Quality of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper discussed the barriers to quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. Secondary data obtained from print and online publications were used for the paper. The paper concludes that poor funding, lack of autonomy, poor stakeholder's participation, poor accountability, corruption, political influence, weak regulatory institutions, shortage of infrastructure facilities, inadequate academic staff and strike actions are the barriers to quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. Based on this problems, the paper recommended; increment in funding of tertiary education. Government should grant autonomy to the tertiary institutions. Stakeholders should be involved in internal and external management of tertiary education in Nigeria. All tertiary institutions manager should be directed to officially give account of their stewardship to the tertiary institutions stakeholders. Government should direct all anti-corruption agencies to monitor academic activities in all tertiary institutions to fight academic corruption in the system.

Keywords: Education, Tertiary Education and Quality.

Introduction

Many people have defined quality in different ways. For, (Uchendu, Akuegwu & Nwi-ne 2006) quality is seen as the degree of excellence while quality assurance is seen as a system for assuring that quality of output meets the required standard all the times. It therefore imply that a product has to conform to a specification or requirement. Quality is also considered by (Bassey & Bassey, 2008) as the basis of how good and effective the lecturers are, how adequate and accessible the facilities and materials needed for effective teaching and learning are, and how well prepared the graduates are to meet the challenges of life and for solving the problems of society. (Harvey & Green 1993) posits that an approach to measuring quality of a product is when it meets, satisfies or worth the value for money paid on such products and could also be measured based on the transformative approach. This refers to the empowerment of the students through the learning process or institutional changes which might have transformed the students during the learning process. (Cole 1996) notes that quality is something everyone considered good and wants to have in order to achieve stated objectives. (Uvah 2005) believes that the quality of university graduates could be measured by how well they have been prepared for life and for service to society in various spheres of human endeavor while (UNESCO cited in Uvah, 2005), agrees that quality in higher education is multi-dimensional and embraces all functions and activities of a university including teaching, academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment.

From above, this paper conceptualized quality as standard of a product compare to stated standard or planned. In this context, quality process of monitoring and evaluation of a product whether the outcome is good and of the intended standard designed to be or planned to be. Quality is the state of a product against particular settled conditions.

Concern has been raised about the decline in the quality of education in Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. This is evident by the quality of graduates produced by these institutions. For instance, graduates from Nigerian universities are faced with problem of unemployment upon graduation (NOUN, 2012; Ogunode**,** Onaolapo, Onaolapo, Adeosun, & Ayoko, 2023; Ogunode & Emmanuel 2023). The (National Policy on Education 2013) defines tertiary education as the education given after secondary education in Universities, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, as well as those institutions offering correspondence courses. Also, (Scott 2005) stated that tertiary or higher education has two meanings. First, it means the next academic level (without research component) after secondary education. Second, it signifies the system of institutions that provides post-secondary school courses and also engages in research. The second meaning is most relevant to university education. The objectives of tertiary education among other things include human capital development and manpower development. Tertiary education offers skills required for individual self-reliance which in turn boosts economic growth.

Quality of tertiary education in Nigeria is deteriorate. For instance, (Saint, Hartmet and Strassner 2003) lament that the Nigerian university system is performing poorly in the area of teaching and learning in terms of labour market absorption and employers' assessment of graduates. Also, (Mohammed and Gbenu 2007) and Obayan 1999) concludes that the quality of education offered by higher education institutions in the recent times has deteriorated substantially. (Babalola 2007) describe the situation in our tertiary institutions as "institutional failure" because of skill mismatch. He said skill mismatch is a major concern in Nigeria where tertiary education graduates acquire skills that are not demanded by the labour market. (Babalola (2001) opine that Universities in Nigeria are in crisis as there is less money to spend on teaching, research and community service. (Akpan 2016) notes that the quality of university education in Nigeria seems to continue to deteriorate as the years passed by, despite the effort of government to improve the university learning environment and the effort of the NUC in monitoring and accrediting academic programmes.

Many factors are responsible for the state of Nigerian tertiary education. The situation called for a holistic review and immediate intervention. It is important to critically analyze this challenges and suggests necessary steps to take by the government and stakeholders to address the challenges. Based on this, this paper is aimed to examine barriers to quality tertiary education in Nigeria.

Barriers to Quality of Tertiary Education

There are many factors militating against quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. Some of these challenges include; poor funding, lack of autonomy, poor stakeholders participation, poor accountability, corruption, political influence, weak regulatory institutions, shortage of infrastructure facilities, inadequate academic staff and strike actions.

Poor Funding

Poor funding of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been a barrier to attainment of quality tertiary education in Nigeria. Tertiary education is underfunded in Nigeria and this has resulted to poor quality of tertiary education. Inadequate funding of public universities in Nigeria is a prime causal of other problems that have undermined quality in university education (Babalola, 2001; Agi, 2017; Ogunode, & Abubakar, 2023). (Tunde and Issa 2013 and Ahaotu & Ogunode 2021) conclude in their respective studies and attributed poor funding of education in Nigeria as reasons why many university administrators are unable to provide adequate and quality infrastructural facilities and equipment for effective teaching and learning. They further stated that the non-commensurate of funding with other growing indices in Nigerian universities have negative impact on the quality of education as the universities are constantly being shut down as a result of staff unions agitating for one form of demand

or the other. Also, (Otokunefor 2015) report that the poor quality of our university graduates is due to the interwoven nature of the infrastructural deficiencies of the universities. (Otokunefor), observe that magic facilities spring up overnight before accreditation exercises and disappear soon after. Sometimes, spaces allocated to and used by other departments are simply relabeled for the sake of accreditation. After the exercise, the facilities revert to the original owners and the struggle for survival continues (Otokunefor, 2015). Quality education in the higher institutions required high investment in both human and materials resources. There are a lot of resources needed to guarantee quality education in the higher institutions. It is unfortunate that the budgetary allocation for the higher institutions are inadequate and this have affected the quality in the system (Ogunode, & Ndayebom, 2022; Ogunode & Atobauka, 2021; Ogunode, Akinlade & Musa, 2021). The poor funding of higher educational system in the Nigeria has rendered the higher education system incapacitated. The higher education system has not had the financial resources necessary to maintain educational quality in the midst of significant enrolment explosion.

Lack of Autonomy

Lack of full autonomy in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria has been a challenge to attainment of quality education in the tertiary institutions across the country. Autonomy in Nigerian varsities in simple terms connotes a situation where each university exercises its right to select or admit its own students, decide what to teach and determine its areas of research (Akinwale, 2023). University autonomy according (Azenabor 2022) self-determination and self-governance or self-rule. It refers to the right of the universities to determine the manner in, or the ground rules by which they are governed and their capacity to control their own affairs and shape their own destiny, free from external interference or control. University autonomy builds a system that will ensure quality output. University autonomy eliminates policies and programme that reduces quality. Most of the higher institutions are in these present conditions because the institutions lack autonomy. Autonomy helps institutions to maintain accountability which is the foundation for effective administration that guarantee quality in the system. The lack of autonomy in the higher institutions allows political influence and corruption that give birth to mediocrity, poor leadership and appointment of less qualified staff. (Egwa 2016) posit that the unprecedented influx of academic personnel into tertiary institutions through *god fatherism* poise both strength and threat to these ivory towers. It is strength when the human resources available have potential, talents and abilities which are used in combination with other resources to produce quality output. On the contrast, it is a threat when these potential, talent and abilities in combination with other resource produce mediocres, or constitute a brooding habitat for touts, prostitutes, armed robbers among other vices on which students are highly vulnerable, as the teachers' performance according to (Ogunode & Ahmad 2022 and Madumere-Obike 2004) determine quality of students.

Poor Participation of Stakeholders

Poor participation of stakeholders in the management of the various tertiary institutions have resulted to poor quality education in the system. Stakeholders are very important members of the tertiary institutions whose jobs are to ensuring standard and quality education. (Asiyai, 2015) states that the stakeholders are grouped as internal or external. Internal stakeholders include government who is the owner of higher education institutions or service provider, students-on whom all the activities of university education systems are centered, academics-who are constantly engaged in teaching, research and community service, university administrators who manage the affairs of the institution by providing leadership, non-academic staff, and other management staff, principal officers, senators, directors of institutes, heads of departments and internal members of governing council. Internal stakeholders must be committed to the principles of SERVICOM-Service Compact with all Nigerians which is government initiative in pursuing excellence in delivery of services for all Nigerians. The author went further and discloses that Nigerian higher education stakeholders are greatly concerned about the quality of education provided the citizens of the country. Concerns about the quality of education students receive from universities, the quality of lecturers (teaching staff) employed to teach students, the quality of infrastructures and instructional facilities have always been of upmost interest.

Additionally, university education stakeholders are interested in the quality of health facilities for students/staff health services, quality of students' hostels, quality of the overall institution environment, quality teaching and learning as well as quality support services from non-academic staff. (Bello 2013) observe that when stakeholders fail to do their responsibilities in the system the implication will be deteriorating educational system. (Billy 2014) submits that stakeholder participation in the activities and programme of the universities is low and the low representation in the system have resulted to the poor funding, corruption, low levels of investment in research capacity, weak institutions and exponential increase in students enrolment with a non-corresponding expansion in facilities, material resources and poor ranking.

Poor Accountability

Poor accountability in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria have led to the poor quality of education in Nigeria. (Akey, 2012) acknowledges that accountability is usually linked to the management of scarce resources available in the educational system through efficient and prudent utilization of such resources for achieving educational goals. Universities are increasingly urged to be accountable because the school system which facilitates the objectives of education is a creation of the society which is required to maintain check and balances; because the university system is funded by society through taxes paid, it is vital that it becomes accountable to society (Leveille, 2006). Investment in education development is crucial to the survival and progress of any modern nation. It is like an industry that utilizes money and other valuable resources to produce its own products. Accountability means ensuring that officials in the public, private and voluntary sector organizations are answerable for their actions and that there is redress when duties and commitments are not met. It requires the accountable party to provide an explanation or satisfactory reason for his/her activities and the results of efforts to achieve the specified tasks or objective (Leveille, 2006). When accountability failed in the tertiary institutions the result effect is poor quality education. When institutions and individuals who are supposed to ask the higher institutions' manager equations on their actions and policies are not doing their responsibilities. The system operates anyhow and the result will be bad. Poor accountability in the higher education in Nigeria have accounted to poor quality of education in the system.

Corruption

Corruption in the various tertiary institutions in Nigeria have fueled the problem of poor quality education in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. (Odoba & Elijah 2007) defines accountability as a deliberate and conscious deviation and violation of rules, norms, and cherished values of society by someone or group of persons occupying position(s) of trust because of inordinate desire for power, wealth and recognition. Corruption have penetrated Nigerian higher education. The various forms of corruption in the Nigerian higher institutions according to (Okobi, 1997) includes examination malpractice, admission racketeering, hostel profiteering, extortion of the students, abuse of office, sorting, forgery of certificates and statements of results, sexual harassment and immorality, embezzlement of funds, godfatherism, corruption in recruitment and promotion of staff, placing government's or management's machinery at the disposal of a particular student to win election during students' politics in the campus. (Agbo (2017) submits that institutionalized corruption increases administrative costs, losses in the revenue of these institutions, results in goal displacement as the institutions' goals are replaced with the personal benefits of some persons. The author also note that educational corruption in tertiary institutions in Nigeria affects standard of education. For instance, examination malpractice, sorting, sale of marks for cash or kind, etc., have adverse effects on the manner in which educational practices are run and practiced; it reduces standards and quality of education in the society as illiterate graduates are produced. Also, (Agbo (2017) noted that there are cases of students being exploited by staff; recruitment and promotion of staff being based on political patronage instead of merit. There are cases of abuse of office by those in authority. Other vices include: admission racketeering, hostel profiteering, sorting, examination malpractice, sexual harassment, etc. All these social vices are signs of a big rot in the tertiary institutions and portend danger for the entire Nigerian nation. It shows absolute lack of credibility in the tertiary institutions'

service delivery (Okobi, 1997). The presences of corruption in the educational institutions are rendering the quality down. No any meaningful quality of education can be attained in the atmosphere filled with corruption practices (Ogunode, Akinlade & Musa, 2021). Corruption in the administration of tertiary institutions has contributed to the poor quality of tertiary education in Nigeria (Ogunode, Josiah, &Ajape 2021).

Political Influence

Political influence activities in the running of tertiary education in Nigeria have led to poor quality education. When politics are employed in the appointment of principal officers in the tertiary institutions the implication is the appointment of people with less experienced and qualifications who lack the vision, the capacity and the technical know to manager the institutions and transform its to a global stanadard. (Ogunode, Gregory, & Abubakar 2020; Yawe, Ivagher & Ijov 2015) observe that the political interference in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria has degenerated so much that credibility is completely eroded, as principal officers of higher institutions such as vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, provosts, rectors and registrars among others are appointed on the basis of political affiliations, sectionalism, nepotism, tribalism as well as religious beliefs. The implication of qualification not been the yardstick for the appointment of such principal officers is that any Tom-Dick and Harry can be given such sensitive positions which may make the entire system ineffective and inefficient. Leaders in some universities are weak, uncoordinated and lack administrative skills. Some do not have administrative knowledge or skills According to (Udida, Bassey, & Udofia; Taiwo in Ekaette 2001). A lot of higher education system managers do not poses the charisma, or good human relations needed for effective and efficient leadership. As a result of the poor leadership and ineffective style of administration, a lot of programme of activities are not carried out in such institutions such as provision of grant for research and publications, staff welfare is neglected, no adequate control of staff and students, no vision for the University. Such leaders also do not have the zeal for supervision and monitoring of institutional activities. This can affect the systems performance. (Ogunode & Musa 2022) conclude that politicization of university education have led to underdevelopment of the system. The major implication of university education politicization in Nigeria is that it has led to a fall in the standard of university education. The introduction of political influence in the administration of the university system has led to a crisis in the system. When leaders appointed to head the universities are selected based on ethnicity, religion and indigeneship, the effects would be bad leadership which will affect the standard of the system (Ogunode, Atobauka, & Ayoko, 2023). (Punch 2021) submitted that the acrimony and vitriol accompanying succession to the post of vice-chancellor in most public varsities offer a sad commentary on the abysmal level the nation's academic community has sunk into. The negative nuances of politics crippling the country's vital sectors appear to have been smuggled into university education to the detriment of robust scholastic exercise. The estimable town and gown concept is eroded, and the gown now emulates the town's way of life instead of otherwise.

Weak Regulatory Institutions

Another problems responsible poor quality of education in the Nigerian tertiary institutions is that the various regulatory agencies both external and internal seems weak (Ogunode and Ahaotu (2020) states that Agencies of the various government established to ensure that both public and private tertiary institutions compile with the educational policies in the country are weak. The ineffectiveness of these agencies and departments is responsible for the poor implementation of the policy in the country while (Ehichoya and Ogunode (2020) concludes that ineffective supervision of tertiary institutions is responsible for poor teaching programme in higher institutions in Nigeria. The Nigerian government, in bid to ensure effective supervision of teaching programme in the higher institutions, established the following agencies: universities are supervised by the National Universities Commissions, while colleges of education are supervised by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) oversees polytechnic education. These commissions are responsible for policy decisions affecting institutions under their supervision, maintenance of standards through a system of periodic accreditation of courses, distribution and monitoring of government funding, appointment of members of governing councils, and the day-to-

day running of the institutions (NEEDS, 2014). These supervisory agencies of higher institutions have not been effective in supervision of teaching programme at the various higher institutions due to many challenges that include underfunding, shortage of staffers, weak leadership and internal problems. The inability of these supervisory agencies to effectively supervise the activities of the higher institutions is one of the factors responsible for poor teaching in the higher institutions in Nigeria (Ogunode, Akinlade & Musa, 2021). The inability of these regulatory institutions to carry out their works have resulted to poor quality in the system.

Shortage of Infrastructure Facilities

Shortage of infrastructure facilities in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have led to poor quality of education in some tertiary institutions across the Country. (Ogunode 2020) defines infrastructural facilities as those facilities aiding delivery of academic and non-academic services in educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include; libraries, laboratories, halls, offices, administrative blocks, hostels, roads facilities, water, electricity, internet etc. The availability of the infrastructural facilities in adequate quantities will support effective administration of educational institutions and the inadequacies will prevent effective administration of educational institutions. Many public universities in Nigeria do not have adequate lectures halls, laboratories and offices for both students and academic staff. (Ishaya & Ogunode, 2021; NOUN 2007) posits that it is worrisome to note that higher institutions are fast decaying. All the required resources for education production process are in short supply. Lecture halls, laboratories, students' hostels, library space, books and journals, official spaces are all seriously inadequate. The equipment for teaching and learning are either lacking or very inadequately and in a bad shape to permit the higher educational systems the freedom to carry out the basic functions of academics. Also, (Mufuyai 2012) noted that Nigerian universities are characterized by lack of basic technology, poor funding and operating environment. (Akomolafe & Ibijola 2014) discover low status of infrastructure in the universities and they attributed this to funding challenges despite the monitoring and compliance driven mechanism. Also, (Ogunode & Jegede 2021; Ogunode, Akin-Ibidiran & Ibidiran 2022; Alechenu 2012) affirms that low status of infrastructural facilities has led to a sharp decline in scholarship.

Inadequate Academic Staff

Shortage of academic staff in many higher institutions have contributed to poor quality in some Nigerian tertiary institutions. (Ogunode & Adamu, (2021) views academic staff as those teaching staff in higher institutions. Academic staff are the implementer of the school curriculum and lecture presenters. Academic staffs are the teachers and delivery of instruction in the higher institutions. Academic staff are the knowledge and character builder/importers in the higher institution. The academic staff are the engine room of the higher institutions. They are the pillar and foundation of higher institutions. The functions of the academic staff include; lecturing, preparing the lecture note, preparing the lesson note, sourcing instruction materials, giving an assignment to students, assessing the students through continuous assessment and examination, setting exams questions, marking the answer sheet, supervising students' research work, especially projects, theses and dissertation and prepares the students to grade points. The academic staff conducts different levels of research, presents their findings and contributes to the development of knowledge in the higher institutions (Ogunode, Jegede & Musa, 2021). The quality of tertiary education is determined by the quality of its personnel and the quantities. The shortage of personnel in the tertiary institutions affects its quality output. It has been observed that majorities of tertiary institutions in Nigeria lack adequate staff. For instance, in the Universities, (National Universities Commission 2021) submits that 100,000 academic staff members were attending to 2.1 million students in Nigerian universities. NUC observed that ―The entire system has about 2.1 million students and a staff strength of about 170,000 non-teaching and 100,000 academic staff. When academic staff in the universities are not having the right qualifications and are not in the right numbers compare to the students it will lead to poor quality of education.

Strike Actions

Strike actions in the Nigerian tertiary institutions is another problem responsible deteriorating tertiary education in Nigeria. The Nigerian public universities are known for continuous strike actions by different union groups in the public universities. The continuous strike actions by these different union groups have frustrated the administration of public universities in Nigeria (Oribabor, 2008;Ade-Ajayi, 2003). The reasons for the strike actions by different union groups include; underfunding of the public universities, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor implementation of agreement reached with union groups and poor working condition (Ogunode, Ugochukwu & Jegede, 2022). (Ahunanya & Ubabudu 2006) while citing (Ayo-Shobowale) states that the perception of falling standards coupled with the escalating incidence of examination malpractices, low rate of completion of university programmes at the required time are due to closures and strikes. (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. (Ogunode 2020) notes that strike actions by different union groups in the Nigerian higher institutions has contributed to poor quality of education The implications of the continuous strike actions on the public universities include; disruption in the academic programme, poor quality of education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the barriers to quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. Secondary data obtained from print and online publications were used for the paper. The paper conclude poor funding, lack of autonomy, poor stakeholders participation, poor accountability, corruption, political influence, weak regulatory institutions, shortage of infrastructure facilities, inadequate academic staff and strike actions are the barriers to quality tertiary education in Nigeria. Based on this problems, the paper recommended

1) Adequate funding of tertiary Education by Nigerian government

2) Government should grant autonomy to the tertiary institutions. This will help to eliminate political influence in the administration of tertiary institutions

3) Stakeholders should be involved in internal and external management of tertiary education in Nigeria

4) All tertiary institutions manager should be directed to officially give account of their stewardship to the tertiary institutions stakeholders.

5) Government should direct all anti-corruption agencies to monitor academic activities in all tertiary institutions to fight academic corruption in the system.

6) Adequate funds should be provided to all regulatory institutions to enable they carry out their supervisory supervision in all the tertiary institutions across the country. Adequate monitoring, supervision and evaluation of system activities such as teaching: research activities and community services

7) The government should provide adequate infrastructures that will cope with the current increased population enrolment in Higher education and provision of adequate funds for the construction and rehabilitation of collapsed buildings;

8) The government should employ more academic staff in all tertiary institutions;

9) Government should implement agreement signed with different unions groups in the tertiary institutions to prevent strike actions.

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