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QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION OF TVET INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract
The Education Act of 1985 that allows individuals, associations, government and companies incorporated in Nigeria that meet the criteria for establishing tertiary educational institutions to do so, is one of the factors that has led to proliferation of Polytechnics and Monotechnics in many states of Nigeria. It is therefore, important to supervise and regulate their activities in order to achieve the aim of education. Education reforms worldwide has moved from knowledge-acquisition to skill-acquisition programmes. Hence, the periodic review of curriculum, to align with industrial needs. Quality assurance is the proactive and continuous review of educational resources aimed at maintaining and improving quality and efficiency in academic processes to ensure they are fit-for-purpose. Accreditation is therefore, granted when an education program or institution has met the set quality standards. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) is the agency legally recognized in Nigeria to oversee and regulate the activities of polytechnics and monotechnics. Focusing on the two principles of quality assurance: "fit-for-purpose," and "right-first-time", the agency carries out its functions of accreditation meticulously to avoid sentiments. However, narrow stream of income, poor attention to indigenous technology, increasing cost of equipment, inability to align with technological innovations, staffing issues, poor maintenance culture, personnel gratifications, administrators disregard for standard and poor orientation of staff are some challenges faced by institutions and the agency. Sone solutions to these challenges include setting up a functional quality assurance unit in the institutions, pooling resources and political will to reverse the challenges outlined.
Keywords: Quality, Assurance, Accreditation, Challenges, Solution

Introduction

The value of any academic programme is measured by the quality of the resources needed to run such programme, which also reflect in the quality of the product (students) turned out by the institution. By the Education (National minimum standards and establishment of institutions) Act of 1985. individuals, associations, government (federal, state and local), companies incorporated in Nigeria that meet the criteria for establishing tertiary educational institutions are allowed to do so. This has led to proliferation of polytechnics and monotechnics offering technical and vocational programmes in many states of Nigeria. In as much as the establishment of these institutions is necessary to accommodate the teeming population with diverse needs in a dynamic society, it is also important to regulate and supervise the teaching and learning process in order to achieve the aim of education. To carry out the function of overseeing and regulating the activities of these institutions is the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), established by Act no 9 of 11 January 1977, the NBTE minimum standard decree 16 of 1985 and amended decree 1993 (NBTE, 2023a)
The NBTE achieves this through quality assurance and accreditation. In order to meet the changing needs/demands of a dynamic society, effective quality assurance and improvement should be paramount. Education reforms globally are moving from knowledge-aquisition programmes to a skill-acquisition

programmes. Hence the periodic review of curriculum, to align with industrial need. Products of the educational institutions are the students (graduants) and the services are the teaching and administrative processes, which can also be regarded as the input and process. Quality assurance is a proactive and continuous measure aimed at checking and improving academic processes to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose. It helps ensure that the right things are put in the right place and at the right time. Thus, aligning with the just-in-time management theory. Quality assurance is ascertained for both academic and non-academic activities such as teaching/learning methods, lecture timetable, students'/lecturers' attendance to class, teaching quality, content coverage, continuous assessment, setting examination questions, scores allocation to questions, script marking, result assessment, and more. administrative procedures and resource allocation. This supports an earlier assertion by the European Education Area (2022) that quality assurance helps to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of educational provisions and encompasses school self-evaluation, external evaluation, the evaluation of teachers, school leaders, and student assessments.

In the views of Westland (2024) 'quality assurance is a quality management process that involve establishing standards, guidelines and procedures to prevent issues pertaining to quality and maintenance of product or service integrity throughout its development'.

It is worthy to note that after the development of a product, such product should be sustained to meet the test of time.

Thus, the two principles of quality assurance namely, "fit-for-purpose," and "right-first-time" (Jason, 2024), must be implemented at all levels. This means that the product (students) and services (teaching, learning, administrative processes) must meet their intended purposes and any mistake detected during this process must be corrected or addressed immediately. Effective application of these principles, prepares the ground for resource verification by a team of assessors, objectively drawn from different institutions. A quality assurance unit, should be created in all polytechnics and monotechnics to provide quality control of all academic and non-academic processes, making sure it meets the curriculum content. This serves as a pre-cursor to accreditation

Accreditation on the other hand, according to Asokan (2024) is a process, carried out voluntarily by a recognized agency to evaluate and recognize the quality of an institution or program to ensure that it meets certain standards of quality and excellence. It is the result of a review of an education program or institution following certain quality standards agreed on beforehand. It recognizes that a program or institution fulfils certain standards. Accreditation emerged in Nigeria out of concerns to protect public health and safety, as well as to serve the public interest, thereby giving students, employers, families, funding/sponsoring individuals, organisations and governments at all levels confidence in the credibility of an institution's programs.

Accreditation can be institutional or specialized. Institutional accreditation evaluates the overall quality of an institution, while specialized accreditation evaluates specific programs or departments within an institution (Asokan, 2024). Institutional accreditation evaluates the overall quality of an institution. Factors such as the institution's fiscal status, finance, administrative capacity, staff credentials, teaching, quality of programmes run in the institution whether they are in the employers' scheme of service, institution/students' eligibility for grants, loans, funding and scholarships, recruitment and admission processes. The specialized accreditation evaluates specific programs or departments within an institution. This process creates an avenue for structural, equipment and material development and improvement of the higher institutions, because there are minimum requirements to run a programme or start an institution that must be met before accreditation is granted. Thus, to qualify for accreditation, institutions strive to meet these standards.

From the foregoing, it can be succinctly deduced that an institution that is running unaccredited programme lacks the resources to do so and is doing the students a disservice, because the programmes can be said to be undefined and inappropriate and thus not fit for purpose.

Accreditation facilitates the recognition of degrees within and outside the country and thus facilitates movement of graduates from one institution to another to run the same programme because, the institutions have independent approval for the same programme by the accrediting agency. It also provides access to financial aid by the governemnt and other funding opportunities. Employers are willing to provide financial assistance for their employees who are admitted in accredited institutions or programmes, because they are confident that they would get the necessary knowledge and skill to enhance their job performance. The students are also confident that they will receive quality education, and the credits received would be sufficient to prepare them for their chosen career. It is easier for government to make fund available to accredited colleges and allow students to sit for licensure examinations from accredited colleges, especially when the government would require the services of the students. This happens in professional and specialized programmes like medicine, nursing, engineering and many others, and when there is a special need for a particular work force. It is unlawful for an institution to run unaccredited programmes. Therefore, when accrediting, quality assurance should be guaranteed in order to sustain the standard (Zavale, 2021: Asokan, 2024: Shaffer, 2025)

Commencing a new programme begins with the institution's initiation of request for accreditation, on receipt of the request, an amount to be paid is specified by the NBTE. On confirmation of payment, an electronic self-study questionnaire (eSSQ) is completed, verified and submitted to NBTE. The NBTE schedules a physical verification visit, approval and programme activation. (NBTE, 2022) The physical verification visit is to objectively inspect the structures, cite documents and meet/interview personnel one-on-one, visit training centres outside the institution etc, to authenticate what is contained in the eSSQ. By NBTE regulation, an institution is sanctioned if there is a disharmony between what is documented in the eSSQ and what is seen physically (Bello et al 2024). The institution could be allowed to run the programme completely, if it meets the requirement, or partially, if it lacks resources of little significance to the programme, or not allowed at all, if it lacks very significant resources to run the programme.

Challenges of Quality assurance and accreditation

Quality assurance and accreditation are inevitable. It is unlawful for an institution to run unaccredited programmes. It is a disservice to the students and the society. It is detrimental to the national and international economy. It also gives the institution a negative public image. As a result, administrators of institutions struggle hard to get their institutions and programmes accredited in order to increase their student enrolment status, attract more funding and improve their public image. To achieve this is not without challenges.

Cost, inadequate, obsolete regulatory instruments, corrupt practices and related offences funding, integration of the entire institution, staffing, poor infrastructural facilities, educational facilities, research and publications, political interference, have been identified as some challenges of accreditation (Zavale, 2021: Obilor & Ikpa, 2022: QAHE Association, 2024: Bello, et al 2024)

Pushpakumara et al (2023), categorized three main challenges which they coined as, institute-related issues, quality assurance process-related issues and stakeholders-related issues. These are listed as management not involving in quality assurance activities, bottleneck posed in monitoring quality assurance process, resistance from academic staff in contributing to the quality assurance process, difficulties in maintaining documents, poor access to required data and poor linkage with external quality assurance.

Watergate (2025) mentioned application of paper-based assessment as a major challenge. Paper-based assessments involve entering important data into numerous pages of paper and transferring the data to digital spread sheet. The process can be tedious, time and energy-wasting. The problem of error encountered during data entry is also inevitable.

Challenges outlined in this paper are as follows:

1. Narrow stream of income: Most polytechnics and monotechnics rely on school fees alone as the only source of income. This poses a very huge challenge in ensuring quality, because the fees will never be sufficient to purchase all that the institution requires to ensure quality education, hence it also impedes accreditation.

2. Disregard to improving indigenous technology: The country still depends heavily on importation of equipment and ignoring the indigenous production. This has led to a dearth in that industry, with resultant lack of equipment.

2. Increasing cost of equipment: Most programmes require the use of high-profile equipment. Health-related programmes such as dispensing opticianry, paramedic technology, medical laboratory technology, dental technology, medical imaging technology to mention a few require high profile and expensive equipment for training. Most of this equipment are imported and so require currency exchange which is affected by high inflation rate in the country.

3. Inability to align with technological innovations: The new NBTE requirement to digitalize academic processes has not been fully implemented by most polytechnics and monotechnics. The reasons for the delay range from lack of ICT equipment, untrained staff, lack of fund, problems of electricity and data availability, and the rule-of-thumb mentality of some staff among others.

4. Limited number of staff with requisite qualification: Staffing is a key factor in the quality assurance and accreditation process. Most institutions lack staff with the requisite qualification for a particular programme. Such institutions resort to hiring of experts for accreditation, thus incurring additional financial burden.

5. Fear of litigation: Hired staff are usually given a letter of appointment. There is the possibility of the staff claiming afterwards to have been fully employed by the institution. This fear could be a setback for the institution during accreditation.

6. Poor maintenance culture: Quality assurance and accreditation provides an avenue for equipping an institution. In certain instances, this equipment is allowed to deteriorate after the exercise, thus subjecting the institution to extra financial burden of re-purchasing the equipment for subsequent accreditation.

7. Financial demands by some members of the quality assurance and accreditation team: The accreditation team comprise individuals from various fields and institution. They are selected based on the programme to be accredited. Most of these individuals lack credibility. They make personal financial demands from the head of institution or the head of department, thus lowering the standard of the process.

8. Administrator's disregard for standard: Some heads of institutions choose to recycle the institutions resources for each accreditation exercise. This is evident in situations where different programmes are accredited at different times, staff offices and classrooms are usually recycled.

9. Lack/poor orientation of staff and institution community: Many staff lack the knowledge in what is required to ensure quality and success in accreditation. They end up not been able to provide correct answers to questions posed by the accreditation team. This could result to failure

Solutions to Challenges of Quality Assurance and Accreditation

1. Expand the stream of income: The institution can diversify in other areas of income generation such as endowments, loan schemes, and many more. Federal government to adequately fund the educational sector, so as to relieve institutions from some financial burdens, borne during accreditation
2. Recognition and funding of indigenous technology to boost local production.
3. Increasing the workforce with persons with the requisite skills and knowledge, by opening the employment channels, and application of equity and fairness in employment. This will reduce the problem of hiring personnel during accreditation with its accompanying problems.
4. Formulating and implementing fiscal and financial policies to reduce inflation and improve the value of the naira. This will assist in reducing cost of production and improve supply.
5. Staff to adopt good maintenance culture to safeguard educational resources and avoid wastage.
6. Proper selection of personnel for accreditation to avoid inclusion of persons with questionable credential that would seek personal gratifications.
7. Punitive measures instituted on institutions and administrators who fail to adhere to standards.

Conclusion

Conclusively, it is important to note that quality assurance and accreditation are not one-off activities but a continuous process. Therefore, every institution must have a functional quality assurance unit that would ensure continuous monitoring and correction of academic processes, making sure that they comply to standards set by the NBTE, to avoid or reduce the rat race observed whenever accreditation visit is scheduled. Quality assurance and accreditation gives confidence to all stakeholders in the education sector; hence all staff must be knowledgeable of quality assurance and accreditation requirements and key in accordingly.

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