



Research Article

# Managing quality assurance for the attainment of the goals of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Quality university education has relied heavily on the quality assurance mechanism of the institutions and the management of these education institutions has ensured that the planning and implementation of the quality process works effectively and efficiently. This study examined the management approaches adopted to ensure quality is assured in the tertiary education institutions in north east Nigeria. The purpose is to determine the impact of accreditation, assessment and audit on the improvement of quality tertiary education in the north east Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study while two hypotheses was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The method adopted for the study is descriptive survey research. The population for the study is all the management staff of the tertiary institutions in the North East of Nigeria. The sample size was 120 drawn with simple random sampling techniques. The instrument for the study was "Quality Assurance Management Approach Questionnaire" (QAMAQ) which was duly validated with a reliability index of 0.87. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the analyses of data, the study findings indicate that the quality assurance approaches improve significantly the quality of education in the tertiary institutions in North-East Nigeria. On the basis of the findings, the study recommends the implementation of regular assessment, accreditation and audit to assure quality in the tertiary institutions.

**Keywords:** Quality education; Quality assurance; Accreditation; Assessment; Audit

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The trend in education systems world over in the era of globalization and rapid technological development is the increasing importance of tertiary education as a platform

for developing the nation's mobile knowledge capital and talents (Odaudu, 2018). As a result of this development, they have been exponential increase in the demand for higher education especially in countries necessitating the supply of more higher education spaces. However, this development is not in consonant with the level of funding required to achieve quality education at this level. The inability of government to fund effectively higher education institutions has generated concern worldwide about tertiary education quality and the need for quality assurance (Mattah, Kwarteng and Mensah, 2017). Furthermore, the current trend of sector expansion and diversification, the emergence of new technologies, the requirements of adherence to standards for cross-border recognition, and the high demands placed on employees in real-world work situations exacerbate the call by educational administrators and planners (in her Lagos NAEAP national conference in 2019) and other relevant stakeholder groups for quality assurance in order for institutions to improve their performance, international attractiveness and competitiveness.

Quality tertiary education is a major issue that the government is struggling to achieve in order to ensure a sustainable education future. This is due to the realization that tertiary education is the fulcrum from which all other development pivots. It is believed that quality assurance in tertiary education will enhance the knowledge capital of the citizens. In accordance with this, Section 5 (81) of the National Policy on Education 2013 says the purpose of tertiary education shall be to

contribute to national development through high level manpower training, develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment; acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful member of the society; promote and encourage scholarship and community service; forge and cement national unity; and promote national and international understanding and interaction (FRN, 2013, pp26).

Quality assurance, as a method for verifying compliance with minimal standards and supporting quality improvement, is used by quality assurance organizations to monitor compliance with minimal standards and to assist quality improvement in order to fulfill tertiary education objectives. The tertiary institutions need to maintain quality assurance of its programmes to build confidence in the stakeholders about its programmes, and this has been on-going for years in Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Education has established institutions to maintain quality assurance in schools. The National University Commission (NUC) for the Universities, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for its Colleges of Education, and the National Board for Technical Education (NABTEB) for polytechnics and mono-technics. These institutions are saddled with the onerous responsibilities for maintaining quality education in these schools. Their actions have legal consequences for the operation of schools and running of programmes in the country.

To ensure quality assurance in Nigerian tertiary institutions, Nigeria has adopted the quality assurance approaches often used by external quality assurance body globally (Anugom, 2016). Assessment, accreditation, and audits are examples of these approaches. The goal of

assessment is to improve a program or an institution by focusing on its strengths and faults and making recommendations for improvement. Accreditation is the regular appraisal of educational programs to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained. Accreditation ensures that institutions maintain quality (Anugom, 2016; Ukaka and Ohia, 2018). The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded the published standards for accreditation, and whether it is achieving its mission and stated purposes. The exercises lead to full accreditation, interim accreditation or denied accreditation. Audits, on the other hand, focus on evaluating an institution's internal quality assurance system and highlighting its strengths and faults (Watcher, et al., 2016). On a regular basis, quality audits are conducted at the institution level. This approach to education quality assurance does not assess an institution or program's resources, activities, or quality; rather it focuses on the effectiveness of the institution's internal processes in assuring quality. As a result, an audit does not result in a yes/no conclusion on a specific item of quality or the comparability of quality levels (IIEP, 2010). Some quality assurance systems, such as those in Norway, Australia, and New Zealand (Kirkwood and Cameron, 2013; NZQA, 2013; Shah, 2012; Stensaker, 2018), adopt this approach to quality assurance.

The Academic Quality Agency in New Zealand presently conducts quality audits with institutions on a five-year cycle (AQA). But this have been replaced with external evaluation and review for New Zealand's institutes of technology and polytechnics (including VET institutions) (NZQA, 2013). In this study the impact of these quality assurance approaches on the attainment of the goals of education is been considered.

Ensuring quality assurance through assessment, accreditation and audit processes falls in the hands of university management (Anugom, 2016). Therefore, the result of management perceptions of QA is very important to the improvement of QA of the tertiary institutions. An examination of the literature on these processes indicated that there has been a lot of work done on external quality assurance systems. Internal quality assurance, on the other hand, has not been given much attention. The same may be said regarding the impact of quality assurance. Scholars have claimed that there is a scarcity of hard evidence on the effects of quality assurances on educational quality (Ukala and Ohia, 2016). Again, the conditions to assure quality of education in some context are limited. Obadara and Alaka (2013) in their study maintained that the relationship between accreditation and quality assurance in terms of physical facilities and staffing has not been fully established. The studies further revealed that there is relationship between quality assurance approaches and quality of resources but there is no relationship between QA and quality of content. Similarly, study has revealed that QA approaches have no impact on administrative structure and efficiency of schools (Oribabor cited in Anugom, 2016). It is against this background that this study examines managing quality assurance in tertiary institutions in the North East Nigeria.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Managing quality assurance is key to the attainment of quality education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Quality assurance touches all aspect of the university life. It could be

internal or external (Amaechi and Odaudu, 2017). Although many educators are positive about quality assurance, especially in ensuring the quality of education in tertiary institutions, Amaechi and Odaudu (2017) argue that resource constraints do not permit regular external review and thus make quality assurance daunting, and by no means without its challenges. These challenges which is due to lack of understanding of the quality assurance approaches and processes by stakeholders seems to have affected the effective implementation of the quality assurance in institutions.

It is observed that this lack of understanding of quality assurances processes and practices results in differing conceptions of quality assurance between academics and other stakeholders in higher education, which generates a potential for conflict. There is the problem of filling the self-study form, the *laisser-faire* attitudes of staff to quality assurance, problem of funding and poor leadership. There is the concern that if these challenges are not addressed, resolving the quality challenge will be a mirage regardless of the mechanism put in place to assure quality. Therefore this study is asking to know what impact does managing quality assurance systems and processes have in tertiary institutions? What are the challenges affecting the quality assurance processes of tertiary institutions? This has not been empirically studied in the context of tertiary institutions in the North East Nigeria, yet evidence of the actual impact of quality assurance approaches on tertiary institutions is very little (Ukala and Ohia, 2016 and Watcher, et al., 2016).

### **3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of managing quality assurance for the attainment of the goals of quality tertiary education in the North-East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to determine:

1. The impact of managing Quality Assurance approaches / practices on the attainment quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria?
2. The quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality in tertiary education in the North East Nigeria?

#### **3.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the impacts of managing Quality Assurance approaches / practices on the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria?
2. What are the quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality in tertiary education in the North East Nigeria?

#### **3.2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The following research hypotheses were formulated to be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

$H_{0i}$ : There is no significant difference between the mean rating of the perceptions of administrative and academic staff on the impact of managing Quality Assurance

approaches / practices on the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean rating of the perceptions of administrative and academic staff on the quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality in tertiary education in the North East Nigeria?

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study is made up of 660 staff comprising administrative and academic drawn from five faculties of the three Universities used for the study. The sample size for the study was 150 respondents for the study. This included 30 administrative staff (Registry staff, Directors of heads of Units in the institutions such as Director Academic Planning, Director of Works, Librarian, Director of Physical Planning, and Bursary Staff) and 120 academic staff (comprising Deans and HODs). The instrument for the study was Quality Assurance Management Approach Questionnaire "QAMAQ". The instrument was validated by experts in Taraba State University, Jalingo and was pilot tested using Cronbach Alpha and it yielded a reliability coefficient of .87. This indicates that the instrument is appropriate for the research. Mean and Standard deviation was used to answer the research question and a z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The criterion mean above 2.5 was accepted / have impact, and the mean below 2.5 was rejected / no impact.

##### 4.1. QUESTION 1

What are the impacts of managing Quality Assurance approaches / practices on the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria?

**Table 1.** Mean Rating of Administrative and Academic staff perceptions on the influence of Managing Quality Assurance Approaches / Practices for the Attainment of Quality Tertiary Education in the North East Nigeria.

S/No.	Impact of managing Quality Assurances on tertiary institutions	Admin Staff	Academic Staff	Mean	Rank Order	Remarks
1	increased awareness amongst staff of Quality Assurance	3.290	2.940	3.11	11	Agree
2	a catalyst for institutions' change and improvement practices	3.220	3.770	3.500	1	Agree
3	improvements in managerial practices	3.210	3.230	3.550	1	Agree
4	increase funding	2.550	3.420	3.120	12	Agree
5	Provision of facilities for teaching and learning	3.540	3.420	3.540	2	Agree
6	enhance quality of teachers	3.550	3.450	3.250	8	Agree
7	Foster better decision making	2.800	3.000	2.890	13	Agree
8	Ensures periodic review of the curriculum and programme	3.000	3.500	2.880	14	Agree
9	Students recruitment and admission	2.780	3.450	3.150	9	Agree
10	Positive profiling of the institution and ranking	3.100	3.150	3.300	6	Agree
11	Governance and operation	3.400	3.030	3.280	7	Agree
12	Academic publications and practices	2.770	3.560	3.400	4	Agree
13	Data massage	2.880	2.590	3.530	3	Agree

S/No.	Impact of managing Quality Assurances on tertiary institutions	Admin Staff	Academic Staff	Mean	Rank Order	Remarks
14	Homogenisation of tertiary education provisions	2.950	3.220	2.790	15	Agree
15	Academic drifts	3.400	3.040	3.320	5	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.280	3.220	3.240		Agree

Data in the Table 1 shows the mean rating of administrative staff and academic staff perceptions on the impact of managing Quality Assurance approaches and practices for the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria. Details of the analyses reveals that the grand mean scores of administrative staff is 3.28 while that of academic staff is 3.22, this indicates that they all agree on the impact of QA on quality of education in tertiary institutions. Therefore, managing quality assurance approaches / practices impact on the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East of Nigeria.

## 4.2. QUESTION 2

What are the quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality in tertiary education in the North East Nigeria?

**Table 2.** Mean Rating of the Administrative and Academic staff perceptions on the Quality Management Challenges militating against the attainment of Quality Tertiary Education in the North East Nigeria.

S/No.	Management Challenges of Managing Quality Assurance in tertiary institutions	Admin Staff	Academic Staff	Mean	Rank Order	Remarks
16	Issues with filling Self- study report	3.210	3.100	3.140	4	Agree
17	Staff related issues Laizzefaire attitudes of staff	3.320	3.220	3.480	2	Agree
18	Lack of support from Leadership	3.340	3.590	3.450	3	Agree
19	Limited budget	3.210	3.440	3.570	1	Agree
20	Time constraints	3.230	3.140	3.360	4	Agree
21	Problem of feedbacks	2.580	3.000	3.100	7	Agree
22	Negative reporting	3.100	3.120	3.140	6	Agree
23	Excessive bureaucracy	2.870	3.300	3.040	8	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.240	3.280	3.330		Agree

Data in the Table 2 shows the mean rating of administrative staff and academic staff perceptions on the quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria. Details of the analyses reveals that the grand mean scores of administrative staff is 3.24 while that of academic staff is 3.28, this indicates that they all agree on the challenges militating against management of quality assurance in tertiary institutions. Therefore, quality management challenges militate against the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East, Nigeria. These challenges are problems of understanding and filling the self-study form, poor attitudes of staff to quality assurance processes, lack of support from leadership of institutions, limited financial and budgetary provisions, time constraints, poor feedback, negative reporting and excessive bureaucracy.

### 4.3. HYPOTHESES ONE

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean score of the perception of administrative and academic staff on the impact of managing quality assurance approaches adopted for the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria.

**Table 3.** Z-test analysis of the difference between the Mean Rating of the Perception of Administrative and Academic Staff on the Quality Assurance approaches adopted for the Attainment of the Goals of Tertiary Education in Nigeria.

Status	N	X	SD	Df	z-cal	Critical value	Decision
Admin. staff	30	3.250	1.390	148	1.360	1.960	Ho <sub>2</sub> not retained
Academic staff	120	3.220	1.370				

$P \leq 0.05$

The data in Table 4 above shows the z-test analysis of the difference between the mean rating of the perceptions administrative and academic staff on the quality assurance approaches used by universities for the attainment of the goals of tertiary education in Nigeria. Details of the analysis indicate that the z-calculated value of 1.36 is less than the critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained. There is no significant difference between the perception of administrative staff and academic staff on the impact of managing quality assurance approaches adopted for the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria.

### 4.4. HYPOTHESES TWO

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of administrative and academic staff on the quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria.

**Table 4.** Z-test analysis of the differences between the Mean Rating of the Perception of Administrative and Academic Staff on the Quality Management Challenges militating against the attainment of Quality Tertiary Education in the North East Nigeria.

Status	N	X	SD	Df	z-cal	Critical value	Decision
Admin. Staff	30	3.140	1.260	148	1.310	1.960	Ho <sub>2</sub> not retained
Academic staff	120	3.180	1.270				

$P \leq 0.05$

The data in Table 5 above shows the z-test analysis of the difference between the mean rating of the perceptions of administrative and academic staff on the quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria. Details of the analysis indicate that the z-calculated value of 1.31 is less than the critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained. There is no significant difference between the perception of administrative staff and academic staff on the quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results of the first research question and the hypothesis revealed that management of quality assurance approaches and practices do impact on quality tertiary education in the North East, Nigeria. The finding agrees with Harvey (2007), Kis (2005) and Utoh (2015). Drawing on studies on the outcome of quality assurance approaches in Nigeria, UK, New Zealand and Hong Kong, management of quality assurance approaches and practices impact on the quality of education. They facilitate discussions, cooperation, and development within academic units with regards to means for improving teaching and learning (Kis, 2005 and Udoh, 2015), provision of funding, improvement of facilities, curriculum review and positive profiling and homogenization of tertiary education provision among others. This is supported by the claim that QA impact is not only on teachers and students performances but also on performance indicators such as behavior of students, income levels of school personnel and percentages of passes in public examination (Arcelo, 2008; Board and Regent, 2007; and Okogie, 2008 cited in Utoh, 2015). However, Newton (2000) hold a contrary view where he maintained that changes in learning outcome are not necessarily linked to quality assurance mechanism. In his case study of NewColl, he reported little support among staff for the view that students learning experience per se had been improved due to quality assurance. He maintained that academic staff associated the quality assurance system with improved 'discipline' and 'technology' for validation, monitoring, and external scrutiny. Further, scholars have argued that the existence of external quality arrangements provides, at the best, a legitimization for internally-driven innovation (Harvey and Newton, 2004 cited in Kis, 2005). The hypothesis tested revealed that there is no significant difference between the perception of administrative staff and academic staff on the impact of managing quality assurance approaches and practices adopted for the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria. Theoretically, this is supported by the system theory of Beer and Huse (1972) which acknowledges the importance of inputs, processes and throughputs. Clearly, there is no contestation that deliberate management strategies designed to satisfy quality expectations based on the quality assurance approaches and processes implemented within a quality system do impact on learning content, learning environment, management and organization of learning and learning outcomes. Therefore, for a successful implementation of quality education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the external quality mechanism should therefore serve to complement the internal quality practices and procedures adopted in the tertiary institutions in order to attain the goal of quality tertiary education including quality certification that is recognized both locally and international.

The second research question revealed that quality management challenges militate against the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East, Nigeria. This concurs with Loomas (2004) and Mahbub (2017). Their studies show that implementing quality assurances mechanism can be really problematic and challenging to senior staff and management. Specifically, these challenges relates to the problems of understanding and filling the self-study form, poor attitudes of staff to quality assurance processes, lack of support from leadership of institutions, limited financial and budgetary provisions, time

constraints, poor feedback, negative reporting and excessive bureaucracy. The second hypothesis was tested and affirms that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of administrative and academic staff on the quality management challenges militating against the attainment of quality tertiary education in the North East Nigeria. Scholars concur that these challenges will continue to rise in the years ahead and that external quality assurance, for instance, will continue to raise the issue of trust across national borders (Stensaker, 2018).

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study is the first reported empirical study on managing quality assurance for the attainment of tertiary education in the North East Nigeria. The quality assurance approach in Nigeria is influenced by the increasing demand for tertiary education in Nigeria and the need to prepare citizens to satisfy the manpower need of the country in line with frameworks that is obtainable in other system across the globe such as Europe and USA. The study showed that quality assurance impact on the quality of education in Nigeria. However, the implementation of quality assurance is still bedeviled with lots of problems which when addressed quality education can be assured in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for tertiary institutions managers to be more proactive in their quality assurance approaches and processes by establishing frameworks and protocols to enhance quality education for attainment of educational objectives particularly in the North East of Nigeria and in Nigeria in general.
2. Tertiary institutions need to provide a forum for audit of QA processes by departments within the tertiary institutions and ensuring a follow up on all QA assessments to determine the quality of the institutions graduates.
3. Government should strengthen the quality assurance units of tertiary institutions through training to enable them check corrupt tendencies in their various institutions.
4. Government should endeavour to fund tertiary institution including empowering the quality assurance departments to deliver on their job.
5. The external quality mechanism should not only be for control but to complement the internal quality practices and procedures.

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