

QUALITY MANAGEMENT: A FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

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Abstract

This paper was designed to study fundamental issues that affect or impact on how quality management are implemented in Nigeria university context. It is a review of eight major papers focused on quality improvement of Nigerian universities. The research used a desk research methodology to critique areas hitherto overlooked by other researchers in the plan to improve quality services and management. The paper reveals that the challenge of management quality in Nigeria transcends the issue of finance or federal government allocation of resources. The paper presupposes that the issue of poor funding is critical to the development of quality service. However, it is not the exclusive responsibility of the federal government to finance the sector. Other stakeholders, such as state and local governments, as well as other private businesses, have responsibilities they must discharge.

Keywords: government, quality management, Nigeria, university

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most populated countries on the African continent. This necessitates increased demand for university education and its continued development, perhaps more than any other African country. In an attempt to fulfil this growing demand for university education, the Federal government that was largely responsible for its provision is gradually shifting the task, ceding ownership to state governments and private providers. This continues to raise concern, especially in relation to the question of who should shoulder the duty of finance.

In a research by Adetunji (2014), he had concluded that establishment of many of the universities in Nigeria was motivated by political motives, without due and critical deliberation on several other related factors. The Federal government allocates resources to states and local governments for the development of their domains. Likewise, the Federal government allocates funds to its universities situated in those states. Invariably, the state governments are expectedly responsible to universities located their domain, in order to engender mental development of their citizens and prepare them for prospective opportunities and employability. However, it has been observed that state governments typically tend to decline financial responsibility on Federal universities sited in their area making it extremely difficult for such institutions to meet their funding requirements. On such many occasions, politics is introduced into the funding of tertiary education. As a result of this, adequate financing becomes a major constraint and challenge.

Nigeria, like other countries of the world, recognizes education as a major instrument for effecting national development. Nigerians believe that education is critical for social, economic and political progress. They adjudge that educational goals can be fully attained if quality delivery is ensured. Thus, quality higher education is considered critical to Nigeria and Nigerians becoming globally competitive.

This article discusses and identifies fundamental quality issues in Nigerian higher education as a fundamental requirement in the 21st Century. The author agrees that there is the need for the Nigerian governments at Federal, State and Local levels, to meet up with the 26 per cent education funding as recommended by UNESCO. Besides, reforming existing universities in Nigeria requires collaborative efforts of the three-tier levels of government, as well as the other stake holding sectors of the Nigerian economy, be they private or public institutions.

According to Peretomode and Chukwuma (2007), higher education is the facilitator, the bed rock, the power house and the driving force for strong socio-economic, political, cultural, healthier and industrial development of a nation, as higher education institutions are key mechanisms increasingly recognized as wealth and human capital producing industries. Only human capital can sustain growth (Sofowora, 2011). World Bank (1999) posits that higher education is a fundamental instrument for the construction of a knowledge economy and the development of human capital all over the world.

An update report of the World Bank (2004) actually argued that higher education is fundamental to all developing countries if they are to prosper in a world economy where

knowledge has become a vital area of advantage. The quality of knowledge which is generated in the university is critical to national competitiveness. It is only quality education that can sharpen the minds of the individual and help transform the society economically, socially and politically. Countries can achieve sustainable development by improving, through training in higher levels, the skills of their human capitals.

From a global perspective, higher level manpower training has been recognized as a primary tool for national progress. Ehiamentor (1988) suggests that provision of high level education enables a nation's citizens to acquire skills and techniques which are ploughed into human productivity, creativity, competence, initiative, innovation and inventiveness. In view of this clear understanding of the necessity for higher education to be effective and efficient in producing graduates, the need for quality means toward achieving this goal becomes significant.

Research

Adetunji (2015) state that quality education is education that is relevant and adapted to the needs of the society. Adetunji (2015) argues that such needs must meet the standards in growth, health and physical survival, in a complex and globalized world. This implies that education empowers the recipients with relevant knowledge, ideas, skills, values and attitudes needed for them to make informed decisions and to live a self-sustaining life. Therefore, education is worthwhile.

Quality refers to the worth of inputs in terms of instructional facilities, lecturers, teaching facilities and evaluation procedures invested into the system, which translates to the outputs. Majasan, (1998) maintains that quality education is value-loaded, arguing that quality education should produce disciplined behaviour, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. Majasan asserts that If a society expects quality manpower for rapid development and transformation, quality education is a must. This, he continues, is because quality education expectedly addresses critical issues like the dignity of labour, quality leadership and committed citizenship, industrial harmony, political stability, religious tolerance, self-reliance and security. Consequently, quality higher education entails that its products are able to perform according to expected standards and compete favourably with their peers in other countries of the world. Adetunji (2015) expresses that quality education produces a complete person, in the sense that the person is intellectually, morally, physically, emotionally and socially developed. Hence, Akinola (2013) argues that education without quality can even be more

dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education has no value.

Concept and Definition of Quality Management In Higher Education

This section explores what quality management is and how it has been perceived in the university context by different stakeholders involved in the process. The university system quality is recognised as a fundamental issue in management theory and practice. However, there is substantial variation in the perception by different stakeholders and the ensuing implications for organisational performance (Saad and Siha, 2000; Harvey, 2005). The gurus such as Juran, Ishikawa and others who have contributed to the study of quality focus on rationale (objects). Meanwhile, Hill et al. (2003) analyze that education is a service, and services are described as activities or processes that are differentiated from physical goods. Likewise, Hill et al. (2003) claim that one distinct feature of services is that they are more interactive, rather than substantial entities. This feature is particularly relevant to universities, which have been described by Harvey (2005) debated by Mattick and Knight (2007) as a process of transformation involving the systematic and critical development of the student to a competent mind.

Furthermore, Iacovidou, Gibbs and Zopiatis (2009) advocate that universities engage in highly subjective and intangible products, which are the aftermath of a complex multifaceted service delivery of post-purchase knowledge and an addition of tangible and intangible offerings (Wright and O'Neill, 2002). This includes students, faculty, employers, university employees and the community, thus constructing an entity that is tremendously hard to assess. Harvey (2005) acknowledges that the quality of a multi-dimensional learning experience, such as university education, is influenced by numerous factors and variables, at the end of which the student completes a profile of experience and talents which the world in general will recognise as the quality of the learning provision. Although to some people universities may be defined by the quality of their educational delivery or provision, Harvey argues that the measurement and evaluation of quality is subject to many different understandings and difficulties.

A vital concern in management is the absence of agreement in defining quality, although many people seem to believe they can automatically identify quality when they encounter it. The doubt arises because people observe quality differently, making it a puzzling perception to express or measure (Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2006; Ardi, Hidayatno & Zagloel, 2012). In the light of this assertion, Wittek and Kvernbekk (2011) express Ball's view in Westerheijden et al. (2007), on what quality is in the university and how it can be obtained. They write:

...Politicians, academics, students, employers and other stakeholders may have different views; each of these groups of stakeholders among themselves may have different views. The variety seems boundless and leads back to Ball's exasperated reaction' (p. 4)

From this point, Harvey and William (2010) and Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker (2010) elaborate that quality is a vigorous idea, which utilises passionate and moral encouragement, making it difficult to connect it to any one specific meaning. Furthermore, the emphasis in the literature on quality is mainly product-oriented, while service quality has received considerably less attention (Abukari & Corner, 2010).

Likewise, there is absence of agreement on the several aspects of service quality and their interrelationships (Hung et al., 2003; Eagle and Brennan, 2007). Nevertheless, Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002) support Zeithamal et al. (1990): they hypothesize that the main difference between product and service quality is the fact that unlike products, service users do not evaluate services solely in retrospect, but consider the procedure of presenting the service as an essential part. Users' inability to evaluate services retrospectively has also made it more challenging for service users to assess service quality, creating a fundamental issue in determining quality.

Edvardson (2005) made a case that quality management in the services sector was seen as improving internal processes without considering the impact or interrelationships between the processes and the ultimate customers. Ultimately, the attention shifted to the consumer, and now, many explanations of service quality are customer focused, as observed by Doherty (2008), such that once consumer expectations are met, service quality is considered acceptable (Abukari & Corner, 2010).

This is observably not the case in the production or delivery of services in the Nigerian universities as students are currently not considered as customers. The question and appropriateness of whether or not students are customers remains undecided. This has contributed to the decline of quality service provision (Adetunji & Mojeed-Sanni, 2015) making it difficult to ascertain the quality of service delivered and received.

Quality Management Debate In Nigeria Universities

Obasi, Akuchie and Obasi (2010) argues that there have been several discussions on the decline in quality of Nigerian public universities. Likewise, Okechukwu and Okechukwu (2011) state that the context in which public universities operate has experienced change over the last two decades. There has also been increased demand for quality when the resources in terms of finance

and materials are scarce, resulting in low technological advancement. They claim that there is pressure on universities to respond to the needs and aspirations of students and other users.

In a similar view, Adeogun and Gboyega (2010) stress that it is good news that university education is becoming a global business. They observe that competitors around the world are now seeking to sell their universities overseas, into such a market Nigerians previously saw as theirs. For these reasons, Sofowora (2011) claims that the Nigerian government has introduced various policies, models and theories in the last decade to accommodate and satisfy increasing anxieties from key stakeholders. This was assumed a fundamental strategy to reasonably resolve the access crisis in the Nigerian public universities. However, the strategy creates other quality issues, including quality decline of intakes, teaching and output, according to Adelabu and Akinkunmi (2008) as well as Adeogun and Gboyega (2010).

In view of these problems, Ogundare (2009) and Dauda (2010) added that the resources required to provide education are scarce, while students' desire for university education has continued to swell. Likewise, Salmin (2009) claim that Nigerian universities are actually not relevant or efficient in fulfilling national development objectives. For instance, Salmin (2009) hypothesized that, whereas Nigerian universities graduate students in civil and electrical engineering annually, there are no good roads, and the country struggles to provide constant electricity and potable water. Duze (2011) assert that a high ratio of distinctions or first class degrees obtained does not necessarily indicate an elevated level of quality. consequently, Aina (2007) stress that it is uncertain whether university graduates may be reduced to simple measurable end products. Thus, it is argued that the value added by the university (if it is effective) should continue long after the formal programme of study has been completed. This seems not to be the case in the Nigerian context, setting the subject of quality at the top of research agenda.

Moreover, Salmin (2009), Ojerinde (2010), Akinola (2013) hypothesise that Nigeria is likely to witness the establishment of more universities as a result of overcrowding in the existing ones. The unremitting demand for university education by applicants, with the incessant trend of protracted strike action by the academic and non-academic staff in Nigerian public universities, has kept over 1.5 million qualified applicants waiting for admission yearly since 2005. This figure is estimated to have doubled following the recent nine-month Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike from April 2013 to January 2014. Convincingly, Blackmore (2009) claims that universities need to realise that their long-term survival depends on how meritorious their services are and the quality of services offered, rather than the number of students they can admit. Modebelu and Joseph (2012) state that it is very important to understand the complexities involved

in managing quality in the university. They added that the presence of such complexity should not obscure the fact that management concepts and strategies underpin the long-term survival of universities with a mission to accomplish.

A few researchers (Okogie, 2009; Ojerinde, 2010; Akinola, 2013) also indicate that the National Universities Commission (NUC) aims to prevent poor quality service delivery by focusing on the process and emphasising prevention rather than cure. It is evident in the work of Cartwright (2007) that as a function of desperate need for positive changes in implementing university objectives, principal officers introduce mechanisms such as quality control and quality assurance. Nigerian universities are not exempt from such need for change, as the government has put in place elaborate measures to improve quality, such as quality assurance initiated through the NUC, as an indication of the frantic desire to effect improvement in Nigerian universities (Okogie, 2009; Sofowora, 2011). But in reality, if the government has introduced the NUC to prevent poor service delivery, why was it difficult to stop public university lecturers from a nine-month strike? The effectiveness of such measures introduced by the government remains a perennial disquiet requiring critical analysis of quality management in Nigerian universities.

Fundamental Issue

The discourse on qualitative higher education delivery, particularly in Nigeria, appears to suggest that education is exclusively the responsibility of the Federal and state governments. Yet, several stakeholders tend to maintain that the current state of university education is a result of poor funding by the central government. It is beyond question that the Federal government should play a major role in the delivery of quality education, design of curriculum, prescribing the national education philosophy and providing education policy direction for the entire country. Federal government's leadership is requisite, especially because it is the single largest owner of universities in the country with about 80 Universities (NUC, 2015). Moreover, poor funding is evidently one of the numerous challenges confronting the Nigerian university system. With better funding, universities can afford better equipment, better quality teachers and research grants to both students and faculty.

However, this author submits that these fundings, if taken at face value, may be gravely deceptive. Improving the quality of university education in Nigeria requires more than Federal government involvement and certainly much more than allocation of financial resources – although this is extremely desirable. While the allocation of adequate financial resources (be it 26 per cent of the budget or 6 per cent of GDP, whichever is considered as appropriate) remains paramount, fixing

Nigeria's virtually wrecked university system requires much more than that. Every stakeholder needs to get involved.

University education is not the sole responsibility of the Federal government. As clearly indicated in part 2 sections 27 to 30 of the 1999 constitution, the provision of education, and university education in particular, is the duty of both state and Federal governments. Out of the about 125 Universities in the country, only 37 belong to the Federal government. States own 38 of them while the rest are privately owned. Thus, the states as well as the private sector, as much as the Federal government, have investment responsibility in the development of tertiary education. States need to allocate proportionate resources required of the Federal government to ensure quality education delivery in their respective universities. The resources required should help in the purchase of necessary tools (including laboratory equipment), provision of continuous professional development training of faculty members, provision of access to research grants, building of adequate classrooms and offices, procuring of information and communication technology tools and update of libraries. In addition, state governments should invest in scholarships for outstanding students from disadvantaged backgrounds (in addition to or in place of existing annual bursaries) and support learning exchanges nationally and abroad. Federal and state governments also need to set unambiguous goals and standards for their universities to pursue and accomplish. In this regard, an annual education policy review forum between the governments and universities to discuss national vision, goals and objectives for education is inevitable. Such fora will enable the governments to obtain feedback as well as buy-in from university authorities and staff.

There are other fundamental issues, apart from poor funding. This author lists four of these to include corruption, poor customer service, lack of continuous professional development and poor ethical standards. Corruption encapsulates, like for the rest of Nigeria, all the problems facing university education delivery in Nigeria. So the first means to improve university education delivery is to deal with challenge of systemic corruption and ensure that universities become more accountable with 'internally generated revenue' and judiciously expend subventions provided by government.

Poor customer service affects the delivery of quality education in Nigeria. In the author's view, the relationship between students and lecturers is, in a solemn sense, a business liaison (particularly in the fee paying university system) and therefore, should be handled as such. If this is the case, then students deserve to be treated with deference. Interference with students' private affairs under the guise of character development (whatever this means in relation to university

delivery in Nigeria) requires cessation. Clear guidelines defining student-lecturer relationship and processes for conflict resolution should be established to foster immediate growth rather than a blame culture and non-involvement of staff in contributing to student learning.

Additionally, the palpable lack of sustained professional faculty development explains why many are *stuck* with archaic pedagogical approaches, obsolete course contents and irrelevant theoretical frameworks, some of which may have been disproved, updated or discarded overtime. The responsibility for ongoing knowledge acquisition, skills and professional development, should be mutually borne by the staff and the university managements. Incentives should be provided by the institutions to motivate lecturers to generate excellent scholarship. In this regard, it is possible to establish schemes that recompense lecturers for publishing in high impact and reputable journals.

Further to this, universities should institute processes, standards and support infrastructure that will enhance the updating of their staff. This could be achieved through the establishment of staff development centers focusing on social capital development as mooted by Mojeed-Sanni, Adetunji and Ogunleye (2015).

Finally, the author suggests that universities should establish clear ethical standards and guidelines, effectively disseminate or improve the enforcement of existing ones. Several questions surround this issue: what ethical standards should guide student-lecturer, student-student relationships? There should be clear ethical codes that guide research and practices at our universities. ...and many more.

Conclusion

Essentially, the author makes a claim that although the Federal government has a vital and central role in the delivery of quality university education, there are other actors whose roles are equally critical. These include state governments, the private sector and individual university authorities. Also, while the allocation of adequate funds is important, there are other significant aspects of university life that need to be addressed. Some of these include tackling corruption, improving customer service, supporting continuous professional development of faculty members and promoting and enforcing ethical principles of engagement, among others. The author established that managing quality in Nigerian universities is a requirement with potential of enhancing better practices and developing sound mental capacities of the individual, including both students and staff, since university education system is a learning environment. Consequently,

everyone associated with the institution needs to learn something from the establishment, either directly or indirectly.

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