

Research Article

Towards Quality Assurance in Business Education in Nigeria: Constraints and Control

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Abstract: This study x-rays the concept of quality assurance in business education programs in Nigeria with particular reference to its constraints and control measures. The importance of quality business education in nation building cannot be overemphasized. The whole essence of quality assurance in business education is to enhance and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the system towards achieving the set standards. However, in recent times, evidences abound that the education system in Nigeria (business education inclusive) is performing below expectations. Although, quality assurance of business education program in Nigeria may have been jeopardized by several factors such as poor evaluation program, inadequate funding, poor supervision, attitudinal failure among others but the situation can be reversed and revamped for quality to be guaranteed. Hence, there has been a concerted effort targeted at ameliorating this deplorable situation. It was based on this therefore, that this study suggested some control measures that could help to enhance the quality of business education in Nigeria. Consequently, the paper drew a conclusion for the subject matter and it was recommended among others that there should be a positive attitudinal change, internal integrity and commitment by all stakeholders to the whole issues of education for quality to be assured in business education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Attitudinal change, evaluation, funding, minimum standards, Nigeria, quality assurance

INTRODUCTION

Education is obviously the basic instrument of economic growth and technological advancement of any society. It is in recognition of this fact that governments commit immense resources to ensure the provision of education for their citizens and also tailored their policies towards ensuring that it is made accessible to the generality of their citizenry (Oyebade *et al.*, 2008). However, business education is an essential element of this general education. It is concerned with the impartation of business orientation and knowledge for personal and national development. Business education involves teaching students the fundamentals, concepts, theories and processes of business.

To Okoli (2010), business education is an important part of the general education which emphasizes on skills and competencies acquisition for use in offices and business related occupations. Similarly, Nwanewezi (2010) describes business education as encompassing education for office occupations, business teaching, business administration and economic understanding. In all, Abdulkadir (2011) noted that one remarkable important characteristic of business education program is that, its products can function independently as self-employed and employers of labor. To this end, the tenet of business education

embraces basic education for teaching career, entrepreneurship, business understanding, office environment and vocational practices.

Education in this field occurs at several levels, including primary, secondary and higher education, with the greatest activity in the later. However, Igboke (2005) enumerated the following as the objectives of business education at all levels of education:

- To develop basic skills for personal use in the future
- To acquire the basic knowledge and skills of business education
- To relate the knowledge and skills acquired to national development
- To develop basic skills in office occupation
- To provide the needed background for teaching in business subjects
- To prepare students for further training in business studies
- To provide orientation and basic skills with which to start a life of work for those who may not undergo further training

For education to really serve as a veritable vehicle for socioeconomic growth and development as well as for the actualization of these lofty objectives of

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business education in tandem, educational institutions and its systems must function optimally in relation to its set standards. It therefore becomes imperative for a systemic quality assurance in the administration, teaching and learning of business education in Nigeria. Hence, this study seeks to discuss the issues of quality assurance in Nigerian business education program in relation to its constraints and control measures.

Conceptual view of quality assurance: Ensuring quality of education delivery in Nigeria is a fundamental and contemporary challenge in the education subsector. Quality assurance is designed to prove and improve the quality of an institution's methods and educational processes and products. According to Igborgbor (2012), quality assurance connotes all the measures taken to ensure that the educational system is better able to meet the needs of each society. In the view of Kontio (2012), quality assurance means all the procedures, processes and systems that support and develop the education and other activities of the higher education. To Kontio, quality assurance and auditing are one way to support education to improve its quality of delivery.

Similarly, Oladipo *et al.* (2009) see quality assurance as the relevance and appropriateness of the education program to the needs of the community for which it is provided. They further assert that it is the arrangement made or the mechanism put in place to maintain the degree of excellence of an educational product or services. Quality assurance involves series of operational techniques and activities which include all action taken for standards to be met. In summary, quality assurance is the entire process of ensuring maximum effectiveness and efficiency of educational programs and services in relation to their context, mission and stated objectives.

The need for quality assurance in Nigerian business education for effective teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized. However, Adegbasan (2011) enumerated the following as the major needs for quality assurance in Nigeria education system:

- To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in education
- To ensure and maintain higher standard of education at all levels
- To assist in monitoring and supervision of education
- To determine the quality of the teachers' input
- To determine the number of classrooms needed based on the average class size to ensure quality control of education
- To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control
- To ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized

On the other hand, Ehindero (2004) postulates the following as the basic indices for quality assurance in education:

- Learners' entry behavior, characteristics and attitudes including some demographic factors that can inhibit or facilitate their learning
- The teachers' entry qualifications, values, pedagogic skills and professional preparedness
- The teaching/learning processes including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment
- The flow of operational funds including its adequacy and regularity. The interplay of these and other related factors will go a long way in determining the outcome of any educational program

It is obvious that philosophical objectives of quality assurance are the decision of educational program to train individuals to achieve competence in a given area of industrial production function. The focus is to prevent problems, strengthen organizational systems and continually improving performance. Relating to the university, Uvah (2005) explains that the quality of university graduates could be measured by how well they have been prepared for life and services to society in various spheres of human endeavor. Quality of education is not determined by the end product alone but also the processes leading to the end product is as important as the product. The product is only as good as the system that produces it. Therefore, if the input is faulty, the output may likely be faulty as well. They both form part of a cyclic process with each deriving from and also feeding into the other. This is illustrated in the Fig. 1.

In Fig. 1, emphasis is on the input and process combination that produces the output with feedback mechanism to reassess whether the objectives

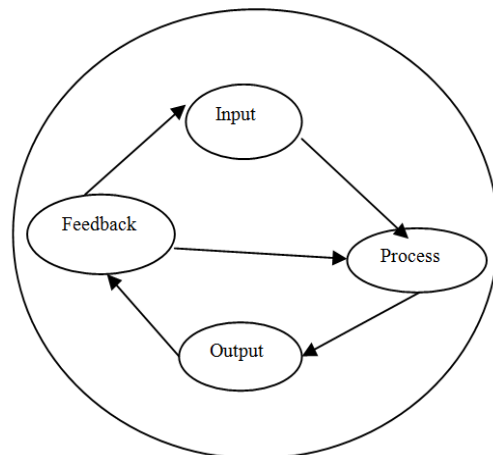


Fig. 1: Control mechanism for quality assurance in school

have been achieved or otherwise and to determine where to fine-tune. The input element includes the teachers, equipment, funds, infrastructures, supervisors etc, the process element includes the system, curriculum, teaching/learning interactions among others. The output elements are the school products, students' achievements, skills, attitudes and general behavior. The reactions from each of these elements are channeled back to the input segment through the feedback mechanism for proper control.

Quality assurance measuring parameters: To measure the quality of a program is very important in an educational system. Zunaed (2011) opines that quality of education could be measured based on several criteria such as market demand of graduates, admission in foreign universities, research and publication and institutional affiliations. However, Oladipo *et al.* (2009) submitted that quality of education could be measured in terms of quality of input, quality of output, quality of process and quality of content.

Quality of input: Input here includes both human and material resources put into educational production process. They are the teachers, administrators, classrooms, facilities, equipment and other infrastructures. What is the status of these resources in terms of quality and quantity in the schools?

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. How efficient are the products of the schools? If the input is faulty, the output may likely be faulty also.

Quality of process: This implies student/teacher interaction, level of learner's participation and engagement in learning. The process of teaching and learning should be fair and firm to the students. This is another indicator of quality education program.

Quality of content: The curriculum content of our educational system had been criticized as being overloaded, obsolete 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. So, the content of learning is yet another indicator of the quality of a program. A systematic and consistent quality assurance system helps to establish an institution's good reputation, image and credibility.

Current efforts at ensuring quality in business education in Nigeria: Tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria have enjoyed more provisions for quality assurance than the lower levels. With the establishment or expansion of each specialized type of institution, a separate coordinating organ is instituted. These organs are government agencies charged with the responsibility of regulating and supervising tertiary institutions. Thus, for universities, there is the National Universities Commission (NUC), for polytechnics, there is the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and for Colleges of Education, there is the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

Each of these bodies is empowered to set up its own mechanisms for quality assurance for institutions under its supervision. These bodies from time to time draw up Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in terms of floor space for lectures, minimum laboratory facilities per students, minimum library space, minimum staff/student ratio, minimum teaching facilities/equipment and office accommodation for effective teaching and learning in any given discipline (Uvah, 2005). They also stipulate the curricula for these institutions as well as minimum entry and graduation requirements for each discipline.

Furthermore, to ensure that these Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) are adhered to by the tertiary institutions, the NUC, NBTE and NCCE conduct routine accreditation exercise for courses and programs of institutions under its watch. The essence of this whole exercise is to maintain standard and quality of higher education (including business education) in Nigeria.

Similarly, in order to enhance the infrastructures and facilities of tertiary institutions, development of staff and research, the federal government through the ministry of education has established agencies such as the Education Trust Fund (ETF), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) amongst others. These bodies support the schools in terms of infrastructural development, training and retraining of lecturers and aids for research development. Also, the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) is a government agency that tends to bridge the gap between students' theoretical or classroom knowledge and practical or workplace experience. All these efforts are aimed at ensuring standard and quality of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) is also instituted to conduct matriculation examinations for admission into all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is a way of maintaining standard and ensuring high quality of students' intake into the institutions. Besides all these superstructures like the NUC, NBTE, NCCE, ETF, TETFUND, ITF and JAMB, each tertiary institution also set up its own internal organs for quality assurance such as the lecturers' appraisal systems, internal and

external examination moderation system, the Post Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (PUTME) and the general supervision by governing councils and visitors of each institution. Business education as an academic program has benefited from all these attempts aimed at quality assurance of the education industry.

Despite these huge efforts to ensure high quality of tertiary education in Nigeria, symptoms of poor quality education are still very obvious. Schools are now shadows with dilapidated infrastructures and obsolete equipment, parents scout for admission into universities abroad for children, employers are dissatisfied with graduates of nation's institutions, certificates obtained in Nigeria are subjected to further tests outside the country, West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) have continued to report low performance of students at the senior secondary school certificate examinations (Onyesom, 2012). This whole shambles about Nigerian education may also be further seen from the current status of world ranking of universities as reported by Igborgbor (2012) and shown as follows:

- Eight of the first ten universities in Africa are in South Africa.
- Only nine African universities are among the first one thousand in world ranking, eight of these are in South Africa.
- There is no Nigerian university among the first twenty in Africa or the first one thousand six hundred in the world ranking.
- The first ranked Nigerian university, the University of Benin is the twenty second in Africa and the one thousand six hundred and thirty ninth in the world.
- Only eleven Nigerian tertiary institutions are mentioned among the first one hundred African tertiary institutions.

The following remarks may be made:

- While one cannot be resolute about the criteria implied in this ranking, however, it does show a trend of relative qualities among countries.
- There is a strong need for sustained quality assurance measures in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

To this end, one may agree that it was based on these ugly trends in Nigeria education sector that President Goodluck Jonathan hurriedly convened an education summit on the 4th and 5th October, 2010 to chart the way forward for Nigerian education. The main question to ask here is; why quality cannot be assured with all the internal and external organs and mechanisms put in place so far?

Constraints of quality assurance in business education: The answer to the question in the preceding paragraph may be found in the following:

Poorly coordinated supervision mechanism: There is no properly managed structure on ground to adequately monitor and supervise business teachers in Nigeria tertiary institutions in order to ensure quality teaching (Amoor, 2010). It can be observed that once a business teacher is employed, he is assigned with courses to teach and nobody cares to monitor or supervise what and how he teaches. If such a teacher is inexperienced and not supervised, the students are at a risk of learning things that may not lead to the desired knowledge, skills and competencies. In another dimension, some teachers take up adjunct appointments in two or more tertiary institutions, thereby ignoring their primary assignment where they are on full appointment. This can seriously affect the teacher's quality, input and output. According to Ohiwerei and Okoli (2010), supervision has been a great challenge in business education as it lacks the needed commitment and coordination to survive. Both the internal and external organs of quality assurance in business education in this regard have failed. Any system or project that is not properly supervised is bound to derail from its expectations and intended objectives.

Under funding: The issue of funding of education has been a recurrent decimal in the history of Nigeria's educational system. The establishment and running of tertiary institutions is capital-intensive. Every item within the formal learning environment is subject to availability of fund. Oladipo *et al.* (2009) noted that lack of adequate funding has clearly impaired the performance and the standard of Nigerian universities. They added that Nigerian universities cannot meet their expectations especially in terms of the quality of teaching and research due to inadequate funding. According to Amahua (2010), records show that Nigeria allocates less than 10% of her annual budget to education in spite of the poor state of education system in the country. This allocation is far below the UNESCO recommendation that a minimum of 26% of annual budget of the developing countries be allocated to funding of education, which the government of Nigeria has consistently refused to implement. This shortage of fund has affected the infrastructural development and research in Nigeria tertiary institutions. Hence, 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, lack of lecturers in their right quality and quantity, incessant strike actions, all due to poor funding of tertiary education. Consequently, it is in recognition of this problem that educational institutions mount and execute substandard programs mainly as a means to raise funds for themselves. At the moment however, the NUC is mounting pressure on universities to discontinue such programs.

Student explosion: The issue of over enrolment of student has become a common feature in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. This could be as a result of the quest for higher education and population explosion in Nigeria. Many of the facilities on ground are being overstretched. Okebukola (2005) released the list of some overcrowded universities where Olabisi Onabanjo University topped the list with excess enrolment of 24,628 students. A development that surely will affect the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria, since excess enrolment usually leads to overcrowded classrooms, ineffective teaching and examination malpractices. Business education is in forefront of this enrolment explosion because students and parents want a course that can make the graduates self-reliant considering the present economic situation of the country where graduates unemployment is soaring high.

Poor management and governance: The way and manner some of the Nigerian tertiary institutions and programs are being managed by administrators is also having a consequential effect on quality assurance in the education sector. This problem characterizes every other sectors of Nigerian society. We are notorious in having weak institutions that govern our social interactions. To Amadi (2012), the problem in Nigeria is that the institutions for managing education whether at the local or national level are weak and inefficient because of the democracy deficit in our polity. These institutions are themselves not transparent and accountable. For most of the tertiary institutions, management means little more than playing the role of a "Caretaker." This vital function has been largely reduced to the maintenance of the status quo. This unfortunate development negates the concept of higher education, particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. It seems certain and sure that as long as management continues to play this nonchalant role, quality assurance will continue to be jeopardized in the nation's tertiary institutions.

Attitudinal failure: Closely related to poor management is attitudinal failure. Many pitfalls in quality assurance measures in business education are actually avoidable but for attitudinal failures on the part of stakeholders and educators. On the part of governments as stakeholders, several reports from commissions, conferences and agencies have highlighted many deficiencies in the education system nationwide. Instead of addressing the issue, governments take the attention seeking measures on television screens to show that it is working while the decay continuous unabated at the roots (Igborgbor, 2012). Worse still, even the meager proportion of the budget allocated to education is not left to the end user. Government and its functionaries would rather use it on behalf of the institutions to award politically motivated contracts which may never get completed until the end of the life of that regime.

On the other hand, do the educators interact with students in the most productive ways? What are these rumors about sales of marks, payments for project supervision or writing, what about planning and execution of examination malpractices by school heads and teachers in our schools? Do we recruit educators on merit or by ethnic or political considerations? When schools face accreditation panels, do they show only what they have or what they have borrowed in order to 'succeed'? These are what Amadi (2012) termed the "ethic problem in Nigerian education". The point being made here is that without a positive attitudinal change and internal integrity being maintained, any attempt by both internal and external bodies to assure quality in education will remain nothing but a mirage.

Control measures of quality assurance in business education: For quality assurance in business education to be guaranteed, the following measures should be noted and implemented.

Evaluation and monitoring: This is a formal process carried out within the school setting. It is based on available data which are used to form conclusions. The aim of evaluation and monitoring as a quality assurance strategy is to see how the system can be assisted to improve on present level of performance. There is therefore, need to examine the qualification of teachers, availability of equipment in the required number as well as the proper use of the processes involved in the various skills to ensure that the finished products are of high standard. Evaluation will show (if any) the gap existing between the intended objectives of the school program and the actualized objectives. Similarly, it will expose areas that need improvement. Through constant evaluation and monitoring of business education activities in terms of effective control by the heads of departments and constant feedback to management and good utilization of reports, the standard of business education would be raised high and sustained. So, evaluation and monitoring of business education programs should be regularly done to ensure high quality of the program.

Adequate funding: Business education needs to be funded adequately to enable its programs to achieve the aim of ensuring quality in education. The funding needs of business education are quite enormous and they need to be addressed promptly. These needs include the purchase of equipment and facilities for typing laboratories, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) laboratories, model offices, provision of infrastructure, maintenance of equipment and facilities, training and retraining of staff, funding of students work experience programs amongst others. We cannot compete in today's world if we continue with the insufficient public investment in education under

the excuse of financial constraints. However, business education departments should look beyond funds from governments and proprietors of schools, through partnership with the organized private sector, nongovernmental organizations and philanthropists. This would help to supplement government funding and enhances the wellbeing of the program.

Enhanced supervision: A well-coordinated 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 stimulate and encourage both staff and students in the system to perform their duties as to achieve the institutional tasks or objectives. Also, effective supervision mechanism will help administrators to identify the quality of lecturers in the institution. It will also check and balance academic staff, nonacademic staff and students. Hence, Zunaed (2011) remarked that any quality assurance management system should have a check and balance method. According to Zunaed, an independent third party auditor (supervisor) can serve the purpose. Supervision goes beyond inspection and includes attempts at bringing about improvement in the quality of instructions. There should be a strategic supervision mechanism for business education. A mechanism that would regularly and properly supervise the teaching and learning of business education programs. A framework should be instituted to implement the mechanism in the best interest of business education program. A well coordinated supervision will certainly improve the quality of business education program.

Retraining of teachers: The teacher is the king-pin of quality in education. There are situations where students with bright academic performances 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 area of character and learning. The teaching staff should be provided with training in relevant aspects of students' managements systems, educational design and pedagogy. It is imperative that business education teachers are aware of institutional policies about assessment of student's learning, return of assignment as well as how to optimize the use of E-learning technologies. Business teachers should be aware of the support services available to students. All these awareness and development can only come through a process of training and retraining. Therefore, the business educators should be trained from time to time because some skills that are relevant and useful today may likely be irrelevant and obsolete tomorrow as result of advancement in technology and learning. Retraining of business teachers will put them in the

balanced stand to ensure quality of business education program.

Research improvement: Absence of research is synonymous to absence of development and innovations. The gap that has been created by the current trend of technology and demands in work places need to be covered through research efforts. Research in business education should be encouraged and motivated in order to surmount some of the contemporary challenges in the discipline. An improved research endeavor will certainly enhance the quality of business education.

Attitudinal change: For the above control measures of quality assurance in business education to be effective and sustained, there is a strong need for positive attitudinal change on the part of government, school administrators and management, business education teachers and of course the students. Integrity is highly required in this regard. Integrity on the part of governments, administrators, business educators and students. Commitment and dedication is also a vital tool in the war against poor quality of education. The governments, school administrators, teachers and students need to be committed and dedicated to the core objectives of the educational system. According to Amadi (2012), the federal and state legislators must be serious in overseeing the effective use of education budget. Amadi further stressed that increasing education budget is important but ensuring that every kobo spent on education adds value is more important. Our attitude and value system need to change positively for us to realize the dream of quality and high standard of business education.

CONCLUSION

Education in Nigeria, (business education inclusive) has gone below its expectations. The system has derailed from its original intentions because the learning conditions are deteriorating, classrooms are overcrowded, laboratories lack the basic equipment, libraries are nothing but a collection of obsolete materials, incessant strike actions and students' unrest. All these have contributed to a precipitous fall in the standard and quality of education in Nigeria. Apart from these seemingly deficiencies in the sector, there is an attitudinal failure on the part of all stakeholders. However, this situation in the education sector is not irreversible only if there is a positive attitudinal change by all stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Base on the preceding discourse on ensuring quality of business education in Nigeria however, the following recommendations are made:

- There should be a strategic vibrant framework for evaluation and monitoring the entire business education program. This could be done by internal and external organs.
- There should be a strong institutional supervision mechanism to regularly supervise the teaching and learning of business education towards quality assurance.
- Funding of business education should be improved by school owners and donor agencies to ensure quality of the program.
- Business educators should be subjected to training and retraining from time to time in order to remain relevant and useful.
- There must be a positive attitudinal change, internal integrity and commitment by all stakeholders to the whole issues of education for quality to be assured in business education.

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