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Quality Management of University Education in Nigeria: an Appraisal

Ibiam, Nnennaya
College of Agricultural and Science Education
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike
P.M.B. 7267, Umuahia – Abia State, Nigeria
E-mail: nneibiam@yahoo.com
Phone: +2348063411304

Abstract

Quality management in education is about all the various organized activities that culminate in the production of a given output that conforms to set standard. It is geared towards high standards and a zero tolerance level for wastage in the educational enterprise. This paper examined quality management of University education in Nigeria. The roles of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in maintaining quality management in University Education were highlighted. The appraisal revealed that there were constraints to quality management in Nigerian Universities leading the author to recommend possible solution.

Key words: Quality, Management, University Education, Nigeria, Appraisal.

Introduction

Quality management in education was stressed in the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) where it stated that the success of any education lies on proper planning, efficient administration and adequate funding (which are components of management). It expects these management services in education to achieve specified goals which include:

(a) Provision of efficient administrative and management control for maintenance and improvement of the system.
(b) Assurance of quality control through regular and continuous supervision of instructional and other educational services.

Education occupies a strategic position in the development of the manpower of a nation. Moreover, education develops the skills and relevant attitudes as well as the values more productive but also to be less ignorant and consequently become more governable (Jubril, 2005). However, university education in Nigeria is presently facing a lot of management crises. Regrettably, at this level of education, lip service appears to be paid to this all important issue of quality management. The problem of declining quality management in university education is usually attributed to paucity of financial resources, goal displacement and mismanagement. The employers of labour described the poor quality of university education in Nigeria as a multifaceted problem.

Apart from the inadequate financial allocation, there is also the problem of internal mismanagement in the university system. Moreover, there is presently a huge scarcity of qualified and experienced lecturers in many departments. Also in many universities, equipment workshops, libraries and laboratories have become mere monuments of obsolescence. All of these factors combine together to hamper the quality of university education in the contemporary Nigerian society. There is therefore an urgent need to address these problems with a view to improving the quality of university education being received by the growing number of youths in the society. The improvement of quality in the management of university education will however require the effective combination of adequate provision of material resources as well as a conducive learning environment before such needed quality management in university education can be achieved. Odekunle and Babalola (2005) explained that quality management in university education is expressed as a function of:

$$QUE = \frac{M(RxSPxSAxSTxLTxLQxLM).}{SE}$$

Where

M = Management denotes the management input by the Vice-Chancellor, Dean, HODs, Registrar etc. (The management team) is referred to as the Senate.

R = Resources means human, materials, physical, (classroom) natural and financial resources.

SP = Capacity of student benefits from the university education (character, history, age, home and educational background)

SA = Denotes application of himself through attendance at lectures,

library, independent readings, completion of assignment, tests and examinations.

ST = Denotes the number of period during which a student is attending the per session (duration of studies).

LT = Denotes lecturer attendance records at lectures per session

LQ = Refers to lecturer's initial qualification, training and experience

LM = Denotes lecturer's level of motivation or job satisfaction as measured by his reward package.

SE = Refers to the supportive events from government and non-governmental organizations in the wider society such as democratic tendencies, respect for university autonomy respect for academic freedom, low priority accorded to university education.

The above provides a necessary and sufficient justification for our current concern with the quality management of the university education in Nigeria. The simple equation presented above suggests that university managers have a duty of managing both the various groups and interests within the university as well as the groups and interest outside the university but whose actions or decisions affect the fortunes or misfortunes of the university. The necessity for improved management of the university education in Nigeria however, compels a fuller understanding of the nature and the complexities of the university as a human contrivance for goal attainment. To be in position to manage the contemporary Nigerian university for the attainment of its assigned goals and especially engendering quality education, those who are entrusted with such responsibilities must be able to rise above factions and interest groups and be in a position to pursue the common good of both the university community and of the Nigerian society. One of the common roots of the current crisis in university education administration in Nigeria today is the failure of all concerned to pursue and promote the common goal of teaching, learning and research (Jubril, 2005).

What is quality management in education?

According to Okeke (2001), quality management is the aggregate of "all efforts from the top management to the lowest rung of the organizational hierarchy geared towards doing the right things first and all the time and continually striving for improvement".

While Jacklin (2002) regards quality management as an ideal systematic process for managing change in public education. Quality management is concerned with the improvement of the organizational performance. It has to do with conscious and concerted efforts of everybody in the educational system. Though it is a fact that all stakeholders in education have the responsibility of contributing towards the

continuous improvement of the education system for excellence; those statutorily charged to manage education for quality and standard as well as meeting up with the challenging changing society are required to exhibit leadership qualities and practices that will create and usher in best practices in education. Quality management requires the attention of education managers in the input-process-output framework to achieve any success since quality encompasses quality in people, process, service and products.

As Iheonunekwu (2003) stated, each element in the input-process-output framework of the education enterprise should be of an acceptable quality to ensure high quality in education. This implies that quality management which results in quality education has to really address these elements in the education enterprise. There is the need for adequate planning, provision, organization, evaluation and re-planning of the educational inputs, process and outcomes. The state, level, extent, quality and quantity and management of these elements account for the quality of management in education. For example, if the educational inputs (financial and human resources) such as funding, learner enrolment, quality and quantity of teachers are in the right proportion, learner/teacher ratio, curriculum, textbooks, school materials and facilities etc are adequately, proportionately and timely provided for education delivery, quality management is on course.

In the same vein, when the process of delivering the educational service is monitored, checked, encouraged and improved for efficiency and effectiveness, the end-product would be of high quality. At this point, how learning is organized is checked, the content and quality of what is taught, the number of teaching hours and contact hours ascertained, assessment and graduation procedures are determined.

After the necessary and required inputs have been made available, and the process of delivering or producing the output ensured, the output is now evaluated to ascertain whether the three dimensions of achievement, attainment and standards which determine their relevance and fitness have been realized. That is, have the students actually gained the knowledge, skills and attitude required of them (achievement)? How encouraging the percentage number of students who completed the course of study and obtained certificate (attainment)? Finally, does the product satisfy societal expectations and customer needs?

The feedback or data derived from this input-process-output help the quality outcome so as to measure up with the ever-changing political, social, economic, scientific and technological demands.

Information is a vital resource in quality management. An educational manager needs to garner and disseminate information to all who are concerned with the policy making and implementation so as to sustain continuous quality improvement. A new organizational culture in which changes and improvement are constantly occurring

and harnessing the creative abilities of the entire work-force to identify and solve problems that affect their abilities to perform their jobs make for quality management (Emenalo, 2009).

Inspectorate Power for Quality Management of Nigerian Universities

The pre-independence administration based on the recommendation of the Walter Elliot Commission of 1943 established the Inter University Council for Higher Education in the colonies and the University Grant Advisory Committee to advise the British Government on the funding of universities in the colonies. This might have influenced the decision of the Ashby Commission of 1959 set up by the Federal Government to recommend the establishment of the National Universities Commission in an advisory capacity. The Ashby Commission Report (1961) stipulated that the NUC should play a vital part in securing funds for the universities and in distributing them, coordinating (without interfering with) their activities, and in providing cohesion for the whole system of higher education in the country.

However, subsequent events indicate that the NUC has transformed from an advisory agency to a statutory body performing other functions outside its mandate at inception. Decree No 1 of 1974 has empowered the NUC to advise the Federal Military Government, through the Federal Commissioner of Education, on certain aspects of higher education, such as development, finance and conditions of service, as well as external aid, to all the universities and other degree awarding institutions. Additionally, Tamuno (1987) remarked that through provision of Decree No 16 of 1985, the purpose and mission of universities in Nigeria was given additional meaning. According to him under Section 10(1), the NUC, the Minister of Education and the Head of State of the Federal Military Government have therefore power to lay down minimum standards, accreditation of degrees and other awards of all universities and similar institutions throughout Nigeria and by so doing, the proprietor, as owner and master unmistakably assumed management and other powers which hitherto rested exclusively with the Senate of every university in Nigeria. From the foregoing, it appears the universities through the empowerment of the NUC have lost their basic functions of teaching, research and community service.

It was also observed by Ade-Ajayi (2003) that the aim behind the establishment of the NUC was to protect the autonomy of the universities by acting as a buffer institution between the universities and the government especially in matters relating to funding. He added that manipulation of the university system began as soon as the Executive Secretary of the NUC transformed himself into a super Vice-Chancellor to tell the Vice-Chancellors what the Military Government on his advice wanted the universities to do. The NUC claimed that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors, hitherto responsible for representing the views of the universities, was declared an informal assembly that could not challenge the authority of the NUC as a statutory

body. From then, the NUC became a huge bureaucracy in Abuja, with expertise often inferior to those individual universities, but nevertheless acting as the real experts in a Ministry supervising the work of its parastatals. It prescribes terms of accreditation of universities, insisting, for example, on a collegiate system for all, irrespective of historical background, age, size or complexity. In the name of prescribing minimum standards, the NUC began to prescribe the same curricula in every subject for every university, in complete defiance of the powers of the Senate of individual universities.

The use of the MAS Documents as a benchmark to accredit degree programmes in Nigerian universities has been identified as one of such encroachments on the autonomy and academic freedom of the universities. From the foregoing, it would appear as if the involvement of the National Universities Commission in the quality management function of the Nigerian universities has done more harm than good. The root cause of the negative perception of the universities about the role of the NUC might not be unconnected with the approach of the latter agency to its quality management function through accreditation. This tends to give the impression that universities in Nigeria lack the initiative to maintain quality in their academic functions as well as in the learning environment.

The perception of the universities tends to indicate that the procedure for its quality management functions is more of inspection rather than supervision. This appears to be correct against the background of the advisory role that the NUC was meant to play at inception before the advent of the military administration. Perhaps it is necessary at this point to clarify the concepts of inspection and supervision. According to Ogbonna and Afiamagbon (2008), to inspect means to find fault and to ascertain that all is in line with expected standard while supervision means to direct, to oversee to guide and to make sure that the expected standards are being met. Thus it appears that supervision rather than inspection is what Nigerian universities need. This is partly what informs the observation made by Akinkugbe (2001) that the idea of a nationally agreed set of minimum standards for the nation's universities is good, though not an inevitable one. Besides, where such explicit formulations are considered necessary, care must be taken to express them in more abstract terms than virtually handing down syllabuses to the university. An institution that is incapable of designing its own curricula and syllabuses and being constantly innovative about them does not deserve the title of a university.

The primary responsibility of the universities for quality assurance through internal mechanisms is encapsulated in the remark by Aminu (1986) that the university community must surely be one of the first to engage in self-assessment, self criticism, and self-improvement, through review of courses and modification of curricula. He added that no organization outside the universities is better placed than the university

itself to undertake the performance audit. It is, however, ironic that such a statement came from someone whose tenure witnessed an accelerated erosion of university autonomy and impingement of the academic freedom of Nigerian universities.

However, the establishment of buffer institutions like the NUC the world over has been attributed to the following reasons: to avoid a government decision-making monopoly in the organization, to have more comprehensive representative of the society in decisions related to education and to relieve the learning institutions from their dependency on governments. These parastatals, occasionally referred to as buffer institutions (Frackmann, 1992), or 'intermediary bodies' (Neave, 1992) are established as corporate bodies to organize, promote, supervise and control education services for the benefit of the people. They usually enjoy considerable autonomy from federal government by law or constitutional provision. The forms of educational parastatals vary greatly particularly among the states depending on the state's unique history, the personalities and geo-political relationships. However, they are viewed as levers in steering and coordinating the education system. They are the mediums of injecting a degree of sensitivity into the organization towards the attainment of education objectives.

Experience in the Nigerian university system indicates that rather than be a facilitator of events, the NUC is perceived as government megaphone, which has been accused of unnecessarily lengthening the lines of management that is contrary to modern management literature (Ofoegbu, 2004). Thus Ade-Ajayi (2003) observed that the NUC could not be reformed, as it has become a federal parastatal, subordinate to the Federal Ministry of Education. He then suggested that the Ministry is over burdened and a new Ministry more used to advising than supervising and directing the universities should be put in place. In order to sanitise the universities, Ade-Ajayi (2003) suggested that the NUC must revert to its traditional role at inception, which is that of an advisory function.

Constraints to quality management in Nigerian universities

The constraints to quality management in Nigerian universities have been identified by Erinosho (2004) and Awe (2009) as the factors of the role of their proprietors and those that are self-inflicted by the universities on the other hand, that is, internal and external problems. The internal problems are related to problems of institutional management in the university system while external problems relate to various polices enunciated by the government and effects on the university system.

The external problems are the constraints imposed by external environment, which are determined by the various policies of the government on the university system. For instance, the historical background of the Nigerian universities makes them absolutely dependent on government for their financial requirements (NUC, 2001); Babalola, 2001 and Aina, 2007).

The precarious financial situation in the universities was highlighted by Awe (2009) in his observation that Nigerian universities are expanding and the financial burdens of operating the universities are expanding correspondingly and that it is becoming increasingly difficult for universities to fulfil these functions because of financial constraints and socio-economic co-factors.

While Tamuno (1987) identified under-funding as one of the underlying factors of the inadequacies within the Nigerian universities, he observed that the systems of allocation have proved a serious handicap for effective planning and administration. Additional to this is the inability of these universities to charge appropriate user charges. For instance, Anao (2002) observed that some sections of the Universities Autonomous Bill before the National Assembly explicitly outlaw the charging of fees and that outlawing of fees would be tantamount to binding a person's hand and legs and asking him to run; in both cases there will be no motion but possibly disaster.

The tremendous influence of politics on public universities in Nigeria is encapsulated in the remark by Hamza (1992) that no top administrator, particularly in Nigeria, would deny that political factors have played a part in the formulation of the memorandum he finally submits to the government for a decision. The memorandum would not sail through if political considerations were not met. Clearly, the politics and the philosophy of the government of the day must be taken into account even if these are against his own principles as an administrator and educationist. He may, like Socrates, pay the price of defiance or change his employment.

It appears politics cannot be dissociated from education but attempt must be make to strike a balance between the politics of education and its beneficial effects on the socio-economic growth of a nation. The inability of the various administrations in Nigeria to divulge politics from education has been identified as the bane of the Nigerian university system. Politics of external environment according to Williams (1992) is one of the factors constraining Nigerian universities. He added that politics in the external environment attenuated the requisite autonomy of the universities and lack of autonomy makes it difficult for Nigerian universities to consummate the seven principal functions of: teaching, certification, research, storage of knowledge, publication, public service and enlightened commentary.

In the same vein, Idumange (2002) stated that politics in Nigeria has bastardised the educational system and truncated the equitable distribution of resources and that these vacillating policies did not make for effective coordination and that when deduction is subjected to vagaries and vicissitudes of crude politicking, it becomes a weapon of self-destruction. This is in line with Nwadiani (1999) that the objectives of education, the control, production process variables, financial and accreditation system are metrically wedded to politics. He added that political instability coupled with anti-intellectual leaders have conduced to debase long-term planning, thus, technocracy

has been sacrificed on the altar of rough politics leading to policy inconsistency, discontinuity and their attendant negative multipliers.

The internal problems are concerned with the extent to which the university system has been able to operate within the confines of their statutes in order to carry out their primary assignment of teaching and research. This, to a large extent, determines the management and instructional supervision. The issue of management appears crucial in view of the challenges posed by inadequate funding. With the increasing number of potential university students, the shortage of financial resources and the necessity for redefinition of the contents, distribution and method of delivery of academic programmes, it becomes imperative for the management of Nigerian universities to adopt management strategies that will ensure the sustainable development of the university system.

According to Mohammed (1987) universities must strengthen their managements and shape academic strategies reflecting the philosophies behind their very existence. The management of Nigerian universities has been identified by Mgbekem (2004) as central to the understanding of the close relationship between a proper or improper use of resources meant to obtain desired results in the context of set goals, purpose or mission of an enterprise.

Experience has shown that indifferent management may lead to grievous consequences. For example, Mgbekem (2004) identified depreciation in the quality of academic programmes, wastage in resources and loopholes, which allow for inefficiency, indecision, and abuse as possible results of indifferent management. All these conspire to promote internal dissidence and external disapproval. The observed inadequacies of prudential management within the university system must have informed the convening of the National Submit on Higher Education by the Federal Ministry of Education in 2002. The Submit resolved that:

- All new entrants into management of higher educational institutions should be exposed to an appropriate senior management training programme in order to enhance efficiency.
- An effective Committee system of management should be established where the system does not exist and strengthened where it currently does (Federal Ministry of Education, 2002, p.5)

The Nigerian university system has also been accused of poor strategic planning in its physical development. For example, Mgbekem (2004) observed that a large part of the capital fund in some Nigeria universities is tied to useless uncompleted projects that litter the campuses. Many of these were almost certainly over-designed and grandiose and were started without proper financial planning or may be without even proper clearance from the NUC.

Experience has shown that the intrigue within the university system is fallout of the politics of external environment. The appointment of the vice chancellor in most Nigerian universities appears a major source of conflict, due to the habit of imposing vice chancellors on the university system by the government. According to Idumange (2002) some vice chancellors get appointed for political expediency and the overzealous ones among them set goals that are utopian while few of them render the university system hot beds of politics.

For example, Ade-Ajayi (2003) remarked that a Vice Chancellor was removed because he had divided the university into two camps. This Vice Chancellor reserved one camp for his friends who obtained whatever they wanted from him, and the other for his enemies who got nothing to which they were entitled, whether confirmation of appointment, or promotion, or approval for sabbatical. Similarly, Ayandele (2001) cited in Adesina and Awosusi (2004) described what is left of the Nigeria's universities as the laughing-stock of the world universities today which include among others; the romance of professors with the political ruling elites, internal siege laid on the system by staff unions, the role of the vocal minority in university governance and loss of grip over students.

It is observed that the sensitive leadership roles played by the governing council and the vice chancellor appear to demand that the university must be given a free hand in their appointment, For instance, the decision of the military government to appoint a vice chancellor to a particular university from a different institution created some crisis during the period. In the same vein, academic staff in state universities are observed to have been highly critical of appointing vice chancellors from federal universities, probably because such vice chancellors may not be familiar with the tradition of these state universities.

The damage done to the Nigerian university system due to internal politics has been adduced by Ade-Ajayi (2003) as responsible for loss of focus and fragmentation into rival unions, each trying to pursue its own individual interest at the expense of the overall interests of the university. He went further to add that universities have ceased to build people due to inability to enhance the career prospects of academic staff and students leave the university after four years as worse people than when they came in. According to him, these students more likely than not, have imbibed the culture of violence as the only way to get what they want.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The need for quality management of our university educational institutions has been established. For efficient and effective management of university system, total quality management is expedient. The universities derive their powers for quality management through their statutes.

However, it appears that the process and procedure for quality management have been constrained through policy inconsistency that appears to prevent the universities from adequate mobilization of their statutory and regulatory framework for quality management. There is a need to hamonise the external and internal control measures of universities to facilitate quality management. It is recommended that both systemic and institutional transformation are required to enhance quality management in university education.

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