

ADMINISTERING EXAMINATIONS FOR QUALITY CONTROL IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: The National Open University of Nigeria Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Examination is an important tool for evaluating students learning outcome and require proper planning to meet high standards. This paper therefore examines the processes leading to administration of face-to-face examination in distance education with focus on the National Open University of Nigeria. It highlighted some procedures such as test development, test administration and post test administration/award procedures. It also identified some quality control practices adopted in administering examinations at the National Open University of Nigeria, and concludes that quality control in examinations is the means by which an educational institution ensures that test development and administration procedures meet high standards.

Keywords: Administration; examinations; quality; control; distance education; perspective.

INTRODUCTION

The National Open University of Nigeria is a single mode learner education system which is open and flexible. Since the learning mode is through self study materials such as texts, audio tapes, CDs, broadcasting, interactive session on network system through VSAT, internet, Wide Area Network(WAN), a lot of emphasis is placed on self study assessment assignments, tutor marked assignments and end of semester face-to-face final examinations (NOUN,2006). Nevertheless, in managing open and distance education, some functions such as course development, course presentations, teacher-student contact, use of communication media, student motivation and student evaluation for learning outcomes have to be planned (Fagbamiye,2000). These functions, to a large extent, determine the structure of administration in distance learning institutions. Thus, the task of administering examination in distance learning programmes is unique in several respects due to many study centres that are centrally controlled, and which serve as examination centres. For instance, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has twenty eight Study Centres across the country. Therefore, with many students and study centres to contend with, effective administration of examination which is held simultaneously across the study centres is usually a cumbersome exercise.

Considering the fact that examination is an important aspect of evaluation of students learning outcomes, and the need for proper planning and implementation of examination procedures in open and distance learning institutions, this paper attempts to examine some quality control measures adopted in test development and administration of face-to-face examination at the National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos.

The Concept of Examination

The Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary of Current English defines examination as the process or act of testing for knowledge and ability in order to determine its worth. This implies that a test is a means of measuring the knowledge, skills or aptitude of an individual.

The word examination is a broad term which connotes the assessment of knowledge, skills and intelligence acquired by learners in an educational system (Osindeinde, 2000). From this assertion, it is clear that the purpose of examination is to measure the extent of achievement of learners in terms of educational objectives.

Hence, examination in distance learning institutions serves a number of functions such as certification, selection and accountability.

Administration of Examinations

Administration of examination at the National Open University of Nigeria is a rigorous exercise in terms of logistics, personnel and financial outlay. However, a common feature of the exercise involves:

- Test development
- Test administration
- Post-test administration / award procedures

Test development

The procedure starts with the submission of courses to be examined by the Deans of the various Schools to the Directorate of Examinations and Assessment (DEA). A table of specification derived from the thinking order as prescribed by Bloom (1956) is utilised in the preparation of examination questions. The question papers and marking schemes generated undergo both internal and external moderation. The aim of the moderation is to check through each item for accuracy, consistency and coverage of course content. At the end of the moderation, items are compiled and eligibility report (course wise) per study centre is obtained, this is followed by printing and collation of question papers. The diagram below illustrates the procedure:

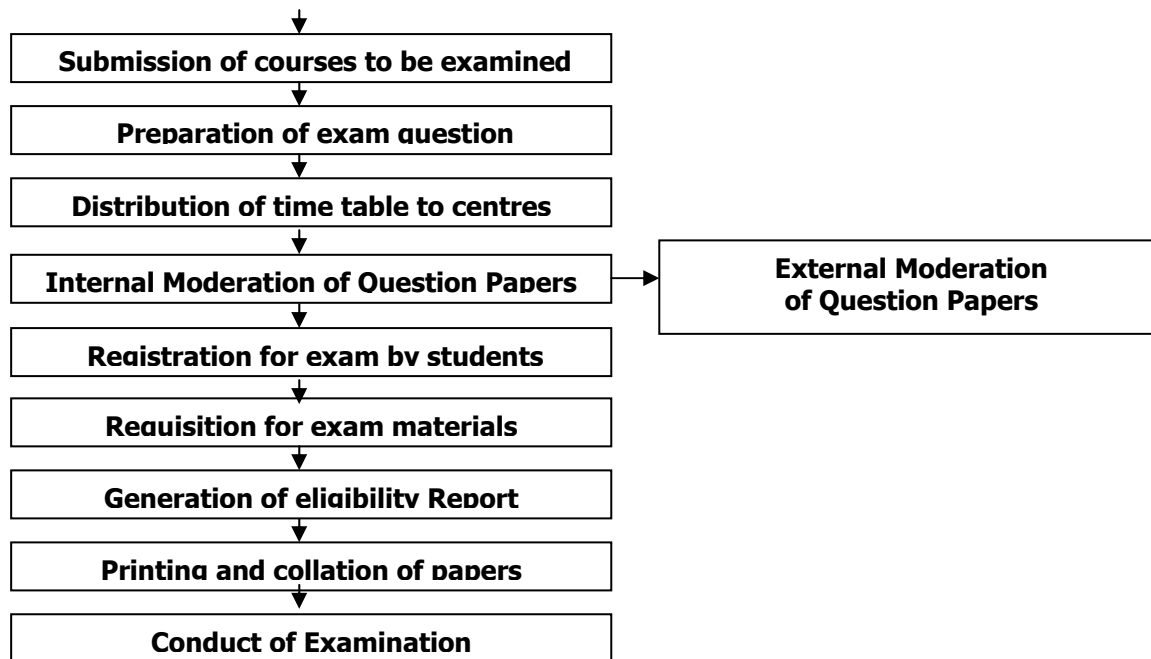


Figure: 1

Organisation of Item Development

Source: Compiled from data obtained from Directorate of Examinations and Assessment, NOUN, 2006

Test administration

In National Open University of Nigeria, test papers are administered to eligible students, and to be eligible for examination students are expected to fulfill some conditions as follows:

- The student must have matriculated and registered for the courses to be examined;
- The student is expected to have been in the custody of the study materials to be examined for a minimum of eight weeks;
- The student should have submitted three Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA).

Arising from the above, the conduct of examination starts with the entry of students using appropriate entry requirements.

Invigilators are nominated among the facilitators at the Study Centres and complimented by senior staff sent from the Headquarters to supervise examination.

Post-examination activities

At the completion of examinations, answer scripts are collated and sent to the Directorate of Examination and Assessment (DEA) for grading exercise. The post-examination activities entail the following:

- **Standardization Process**
- This exercise involves familiarization of examiners with the marking guide and award procedures. The exercise is supervised by the study centre Managers and representatives of the Directorate of Examinations and Assessment (DEA).
- **Marking of Scripts**
- Scripts are marked by facilitators with appropriate qualifications appointed by the University. Scripts are marked according to the specification of marking Guide.
- **Vetting of Scripts**
- One of the quality control measures put in place is the vetting of scripts graded by facilitators by team leaders. This is done in order to standardize the marking exercise. Also, the evaluated scripts are sent to external examiners by the Directorate of Examinations and Assessment (DEA). This is done to assess the performance of script markers. After due approval of examination report, the results are published on the internet for online result checking.
- **Post-examination Analysis**
- One of the major effective quality control procedures is the feedback on the performance of students in examination. Analyses are carried out to determine the grade patterns course by course.

Instruments for Maintaining Quality Control

The Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary of current English (2000) defines quality as the degree of excellence and degree of conformity with standards.

Tawari (2002) contends that quality control involves the detection and elimination of components or final products which do not meet standards. She went further to highlight four criteria mostly applied to measure quality. These include;

- (1) Input of resources-for example grade point average; or standard test scores of entering students; terminal degrees in the faculty; number of books in the library and of the institutions endowment.
- (2) Outputs which include such items as the overall graduation rate; the number of faculty publications or research grants; the number of scholarly awards; or the number of graduates in blue-chip companies.
- (3) Value added criteria defined not by some national standard. But through a comparison of the state of affairs before and after a process. For example, the intellectual development of a student from fresh men year to graduation.
- (4) Improvement and effectiveness of the internal processes.

Thus, it can be deduced that quality control is directed at the level in which a Product meets the required standard. Below are some of the measures for maintaining quality control in examinations.

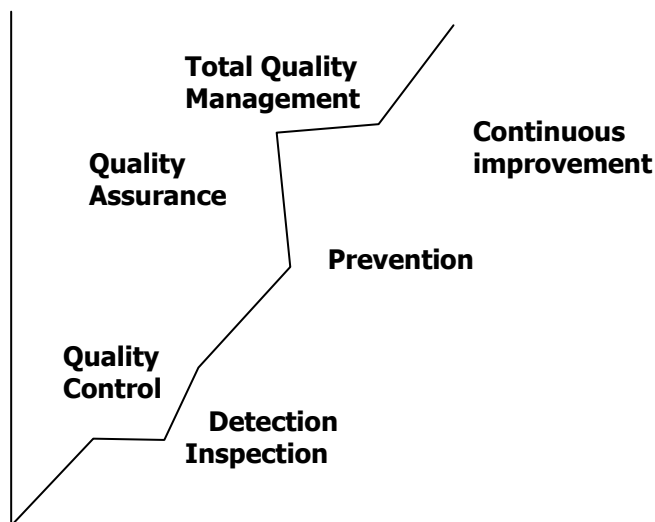


Figure 2:
Hierarchy of quality Concepts

Source: developing a total quality management system for tertiary education in Nigeria. (Tawari, 2002)

Internal/External Moderation of Test Papers

The moderation of questions papers by both internal and external assessors seek to answer inquiries concerning the following:

- Are the questions within the course content?
- Are the questions devoid of ambiguity or properly worded?
- Is the marking guide detailed

These assessments are carried out to ensure that printed questions meet the desired standard.

Tutorial Staff Training

The National Open University of Nigeria normally organizes workshop for tutorial staff prior to marking exercise. Staff is trained on assessment and evaluation techniques. Edem (1987) observes that lack of training for teachers is a contributory factor to the poor quality of education in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, the training sessions enhance the performance of tutorial personnel in test development and evaluation.

Facilities Inspection

The role of inspection of facilities at the study centres which serve as examination centres, in ensuring quality control practices in administering examination cannot be overemphasized. The inspection is to ascertain the level of materials and other logistics required for the conduct of examination.

Feedback

Examination Supervisors provide information to the Directorate of Examinations and Assessment (DEA) on the general conduct of the examinations. The report contributes to improved quality of examinations, as it highlights aspects of questions papers that were misunderstood or not properly worded, and some other deficiencies.

CONCLUSION

The paper articulated some procedures adopted in the administration of face-to-face examination at the National Open University of Nigeria. The exercise starts with test development, test administration and post test administration/award procedures.

The instruments for maintaining quality control in examinations administered at the National Open University of Nigeria have also been identified. Quality control in examinations is therefore the means by which an educational institution ensures that test development and administration meet high standards.

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