

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

By

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Introduction and Background

It is no gain saying that basic education has become inadequate to meet the challenges of the growing world not only in Nigeria but also in the entire global village. The demand for higher education has, therefore, become imperative and fast increasing geometrically (Fabiya and Oladipo, 2004). The global perception agrees that for economic and social development to be derived effectively, there is a need for advancement in, and application of knowledge. The World Bank (2009) reported that education in general, and university education in particular, is fundamental to the construction of knowledge economy and society in all nations. The report also identified the fact that the potentials of higher education systems in developing countries to fulfil this responsibility is frequently thwarted by long standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance. These challenges are linked to the growing role of knowledge in economic development, rapid changes in telecommunications, technology and globalisation of trade and labour markets (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2004).

The communiqué of Gender Budgeting Initiative (2003) highlights the importance of access to quality education as both a basic need (one which is necessary to the fulfilment of individual's personhood) and also a strategic need (that which will yield access to other opportunities such as health, employment and political awareness). It also sees access to quality education by all regardless of class or gender as a critical element of development as education helps to nurture democracy and promote peace. In view of the above, the fact that acquisition of education, most especially university education, is essentially important and useful to man.

Every secondary school graduate struggles to gain admission to the university. Ene (2007) observes that there seems to be a general perception among Nigerians that only a university

degree can promise a good future. According to him, the demand for university education has reached an unprecedented high level that double the current number of universities in the country, will be required to fill this need.

Table 1: Enrolment growth in Nigerian Universities between 1999-2009

Academic Session	No of Applicant	No Admitted	% Admitted	No of Unplaced Applicants
1999/2000	418, 292	64, 368	15.39	353, 924
2000/2001	416, 381	45, 766	10.99	370, 615
2001/2002	714, 548	90, 769	12.70	623, 779
2002/2003	994, 380	51, 845	5.21	942, 535
2003/2004	1, 046, 950	105, 157	10.04	941, 793
2004/2005	841, 878	122, 492	14.54	719, 386
2005/2006	916, 371	65, 609	7.16	850, 762
2006/2007	803, 472	123, 626	15	679, 846
2007/2008	911, 653	119, 195	13	792, 458
2008/2009	1, 054, 060	127, 082	12	926, 978

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board, 2008

Table 1 above, thus, depicts that people have come to realize the importance of university education in one's life as a means for social mobility, self development and self actualization. Nigeria has the largest university system in Sub-sahara Africa, although, South Africa's tertiary enrolments are higher. Nigeria has 103 universities (27 federal, 35 states and 41 private) all enrolling over 400, 000 students (NUC, 2009). Nigerian university system reports numerous graduates programmes and serves as a magnet for students from neighbouring countries. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board administers a national university entrance examination and informs universities of applicant's scores.

Notably, enrolments in the federal universities (34% female, 59% sciences) grew at the rapid rate of 12% annually during the 1990s and totalled 325, 299 students by 2000 (NUC, 2002). Enrolment growth rates were the highest in the South-South Region, followed by the North East Region. However, the overall growth rates far exceeded government policy guidelines as shown below:

Table 2: Enrolment growth-Policy Norms and Rates of Increasing between 1989/90 and 1998/99

Category	NUC Policy Norms	Actual Growth Rates
1 st Generation Universities	3%	9%
2 nd Generation Universities	10%	13%
3 rd Generation Universities	15%	21%

Source: Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2004)

However, efforts to expand enrolment and improve educational quality are severely constrained by growing shortages of qualified academic staff. Between 1997 and 1999, the number of academic staff declined by 12% even as enrolment expanded by 13%. Long-term brain drain combined with insufficient output from national postgraduate programmes in the face of rising enrolments, has left the federal university system with only 48% of its estimated staffing needs filled. Staffing scarcity was most acute in engineering, science and business disciplines. Shortfalls were estimated at 74% in engineering, 62% in Medicine, 58% in administration and 53% in Sciences. In contrast, no staffing shortages exist in the disciplinary areas of Arts and Education (NUC, 2002). All these pointed to the challenges of the university system in Nigeria which culminated in decline in quantity.

Quality and Quality Assurance/Quality Control: A Theoretical Framework

Quality is a slippery concept, which implies different things to different people (Pfeffer and Coote, 1991). It is that which best satisfies and exceeds customers needs and wants (Artzt, 1992). Quality can be said to lie in the eyes of the beholder. This is because the consumers, who make the judgement on quality, do these by reference to the best comparable performance.

Quality refers to the standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things like it: how good or bad something is, that is, to be of good/poor/top quality or of a high standard. In this context, it is associated with the 'monitoring and evaluation component of education' to see whether the outcome is good and of the intended standard. In view of this, topical issues in Nigerian education system today centre around the quality of education imparted to the citizenry and the relevance of that education to the life of the individual in particular and the nation in general. Quality education, according to Mosha (1997) is:

“measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment”.

There is the general feeling that the quality of education imparted with curricula that are limited to parochial concerns may no longer be adequate in the face of prevailing global situation. The curricula they contended have outlived their usefulness and thus have little relevance to the needs, aspirations and values of today's Nigeria and her education system.

Hence, quality factors in education are indispensable, for excellence in education is required for the development of the human resource base needed to catapult Nigeria into an enviable position in the comity of nations.

Quality assurance on the other hand, is about consistently meeting product specification or getting things right first time, every time. Quality assurance in the university system implies the ability of the institutions to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to quality of skills acquired by their outputs (Ajayi and Akindutire, 2007). Equally, it can be said to be the ability of the universities to meet certain criteria relating to academic matters, staff-students ratio, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding and adequate library facilities. Adequacy of various inputs in the university system, in terms of quality and quantity, exercises tremendous influence on quality assurance in the university system. Quality assurance is a key component of successful internationalization, mechanism for building institutional reputation in a competitive local and global arena and necessary foundation for consumer protection (NUC, 2007).

Quality is the ability or degree with which a product, service, or phenomenon conforms, to an established standard, and which make it to be relatively superior to other. With respect to education, this implies the ability or degree with which an educational system conforms to the established standard and appropriateness, of the inputs available for the delivery of the system. {Fadipe 1999, Yoloye 1976 and Thomas 1991} Quality in education, therefore means the relevance and appropriateness of the education programme to the needs of the community for which it is provided.

Quality control, as defined by Olagboye, {1997} is the arrangement made or the mechanism put in place to maintain the degree of excellence of a product or service. Applies to education, it means, the mechanism by which an education system ensures that the service it delivers or intends to deliver serve the purpose for which it is intended. It focuses on the means by which an educational system ensures that the service it provided remains relevant and appropriate to the needs of the societies. It involves series of operational techniques and activities which include all actions taken when requirement for quality are met. Indices for quality assurance in education according to Ehindero {2004} will include:

- **Learners:** their entry behaviours, characteristics, and attributes including some demographic factors that can inhibit or facilitate their learning;
- **The teachers:** their entry qualifications, values, pedagogic skills, and professional preparedness.
- **The teaching/learning process:** including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment
- **Flow of operational fund;** its adequacy and regularity.

The interplays of these and other related factors will go a long way in determine the outcome of any educational programme.

However, Zelvys (2004) perceived that the concept of quality has been one of the most important concepts in contemporary educational terminology. Many educationists have attempted to define the quality of education and educational assurance. Alele – Williams (2004) defines 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.

Oderinde (2004) enumerated two aspects of quality in education, which are both internal and external. The internal aspect is the implementations of the school objectives while the external aspect deals with the implementation of national objectives which are pre-requisites to the achievement of quality in any educational institution. Middlehurst (2001) describe the scope of quality assurance as including the following dimensions:

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

In summary, Middlehurst sees quality as a grade of achievement, a standard against which to judge others. By this conceptual understanding, it can be said that the emphasis on quality assurance is the training of personnel to enhance their performance in work places.

Problem

The experience of the industrialized nations has established a causal relationship between heavy investment in university education and economic growth and social development. Under the pressure to expand access and at the same time, reduce the financial burden of education, governments take relief to welcome other providers of higher education. However, the onus falls on government to ensure that quality is assumed through the maintenance of minimum accepted standards in all institutions of higher education. Kasirim (2005) observed that in African, Nigeria inclusive, where capacity problem is believed to be a major impediment to economic growth, private providers of higher education play an important role in alleviating this problem. Inadequate capacity explains in large part, the failure of African countries to respond appropriately and timely to international cooperative initiative such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP).

Private universities are definitely on the increase in Africa, Nigeria witnessing the fastest growth. Among the factors responsible for the increase in private provision of higher education in Nigeria are: the rapid growth in the university age population; public outcry about deterioration in quality of public education. The decline in quality is brought about by a number of factors, which include demography, poor states of economy, weak internal capacity, poor governance, poor research activities, brain drain, political interference, incessant industrial actions, unruly and destructive conduct of undergraduates, poor preparation of entering students, unsuitable policy environment, poor funding, shortage of instructional materials, laboratory equipment and poor library facilities; other factors are unexpected consequences of government policy at the primary and secondary level, all of which have had devastating effect on the quality of education (Ijeoma and Osagie, 2005; Nwuke, 2005; Uvah, 2005; FME, 2003 and Efanga, 2005). This has therefore informed this study.

Quality Assurance Measuring Parameters

Quality of education could be measured in terms of quality of input, quality of output, quality of content and quality of process.

Quality of Resource Input: It is often said that no education can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teacher is the most important of all the inputs that go into educational provision. This is because education of the highest quality requires teachers of the highest quality. Education in Nigeria today seems to lack, not only quality programmes but also quality and dedicated teachers. Most of the teacher education institutions including Faculties of Education turn out teachers that are deficient in content and methodology. As a result, are unable to teach effectively which takes its toll on the quality of education imparted. There is thus, the need for the Government to review and overhaul the curriculum for Teacher education at all levels of Nigerian education in order to meet the demand of 21st century. Government, as a matter of urgency, needs to embark on Quality Teacher Programmes. Special attention needs to be paid to the quality of candidates being admitted to the teacher education programme. According to available statistics, there are about 426,794 primary school teachers and approximately 16,945,567 pupils enrolled in 40,876 primary schools utilizing 456,512 classrooms (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2001). It is highly imperative to know that all these are affected by the quality of the products of the universities, simply because university products serve as teachers, administrators, planners, heads and supervisors at the lower level of education. There is disparity between policy and practice.

Quality of Output: The quality of education does not depend only on resource inputs, but also on the output, which include academic achievement on tests, scores and progression and pass rates, thus, the internal and external efficiency. The Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) project, a nationwide study conducted between 1994 – 1996 and the report published in 1997 by the Federal Ministry of Education, with the support of UNICEF and UNESCO. Three learning areas were selected for the MLA studies namely:

- Numeracy
- Literacy and
- Life skills (a combination of science, social studies and general Knowledge).

The MLA study in Nigeria gives considerable insight into the quality of output especially at the lower level of education in Nigeria. The result of the study indicates that an average

public primary school child in Nigeria can neither read, write nor calculate properly. Several reasons have been given to explain this:

- Lack of textbooks and writing materials. The National Situation and Policy Analysis (SAPA) survey conducted under the auspices of UNICEF and the Federal Government in 1992 showed that 77% of public primary pupils had not textbooks while 36% had no writing materials, science equipment were lacking in the majority of the schools.
- The poor quality of instruction; among others. Generally, it is believed that poor quality education exists at all levels of education in the country because similar problems exist at all levels.

If the consequence of the above scenario is to be reversed, in order to meet the challenges of globalization, Nigeria must therefore, begin by giving greater attention to the entire sector, i.e our pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational foundation and tertiary levels. All stakeholders in education should endeavour to play their roles doggedly to ensure qualitative education in Nigeria.

Quality of Process: This implies student/teacher interaction, level of learner participation and engagement in learning. In an earlier study, Ali and Akubue, (1998) found that teachers in dominated the lessons and posed few open-ended questions. Group work which encourages discussion is rarely encountered, and only 10% of teachers used continuous assessment. Okebukola (1998) observational studies showed that boys are given greater opportunities than girls to ask and answer questions, to manipulate materials and to lead groups. In science classroom interaction, girls were also given less time on practical work than boys.

Quality of Content: The curriculum content of our educational system had been criticized as being overloaded, and does not sufficiently attend to the needs of the Nigerian learner. The data from the Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) project has also shown that there is a wide gap between the intended curriculum and the achieved curriculum. However, this criticism had been challenged because the curriculum content of our institutions compares favorably with those in other countries. What is needed in our system is a re-ordering of the curriculum content i.e. (the intended curriculum) and an enrichment of the achieved curriculum and the implemented curriculum with focus on relevance and functionality. The achieved curriculum is the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are achieved or learned while

the implemented curriculum is the translation of curricula intentions into reality in classrooms, laboratories, workshops, playgrounds and other settings for learning not losing sight of the language provisions in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004). Sequel to this, there should be flexible curriculum. Curriculum rigidity must give way to ‘curriculum liberality’. Such curriculum must be relevant to both individual learner’s needs and societal needs at large.

Challenges of Quality in Nigerian Universities

In the early years in Nigeria, it is glaring that the university was regarded as the single most important industry for the production of high-level manpower and the capstan of the entire educational system. University training according to Ume (1979) aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, cultivating the public mind, purifying the national taste, supplying the principles of popular aspirations and giving enlargement and sobriety to ideas of the age. It is not surprising then that stakeholders in University education tend to guard jealously the integrity of the university and the quality of graduates produced.

It is on record that Nigerian Universities have been producing high quality graduates in the past. As affirmed by Daisi (1997), many graduates from the nation’s universities have distinguished themselves in their areas of specialization so much that some of them are now professors in the best universities across the globe. This attestation is quite resounding more so that quality entrants transformed into quality graduates. Due to declining quality in recent years, however, the accolade attached to Nigerian Universities seems to have faded away. This is informed by the flood of criticisms that becloud the admission procedures and quality of graduates produced. In his keynote address delivered at the first education summit of Oyo State held in Ibadan, Okebukola (2006) decried the quality of graduates produced in Nigerian Universities especially in the last four years and thumbed down the quality of those that would graduate in the next three years. Similarly, Adebayo (2007) commented that the non-inclusion of any of the nation’s universities in the world best 500 universities is unsavoured and worse still, Nigeria ranked number 44 after Ghana, Kenya and South Africa in the ranking of African Universities.

Previous studies in this area (Nwokocha, 1997; Ige, 1997; and Jemibewon, 1997) have pointed out that many entrants into the Nigerian Universities are deficient in academic quality.

Indeed Nwokocha (1997) called the attention of the stakeholders in University education in Nigeria to the purported letter written by the British Council alerting the British Universities in general terms that Nigerian degrees are no longer comparable to honours in the United Kingdom no matter which university has awarded the degree and in what discipline. Ige (1997) revealed how he stumbled on the examination scripts of some undergraduates in one of the nation's universities and described the performance of such undergraduates as deplorable.

In another development, the NUC (2004) assessment study on labour market expectations of graduates from Nigerian Universities revealed that there were scores of unemployed graduates roaming the streets and more embarrassingly, those who were lucky to secure employment had to undergo remedial training in order to bridge the huge knowledge and skills gaps left over from university training. This tends to negate the tenet of University education which is essentially an industry established to produce quality workforce for national development.

Nigeria has unilaterally opened its doors to foreign programmes and commercial presence of institutions and benefited from such arrangements for a long time. The negative impacts of the foreign educational providers in some cases are provision of poor quality programmes, insufficient commitment and monitoring of the delivery by partner institutions, different quality standards, indifference or general ignorance to national criteria, local needs and policies, issues comparability of quality of education, faculty staff, and lack of clear information. Cultural differences and issues relating to recognition of qualifications.

Other new challenges faced by authorities come with the technology mediated provision of higher education, fraudulent qualifications and practices.

Recent development in the Nigerian university system seems to indicate that all is not well as expected with the quality assurance in Nigerian universities system. The scenario appears worrisome when viewed against the background that Nigeria once served as the hub of university education in the West-African sub-region. This development revolves round a lot of factors ranging from the collapse of essential infrastructure to explosion in students enrolment without corresponding increasing in funding.

Nigerian universities cannot meet their expectations especially in terms of the quality of teaching and research. Lack of adequate funding has clearly impaired the performance and standard of Nigerian universities as the vicious circle of inadequate funds, helplessness, frustration and recriminations is continually fed in a mutually reinforcing manner (Kayode, 2002).

Babalola (2001) reported that Nigerian universities are currently in crisis. He further stressed that there is less money to spend on teaching, research and community services. Libraries are ill equipped, laboratories lack essential apparatus, classrooms are dilapidated and office accommodations are mirage. Many of Nigerian universities even lack lecturers in their right quality and quantity.

Other militating factors against quality assurance in Nigerian Universities are discussed thus:

Under funding: One of the greatest challenges that appear to face the Nigerian universities is that of under funding. Finance is so crucial to any organisation as it continues to dominate discussions on state of university education in Nigeria. The establishment and the running of tertiary institutions are capital intensive.

Running the institution, therefore, requires significant investment in providing and maintaining a basic level of infrastructure – such as facilities, staff salaries, and residential housing. Universities in Nigeria have been supported largely by government kinds in the time past, but with economic down-turn, these universities have been grossly under-funded and this had invariably led to the quality being adversely affected. Some of these institutions are characterised by poor infrastructures, overcrowded classrooms, incessant strike and students' unrest.

Enrolment Explosion: This over enrolment has become a common feature in the Nigerian universities. Many of the facilities on ground are being overstretched. Okebukola (2005) released the list of some overcrowded universities recently where Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago-Iwoye topped the list with excess enrolment of 24,628 students. A development that surely will affect the quality of university education in Nigeria, since excess

enrolment usually leads to overcrowded classrooms, ineffective teaching and examination malpractices.

Inadequate Physical Facilities: The state of physical facilities in many of the Nigerian universities is revealed by the NUC (2006) report that facilities in Nigerian universities are in poor shape, the available physical facilities are severely overstretched and ill maintained. Hence, with this development quality seems not to be guaranteed in such universities.

Poor Management: The way and manner some of the Nigerian universities are being managed by the university administrators is also have consequential effect on quality assurance in the universities. For most of the universities, management means little more than playing the role of “Caretaker”. This vital function has been largely reduced to the maintenance of the status quo. This unfortunate development significantly negates the concept of a university, particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. It seems certain that as long as management continues to play this non-challant role, the quality assurance will continue to be jeopardized in the universities.

Inadequate staffing: One of the reasons for low level of quality assurance in Nigerian universities is a severe shortage of teaching staff. Report from NUC, 2006) shows that only 16,856 out of 72,704 staff in the federal universities are academic staff. Many universities in Nigerian are bottom heavy in terms of academic staff mix.

Quality Control Measures for sustainable University Education

Leadership/ Administration of Higher Education: Some individuals appointed as vice chancellors of some university are weak, not competent and lack administrative potentials; such appointees must possess administrative qualities and must lead by example. The leader must have integrity, must be knowledgeable, and practice modern types of management leadership styles. He or she must be visionary and ready to adjust to situations in the system. The performance of the administrator should be sustained through the proper utilization of materials and human resources in the achievement of the institutional goals and objectives.

Internal Quality Assurance: The Commonwealth of Learning (1999) defines quality assurance as an approach to organizing work that sets in place system to check that the

programmed activities are carried out according to its plan. To ensure internal control and quality assurance, student intake and quality of university products must be controlled right from admission stage. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board in Nigeria has demonstrated integrity in conducting her examinations, while the various universities have come up with the POST- JAMB Screening. It is expected that, the POST-JAMB Policy will prevent morally bankrupt students from gaining admissions.

Teaching / Learning: The National Commission for Colleges of Education (2002) stated that, the teacher is the King-pin of quality in education. There are situations where students with bright academic performance fail to actualize their life ambitions because of the incompetent and ineffective teachers within the system. It is expected that academic staff perform their role through proper teaching, guidance and counseling of students to gainfully learn from them and their personal positive examples in the areas of character and learning.

Supervision / Inspection: Ojugwu (2001) maintains that supervision creates the awareness of sound education philosophies in teachers and makes them to be aware of educational policies and reforms. Thus, supervisors are to play leadership roles that would stimulates and encourage both staff and students in the system to perform their duties as to achieve the institutional task or objectives. Also the effective supervision of instruction will help administrators to identify the quality of lecturers in the institution. It will also check and balance academic staff, non-academic staff and students.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Through constant monitoring and evaluation of system activities in terms of effective control by the different heads of units or departments and constant feedback to management and good utilization of reports the standard in the system would be raised high and sustained. The Role of National University Commission (NUC) in system performance cannot be overlooked. As an external quality assurance agency of the Nigerian University Systems, it has the following role:

- Advising the Federal Government on the establishment and location of universities, creating new facilities and post graduate units in the universities.
- Advising Government on the fundamental needs of the universities.
- Carrying out periodic plans on the general programme to be pursued by universities staff.

- Preparing periodic plans on the general programme to be pursued by the universities.
- Receiving and distributing Federal grants to Federal Universities.
- Establishing and maintaining the minimum academic standards.
- Accrediting the degrees and other academic programme awarded by the universities (Lassa, 1992). The audit role and the supervisory functions of NUC has indeed contributed to the quality and sustainability of higher education in Nigeria.

Policy Measures for Quality Assurance Structure in Nigerian University System

Designing a curriculum that is responsive to the learner's endlessly changing requirements will necessitate not only a greater emphasis upon individualization, but a willingness to restructure the ends and means of instruction, and to place a much large reliance upon both technology and the available learning experiences in the outside community. More importantly, the Federal Ministry of Education, together with its parastatals and agencies are working hard to ensure the achievement of the MDGs as well as EFA. For instance, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) had the mandate to develop and review curricula periodically on relevant educational and developmental issues. It has taken care of this at the basic and secondary education levels.

There are other salient problems that culminated in eroding the very high standards with which the Nigerian educational system was associated over several decades. These include: poor quality entrants (higher level), too much emphasis on paper qualification, poor funding which led to a disparity between educational philosophy and objectives on the one hand, and the practice on the other; contextual problems of rapid transformation, improper mission interpretation, inappropriate curricula, opening and closure of universities, students' unrest, incessant strike which often led to tuggery, armed robbery, gangsterism, cultism, paucity of academic staff as well as problem of staff retention, lack of quality assessment, poor infrastructural facilities for teaching and research, the phenomenon of students' migration to foreign countries, among others. These call for strategic planning which the Nigerian educational system stands to benefit immensely from.

After the planning process has been agreed upon, the next step is environmental scanning. This is a very crucial step in the overall process. It requires that the institution conducts an analysis of its strength, weakness, opportunities and threats; otherwise called the "SWOT

analysis". After this, Gap analysis can be conducted in order to identify Options and Publicize the Plan. Implementation and Monitoring phase is equally of paramount importance. Assuring the quality of education provision is a fundamental aspect of gaining and maintaining credibility for programmes, institutions and national systems of higher education world-wide. Quality assurance is designed to prove and improve the quality of an institution's methods, and educational products and outcomes.

The National University commission (NUC) empowered by Act No 16 of 1985, first established benchmarks for the assessment of quality in Nigerian Universities in 1989. The commission developed the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) and organised a stakeholder's conference on curriculum review in 2001 to draw up subject benchmarks. In Nigeria, these are the federal, state and private universities, presently totalling 103 as pointed out earlier.

All categories of universities are subject to federal government's regulations for maintenance of quality of education. Regulatory and monitoring mechanisms put in place to ensure quality through external review, according to Uva (2005), include NUC's accreditation of undergraduate programmes; ranking of universities and Quality Support Mechanism (QSM) such as Virtual Library, Virtual Institute for Higher Education Pedagogy (VIHEP), etc. For internal quality assurance, the focus is the area of admission requirement, process for establishment of new programme, programme review exercises, external examination system and internal self review so that continuous maintenance of standards of teaching, research and community/public service is assured.

It is obvious that the philosophical objectives of quality assurance are the decision of educational programme to train individuals to achieve competence in a given area of industrial production function. The focus of which, is to prevent problems, strengthen organizational systems and continually improving performance. Thus, quality assurance is the ability of educational institutions to meet the need of the use of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their products. With this, the quality of an academic programme becomes a universal concern. The NUC reported the first attempt at universalization of quality assurance in higher education across the globe in 2004. The study ranked the universities in terms of their productive functions, and the relative efforts on their product.

No African universities were ranked, including Nigeria. Since this development, the NUC has heightened its efforts in standardizing the quality of university education in Nigeria. To establish and maintain high quality standards, the universities and the NUC have a shared responsibility in addressing the following key areas, according to Adedipe, (2007).

- Minimum academic standard.
- Accreditation
- Carrying capacity and admission quota
- Visitation
- Impact assessment
- Research and development
- Publications and research assessment
- Structures, infrastructures and utilities

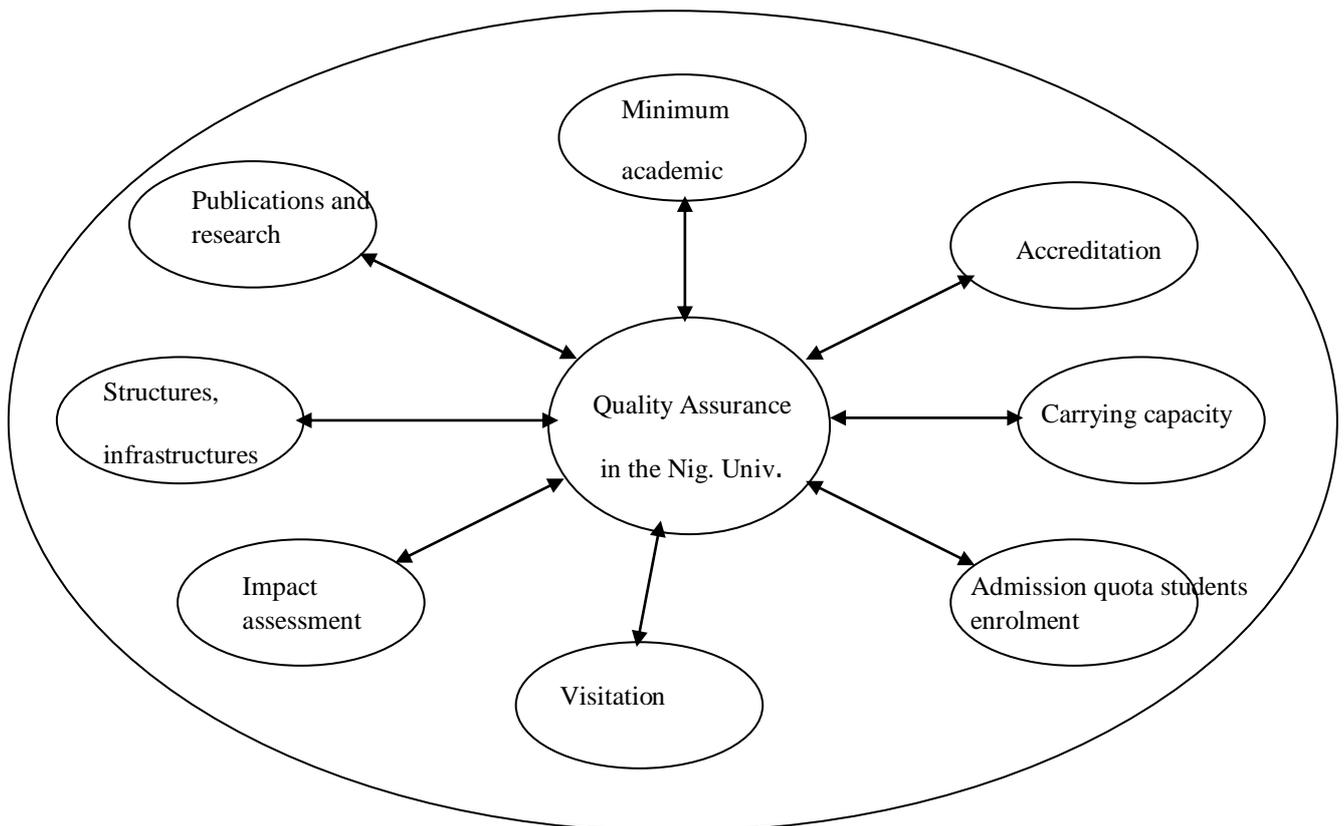


Fig 1: Quality assurance drivers in Nigerian University System adapted from Adedipe (2007).

1. Minimum academic standards form the baseline for entrenching quality university education, since it prescribes a profile of curriculum, human resources, structures,

infrastructures, equipment and associated facilities required for establishing, governing and managing the university.

2. Accreditation is the process by which programmes are evaluated against set minimum academic standard and institutions comprehensive academic research and development) activities are evaluated against prescribed criteria (including self-visioned and self-produced strategic plan.
3. Carrying capacity of a university is the maximum number of students that the institution can sustain for qualitative education based on available human and material resources.
4. Visitation to universities is a statutory requirement that empowers the proprietor to ascertain the well-being of the university.
5. 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.
6. Research is the driving force for human development as globally determined, such research should be evidenced by publications.
7. Structures, infrastructures and utilities are essential driving force for qualitative productivity in any organization, particularly in the university system.

Makoju, Nwangwu, Abolade and Newton (2004) observed that the Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) concept/practice is considered as one of the cornerstones of quality assurance and one way of improving the quality of education. Quality assurance in this concept refers to the monitoring and evaluation of performance of the various levels of the education system in achieving the specific goals at each level and overall objectives of the system. To them, quality assurance consists of three programmes, namely: Whole – School Evaluation (WSE), Systematic Evaluation (SE), and Quality Management System (QMS).

It is generally believed that the purposes of evaluation in the school system are to:

- Assess the quality of school using nationally agreed criteria;
- Increase the level of accountability in the education system;
- Strengthen the support given to schools by government and other agencies;
- Provide feedback to stakeholders through a publication of reports resulting from whole school evaluation; and
- Identify aspects of excellence in schools as well as areas of major under-achievement, thus, improve understanding of what makes an effective institution.

Conclusion

In the last three decades, higher education in Nigeria has witnessed a significant growth in terms of expansion of access through increase in enrolment and establishment of additional higher educational institutions. However, it is saddening to note that many of the indices that can guarantee qualitative higher education are not taken into consideration in the country's quest to meet quantitative target. It has been observed that political factors are the main motives behind many of the expansion policies, especially in the University system. Boateng (2002), had noted that the supply of education services in Nigeria is market blind. Admission policies of university education, he observed, are not related to labour demand requirements, nor to individual student interest, but mainly to secondary school grades.

The result was a summon table pressure on the available limited resources thereby resulting in downward pressure on staff salaries together with deteriorating working conditions. The effects include high degree of "brain-drain" among the academic staff, incessant strikes action, students' riots e.t.c. All these have contributed to a precipitous fall in the quality of university education.

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