



Information on Strategies for Achieving Compliance with the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the strategies adopted for achieving compliance with the guidelines for quality assurance in Nigerian university system using descriptive research method. It focused on the concepts of quality and quality assurance, quality assurance guidelines in the Nigerian university system and strategies adopted by the NUC, for achieving compliance with the quality assurance guidelines. The paper also highlighted the challenges hindering the effective achievement of compliance with the quality assurance guidelines and offered recommendations for improvement.

Keywords: Compliance, Guidelines, Quality assurance.

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I. Introduction

The need for compliance with quality and quality assurance guidelines in Nigerian University System cannot be overemphasized. One of the driving forces for performance measurement of products and services is the demand for quality services and products.

In the early years of University education in Nigeria, the Nigerian University System had developed well and had gained international acceptability and respect for the quality of its graduates and high standards of teaching and learning until the 1980s when economic depression took its toll on university library budgets as observed by Oyelese (1988) and affirmed by Daisy (1997) that many graduates from the Nation's Universities have distinguished themselves in their areas of specialization so much such that many of them are now professors in various universities across the globe. The introduction of austerity measures of the second republic like Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) also had serious effects on University Library collections, Laboratory equipment and staffing. These marked the beginning of the fallen standard of education in the country.

Other problems that brought about the fallen standards of education were also the issues of brain drain and technical aid that took many university staff to other countries. Consequently, the first measure taken by the

federal government to regain the lost glory and ensure quality in Nigerian Universities was the promulgation of decree no. 16 of 1985 now cap E3 Laws of the Federation 2004. The decree empowers the National Universities Commission to lay down Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) now, Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for all the universities in Nigeria and to also accredit their degrees and other academic awards. Therefore, to examine the strategies for achieving compliance with the guidelines for quality assurance in the Nigerian University System as laid down in the BMAS document, the paper is going to focus on the concepts of quality and quality assurance, quality assurance guidelines in Nigerian University System, strategies adopted by the NUC for achieving compliance with the quality assurance guidelines, challenges to the achievement of compliance with the quality assurance guidelines, make recommendations and conclusion.

II. Definition of Concepts

a. Quality

Quality is defined differently by different people from different perspectives. Uvah (2003) posit that, quality can be seen as a degree of excellence while others see it as a level of value in a products, goods or services some say it is conformity to purpose, while Defort-Wolf (2005) is of

the opinion that quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy defined or implied needs of its clientele. In this context, it is associated with the monitoring and evaluation component of education, to see whether the outcome is good and of intend standard. In Nigerian education system today, quality centres around the quality of education imparted to the citizenry and the relevance of the education to the life of the individual in particular and the nation in general.

According to Mosha (1986) Quality education 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.”

b. Quality Assurance

Quality assurance refers to planned and systematic production processes that provide confidence in a product's or services' suitability for intended purpose. It is a set of activities intended to ensure that products, goods or services satisfy customer requirements. In the view of Walkin (2002), “quality assurance is a term used to describe activities taken to prevent non-conformance and also to remove doubt about meeting customers' requirements”. It incorporates procedures for planning, establishing, monitoring, auditing and evaluating management services or products. Quality assurance is therefore, “aimed at prevention of errors rather than a rectifying measure” as stated by Ijaiya (2001) citing West-Burnham (1994).

According to Ijaiya, “prevention of error is the basis of quality assurance in any human organization and that is why these days, emphasis shifted from quality control to quality assurance in organizations such as the school system.

In context of education, quality assurance is the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained for global competitiveness. For example, in a labour market, recognition is based on certificates presented. A holder of a foreign university degree certificate in say B.Sc. Economics would compete with a holder of a B.Sc. degree certificate from a Nigerian university, the two applicants would be regarded as comparable in labour market, it is therefore better, more rewarding and less costly to take steps to prevent failure and wastage before they happen, hence the need for quality assurance which is preventive rather than corrective.

c. Guidelines

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, guidelines are “rules or instructions that tell how something should be done, lines by which one is guided as a cord or rope to aid a passer over a difficult point or to permit retracing a course.” Moreover, it says “guidelines may be issued and used by any organization or government as well as private to make the actions of its employees or divisions more

predictable or presumably of higher quality”.

III. Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities

The guideline for quality assurance in Nigerian universities is the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS). It provides the various specifications for the number of lecturers required per programme, the laboratory space required for a given number of students, the staff mix by rank in terms of quality and quantity, the staff-students ratio per discipline, physical facilities, library facilities etc. It is an instrument used by the NUC to ensure that the specific guidelines are closely monitored, assessed, evaluated and complied with using a variety of strategies.

IV. What are the Strategies Adopted for Ensuring Compliance with the Quality Assurance Guidelines in Nigerian Universities?

A strategy as defined by Business Dictionary, is “a method or plan chosen to bring about a desired future such as achievement of a goal or solution to a problem, it could also be a tactic” (Business Dictionary, 2014). Therefore, in ensuring that Nigerian Universities comply with the guidelines for quality assurance, the following strategies are being adopted by the NUC.

a. Close Supervision of Establishment of Universities

The National Universities Commission closely monitors the establishment of universities in Nigeria, be it Federal, State or Private, irrespective of the mode of operation. As one and the foremost strategies for ensuring compliance with quality assurance guidelines in Nigerian Universities, it is imperative to therefore, ensure that right from the establishment of a university, the university starts on a right footing to avoid mistakes. Consequently, Mafiana (2014), identified a fourteen-step procedure laid down by the NUC which must be followed in determining the approval of an operating license of a university in addition to submission of a Master plan, Academic brief and a the proposed University Law so as to ensure an orderly development of the proposed university.

The fourteen steps identified, included (i) Submission of a written application stating intent for establishment of the university; (ii) Interview of prospective proprietors; (iii) Collection of application forms; (iv) Submission of application forms and relevant documents (v) Intensive review/analysis of documents by experts in relevant NUC departments; (vi) Revision of documents by proprietors based on report of Standing Committee On Private Universities (SCOPU) of NUC; (vii) Interactive meeting of SCOPU with the proposed university; (viii) First site assessment visit; (ix) Finalization of documentation; (x) Second final site assessment visit; (xi) Security screening of proprietors and Board of Trustees; (xii) Approval by NUC Management; (xiii) Approval by NUC Board; and (xiv) Approval by Federal Executive Council.

b. Benchmarking of University Curricular with International Standards

This is the provision of standards against which the Nigerian Universities Curricular can be measured or assessed. In recognition of the need to improve the relevance of university education in Nigeria for national development and global competitiveness, the NUC, organized a series of workshops in 2001 which subsequently led to the formulation of the outcome-based benchmark statements in 2004. Organized a revision of the 1989 content based Minimum Academic Standards (MAS), developed curriculum on entrepreneurial education and Peace and conflict studies and included it in the 2004 outcome-based MAS to form the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) in all the thirteen disciplines taught in the Nigerian university system. The revision was done to reposition the Nigerian graduates to facilitate the production of globally competitive and entrepreneurial graduates who will be relevant for national development.

c. Resource Verification

The NUC monitors establishment of programmes through the verification of human, material and financial resources that are available to a programme. It prepares application forms for the universities to collect, complete and return to the Commission. Before an approval is given to a university to establish a programme, the NUC sends a resource verification team to the university that requests for the establishment of a programme to assess the human, material and financial resources claimed by the University for running the programme and advise the commission accordingly.

d. Conduct of Accreditation

This is a process by which comprehensive assessment of the human, material and financial resources of a university are carried out and evaluated against set prescribed criteria. In the context of education, there are two basic types of educational accreditation i.e. (i) Institutional and (ii) programme accreditation. Institutional accreditation applies to an entire institution, indicating that every part of an institution contributes to the achievement of the institution's objectives while programme accreditation is an assessment of the human, material and financial resources available to a programme in a university. Adelman (1992) defined accreditation as a "process of assessment or inspection that ensures that an institution or its programmes are recognized as meeting acceptable standards". Accreditation of universities is a way of examining the state of the institution in relation to where it is expected to be. It is a quality assurance process and primary means of assuring the public and the students of the quality of a university and its graduates. It is therefore an indicator of quality.

e. Curriculum Review

The NUC from time to time reviews the Nigerian universities' curriculum so as to reposition the graduates of the system to be globally competitive with their

counterparts across the globe. For example, just before the merger of the MAS and the BMAS, the Commission felt there was need to revise the curriculum and introduced Entrepreneurial studies and peace and conflict resolution in Nigerian universities curriculum and directed the establishment of centres for the studies. The centres were established to aid students to acquire skills in specific enterprises such that on graduation, Nigerian graduates would be employers of labour and not just job seekers. So far, 14 of the Nigerian universities have complied with the directive and established entrepreneurial study centres and many are still on the project. In the meantime, entrepreneurial studies have been included in the universities' curriculum to be taught as a general studies course in levels 2 and 3 of their various programmes of study.

f. Inspection and Monitoring of Universities

These are surveillance visits to the universities by the NUC staff, ideally to be carried out unannounced such that the actual situation on the campuses would be observed. Brown (2000) defined monitoring as "an intermittent series of observations in time carried out to show the extent of compliance with formulated standard or degree of deviation from an expected norm". While inspection is the physical examination of a product or service to confirm that it meets the predetermined standard. During such visits, the inspection and monitoring officers go to the universities to physically examine and monitor the level of compliance of the universities to the quality assurance guidelines as laid down in the BMAS to prevent errors and maintain standards. During inspection and monitoring visits, officers are expected to monitor the programme delivery, the number of students in lecture halls and the mode of delivery for large classes, the environment and the course content as they are being delivered in the classes or lecture halls etc. The Commission carries out inspection and monitoring of activities in the universities through various departments depending on the nature of the activity to be monitored. Some of the monitoring activities include:

g. Monitoring of Post Unified Tertiary Education Matriculation Examination (UTME)

This is a surveillance of the conduct of the UTME for admission of students into the Nigerian universities. It is done by NUC staff and at times in liaison with the Joint Admission and Matriculation Examination Board (JAMB) Officials. The essence of the surveillance is to ensure that the exam is transparent and fairly conducted, i.e. ensuring the quality of input into the system. It is also to ensure that the universities are not introducing some new things like levies on the applicants without the knowledge of the Federal Ministry of Education and the NUC as well as JAMB.

h. Post Accreditation Monitoring Visits

As the name implies, post accreditation monitoring visit is usually carried out after the conduct and release of accreditation results. Universities whose majority of

programmes scored full status and those whose majority of programmes got denied status are given priority. The visit is conducted to ascertain the claims of the affected universities in the case of those with full status while those with denied status are monitored to ensure that new students are not admitted into the programmes. As for the programmes with interim status, the visit is aimed at ensuring that remedial measures are being taken to address the shortcomings and to offer advice on how to improve the situation.

i. Monitoring of Capital Projects

The monitoring of capital projects is usually carried out by the Department of Finance of the NUC, alongside representatives of other NUC departments. These capital projects include:

1. Direct Teaching and Laboratory Cost (DTLC),
2. Internally Generated Revenue (IGR);
3. Teaching, Research and Equipment Grant (TREG).

j. Direct Teaching and Laboratory Cost

Direct Teaching and Laboratory Cost is an allowance instituted in 2004 as a special funding for the purchase of consumables for the conduct of quality teaching and research. It is usually budgeted to universities as part of overhead, aimed at ensuring that students are actively engaged in productive academic work. It also leads to improvement in the quality of graduates of Nigerian universities by putting an end to the era of “alternative to practicals” occasioned by lack of laboratory reagents and other consumables. The fund is usually allocated to faculties for redistribution to departments in universities. The fund is solely controlled by departments. The NUC therefore monitors the effective utilization of these funds to ensure that departments get the allocation and if they do, to ensure that the funds are appropriately being utilized for the purpose it was meant to serve.

k. Internally Generated Revenue (IGR)

Internally generated revenue are monies generated from within the universities, usually from students fees, investment incomes, business operation, gifts and other incomes like sale of forms, fees, contractors registration, medical services charge, sale of stores, okada proceeds, photocopying and secretarial services etc.

The NUC monitors the yearly income generated by the universities and how the universities spend those monies. It is usually done by cross-checking the universities’ cash books vis-à-vis the universities’ statement of accounts to determine the accuracy of the spendings.

l. Teaching, Research and Equipment Grant (TREG)

In addition to the DTLC, government graciously acceded to NUC’s request for the provision of funds annually for the purchase of new teaching and research equipment in federal universities. The grant gives more meaning to DTLC as the new equipment purchased will help equip laboratories, studios, workshops as well as farms and it enhances their ability to measure up to similar facilities in world class universities.

Teaching, research and equipment grant is usually allocated to universities as part of capital grant. It is monitored by Finance Department of the NUC but initially by the Department of Physical Planning. Recently, with the resuscitation of the Department of Physical Planning, the responsibility of monitoring the spending of the grant has been reverted to the Physical Planning Department because it monitors capital projects and grants in the universities.

m. Coordination of Nigerian Universities Research and Development Fair (NURESDEF)

The NURESDEF is an annual research fair instituted to:

1. exhibit innovative research projects and their outputs;
2. highlight innovations and creative efforts of Nigerian universities in research and development;
3. provide opportunities for networking and collaboration among academic researchers, institutions and between them as well as with institutions abroad;
4. provide a forum for industries to select research outputs for further development for mass production and commercialization; and
5. provide platforms and avenues for attracting support for on-going development-oriented research from the private sector and international development agencies.

n. Organization of Nigerian Universities Doctoral Thesis Award Scheme (NUDTAS)

This is an award of prizes to Doctoral students identified with best research works in the NUS. It was instituted to encourage high quality research among doctoral students in the Nigerian University System. The competition created will result into production of quality research output from the Nigerian universities thereby producing quality graduates from the system.

o. Institution of External Examination System in Universities

External moderation is very important in assuring quality in education. Students and other stakeholders wish to be assured that a given standard of education under one setting is the same with what is provided in the other. This is achieved in the Nigerian University System by institution of a veritable external examination system. Under this arrangement, experienced and professionally qualified senior academic staff from one university is appointed by another university that does not share zone with it to moderate the university’s examination questions and scores obtained by students and also examine their final year students’ projects. The reports of the moderation exercises are usually kept for NUC Inspection and Monitoring officers as well as accreditation teams for scrutiny.

V. Challenges to Strategies Employed for Achieving Compliance with the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Nigerian University System

With the implementation of the various strategies as enumerated above, quite a number of successes have been recorded in the system overtime. However, despite the successes, the following issues affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategies for ensuring quality in the system.

a. *Window-Dressing during Accreditation Periods*

This is a situation where before the arrival of an accreditation panel to a university, the university would spend all its available human material and financial resources to prepare and put in place so many things that were hitherto not available on the campus. All they target is to “survive” the exercise.

It was observed that some universities even go outside their campuses to borrow some items including academic staff before the visit and return the borrowed items after the exercise. This attitude misleads and creates confusion because the programme evaluated would be scored based on what the panel finds on ground where as in the actual sense; the programme had nothing to show.

b. *Lack of Post-Accreditation Monitoring Visits*

After the conduct and release of accreditation exercises results, a follow-up monitoring visit is supposed to be carried out to the universities whose majority of programmes had denied or full accreditation status. The visit would help to ensure that those programmes with denied accreditation status are not still being run and to also ensure that the remedial measures recommended by the accreditation panel are being implemented by the universities concerned in the case of programmes with interim status.

In the case of those universities whose programmes had full accreditation status, the visit would also give the NUC an opportunity to ascertain the true situation of things on the campuses. By so doing, the NUC would know whether a programme actually deserved a full status or otherwise. Unfortunately, this is not often carried out in the system.

c. *Lack of Seriousness with External Examination of Papers/Grade of Students*

The external examination conducted by appointed external examiners in the universities is taken without serious commitment. These days it is only external examiners that would not give problem to the candidates and the supervisor during oral examinations are appointed, while examination questions and grades moderation are taken to be formality. In some instances, external examiners are even appointed from within the same zone with the university to be examined. This attitude to a large extent jeopardizes quality assurance efforts in the system.

d. *Establishment of Unapproved Part-Time Programmes*

Establishment of unapproved part time programmes has been a challenge to quality assurance in Nigerian universities. Even though the establishment of part-time programmes following due process is a legitimate right of the universities, some of the universities admit more part-time students than the full time which is against the provision of the BMAS which allows a university to admit not more than 20% of the full time students. The consequence associated with violation of this rule is that the number of students would exceed the carrying capacity of the existing facilities, thereby affecting the quality of programme delivery.

e. *Illegal Affiliation Arrangements*

There is proliferation of illegal affiliation arrangements between some Nigerian universities and some non-degree awarding institutions for the purpose of awarding degrees. In some instances, some of the universities award degrees to students of affiliate institutions in programmes that they themselves have no approval to run on the campuses or programmes that do not have full accreditation. All these violations of rules and regulations tend to affect quality assurance in Nigerian universities.

f. *Illegal Institutions/Satellite Campuses*

Proliferations of illegal institutions and satellite campuses have continued to be an issue of serious concern to quality assurance in Nigerian University system. Some of the universities sign Memoranda Of Understanding (MOUs) with privately owned businesses to run degree programmes at different locations. Such programmes are usually taught by unqualified personnel thereby undermining the quality assurance efforts of the NUC as differentiation between them and the degrees awarded by the legally established institutions is very difficult. In some instances, the universities themselves are illegally established which also results in production of unqualified graduates.

g. *Inadequate Qualified Academic Staff*

Nigerian universities are faced with serious problems of in-adequacy of qualified staff to deliver quality education to the growing student population. Okebukola (2010) lamented that, “The teacher/student ratio is always nothing to talk about, adding that the ratios by discipline are far from encouraging especially in the humanities and some science-based disciplines”. The unfortunate aspect of it is that, the academic staff are no more interested in enrolling for Ph.Ds, and with the establishment of private universities, the already existing insufficient academic staff are being shared among the nation’s universities. The population of the academic staff is heavy at the bottom with Senior lecturers and above being fewer while lecturers 1 and below are more in number in the system.

h. *Violation of BMAS Specification*

The Bench Mark Minimum Academic Standards has specified all that is needed both in terms of human and

material resources for running a programme in the universities. Contrary to the provisions of the BMAS, almost all the universities do not strictly adhere to the specifications. For example, the BMAS specifies the number of weeks that a semester should consist of, which is normally 18 weeks, consisting of 15 weeks of lectures, 1 week for revision, 2 weeks for exams. You find that most universities do not strictly adhere to the calendar. Another example is hours for practicals in science based courses, you will find that in some universities they do not even do the practicals, they do theory and call it “alternative to practicals”!

i. Announcement of Inspection and Monitoring Visits to Universities

Announcing an inspection and monitoring visit to a university is asking the university to prepare for your coming. By so doing, the universities adequately prepare and do window dressing just as they used to do for accreditation visits. The preparations done by the universities deprive the NUC Monitoring team the opportunity to observe things in their natural condition.

j. Admission of Unqualified Candidates into the Universities

Some applicants gain admission into the universities without having the pre-requisite requirement for the admission due to favouritism. In most cases, when candidates do not qualify for admission, they find it very difficult to cope on the programme thereby affecting the overall performance of the university in terms of the quality of its products. In another scenario, you find that some candidates scored very high marks in UTME exam which qualifies them for admission whereas in the actual sense, the score was obtained through manipulation not that the candidates were intelligent enough to score such marks.

k. Diversion of Funds Budgeted for Specific Purposes by the Universities’ Authorities

Some funds budgeted for important projects in the universities are being diverted for other uses. An example of such funds is the Library Development Fund. The parameters for funds allocation to the various units of the universities stipulates that 10% of the total recurrent allocation to universities should go to the libraries for the purchase of books and journals. Contrary to that, the libraries hardly get the 10%. The university authorities always divert the fund to other uses and only give the libraries like 5% of the total allocation or even less in some instances. The DTLC is also another kind of fund that the universities easily divert to other uses without even the knowledge of the departments.

l. Lack of Capacity Building and Professional Development

Academic staff of Nigerian universities needs to increasingly update their knowledge so as to ensure quality in the system. The in-thing now in universities is off-shore publications, and where the quality of research

is low due to lack of funds to acquire instructional and research facilities, it obviously becomes difficult to finance the publications thereby affecting quality in the system.

m. Incessant Strike Actions by University Lectures/Students Unrest

In Nigerian universities, there is a recurrent of labour and management disputes as a result of non-implementation of agreements on the part of the government. This development jeopardizes academic activities on Nigerian campuses. Many times, the universities would remain closed for months, at times 3 – 6 months or more. Ramon – Yusuf (2005) observed that between 1995 and 2003, 28 months were lost in the academic calendars without a make-up. Such breaks affect the quality of education delivery from both the side of the students and the lecturers as the action kills their morale. Students too on their part used to go on rampage thereby forcing the university authorities to shut down the campuses to avoid damages on the already insufficient facilities.

n. Insufficient Funding of Both the NUC and the Universities

This is a general phenomenon in almost all sectors. The money budgeted for running the activities of the universities is always inadequate. What worsens the situation is that not all the funds requested for in the budget are being released for the universities. With the partially released budget, the universities are forced to prioritize their needs and do away with the others. This affects the successful implementation of projects, programmes and activities of the universities.

On the part of the NUC, the existing budgetary allocation to NUC is grossly inadequate. As a result of the in-adequacy of the funds allocation to the NUC, it finds it difficult to carry out its mandate effectively and efficiently, thereby having a negative effect on the quality assurance of the system.

VI. Recommendations

In view of the enumerated challenges jeopardizing effective compliance with quality assurance guidelines in the NUS, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Conduct of post accreditation impromptu inspection visit to the universities to avoid and discourage window dressing.
2. Unbiased appointment of external examiners to avoid favouritism during both oral examination and examination of answers scripts and examination questions.
3. Application of serious sanctions on universities that establish programmes without approval from the NUC. Such sanctions should take the form of closing down the programme, coupled with close monitoring of activities going on in the universities by the NUC.
4. Admission of qualified candidates into the system. This can be achieved by close monitoring of

qualification of intakes by NUC monitoring teams and application of sanctions to defaulters by withdrawal of such candidates.

5. Implementation of agreements between government and university staff unions to avoid unnecessary strike actions by university lecturers and other unions of the universities. Often times the government goes into agreement with the unions but eventually the agreements are not fulfilled thereby provoking strike actions by the unions for the government to implement the agreement.
6. Increased funding for universities to enable them acquire state of the art equipment for teaching and learning as well as sponsorship of research activities and training of academic staff for capacity building and professional development. On the part of the NUC, the government should also adequately fund the Commission to enable it discharge its mandate efficiently and effectively.

VII. Conclusion

In the last decade, there has been a considerable increase in the funding of universities in the country through special interventions and Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) etc., That notwithstanding, more needs to be done when we talk about quality assurance and global competitiveness with world class universities. Our universities are still faced with the issue of inadequate lecture and laboratory spaces, inadequate library books and journals, lack of laboratory chemicals and reagents as well as lack of modern day instructional facilities like projectors, public address systems for teaching of large classes, etc. On the other hand, the regulatory agency NUC, is also grossly underfunded thereby making it almost impossible for the Commission to discharge its mandate. Under such a situation, effective quality assurance cannot be realized, hence the need for all these materials and funds to be made available to both the NUC and the universities so as to complement the efforts put in through the various strategies adopted to ensure quality in the Nigerian University System.

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