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QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract
The quality of higher education in Nigeria is falling and this is affecting the social, economic and technological development of the country because the higher institutions are saddled with the responsibilities of manpower development of the country. In order to address this problem, there are various agencies designed to ensure quality assurance in the various higher institutions. These agencies are been confronted with many challenges. This paper is aimed to examine quality assurance and accreditation: challenges and solutions in Nigerian tertiary institutions. To achieve this, the researchers employed secondary data to justify the various points raised in the paper. Print materials and online publication were sorted and used in the paper. This paper identified; inadequate funding, shortage of academic staff, poor implementation of quality assurance policies, inadequate infrastructural facilities, strike actions, corruption, weak supervision, poor staff development as problems preventing quality assurance in the Nigerian higher institutions. To ensure quality in the Nigerian higher institutions, the following have been suggested: adequate funding, employment of adequate academic staff, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, fight all forms of corruption practices, implement all agreement reached with the different union groups, motivate academic staff, effective supervision and effective staff development.
Keywords: Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Universities

Introduction

Quality assurance and accreditation are critical components of the higher education landscape, serving as mechanisms to ensure that institutions meet defined standards of academic excellence and provide value to stakeholders. In Nigeria, a country with a rapidly expanding education sector, these processes play a pivotal role in safeguarding the credibility of degrees, fostering institutional accountability, and aligning educational outputs with national and global development goals. Ajayi, and Akindutire (2017). Accreditation standards and guidelines in Nigeria educational system is aimed at strengthening programme for quality assurance and quality improvement. It is a process that aids institutions in developing and sustaining effective educational programmes and assures the educational community, the general public, and other organizations that the accredited institution has met high standards of quality and effectiveness. (Kayode, 2012).

Despite their importance, the implementation of quality assurance and accreditation in Nigeria faces a plethora of challenges. The rapid increase in student enrollment, driven by population growth and a growing demand for higher education, further exacerbates the pressure on institutions and accreditation bodies. Additionally, the uneven distribution of resources between public and private institutions widens the gap in educational quality, creating disparities in outcomes. Quality assurance (QA) has been an issue at the forefront of educational system concerns for the past decade. It is the set of planned and systematic actions necessary to provide appropriate confidence that a product or service will satisfy the requirements for quality (Jacob et al., 2021). Also, an important part of defining the end-product of any educational system is the specification of its quality related features - which the system must then aim to deliver. Quality assurance and accreditation

are essential for maintaining educational standards and ensuring that higher education institutions deliver programs that meet national and international benchmarks. However, in Nigeria, the effectiveness of these systems has been significantly undermined by numerous challenges, posing a threat to the credibility and functionality of the country's education sector.

Obadara and Alaka (2013) submitted that tertiary institution is only as good as the quality of its teaching staff, they are the heart of the institution that produces its graduates, its research products, and its service to the institution, community, and nation. Every nation and its university graduates are competing in an environment shaped by its own local and national needs, as well as international expectations and standards. As a result, the success and competitiveness of graduates in tertiary institutions will be affected by those standards and expectations. The Nigerian government in order to guarantee quality of education and quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education, the Federal government established different agencies and commissions to supervise the activities of higher institutions in the country. The commissions include; National Universities Commission [NUC], National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE] and the National Board for Technical Education [NBTE].

Statement of the Problem

The decline in quality of education is brought about by a number of factors, which include poor quality assurance and accreditation. Accreditation processes are often marred by bureaucratic inefficiencies and inconsistencies, leaving room for subjective assessments and potential corruption. These issues erode the trust of stakeholders and create a disparity in the application of standards across institutions. Additionally, there is a significant gap in the training and professional development of staff responsible for implementing quality assurance measures. This deficiency limits the ability of institutions to effectively conduct internal evaluations and meet external accreditation requirements. Without addressing these issues, the credibility of Nigerian degrees and the competitiveness of its graduates on the global stage remain at risk.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

(i) To identify the challenges affecting the implementation of quality assurance and accreditation processes in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

(ii) To proffer solutions for improving the quality assurance and accreditation processes in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Quality Assurance

Quality in higher education is multi-dimensional and embraces all functions and activities of a university including teaching, academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment. Quality assurance refers to the systematic processes and policies put in place to ensure that educational institutions consistently provide high-quality education that meets specified standards. Obadara and Alaka (2013) defined quality assurance (QA) as the set of planned and systematic actions necessary to provide appropriate confidence that a product or service will satisfy the requirements for quality. Also an important part of defining the end-product of any educational system is the specification of its quality related features - which the system must then aim to deliver. Quality assurance is a global term used to incorporate the quality policy, quality management and quality control functions, which combine to assure the client that the product will be consistently manufactured to the required condition. Its aim is to achieve and assure quality through the adoption of a cost effective quality control system and through external inspections and audits. Quality assurance is a way of measuring, improving, and maintaining the quality of any human activity that has a value. It may be academic, sports performance, business, or economy. Quality assurance is a means of ensuring that the best practices are encouraged in a social system (Obadara & Alaka, 2013).

Babalola, (2014) observed that quality assurance deals with the practice of preventive achievements of students and the environment before things get out of hand while Kisailowska (2012) opined that quality assurance principles are a certain form of naming and ordering the actions that are necessary for assuring the quality, for instance of teaching, it is internally measured and evaluated at a given university, and also externally, during an accreditation process. As a result of this, quality assurance principles are to be used as indicators to ensure compliance. It is noteworthy that quality assurance principles regulate both the external and internal activities of an educational institution. In Nigerian universities, quality assurance involves:

Internal Processes: Institutions adopt internal mechanisms to monitor and evaluate their teaching, research, and administrative functions. These include regular self-assessment, peer reviews, and feedback systems to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

External Processes: National bodies like the National Universities Commission (NUC) oversee external quality assurance by setting minimum academic standards and conducting periodic audits to ensure compliance.

Accreditation

Accreditation is the formal process by which a regulatory authority evaluates and certifies that a university or its programs meet defined standards of quality. In Nigeria, the NUC is the primary body responsible for accrediting university programs. Accreditation is a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize an institution and/or its programmes for quality standards and need for quality improvement. (Romina, 2013). The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded the published standards (set by an external body such as a government, national quality assurance agency, or a professional association) for accreditation, and whether it is achieving its mission and stated purpose. The process usually includes a self-evaluation, peer review and a site visit. Accreditation is the establishment or of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme or module of study. Accreditation serves the following purposes:

Validation of Programs: Accreditation ensures that university programs align with national standards and global best practices, confirming their relevance and quality.

Protection of Stakeholders: It safeguards students, employers, and other stakeholders by guaranteeing that the education provided is credible and produces competent graduates.

Institutional Accountability: Accreditation holds universities accountable for maintaining academic standards, proper governance, and efficient resource utilization.

Benefits of Accreditation in Nigerian Universities

Improved Quality: Accreditation helps to improve the quality of academic programs and services.

Increased Credibility: Accreditation increases the credibility of a university and its programs.

Enhanced Employability: Accreditation enhances the employability of graduates.

International Recognition: Accreditation by a recognized accrediting agency can lead to international recognition of a university's programs.

Challenges of Accreditation in Nigerian Universities

Despite the benefits of accreditation, Nigerian universities face several challenges, including:

Inadequate Funding: To ensure quality assurance in the higher institutions required high investment in both human and materials resources. There are a lot of resources needed to guarantee quality assurance in the higher institutions. It is unfortunate that the budgetary allocation for the higher institutions are inadequate and this is affecting the quality assurance in the system. Romina (2013) submitted that the budgetary allocation for the administration of higher institutions is inadequate. Due to this problem, many school administrators cannot procure the necessary human and materials resources needed to ensure quality assurance in their various institutions.

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Shortage of Academic Staff: Another major problem preventing quality assurance attainment in most Nigerian higher institutions is the issues of shortage of academic staff. Ogunode and Ahaotu (2020) opines that many higher institutions do not have adequate lecturers to deploy for teaching in the various institutions. The shortage of lecturer is responsible for the poor quality of teaching and learning in most Nigerian higher institutions.

Poor implementation of Quality Assurance Policies: Poor implementation of quality assurance policies in majority of higher institutions in the country is another major problem preventing quality assurance attainment in the various institutions across the country. The various regulatory agencies are up with policies and standard to ensure quality assurance in the Nigerian higher institutions but the poor implementation of the policies is responsible for the poor quality of higher education in the country.

Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities: Inadequate infrastructural facilities is another big problem hindering quality assurance programme in the Nigerian higher institutions. Ogunode et al., (2020) defined school infrastructural facilities as social capital within the school environment.

Corruption: Corruption in the higher institutions is another big problem frustrating quality assurance. According to Punch (2021) corruption has penetrated the Nigerian higher institutions frustrating the activities and programme of quality assurance. Uvah, (2015) listed the following as forms of corruption in the Nigerian higher institutions: examination malpractice, admission racketeering, hostel profiteering, extortion of the students, abuse of office, sorting, forgery of certificates and statements of results, sexual harassment and immorality, embezzlement of funds, godfatherism, corruption in recruitment and promotion of staff, placing government's or management's machinery at the disposal of a particular student to win election during students" politics in the campus. The presences of corruption in the educational institutions is rendering the quality down. No any meaningful quality of education can be attained in the atmosphere filled with corruption practices.

Weak Supervision: Another problems responsible poor quality of education in the Nigerian higher institutions is that the various regulatory agencies both external and internal are weak in term of carrying out their responsibilities. Ogunode and Ahaotu (2020) submitted that Agencies of the various government established to ensure that both public and private schools compile with the educational policies in the country are weak. The ineffectiveness of these agencies and departments is responsible for the poor implementation of the policy in the country while Ehichoya and Ogunode (2020) observed that ineffective supervision is also responsible for poor teaching programme in higher institutions in Nigeria. The Nigerian government, in bid to ensure effective supervision of teaching programme in the higher institutions, established the following agencies: universities are supervised by the National Universities Commissions, while colleges of education are supervised by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). These supervisory agencies of higher institutions have not been effective in supervision of teaching programme at the various higher institutions due to many challenges that include underfunding, shortage of staffers, weak leadership and internal problems. The inability of these supervisory agencies to effectively supervise the activities of the higher institutions is one of the factors responsible for poor teaching in the higher institutions in Nigeria.

Methodology

The paper adopted the exploratory research design in which qualitative data was obtained through in-depth review of relevant literature and the researcher's personal observation of the scenario.

Conclusion

This study examined the challenges and solutions related to quality assurance and accreditation in Nigerian tertiary institutions, highlighting the critical role these processes play in enhancing the quality of higher education. Accreditation of universities be it institutional or programme is a way of examining the state of the institution in relation to where it out to be. It is a quality assurance process. It is the primary means by which

universities and programmes assure quality to students and the public. The importance of quality education cannot be underestimated in the higher institutions. Quality education determines the level of manpower available for the work force in the country. In Nigeria, the quality of higher education is falling. Many programmes have been designed to ensure quality assurance in the system but there are many factors preventing these quality assurance programme from realizing its mandate. This paper examined the factors preventing accreditation quality assurance programme from realizing its mandate. Inadequate funding, shortage of academic staff, poor implementation of quality assurance policies, inadequate infrastructural facilities, strike actions, corruption, weak Supervision, poor staff development as problems preventing quality assurance in the Nigerian higher institutions. To ensure quality in the Nigerian public higher institutions, the following have been suggested: Adequate funding, employment of adequate academic staff, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, fight all forms of corruption practices, effective supervision and effective staff development. The study underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in the Nigerian higher education system to ensure that quality assurance and accreditation processes are effectively implemented. By addressing the identified challenges and adopting the proposed solutions, Nigerian tertiary institutions can enhance their educational quality, thereby contributing to the overall development of the country.

Recommendations

Adequate funding: The government should increase the funding of higher education in the country. There should be committed effort by the governments (federal and states) to promote education through prompt financing in order to meet UNESCO's budgetary recommendation of 26% of annual budget.

Employment of Adequate Academic Staff: Federal and State Governments should embark on massive recruitment of academic staff in all the higher institutions in the country to cover up the gaps created in the teacher-students ratio.

Provision of Adequate Infrastructural Facilities: The federal government and state governments should provide adequate infrastructural facilities to all the higher institutions in the country especially the universities. There is need for adequate infrastructural facilities to ensure quality assurance.

Fight all Forms of Corruption Practices: Government at all levels should intensify effort to fighting all forms of academic corruption in higher institutions in the country by ensuring that the school administrators and anti-corruption agencies are working in collaboration.

Effective Supervision The government should strengthen all the agencies in charge of supervision of higher institutions in the country and ensure all the supervisory agencies are doing their job as mandated. This will help to improve the supervision of higher institutions. Higher institutions administrators should also put measures down to ensure internal supervision of teaching programme in their respective schools

Effective Staff Development The government and higher institutions administrators should develop an in-service program for all the academic staff yet to be certified as professional teachers to go for compulsory educational programme to enable them to improve their capacity of teaching and classroom management.

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