

Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Anambra State: A Knowledge Management Approach

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ABSTRACT

The importance of quality education in nation building cannot be over emphasized. The research objective of this study is to ascertain quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State through a knowledge management approach. The population consisted of senior lecturers in 10 departments in the universities. Simple random sampling method was used to sample 10 lecturers from each of these departments, which makes the total sample size of 100 lecturers. The instrument for data collection was 20-item questionnaire titled ‘‘Quality Assurance in Higher Education Questionnaire’ (QAHEQ). Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire items. A reliability Alpha of 0.87 was obtained. Two research questions were structured and data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation for the analyses. Findings revealed that, poor funding of education programme were barrier against quality assurance in higher education. It was therefore recommended that, government should re-address the issue of funding of university with adequate budget for training and re-training of staff.

Key Words: Education, Knowledge Management, Quality, Assurance, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the new century, there have been drastic impacts from advances in information technology and rapid increasing social-political demands on quality and affordable education in nearly every States in Nigeria. Education has been described as the bedrock of every society and tool for nation building (Adegbesan, 2011). For quality education to be achieved in a nation, the teachers, learners and environment must be cooperatively organized. In other words, the teacher must be adequate in quality and quantity, the students must be well trained and facilities must be provided as well (Ogunsaju, 2006). Quality assurance in the education system therefore, is an umbrella concept for a lot of activities that are designed to improve the systems input, process and output of education (Aworanti, 2012). Quality assurance in the education system therefore, involves the process of monitoring, assessing and evaluating all aspects of the education activities and communicating the outcome to all concerned with a view of improving the products of the education system. Kadir (2012) quality assurance in Anambra State education therefore, implies the ability of the various arms of tertiary institutions to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills required by their outputs.

Quality assurance, school monitoring and review, parental choice, student representation, community involvement in governance and performance-based funding are some typical examples of measures to pursue to enhance effectiveness in the educational institution and community (Ijaiya, 2001). Recently, it has been contended whether the effects of many initiatives of quality assurance approaches can meet the challenges of rapid transformations in an era of globalization and information technology. Particularly when knowledge management economy and information technology, were strongly emphasized in this new millennium (Fabunmi, 2005). Aina (2011) posited that, there are paradigm shift in teaching, learning, content, practice, and management of education at different levels to ensure their relevance to the future. Ogunsaju (2006) claimed that knowledge management approach of education reform emphasizes strongly on effectiveness in terms of relevance to the new paradigm of education concerning contextualized multiple intelligences, globalization, localization and individualization. Ijaiya (2001) asserted that pursuit of new vision and aims at different levels of education, lifelong learning, global networking, international outlook, and use of information and technology are just some emerging evidence of this approach.

Similarly, the discussion of education quality focuses heavily on the effectiveness of internal education processes, particularly teaching and learning. In this context, education quality mainly refers to the achievement of planned

education goals, particularly in terms of students' education outcomes (Ijaiya, 2001). The higher achievement in planned education goals implies the better quality in education (Olowoselu, 2016). In this sense, education quality is no different from education effectiveness. Also, quality assurance often refers to the efforts for improving the internal working system and processes, such that the effectiveness of learning and teaching can be ensured to achieve the planned goals (Ogunsaju, 2006).

Quality assurance relies heavily on institutional monitoring and reporting to ensure no problems or deficiencies arising from its operation and structure (Fadokun, 2005). The management team of an education institution may set up a stringent quality assurance and monitoring system in order to ensure a deficiency-free environment (Ijaiya, 2001). Identifying strategies for internal improvement of an education institution can be more precisely done by analysing problems and defects as opposed to education quality (Ogunsaju, 2006). Therefore, knowledge management approach is useful particularly when the criteria of education quality are really unclear but the strategies for internal improvement are needed.

The need for quality assurance in Nigerian schools cannot be overemphasized in order to ensure quality of teaching and learning. However, Adegbesan (2011) posited the following as the major needs of quality education in Nigeria: (i) To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in education, (ii) To ensure and maintain high standard of education at all levels, (iii) To assist in monitoring and supervision of education, (iv) To determine the quality of the teacher input, (v) To determine the number of classrooms needed based on the average class size to ensure quality control of education, (vi) To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control (vii) It would ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

Fadokun (2005) characterized quality by three interrelated and interdependent strands; (i) Efficiency in the meeting of its goals, (ii) Relevance to human and environmental conditions and needs, (iii) Something more" that is the exploration of new ideas, the pursuit of excellence and encouragement of creativity. With regards to education, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) views quality from different perspectives. The first is from the internal criteria of the system such as profile expiration and the external criteria which are the fitness and relevance of such an education to its environment. Arikewuyo (2004) views quality in education to be judged by both its ability to enable the students performs well in standard examinations and relevance to the needs of the students, community, and the society as a whole. However, quality assurance is related to quality control, but it functions in a rather proactive manner in the sense that, quality control serves as series of operational techniques and activities used to fulfil the requirements (Onocha, 2002). While, quality assurance goes beyond that, because it extends the focus from outcomes or outputs to the process which produces them. Similarly, Ajayi and Adegbesan (2007) argue that, quality assurance is related to accountability both of which are concerned with maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems and services in relation to their contexts, their missions and their stated objectives. Ehindero (2004) opine that quality assurance focused on: (i) Learners entry behaviours, characteristics and attributes including some demographic factors that can inhibit or facilitate their learning, (ii) The teacher entry qualification, values pedagogic stalls, professional preparedness, subject background, philosophical orientation, (iii) The teaching and learning processes including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment, (iv) The outcomes, which are defined for different levels in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes including appropriate and relevant instruments to assess these objectives. Apparently, Fadokun (2005) sums the definition of quality assurance as all these objectives, actions, attitudes and procedures that are used together with quality control activities in other to ensure appropriate academic standards and programmed in the education sector (Adegbesan, 2011).

Arguably, education assurance mainly refers to the satisfaction of stakeholders with the education services including education process and outcomes (Ajayi and Adegbesan, 2007). Accountability of a school or educational institution to the stakeholders is often perceived as an important indicator for satisfying the needs of stakeholders (Onocha 2002). Therefore, quality assurance often refers to the efforts to ensure that education services satisfy the needs of stakeholders and are accountable to the public.

*Quality educational resources are necessary for education institutions to achieve diverse objectives and provide quality services in a short space of time (Olowoselu, 2016). Therefore, quality assurance refers to the efforts to ensure that different types of quality resource inputs and appropriate environment are available for education services and practices (Arikewuyo 2004). The quality education indicators may include high quality student intake,

more qualified staff recruited, better facilities and equipment, better staff-student's ratio, and more financial support from the tertiary education fund, alumni and parent (Olowoselu and Bello, 2015).

In the context of knowledge management approach. Aina (2011) contend that education environment is now very challenging, demanding and competitive. Education institutions have to face the external challenges and demands for accountability with value for money. This approach assumes that, in order to achieve excellent and acquire critical resource, education institutions have to win support of the community, build up a good public image and show evidence of accountability (Ogunsaju, 2006). Therefore, quality education mainly refers to the achievement of an education institutions reputation in the community (Ijaiya, 2001). Quality assurance by this approach relies on building up public relations, marketing institutional strengths, ensuring institutional accountability to the public, and promoting institutional image and status in the community (Olowoselu, 2016). The current emphasis on parental choice and accountability in educational reforms seems to support the importance of knowledge management approach in assessing quality education.

Statement of the Problem

One of the objectives of higher education is to prepare graduates with appropriate skills and professional competence for self-reliant. This objective seems not to have been achieved due to high rate of unemployment in Anambra state. Authors observed that most of the graduates were seen as applicants roaming the street in search of jobs that are not available. Many engaged in petty jobs such as riding motorcycle as business transportation and restaurants stewards among other outside jobs below their level.

This observation was ratified by the result of the interview conducted by the researchers with 10 lecturers of Universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. The lecturers concluded that they have seen graduates in occupations other than the area in which they were trained. The lecturers posited that they have been working in line with their professional ethics only that they want total review of quality assurance in the university which are faced with lots of challenges. It is to this effect that the researchers embarked on this study to investigate the challenges hindering quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State and proffer possible solution to overcome some of the challenges in the State.

Research Objectives

The research objective of this study is to ascertain quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State through a knowledge management approach. Specifically, the research objectives of the study are to:

1. Ascertain the barriers to quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State
2. Ascertain the coping initiatives adopted for quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used for the study.

RQ1. What are the barriers to quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State?

RQ2. What are the coping initiatives adopted for quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State?

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research design using descriptive survey research was adopted for this study. The study was conducted in Anambra States. Target population consisted of senior lecturers in 10 departments in the university. Simple random sampling method was used to sample 10 lecturers from each of these departments, which makes the total sample size of 100 lecturers. Two research questions guided the study, a 20 item questionnaire titled: Quality Assurance in Higher Education Questionnaire (QAHEQ) was developed by the researchers and used for data collection. The questionnaire had a five-point response scale options of Highly Accepted (HA), Averagely Accepted (AA), Slightly Accepted (SA), Not Accepted (NA) and Higher Not Accepted (HNA) with a corresponding value of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Three experts from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University validated the questionnaire items. Their corrections and suggestions were used to produce the final copy. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire items. A reliability Alpha of 0.87 was obtained. The researchers administered the questionnaire to the respondents and all copies of the questionnaire were retrieved for analyses.

The data collected were analysed using weighted mean and standard deviation. A mean of 2.50 was used for decision-making. Any item with mean value of 2.50 or above was regarded as a practice that is accepted while any item with a mean of 2.49 or less than was regarded as not accepted.

Results

RQ1. What are the barriers to quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean Rating of the respondents on the barriers to quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State (N=83).

S/N	Barriers to effective implementation	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Lack of in-built mechanisms to solicit stakeholder's feedback.	3.32	0.30	HA
2.	Acute shortage of lecturers of all education programmes.	2.60	0.23	SA
3.	Lack of adequate modern teaching and learning resources.	3.36	0.32	HA
4.	Lack of coordinated policies on education programme.	3.55	0.32	HA
5.	There is inconsistency in academic calendar due to lecturers' strike action.	2.62	0.24	SA
6.	Poor funding of education programme.	3.64	0.35	HA
7.	Poor remuneration for lecturers of higher institution.	3.66	0.36	HA
8.	Lack of focused effort to maintain the quality of the curriculum	3.38	0.31	HA
9.	Lack of systematic assessment system	3.44	0.33	HA
10	Budget constraints for training and re-training	3.82	0.39	HA

HA = Highly Accepted, SA = Slightly Accepted, SD = Standard deviation.

The data on Table 1 shows that all the 10 items had their mean values ranging from 2.60 to 3.82 and were above the cut of point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents accepted that all the items were barriers to quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State. The table showed that the standard deviation of the 10 items ranged from 0.23 to 0.39 which means that the respondents were not too far in their option from one person to another in the responses.

RQ2. What are the coping initiatives adopted for quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of the respondents on coping initiatives adopted for quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State(N=83).

S/N	Coping initiatives by lecturers	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Attend workshops and seminars for staff capacity building.	3.14	0.32	HA
2.	Recommend to the Administration to employ more lecturers for programmes.	2.75	0.25	SA
3.	Improving quality of the curriculum in the institutions.	3.08	0.31	HA
4.	Shared vision and mission statement.	2.59	0.23	SA
5.	Strengthening University-Industry collaboration.	3.06	0.26	HA
6.	Students' career development.	3.54	0.35	HA
7.	Students are well informed of the criteria used for assessment through the syllabus.	3.44	0.33	HA
8.	Embark on research to upgrade institutional competence in education programme.	3.31	0.32	HA
1.	Filling gap between the students' needs and the curriculum.	2.61	0.24	SA
2.	Teaching and learning systems are monitored periodically.	3.62	0.38	HA

HA = Highly Accepted, SA = Slightly Accepted, SD = standard deviation.

The data on Table 2 shows that all the 10 items had their mean values ranging from 2.59 to 3.62 were above the cut of point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents accepted that all the items were coping initiatives adopted by lecturers for effective quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State. The table showed that the standard deviation of the 10 items ranged from 0.23 to 0.38 which means that the respondents were not too far from opinion of one another in the responses.

DISCUSSION OF RESULT

The result revealed that there are ten barriers to quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State while there are also ten coping initiatives adopted by lecturers for effective implementation of quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State, Nigeria. The implication is that the experience of the respondents significantly influenced their opinion, since they were all lecturers and also stake holders for effective quality assurance in higher education. However, the result is valid because it is in line with finding of Fabunmi (2005) who asserted that budget constraints for training and re-training, lack of focused effort to maintain the quality of the curriculum and poor funding of education programme were barrier against quality assurance in higher education. Additionally, Fadokun (2005), listed possible barriers to the programme at all levels of education to include lack of staff expertise, lack of time to update course, lack of institutional drive and commitment, lack of staff awareness among others.

The finding of the study is in consonant with the findings of Ogunsaju (2006) who posited that, attending workshops, seminars for staff capacity building, shared vision and mission statement and filling the gap between students' needs and the curriculum were coping initiatives adopted for quality assurance in universities.

The finding revealed that acute shortage of lecturers of all education programmes and lack of in-built mechanisms to solicit stakeholder's feedback were barriers of quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State. The finding is in support with the findings of Ehindero (2004), who asserted that non availability of mechanism for feedback on the school performance.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, we can conclude that education reforms in fact represent different paradigms in conceptualization, quality assurance and quality education. Although quality assurance is based on different paradigms that have different strengths and focuses, Quality assurance is important and necessary to provide a comprehensive framework to manage education quality in the education sector. Education institution can ensure total quality assurance in their departments.

Consequently, education reforms should focus not only on internal quality assurance but also on future quality assurance in order to achieve total quality in education. Additionally, an education institution can learn to become effective through provision of services of high quality in a longer time span. It is hoped that quality assurance in education can provide a new comprehensive framework for educators, researchers, and policy-makers in different parts of Anambra State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made towards quality assurance in higher education in Anambra State.

1. Government should re-address the issue of funding of higher education with training and re-training of staff in Anambra State.
2. Fund allocated to education sector should be properly disbursed and utilized for all educational programmes.
3. Adequate long time planning and budgeting should be drafted in to enhance the education programmes.
4. Teachers' welfare and motivation should be properly managed, in order to make strike action a forgetting issue.
5. The political leader should show higher commitment in managing educational programme and policy in Anambra State, Nigeria

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