

Revitalizing Quality Higher Education in Nigeria: Options and Strategies

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of quality of education in Nigeria. The paper recognizes quality of education as one of the most widely used and spoken of concept in Nigeria, although, very little or no unanimity with regard to its meaning has been reached. This is essentially true in higher education as compared to industry where clearly definable products with quantifiable qualities exist. The 'product' of higher education is intangible and the customer very difficult to identify. However, in Nigeria today, there is mounting concern about the state of schooling at all levels. This is rooted in the realization that literacy levels and academic achievement will determine individual's job attainment and earning as well as the general economic well-being of the society. Moreover, the quality of life in the society will be affected by the level and quality of social skills acquired in schools. It is in line with this that the paper looks at the various issues bordering on quality of higher education in Nigeria and suggests different options and strategies which can be used to improve the quality of education, especially, at the university level. Thus, the following questions will be answered in the paper: How is quality perceived? Can it be measured? What is the interrelationship between internal and external assessment procedures? How can schools deal with quality improvement and development within the context of Total Quality Management (TQM)?

Introduction

Today, more than ever before in human history, the wealth or poverty of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Those with a larger repertoire of skills and a greater capacity for learning can look forward to lifetimes of unprecedented economic fulfillment. While in the coming decades the poorly educated face little better than the dreary (*dull and unexciting*) prospects of lives of quiet desperation.

- Malcolm Gillis, *President of Rise University, 12 Feb., 1999.*

Quality has become an integral feature of the education system all over the world. We are continually faced with quality initiatives and controls, not only from central governments but also from awarding bodies. Often, these quality initiatives are also incorporated into appraisal schemes and in Total Quality Management (TQM). This study examines literature relating to TQM, quality assurance, quality enhancement and also considers the impact an interpretive approach to quality would have on the pedagogic practice of tertiary institutions. The role of university management is to provide the vision and the making of that vision a reality through encouragement and active participation in quality oriented exercise. This paper will provide a framework toward achieving this. Meanwhile, we need to first consider how quality is perceived.

How is quality perceived?

Quality is a multidimensional concept and cannot be taken for granted, but must be defined every time it is used in investigations. How is quality perceived in higher education in Nigeria? The definition of "quality" can be fluid and interpreted within the broadest sense, and is often considered against local contexts and benchmarks.

Quality, in general terms, is most often defined as "fitness to purpose" in relation to the user and customer needs (Juran, cited in Wilkinson, Redman, Snape and Marchington, 1998). Quality can also be taken to mean that the "product conforms to standards, specifications or requirements" (Crosby, cited in Wilkinson, et al., 1998). British Standards Institute (BSI) defined quality as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs."

'Product' in industry is a definable and tangible item (output), manufactured according to specifications and ready for sale. 'Product' in education may be referred to 'output', that is 'graduands' who are awarded certificates having fulfilled all stipulated requirements. They are attested to possess knowledge and skills with which they can impact society. Longe (1999) submitted that the quality of education includes the learning environment (process) and students' outcomes (graduands). The graduands should be able to go out to the society and prove their worth by their level of performance in the competitive labour market. The issue of comparability and international competitiveness of qualifications is therefore, seen as being a central feature of quality education. Consequently, researchers (Longe, 1999; Letuka, 2002; and Adedeji et al 2003) affirmed that quality of education, especially in tertiary institution needs to be urgently addressed.

Birnbaum (1989) discussed the diversity in quality of higher education, and offered three dimensional typologies in discussing quality; namely,

the meritocratic, which is the institution's conformity to professional and scholarly norms with the academic profession as the reference point,

the socialitic, which is the degree to which the institutions satisfy the needs of important collective constituents, and

the individualistic, which is the contribution the institution makes to the personal growth of students (from Van Vucht & Westerheijden, 1993).

Thus, quality in education is a multidimensional concept interpreted by different stakeholders, such as government, teachers, administrators, students, employers, etc. We then argue that each stakeholder, necessarily, will define quality according to its own set of criteria.

How is quality measured?

The quality of education includes the learning environment and students' outcomes (Longe 1999). There are two broad approaches to measuring quality. One involves measuring the 'outputs' from the education system. The other involves examining the 'educational processes' which produce these outputs. These approaches can be used separately or together.

From the input side, quality of education can be gauged through students' capacity and motivation to learn and the curriculum or the subjects to be learned. Other ways of inferring quality from the input side are:

- teachers who know how to teach and can actually teach,
- time for learning, and
- the requisite tools for teaching and learning.

The output indicators for measuring quality of education would be the qualifications and the levels of competence in performance of the outputs (students) using the knowledge and skills acquired. In addition, the effective performance of the outputs in the job competitive market, their impact on moral conduct, and serviceability in the society are also indicators for measuring the quality of education. The feedback from the job market and society generally is important to the education system for evaluation of both the educational processes and outputs.

In most countries, measuring of the quality of 'output' is largely based on examination results. Crude comparisons of results are less helpful and convincing than comparing the results of schools operating in similar social contexts. Some countries are now using complex quantitative measures covering both academic and Micial factors. A few are using approaches which attempt to measure the values which institutions add to the education of learners at each stage. These approaches are regarded as fairer and more illuminating. However, they are complex and costly to design and implement.

External evaluation (inspection) of 'educational processes' by inspectors or supervisors has a long tradition in many countries. There is, however, great variation across countries in the roles of inspectors and supervisors and in the methods they use.

Quality assessment procedures

Monitoring and maintenance of quality of education in Nigeria is done through internal assessments by the school supervisors or external assessment by inspectors. The school supervisors are on ground at the local level that is resident in the schools. They plan, organize, direct, coordinate, evaluate and control all teaching-learning processes to ensure that they are properly done according to procedures, rules and policies stipulated by the federal government at the national level. All efforts of the supervisors and their staff are to ensure that the process of teaching-learning progresses well and that standards are maintained. The inspectors from the state and federal ministries of education visit the schools to carry out external assessments to ascertain that educational standards are maintained and that resources are appropriately utilized. School inspectors also act as advisors or counselors on how to improve the process of instruction in various schools. In Nigeria, the federal government has authorized certain bodies to be responsible for quality control of education for various levels and types of education. In tertiary institutions for instance, the National Universities Commission (NUC) performs these functions.

However, the work of school supervisors and inspectors in Nigeria are hindered by several factors, which, in the final analysis, contribute to poor quality and standard of education. Olagboye (2004) listed some of the challenges confronting school supervision in Nigeria; such as:

1. Supervisors lack training in supervisory competencies because some supervisors were promoted on basis of seniority and length of service but not appropriate training and qualification.
2. Inadequate provision of instructional facilities, teaching aids and instructional materials in schools.
3. Poor remuneration of teachers and poor conditions of service, which reduces their commitment to teaching.
4. Poor status accorded to teachers, which dampen their morale and job satisfaction.
5. Presence of a large number of untrained and unqualified teachers in the school system.
6. Teachers' poor attitude to work and lack of interest in teaching.

Moreover, some problems of school inspection were also listed as:

1. Using of unqualified and untrained personnel in the inspectorate services, which result in poor quality control

2. Shortage of manpower in the inspectorate.
3. Lack of adequate statistical compilation in the school system.
4. Inadequate funds and resources for inspection.
5. Lack of training for would-be school inspectors.
6. Inadequate facilities in the inspectorate.
7. Non-implementation/inadequate implementation of recommendations in inspection reports which results in discouragement in producing high quality inspection reports.
8. Lack of co-operative attitude by some principals.
9. Political instability and frequent policy change.
10. Overload of administrative duties in addition to inspection tours, travel etc.
11. Occupational hazards associated with road or river travels on inspection tours.

Internal and external quality assessments are expected to achieve the same goal, which is maintaining high standard and quality education as stipulated by national education policy. School supervision is done on daily basis in the schools by the school supervisors, while school inspection is done only on scheduled visits by school inspectors from the state or federal ministries of education. The school supervision lay emphasis on activities of staff in relation to teaching-learning process; but school inspection evaluate a school as a whole as a designed place of learning. School supervision and inspection are both guided by rules, regulations and policies stated or implied in the national policy on education. School supervision and inspection are meant to compliment each other in education quality control but not to contradict each other's efforts. Unfortunately, as pointed out earlier, the challenges and problems in school supervision and inspection contribute to inefficiency and ineffectiveness in education quality control in Nigeria.

Quality of Higher Education in Nigeria

In the last two decades, there has been mounting concern about the quality of teaching and schooling in Nigeria. This is rooted in the realization that educational levels, particularly literacy, will influence individual's job attainment and the general economic well-being of society. Moreover, that the level and quality of social skills acquired in schools will, invariably, affect the quality of life in the society (Longe, 1999). Poor schooling has become the greatest barrier to political, social and economic transformation in Nigeria today. Poor quality of schooling, according to Adedeji et al. (2003), is exhibited in many ways, such as an increased rate of absentee and ineffective teachers in schools and the inability of children (school outputs) to read and write effectively. It has also become clear that graduates of tertiary institutions are often not suitably qualified to fill

available vacancies or to contribute effectively to national development. Teachers in some rural schools spend a large proportion of their working hours in income-generating activities such as farming, hunting, petty-trading and so on. This practice not only creates discipline problems in such schools, as children remain unsupervised, but also undermines the value of the learning process and the actualization of Education for All (EFA) goal.

In addition, the frequent and sometimes protracted strikes by workers (both academic and non-academic) in institutions of higher learning disrupt academic programs, thus, affecting learning processes. This frequent disruption of academic programmes has a lot of implications on the quality of education at that level. It would be wrong, however, to attribute the low level of literacy and school achievement to the school or institution alone. This is because other factors such as the home, the society, the mosques/church, government and personal characteristics of students are also important in child development. This then generates an important question, which is "How do schools deal with quality improvement and development?"

Quality Improvement and Development in Nigerian Schools

The issues that can help to improve the quality of education in Nigeria in the short and long run border, according to Longe (1999), on eight factors; namely:

- increase in public spending;
- student's capacity and motivation to learn;
- subjects to be learned;
- teachers who know and who can teach;
- time for learning;
- requisite tools and technology;
- acquisition and use of inputs; and
- performance standard.

Incidentally "public spending" tops the list. Currently, the amount of money Nigeria devotes to education is far lower than the 26% of government expenditure as recommended by UNESCO. This illustrates her poor commitment to the development of education and explains in part the progress that has been made in this sector since 1990. In fact, if we focus on higher education, the situation is not encouraging because of poor funding and inadequate pedagogical resources. This situation has led to a poor quality of schooling at this level. With reliable statistics for the purpose of monitoring and planning simply not available, education development in Nigeria, especially at the tertiary level, has long been hindered.

However, much as the government of Nigeria may be aware of the need to provide more resources to improve the quality of tertiary education in the country, there is a limit to the amount of resources that the government can allocate to education annually. The principle of increased financial allocation to

education has a far-reaching financial implication for other competing social services and ordering of national priority. Thus, some questions must be raised, such as; *will a huge financial outlay on education deny road development and the communication media of fund? Will it reduce the funds, which would otherwise be available for public health services? What effect will huge educational outlay have on the creeping war which drought is waging on the productive capacity of our farmlands?* All these and other relevant points are serious questions to be carefully weighed when considering the provision of funds for educational services in Nigeria. Consequently, government has, more often than not, been exempted from the quality issue in Nigerian schools on the ground of economic inability. While government is aware of the fact that technical evidence has consistently shown that school quality can be improved by increasing expenditure per student, it argues that the economic reality on ground cannot support the immediate implementation of such findings.

The pursuit of quality of higher education should not only be the concern of teachers and educational institutions, but also of the parents, the students, the employers of labour, the government and the international community. Since each of these parties has its own view about what constitutes good education, it has, consequently, been a difficult task to agree on what should be a good practice in our schools. This problem is further compounded by the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria as a multi-ethnic country. What is considered a minimum entry qualification into the university varies across the country. This may be as a result of the prevailing conditions within the communities in which the universities are situated.

Even when there is a consensus as to what a good education should be, determining which standard is expected to be the minimum attainable is often difficult to arrive at. It is, therefore, left in the hands of individual institutions of learning to define what it considers as qualitative education within the context of the minimum standards (if available) and subject to its resources, social conditions and limitations. This implies that quality of education will keep on changing from place to place and from time to time as schools continue to make effort at providing for the stakeholders' needs. Every educational institution in Nigeria faces the challenges of improving quality of education. Some of these challenges include:

- raising student achievements;
- improving the quality of teaching;
- providing learning experiences which meet the needs of all learners;
- providing guidance and support for learners of all ages and at all stages;
- providing adequate resources and using them effectively;
- ensuring that management and leadership of education at

- national and local levels are strong and effective; and
- ensuring that the curriculum and assessment methods are relevant and inclusive.

The management and leadership of various schools or institutions should increase their efforts at improving quality through the above listed areas. When proper teaching-learning experiences are ensured in the school system, the quality of education will certainly improve. In the next section, we are going to look at the application of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the revitalization of quality.

TQM and Quality Revitalization Higher Education

There is need, first of all, to clarify some terms that relate to TQM; such as quality assurance (QA), quality control (QC), quality management (QM) and quality assessment (QS).

QA has been defined by the British Standards Institute as "all those planned and systematic actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality" (Taylor and Hosker, 1992). Taylor and Hosker also stated that for effectiveness, QA

federal ministries of education and other education authorities or bodies saddled with the responsibility for quality control of education at various levels to ensure that standards and practices are in compliance with the national policy of education. Examples are the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE).

Taylor and Hosker (1992) defined quality management (QM) as "the aspect of the overall management function that determines and implements the quality policy". QM, therefore, includes strategic planning, allocation of resources and other systematic activities for quality such as quality planning, operations and evaluations. It must be noted that the attainment of desired quality requires the commitment and participation of all members of the organization. This notwithstanding, the responsibility for quality management still belongs to top management.

Total Quality Management (TQM) has been defined by many authors. Wilkinson, et al (1998) defined it to include the application of quality assurance to every company activity and is characterized by the application of good practice, quality management principles, practices and techniques". 'TQM' as cited by Taylor and Hosker (1992) stated that "total quality management is a way of managing to improve the effectiveness, flexibility and competitiveness of the business as a whole".

TQM is said to have originated from Japan. It is ascribed to Japan's search for improvements especially after Second World War.

Now TQM is being adopted into education in many countries of the world, especially in higher education. Examples of countries in Europe are Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Great Britain. These countries have established QC of education through government and legislation, particularly for distance education. Quality management systems have been developed in distance education, some with the co-operation and partnership of industry and commerce. It is interesting to note that Rekkedel commented that the projects cited with resulting documents took their starting point in general views of quality management from business and industry and made efforts to integrate these with specific aspects of education. All documents according, to Rekkedel, stress "self-appraisal", regular and systematic review of the organization's activities and results as one main method to discern strength and weaknesses as the basis for continuous improvements. TQM, according to Caulcutt (1995), is a coherent strategy for improvement and requires commitment, culture and communication. Commitment here means that all employees at all levels in the organization are encouraged to embrace total quality policies and develop total quality mentality in carrying out their duties. Employees are urged to move away from supervisory approaches to quality control towards a situation where employees themselves take responsibility (Oakland, cited in Wilkinson et al, 1998). TQM would succeed only if it has the total and enthusiastic support of top management.

TQM is a new approach to corporate management itself. Quality becomes a way of life which permeates every part and aspect of the organization (Wilkinson et al, 1998). Caulcutt (1995) opined that a culture for quality improvement is to be developed around an ethos of open communication. Teamwork should be encouraged among various sub-systems of the organization, but the importance of workers as individuals is recognized. Caudron cited by Wilkinson et al (1998) emphasized that TQM is a culture change. Other authors cited by Wilkinson et al (1998) such as Hill, Date and Cooper, Glover, Wilkinson and Ackers, all state that everyone in the organization should develop quality culture.

Powell (1995) cited in Wilkinson et al (1998) combined features of TQM promoted by Deming, Juran, Crosby, and Awards, and listed 12 factors, some of which are: (1) committed leadership (2) adoption and communication of TQM (3) closer customer relationships (4) increasing of training (of employees) (5) employee empowerment (6) zero-defect mentality (7) process improvement and measurement. These ideas or principles of TQM can be adopted to improving education. For example, "zero-defect" mentality is not 100% practicable in education because it is a service-industry moulding lives where each one is unique, unlike a manufacturing industry which produces physical outputs with exact dimensions. Education should aim at high standards, which should be considered the minimum, to be attained by learners. This should be enforced and maintained by continuous review, improvement and measurement or assessment

of teaching-learning process. Leadership should be committed to adoption and communication of TQM to all workers in the organization. There should be employee empowerment and increased training to have competent hands. There should also be a close working relationship with all stakeholders in education.

The views of TQM from business and industry are being integrated into education in other countries of the world to raise and monitor quality of education. The ideas or principles of TQM can also be adopted to revitalize education in Nigeria. TQM is a strategy for improvement (Caulcutt, 1995); is a way of overcoming organizational inertia (Wilkinson, et al, 1998); and calls for constant improvement (Peters cited in Wilkinson et al 1998). TQM also brings senior management concerns of innovating and strategy together with those of finding more efficient methods of doing things, an important activity by operational level managers (Wilkinson, et al, 1998). All stakeholders in education, all levels of management in education, all employees in education and learners need all to take part in the revitalization of education in Nigeria. There has to be a re-orientation to imbibe a culture of quality and excellence by all. With TQM approach, everyone is involved, committed, and each one takes responsibility for the quality of education. However, management and leadership must initiate it and show total support.

Conclusion

Revitalization of education in Nigeria, especially Higher Education, is a vital issue. Therefore, the Federal and State governments should consider the application of TQM in education because education still remains the backbone for the accelerated development needed by the (Caulcutt appro2 Tc(organ Tj0 Tcmi(e)niumTj5.990 Tw-0.155 T

Recommendations

To this end, the following recommendations are made:

1. Federal and State governments should appoint only professionals to supervisory positions in schools and to the inspectorate in the ministries of education.
2. School supervisors and inspectors should increase their efforts in school supervision/inspection to ensure quality in education.
3. Federal and State governments should make the teaching profession attractive by paying commensurate salaries and give other fringe benefits to teachers.
4. Federal and State governments, authorities in schools and institutions should employ more of professionally trained teachers and make opportunity for training those already employed.
5. Management and leadership in schools/institutions should set up school culture, values and standards in order to provide an all-round training of learners.
6. Federal government should increase expenditure on education.
7. Federal and State governments, schools and institutions should initiate efforts to implement TQM ideas or principles in the education system.
8. Federal and State ministries of education in collaboration with schools and institutions should review curricula regularly to up-date them and make them relevant to current trends and needs of the nation.

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