermore, it was found that quality assurance practices are adhered to strategic management planning of secondary schools in Ebonyi state to a low extent. The hypothesis showed no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and quality assurance evaluators on the extent to which quality assurance practices are adhered to in strategic management planning of secondary schools in Ebonyi state.

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This finding is in agreement with Chukwumah's (2015) findings that strategic management and planning examined are indicating a low extent but disagrees on the ground that schools develop their own pattern for progress. This finding is also in contrast with Obanya (2005) discovery that strategic management and planning cannot succeed without the commitment of the plan implementers. There is a link between strategic management, planning and performance. Pupils achievement is low due to lack of planning. There is, therefore, a strong positive relationship between success of institution and long term strategic management planning.

Conclusion

Based on the results obtained from the study, the following conclusion were drawn:

1. Quality assurance practices in secondary schools are necessary to ensure quality and standard in secondary school education.
2. The principals of secondary schools and quality assurance evaluators have significant roles to play to ensure that quality assurance practices are adhered to in students' admission policy and strategic management planning.

Recommendations

1. The criteria for admission of students must be specified and adhered to strictly without undue and unnecessary external interference.
2. There should be a common strategy for management and planning of secondary schools in the state, with a peculiar pattern to encourage the progress of individual schools.

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