

## **Challenges of Quality in Higher Education in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria like other countries of the world recognizes education as the major instrument for effecting national development. Education is a critical for social, economic and political development of Nigeria. These goals of education can be fully attained if quality delivery is rendered in higher education in Nigeria. Higher education of good quality is critical for Nigeria to become globally competitive. This article identified and discussed the challenges of quality in higher education in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The author recommends that Nigerian government should meet up with the 26 per cent education spending as recommended by UNESCO. Besides, reform in existing higher education institutions in Nigeria can be attained via collaborative efforts between government and other sectors of Nigerian economy.

**Key words:** Challenges, higher education, learning, Nigeria, quality, research, teaching

### **Introduction**

Higher education also referred to as post secondary or tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in colleges of education, monotronics, polytechnics and universities and those institutions offering correspondence courses (Federal Ministry of Education 2004:30). Defining higher education in terms of the levels and functions of the educational experience offered, Bernett (1997) sees higher educational institutions as unique institutions which is differentiated from others in terms of research and its managers are designated as Provost, Rector, and Vice-chancellor.

Higher education has been recognized as a fundamental instrument for the construction of a knowledge economy and the development of human capitals all over the world (World Bank, 1999). According to Peretomode (2007), higher education is the facilitator, the bed rock, the power house and the driving force for the 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 (Kors, 2008). World Bank (2004) 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 institutions of higher learning 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 level, the skills of their human capitals. From a global perspective, higher level manpower training has been recognized as a primary tool for national development. Such high level educational provision enables the citizens to acquire skills and techniques which are ploughed into human productivity, creativity, competence, initiative, innovation and inventiveness (Ehiametalor, 1988)

The aims of higher education in Nigeria as outlined by the Federal Ministry of Education (2004) section 8 (59) are:

- Contribution to national development through high level manpower training.
- Development and inculcation of proper values for the survival of the individual and the society.
- Development of the intellectual capabilities of the individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.
- Acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable the individual to be self-reliant and useful member of the society.
- Promotion and encouragement of scholarship and community services.
- For national unity and the promotion of national and international understanding and interaction.

Section 8 (60) of the federal ministry of education also state that higher education in Nigeria should vigorously pursue these goals through:

- Teaching
- Research and development
- Knowledge generation and dissemination and international cooperation
- Dedicated services to the communities through extra-mural and consultancy services

All these stated goals are closely related to quality education because as John Dewey rightly pointed out, every experience of man counts as education.

Nigeria has a teeming population of about 154 million people. A growing population necessitates some growth in higher education to accommodate the

increasing number of students seeking a higher education degree, yet the potential of Nigerian higher education systems to fulfill this responsibility is frequently thwarted by problems of finance, efficiency, equity and quality. This article is focused of the following sub headings:

- the Concept of Quality and Quality Assurance
- Reasons for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- Examine the Challenges of Quality Higher Education in Nigeria
- Discuss the Quality Assurance Variables in Higher Education in Nigeria
- Suggest strategies for handling these challenges

## **Conceptual clarification**

### **Quality**

The concept of quality has attracted many definitions from several scholars. Kalusi, (2001) argued that quality is a complex concept and there is hardly any consensus. According to DuBrin, (1997) quality is a desirable attribute of a product or service that distinguishes it for the person seeking the attribute. Viewed from this definition, quality could be said to have the attribute of worth and acceptance. Nevertheless, DuBrin maintained that good quality should possess the characteristics of conformance to expectation, conformance to requirement, excellence and value and loss of avoidance. Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) defined quality as a measure of how good or bad the products of higher education institutions in Nigeria are in terms of their academic performance and meeting established standards. World Organization of Standardization, (1994) defined quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or services that bear on its ability to satisfy stated needs. Article 11 of the World Declaration on Education, (2003) sees quality as a multi-dimensional concept which should encompass all the functions and activities in schools. Such activities of higher educational institutions has been highlighted as teaching, research and scholarship, community service, staffing, students, infrastructures and educational facilities, equipment and the academic environment (World conference on higher education, 1998). High quality delivery is a prerequisite for effective productivity in education industry and hence quality education is an instrument for effecting national development. According to Ekong (2006), quality builds knowledge, live skills, perspectives, attitudes and values. When quality education is delivered high enough to meet set standards, the products of education should be able to perform well in the world of work in real life situation. When quality is low, performance cannot meet the set standards. Hence one can say that the quality of education has declined below set standard.

### **Quality assurance**

Quality assurance is the process of maintaining standards in products and services through inspection or testing of samples (Ramson-Yusuf 2005). Okebukola, (2010:3) noted that quality assurance is an umbrella concept for a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of inputs, process and outputs of higher education system. In line with this Ayodele, (2007) contend that quality assurance entails the

quality of available instructional materials for teaching, equipment, facilities, school environment, pupils, curriculum, quality of instructional delivery and quality of teachers. Quality assurance is designed to prove and improve the quality of an institutions methods, educational products and outcomes (Oyebode, Oladipo and Adetome; 2008). Everyone has a role to play in ensuring quality assurance in education. One of the key building blocks of quality assurance in education is the development of minimum standards as in qualification of teachers, the quality of teaching in institutions, expected educational achievement of students and the development of a more rigorous management process for education so that the entire sector develop stronger operating policies, procedures which are well documented and adhered to. With time, this will develop into a total management system for higher education in line with what is practiced internationally.

### **Quality Assurance Variables**

Quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria include internal and external mechanisms put in place by institutions and accreditation agencies respectively, to ensure standard in all the functions of the institutions. The external accreditation bodies are National Universities Commission (NUC) for universities, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for Polytechnics and National Teachers Institute (NTI) for Colleges of Education. Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have employed various variables to determine the quality assurance of their programmes and institutions. The variables has been highlighted by Adepoju and Akinola, (2007), Oyebade, Oladipo and Adetoro (2008) and Adepoju and Okunola (2011). They are:

- minimum academic standard
- impact assessment
- visitation
- carrying capacity and admission quota
- accreditation
- publications and research assessment
- structures, infrastructures and utilities

Other quality assurance measures have been identified by Adepoju, (2007) as:

- Accreditation of programmes or institutions
- Monitoring, assessment and evaluation of existing staff strength, students and facilities
- Capacity building for teaching and non-teaching staff
- Exchange programme for teaching personnel and students
- Institutional ranking in terms of undergraduate and post graduate courses and programmes
- Prescription of benchmarks and periodic review and production of documents on minimum standards
- External moderation system.

As part of quality assurance, institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have check mechanism for screening of certificates of candidates admitted into their various programmes to ensure that their certificates are correct and are original copies of external examination bodies like West African Examination Council and National Examination Council.

### **Quality education**

Quality education is that education that is relevant and adapted to the needs of the society (Ndiomu, 1989). He argued that such needs must meet the standards in health, growth, and physical survival in a complex and globalized world. It implies education that is worthwhile and which empowers the recipients with relevant skills, knowledge, ideas, values and attitudes needed for him /her to make informed decisions and live a self-sustaining life. Quality in higher education refers to the worth of the inputs into higher education systems, lecturers, instructional facilities and evaluation procedures which translates to the outputs. Majasan, (1998) maintained that quality education is value-loaded arguing that quality education should produced disciplined behaviour, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. If a society expects quality manpower for rapid development and transformation, quality education is a must do affair (Majasan, 1998). This he continued is because quality education is expected to address critical issues like the dignity of labour, quality leadership and committed citizenship, industrial harmony, political stability, religious tolerance, self-reliance and security. Quality higher education entails that the products of institutions of higher education should be able to perform according to expected standard and compete favourably with their peers in other countries of the world. Quality education is the education that produces a complete person. Complete in the sense that the person is intellectually, morally, physically, emotionally and socially developed. Hence Akinpelu, (2000) argued that education without quality can even be more dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education has no value.

### **Variables acting as challenges of quality in higher education in Nigeria**

Several factors pose as challenges of quality in higher education in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These factors are highlighted and discussed below:

#### **Inadequate funding**

Inadequate funding is the most critical challenge that has threatened the attainment of good quality higher education in Nigeria. The problem of inadequate funding of education has been a bane to educational development in the country. Onokerrhoraye, (1995) maintained that a major constraint to attaining academic excellence in Nigerian universities is financial constraints which made many academics and non academics to be working under difficult circumstances. Many institutions of higher learning in Nigeria were unable to build lecture halls, students' hostels, equip laboratories and workshops and payment of staff salaries, research grants, allowances and medical bills (Ivara and Mbanefo cited in Asiyai 2005). Even the FGN/ASUU Re-negotiation Committee (2009) realized as widely acknowledged that the key to the

survival of Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century lies in the country's ability to produce applied and theoretical knowledge in science, technology and humanities and hence the Re-negotiation Committee arrived at a consensus on the need for a rational and scientific procedure for determining the funding requirements to begin the revitalizing the Nigerian university system. Despite all efforts made the Nigerian government have not showed enough commitment towards adequate funding of higher education.

### **Inadequate teaching staff /poor quality of teaching staff**

A big challenge to the attainment of quality higher education in Nigeria is the lack of academic staff. According to Coombs (1970), teachers are the hub of any educational system. Teachers determine the quality of education because they transmit educational policies into practice and action. As rightly pointed out by Ukeje, (1996) without adequate number of inspiring, well-informed teachers, fully prepared to meet their responsibilities in our schools, we cannot have good education and without good education, we cannot hope for long to meet successfully, the challenges of a changing world. Ajayi (2007) seems to concur with the above when he noted that good teachers are needed for good education which in turn is indispensable for social change, social transformation and national development. The importance of teachers cannot be over emphasized. Despite the importance of teachers in the attainment of good education, institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are short of lecturers to adequately handle teaching and learning activities. The institutions because of inadequate funding are not able to employ additional lecturers. The few available lecturers are seriously over worked. Even in some institutions of higher learning in the country, because of shortage of lecturers their programmes are not accredited by the accreditation agencies. Attainment of good quality in higher education requires teaching staff of adequate quantity and quality. Bamiro, (2012) attributed the problem of de-intellectualization of the academia to low quality of staff of some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Where there is inadequate teaching staff and poor quality of lecturers, the attainment of good quality in higher education will be difficult.

### **Poor policy implementation**

Poor policy implementation is a challenge to quality delivery in education. The poor quality delivery is responsible for the abysmal low performance of graduates of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in their world of work and the alarming incidence of examination malpractice. Anyakoha, (1994) and Obebe, (1983) argued that our policies are written by knowledgeable writers who have foresight and believe strongly in what they write for the future but the problem comes when it comes to translating theory into practice by implementers. However, several factors could be adduced as inhibitors to smooth implementation of educational policies and thereby resulting to poor quality delivery. Such factors as government underfunding of education and injudicious utilization of available funds by implementation agencies-vice chancellors, rectors, provosts deans of faculties, heads of department etc. when funds meant to deliver quality education is misappropriated or embezzled, the education which learners receive becomes worthless. Okoroma, (2001) noted that money the government votes for running the institution does not get to the institutions

and the little that gets there is normally wasted by education managers. Additionally, in Nigerian institutions of higher learning little attention is paid to teaching effectiveness of academic staff. The “publish or perish” syndrome which places more emphasis on research makes lecturers to be more committed to research. Akinmusuru, (2009) attributed the low quality of Nigerian universities graduates to little attention given to teaching effectiveness, stressing that institutional policies are not geared towards making students learning a priority.

### **Lack of resources**

Quality higher education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources put in place in institutions of higher learning. The lack of infrastructures such as science laboratories, workshops, students’ hostels, libraries and electricity will affect the quality of education. For good quality delivery, these facilities must meet the minimum standard specified by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Council for Colleges of Education (NCCE). For quality teaching and learning, the class size must be small for effective students/teacher interaction. Unfortunately, most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, the lecture halls are overcrowded with majority of the students standing at the corridors during lectures.

Besides, the libraries in most institutions of higher learning in the country are stocked with obsolete text books, with current journals and text books lacking. In the opinion of Kamm (1980;34), the library is at the heart of the academic effort in a college or university. For an institution to be strong academically, it must have a formidable library put in place. This explains why the top universities of the world (Harvard, Cambridge, Tokyo and university of California) are academically of high strength and quality. The acute shortage of educational facilities in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria has led to decline in the quality of higher education in the country. For example, in most universities and colleges, the science laboratory and vocational and technical education workshops are empty, lacking the equipment needed for effective teaching and learning. It is not uncommon to see a student graduating from chemistry department without handling volumetric analysis apparatus. The undesirable conditions of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have been worrisome to many scholars (Asiyai, 2005 and Odetunde 2004). Students of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are learning in dilapidated buildings which are poorly ventilated, illuminated, furnished and environmentally depressing and disabling situations. Even many lecturers share small offices. Worried about the poor quality of graduates of higher education institutions in Nigeria, the national universities commission carried out a need assessment survey which was reported by Okebukola, (2005) and highlighted the following:

- only about 30% of Nigerian students’ population has adequate access to classrooms, workshop, lecture halls, laboratories and libraries.
- Deficient libraries in terms of currency and number of books, journals, and electronic support facilities.
- Inadequate academic calendar resulting from staff unions’ industrial action premised on low salary, wages/welfare and students strikes often time related to inadequate facilities.

- Lack of practical experience, often times resulting from deficient facilities.

These factors above are all threats to quality attainment in higher education in Nigeria.

### **Lack of information communication technology facilities**

Another challenge to quality attainment in higher education in Nigeria is lack of information communication technology facilities in institutions of higher learning. As part of her education reform effort Nigerian government adopted information communication technologies in all levels of education since information communication technology integration in educational practices is meant to improve teaching and learning, enhance higher education research, enhance collaboration among peers and improve quality of education. Unfortunately, most institutions of higher learning in the country, there is acute short of computers, multi-media projectors, electronic white boards, and automation of lecture halls and lecturers offices. Even majority of the institutions are not linked with functional internet connectivity. According to Resnick, (1998) these new digital technologies make possible a learning revolution in education. As rightly noted by Onuma, (2007) information and communication technologies could be used to prepare lesson plan, collect data and analyze students' achievement. Curriculum content could be enriched through search from the internet by teachers. Through such internet search, information and relevant school practices which are unknown to teachers and students and which cannot be found in textbooks, can easily be downloaded for use. Information and communication technology in education has been continuously linked to higher efficiency, higher productivity and higher educational outcomes, including quality of cognitive, creative, and innovative thinking (Olatoye, 2011). Despite the role of information communication technologies in enhancing teaching and learning, researches abound in support of lack of information communication technology tools in institutions of higher learning in the country (Akomolafe, 2008; Onwumere, 2008; Sulaiman, 2008; Asiyai, 2010).

### **Frequent labour disputes and closures of universities**

A big challenge to quality higher education in Nigeria is the incessant staff union disputes and subsequent closures of the institutions. Closure of the institutions affects staff productivity and the realization of educational aim and objectives. Asiyai (2005) provided a catalogue of strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) within fourteen years. She revealed that they were too many strikes, some of which lasted up to six months. Asiyai (2006) identified the variables inducing the frequent trade union disputes as poor conditions of service of staff, non implementation of ASUU/FGN or SSANU/FGN agreements, lack of autonomy and academic freedom and poor funding. The universities in Nigeria are presently closed down since July 2 2013 as a result of failure of the federal government to implement the agreement reached with the academic staff union of universities since 2009, despite all assurances and memorandum of understanding between the two parties. The disruption of academic

programmes of institutions of higher learning affects students learning outcomes, since lecturers find it difficult to complete the course work. The frequent disputes and strike galore by university staff and students leave students with little or no time to complete both their theoretical and practical work. In most cases a semester's course work is sandwiched to few weeks during which lectures are rushed to accommodate the time lost to strike. This type of academic rush is a big threat to attainment of quality in higher education in Nigeria. Adeboye, (2003) in his study noted that the higher the level of crisis, disruptions and hostility, the lower the level of productivity, standard and quality of the products of the system.

### **Lack of vibrant staff development programmes**

Most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programme for training and re-training of staff. Vibrant staff development programme on a continuous basis will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behaviour, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus become more effective and efficient in the performance of tasks. Staff development is paramount because knowledge of today is only sufficient for today. In this era of knowledge explosion and emergent knowledge based economy, staff development should be the priority of any nation. Peretomode, (2008) argued that the weakness of post graduate programmes of some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria required a strong staff development programme for staff. He maintained that universities are staffed by lecturers who are not familiar with the topography of educational landscape and have never been expected to formulate their own philosophies of education or their own views about teaching and learning. Again to buttress this point, Aboyade, (1976: 10) noted that given the increasing number of pseudo scholars in Nigerian higher education institutions in the wake of enormous rapid expansion of higher education, it is clearly seen that the doctorate degree is not sufficient for true scholarship. Peretomode and Chukwuma (2007) in their study revealed that a significant relationship existed between manpower development and lecturers productivity. In addition, Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) reported that lack of staff development programmes accounted for the decline in quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. Similarly, Adeogun, (2006) noted that an employee who is not trained and exposed to continuous retraining in the modern methods and new discoveries in his or her field will soon become irrelevant to the organization. Due to lack of opportunity for retraining and non mentoring of junior lecturers by professors, the junior lecturers are not exposed to new ideas, facts, theories and research findings in higher education. Various scholars have reported the deficiency of teacher education programme in Nigeria (Okeke, 2001; Falayayo, 2004; Ajayi, 2007). This calls for addition training of teachers if quality in higher education is to be attained in the country.

### **Cultism and other vices**

A big challenge to quality in higher education in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria is the increasing activities of secret cult groups, kidnappers and other vices. The higher education institutions in Nigeria are under siege barded and almost ruined

by secret cults (Onoyase and Onoyase 2005). As a result of the activities of cult groups and kidnapers' majority of students, lecturers and their families live in perpetual fear. Some of these cult groups indulge in arm robbery, rape, assassination and infrastructure destruction. They cheat in the examination openly and threaten lecturers when caught. While academic and senior staff of universities in the country are being hunted by kidnapers and those kidnapped are made to pay huge sum of money as ransom before they are released. The tensions induced on members of higher education institution communities as a result of the activities of these secret cult groups and kidnapers tend to generate negative impacts on quality of higher education in Nigeria. Another big challenge to administrators of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria is students' uprising. Handling demonstration and strikes by students in protest of their rights or government insensitivity to demands by the civil society.

### **Brain drain**

A big challenge to the quality of higher education in Nigeria is the problem of brain drain. Over the past decades, there has been mass exodus of brilliant and most talented lecturers to other sectors of the economy. Some of the lecturers left Nigerian universities to join the business world, some joined politics while others left Nigeria for better services. As succinctly put by Alli, (2000) many experienced and young lecturers are fleeing Nigeria from the frustration of university life into more rewarding and more challenging sectors of the economy and even to overseas countries. There is diminishing scope of mentoring junior researchers by seasoned and senior lecturers in Nigeria due to brain drain. Brain drain has led to decline in research outputs from institutions of higher learning in Nigeria vis-à-vis the disappearance of research centers in Nigerian universities. Research brings about improvement in teaching and learning (Asiyai 2009) but when there is exodus of brilliant and seasoned academics from institutions of higher learning, the quality of education delivery is threatened.

### **Poor leadership**

Poor leadership both at the government level and at the institution level have been a big challenge to quality in higher education in Nigeria. Since the nineties, the government of the country has not shown enough commitment to higher education development in Nigeria. One of the several indices for properly evaluating government commitment to educational development in any country is budgetary allocation and disbursement to education. UNESCO had recommended 26% budgetary allocation to education based on GNP but the amount allocated to education by Nigerian government has continued to be smaller when compared to other African countries. For example, budgetary allocation to education as percentage of GNP was 0.7%, South Africa was 7.9%, Ghana was 4.2%, Kenya was 6.5% and Sub-Saharan 4.2% in 2005 (Uhunmwangbo, 2005). A World Bank Report cited by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU, 2013) noted that in 2012 Nigeria's GDP was 262.2 billion USD while allocation to education was 1.96 billion USD, the amount spent by Nigeria for the entire education sector being less than what individual universities spend on education in some countries. It is clear that the

government of the country is not committed to quality education. Additionally, poor leadership of some Nigerian university administrators has been a bane to the attainment of quality in higher education in Nigeria. Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria exist because they are goals to be attained. These goals can be effectively attained when the human resources within the institutions are properly managed for their positive impacts on productivity. This is the place of leadership in the institutions of higher learning. The duty of leadership is to reduce problems within the system in order to enhance efficiency. But research has shown that most staff disputes in Nigerian institutions of higher learning since the nineteen eighties were attributed to the high handedness and tyranny of some administrators of the institutions (Obiegbo, 1994; ASUU, 1994, 1997). Accordingly Osiebe (1995) argued that poor leadership of some university administrators by not involving staff union members in decision making while Iyayi, (2002) argued that dismissal of some academics without following due process were indication of poor governance which made many academic staff de-motivated to serious academic pursuit. Additionally Bamiro, (2012) maintained that the unfavourable governance which lead to series of strikes resulting to closure of some institutions for up to 177days since 1993 to the present day accounted for low quality in higher education in Nigeria. This unhealthy situation could lead to strained relations between university staff unions and management, increased hostility and aggression and increased mutual suspicion which are all threats to mutual co-existence for the attainment of good quality in institutions of higher learning.

### **Recommendations**

To address the challenges of quality in higher education in Nigeria, the following are recommended: for higher education policy makers

- Government of Nigeria should place high premium on education by meeting up the recommended 26% educational spending prescribed by UNESCO, to help revitalize the higher education system,
- Enabling environment should be created for staff through improved conditions of service, provision of basic infrastructures, virtual libraries and information communication technologies and internet connectivity.
- Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria should set up internal quality assurance and monitoring of lecture units to enhance good quality delivery.
- Reform in existing higher education institutions in Nigeria can be promoted through deliberate collaborative efforts by government, business sectors, civil society and the academia. This could help to reinvent Nigerian higher education system for better quality delivery in research, teaching and community services.
- To improve quality, lecturers and non lecturers should be motivated to make them more dedicated, devoted and committed and effective in their jobs.
- Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria should employ more lecturers to match the students' population. Institutional policies should be revised to ensure that more emphasis is paid on teaching effectiveness of lecturers for better quality education.

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