



BEYOND MEASUREMENT: NIGERIA UNIVERSITY QUALITY MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to review past literature that has defined quality in universities with the intention of measuring something. It was assumed that such a study, measuring quality in Nigerian universities had taken a superficial approach, ignoring the uniqueness of each university, and the context. It is important to bear in mind that universities encompass human processes, within an institution, with multifarious units that work autonomously, to varying extents. Due to the nature of how these institutions are constructed, some issues are beyond measurement in determining how quality of tertiary education in Nigeria should be assessed and assured. This paper uses a standard literature review to elucidate those issues determining why it is difficult to measure quality in Nigerian universities instrumentally. The value of this approach lies in the ability shed light on factors which have received insufficient attention from other researchers, but are likely to significantly influence effective management of Nigerian universities. The paper found that universities in Nigeria are well-structured and are guided by policies that will enhance continued improvement; however due to certain vices that have been allowed into the university system it is now very difficult for universities to achieve their stated purpose. The study also found that there is a large number of problems mediating the institutions' performance that will cause any yardstick set for measuring quality to fail, or rather to measure quality incorrectly.

Introduction

The main notion behind measurement is to generate meaningful results which allow for useful generalisations to be made. In business terms, profitability is the key measure, in

manufacturing, it is output and, for universities, meaningful results concern their graduates. Without a doubt, measurement is necessary and must always be supported by rigorous methods and accurate results in order to achieve organisational objectives. In the recent past, efforts have been made by many researchers (Beckford, 1998; Doherty, 1994) in the field of higher education to identify a meaningful definition of quality that does not downplay existing factors and criteria that have aided the understanding and definition of quality within the university system. A renowned author (Harvey, 2010) has even looked back into all definitions suggested by different researchers in the field in the last 20 years; her conclusion indicates that quality is a difficult concept to discuss and no particular, unambiguous definition can be ascribed to quality in higher education, as all university levels and components are multifaceted, making it difficult to identify infallible approaches or techniques. However, in the manufacturing sector, from whence the concept of quality was borrowed, the aim is to get it right, the first time to make it fit for purpose while providing value for money (Juran and Godfrey, 1998; Juran, 2003), all to satisfy customers' needs and demands, as well as to increase the profitability of the company. This implies that transactions are involved between a stakeholder (customer) who has a specification (be it in mind or on paper) and a manufacturer who must meet or satisfy the customer to justify quality. Stakeholders in higher education context may be customers, organisations, the government or other financial sponsors who have the capacity to invest for a purpose. The effort made by manufacturers is to comply with sponsors' specifications accurately and consistently; for this reason a measurement procedure for each process was introduced, to 'get it right' in manufacturing sector.

Thus, quality has been introduced to higher education as a strategy borrowed from the manufacturing sector to satisfy the desperate need to meet pressing economic and social demands. Identified in general literature is the difficulties of defining quality by many authors (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2007; Cheng, 2009; Abukari and Corner, 2010), although it is observable that they all pay attention to quality using a quantitative approach with a view to measuring quality from either student satisfaction or learning outcomes, and so the difficulty of defining quality in higher education prevails. Surprisingly, many scholars in the field of higher education have introduced discrepant concepts of quality to their university activities, such as measuring admissions or student intake with numbers of drop-outs and graduation being used to determine quality in their sector. Such approaches encouraged

measurement of different university activities. The result of this measurement process was a failure to identify the reality, which had directly or indirectly led to systemic or administration problems or difficulties. In order to improve how the concept is perceived in universities, researchers (Oyewole, 2009; Ekundayo and Ajayi, 2009; Modebelu and Joseph, 2012) have investigated the concept by using qualitative approaches, asking general questions on how to create solutions to the problems experienced in higher education. On many occasions they successfully made appropriate suggestions as to the solutions, but when it comes to the point of implementation, the process has exhibited difficulties in practicability as a result of missing or inadequate mechanisms within the structure. They have ignored human values of emancipation and freedom that would be central to any valid conception of development (Njihia, 2011).

Research

The introduction of ‘quality’, as a concept which may be exhibited by different agents in the higher education system, and its application to university itself has suggested that the model has failed because quality in manufacturing deals with inanimate objects composed by different components that can be subject to quantification, measurable in meaningful terms to achieve production goals which aptly describe fitness for purpose, classified as quality inspection (Modebelu & Joseph, 2012). Adegbite (2007) ascertained that quality control is beyond quality inspection, as provided by the National University Commission (NUC) in the Nigerian university context: to him, it also concerns adherence to specifications for customers (students), serve as standards or requirements for attainment of goals. These standards should be closely monitored to ensure conformance, which will in turn translate into a competitive advantage. Adegbite (2007) also argued that quality control efforts enhance the use of statistics to avoid undue variation in the process. No wonder Crosby (1996) advocated zero defects: that is, ‘getting it right the first time’. Otherwise there would be a cost attributed to reworking, scrapping or correcting mistakes (Cartwright, 2007; Kong, 2008). Definition of quality is therefore susceptible to varied interpretation, application and types of assessment (Harvey and Williams, 2010; Adetunji, 2015). This was evident in the work of Rue et al. (2012, p. 286) where they stated that ‘several national agencies and higher education institutions have adopted a relatively simple approach to quality assessment, which has become widely accepted. In their view, quality can be measured by quantifying the level of performance according to a well-established achievement standard. Arguably Rue (2009) pointed out that quality is not only dependent on certain contexts or established behaviour

patterns, but on the functional alignment of a series of defining elements in any given context. Likewise, it is debated by Cheng and Tam (1997) that quality is a highly contested concept that has multiple meanings linked to how a university is perceived. The surprising aspect of her work was a proposed model for measuring quality which depicts a direct relationship between input and output. It was called a value added approach which measures the gain by students before and after they receive higher education as if what is inputted into students can be quantified and measured correctly.

In another review by Harvey and Williams (2010) entitled, *Twenty years of trying to make a sense of quality assurance: the misalignment of quality assurance with institution quality framework and quality culture*. The paper (ibid) started by making attempt to review 400 articles, an approach that opened the gap which this paper aims to fill. They make several attempt to discuss the subject, but in the end, they concluded by supporting the work of Saarinen (2010) which asserts that despite the debate put forward by researchers in the field over the past 20 years, the voice of the academic community has become increasingly subdued, and consequently its value has been less clearly presented. Likewise, Sayed's (2010) 'Review of After 2015: Time for an education quality goal', she concluded that getting a meaningful definition for quality in education will require a debate with less ambitious targets. she pointed out that seeking to achieve measurement without asking the fundamental question of whether what is measurable is worthwhile valuable and meaningful. She finally expressed that issue of education quality is to frame a discussion as one of value and belief, which is fundamental about what, is desirable in the society.

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 (1997) maintained that good quality should embody the characteristics of conformance to expectation, conformance to requirement, excellence, value and avoidance of loss. Asiyai (2013) 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. Oyewole (2009) defined quality as the totality of features and features of a product or service that characterizes its ability to satisfy stated needs. Oyewole (ibid) highlighted that Article 11 of the World Declaration on Education (2003) sees quality 'as a multi-dimensional theory, which should comprise all the functions and activities in schools' (p.23). Such

activities of universities which are listed as: teaching and learning; research and scholarship; community service; staffing; and students' personal development; educational infrastructures and facilities to aids learning; equipment and the academic environment (p.24). All the elements listed in Article 11 of the World Declaration on Education (2003 are devoid of items that can be measured effectively without being biased compare to loosely equivalent elements used for production in the manufacturing sector. Without a doubt it, is clear that some issues have been identified as going beyond measurement in this study. The paper attempted to investigate practical issues (if any exist) in the transformation of students in the university sector.

Methodology

This paper was designed to study quality management issues in Nigerian universities which are beyond conventional measurement. The research was based on the assumption that involving senior academic officials in the study may lead to them becoming self-protective, with a tendency to focus their discussion only on issues that will benefit them. It is likely that some would not wish to participate which will threaten the objectivity of the study, leading to sampling bias. Therefore, the paper uses a purposive selection technique to select 5 Faculty Admin Officers (FAOs) who take responsibilities for custodians of every activity including timetabling, allocation of resources, requests for materials, collation of subjects departmentally as well as being involved in internal accreditation and quality monitoring of the faculty's programs. The study selected five major faculties: Management Science, Law, Sciences, Agricultural Science and Humanities. The selection for the sample was based on commonality across a selected university type. The involvement and central roles played by the selected FAOs were very important and were assumed to be suitable for investigating what happens and the specifics of the roles they played in the development of their faculty towards quality enhancement. The use of interviews as the sole research instrument was assumed appropriate because it allow the FAOs to express themselves anonymously without identifying themselves personally, or which faculty or institution they represent. The interview section involved participants who respond to the best of their knowledge on issues beyond measurement in determining quality in Nigerian universities. The study covered six universities - four participants claimed to have a busy schedule and refused to participate in the research process.

The universities selected were assigned numbers from 1 to 6 based on category (see Table 1) where Faculty Admin Officer Management science is represented by FAOMS, Faculty Admin Officer Law is represented by FAOL, Faculty Admin Officer Sciences represented by FAOS, Faculty Admin Officer Agric. Sci. are represented by FAOA, Faculty Admin Officer Humanities by FAOH were purposively selected based on their position of authorities. The participants were coded as follows FAOM = A, FAOL = B, FAOS = C, FAOA = D, FAOH = E. Thus A1 to A6 = FAOM; B1 to B6 = FAOL, E1 to E6 = FAOH. While A1 to A2; B1 to B2...E1 to E2 are from federal universities, A3 to A4; B3 to B4...E3 to E4 are from state universities and A5 to A6; B5 to B6...E5 to E6 are from private universities. A1, B1 to E1 are participants from federal university 1, A2, B2, to E2 are from federal university 2... and A6, B6 to E6 are from private university 6.

Table 1: Participants grids

University type		Participants				
		Faculty Admin Officer Management Science (A)	Faculty Admin Officer Law (B)	Faculty Admin Officer Sciences (C)	Faculty Admin Officer Agric. Science (D)	Faculty Admin Officer Humanities (E)
Federal	1	*	*	*	*	*
Federal	2	*	*	*	*	-
State	3	*	-	*	*	*
State	4	-	*	*	*	*
Private	5	*	*	*	*	*
Private	6	*	*	*	-	*

Beyond Measurement

The participants' discussion was a comprehensive one and revealed major issues that will adversely affect attempts to measure quality in the Nigerian university context. However one can never ruled out the facts that some of the respondent's man be telling the researcher what they think he wants to hear. To the best of my knowledge the interviewees were fair and honest in their expression of subjects discussed.

Teaching / Learning

All respondents accepted that teachers are the linchpins of quality in any educational setting. Four of the FAOs from federal universities expressed that there are situations where students with bright academic potential fail to actualize their life ambitions because of the incompetent and ineffective teachers within the system (B2, C1, D2, E1). One of the interviewees expressed that this could be due to many reasons that are beyond student or institutional control,

I think student sometime are willing to study but teacher or lecturers discourage them through wrong use of words, which will have direct influence on their study [sic] (C1).

Three of the respondents expressed that it is expected that academic staff perform their roles through proper teaching, guidance and counselling of students to enable productive learning and to provide positive personal examples in the areas of character development and educational attainment (A5, C3, E4). Two of the informants agreed that many of the lecturers working today do not possess these attributes or aptitude and consequently measuring quality based on this skillset and assumptions will result in quality being wrongly assessed (A5, E4). One of the respondents was of the view that,

I believe students were in school for a purpose which is to learn but the environmental issue sometime takes their attention away from the learning new things that they were purpose to learn [sic] (A5).

Six of the participants pointed out that as part of developing quality services in the university, supervision was created to give awareness of sound education philosophies in teachers and to foster awareness of educational policies and reforms (A3, B1, B6, C4, C6, E4). Four other interviewees also mentioned that supervisors are used to play leadership roles that stimulated and encouraged both staff and students in the system to perform their duties so as to achieve institutional tasks or objectives (A1, D2, D5, E3). One of the participants pointed out that,

I believe the effective use of supervision will help administrators to identify the quality of lecturers in the institution [sic] (D5).

Two FAOs mention that tools such as supervision, that are intended to be a mechanism for delivery of quality services, have been taken over by heads of unit with no integrity, causing considerable confusion within the system (D2, D5). One of the participants highlighted that,

I think the key reason for supervision is to create a check and balance between the academic staff, non-academic staff and students [sic] (D2).

In teaching and learning categories, few informants mention Monitoring and Evaluation as an important element of teaching. Five of the FAOs also pointed out that through constant monitoring and evaluation of system activities (in terms of effective control by the different heads of unit or department) and constant feedback to management through utilization of reports of a high standard, the standard in the system should be greatly increased and sustained (A5, B5, C1, D3, D5). Three other participants from federal universities mentioned that the role of the National University Commission (NUC) in system performance cannot be overlooked, as an external quality assurance agency of the Nigerian universities. They are required to ensure that every licenced university produces quality graduates; but are they doing that? (B2, C2, D1). Four FAOs from private universities also pointed out that the role of the NUC includes advising Government on the fundamental needs of the universities. Advising the Federal Government on the establishment and location of universities, creating new facilities and postgraduate units in the universities, they are expected to deliver promptly (A5, B6, D5, E6). Another four FAOs from state universities supported the assertion that it is the role of the NUC to carry out periodic plans referring to the general programme to be pursued by universities' staff (A3, C4, D4, E3). Other informants added that the NUC is charged with the duty to prepare periodic plans on the general programme to be pursued by the universities (E1). Another informant was of the view that the NUC's responsibility is to receive and distribute Federal grants to Federal Universities, establishing and maintaining the minimum academic standards (C6). The last respondent pointed out that the NUC is charged with the role of accrediting the degrees and other academic qualifications awarded by the universities. He claimed that,

I believe that audit role and the supervisory functions of NUC has indeed contributed to the quality and sustainability of higher education in Nigeria [sic] (D3).

Cultism and other vices

Four of the interviewees mentioned that a big challenge to achieving the delivery of quality in higher education learning is the increasing in activities of kidnappers and secret cult groups (B2, C4, D1, D3). Two of the participants were of the opinion that higher education institutions in Nigeria are under restriction and almost ruined by secret cults (B2, D3). Many of the participants also agreed that as a result of cult groups' and kidnappers' activities, the majority of lecturers, students and their families live in perpetual fear. Two of the interviewees from faculties of Law claimed that fear of what might happen next is experienced by most lecturers, especially when a student fails and such student is a cult member (B4, B5). One of the participants explained that,

I can tell you that student involvement in cult activities have cause a lot of problems with the sector and most of our colleagues had been killed due to student failure, I mean a cult member [sic] (B4).

Another respondent also shared that student involvement in cultism is a big issue; he exclaimed,

I think we all suffer the outcome of cult activities, because when they strike everywhere became unrest, student cannot learn, lecturers don't want to risk their life going for lectures. Even their family members are not safe, they kidnap or kill each other's relative [sic] (A2).

With these activities it is very difficult to measure quality by any standard and even when the institutions are up-to-date in their activities these vices can cause the yardstick to measure quality wrongly, in the event where crises had happened.

Further, five of the participants expressed that cult groups do not just cause unrest within the university; some of them also indulge in armed robbery, assassination, rape and infrastructure destruction (C3, C4, D1, D3, D4). Three of the FAOA shared similar views, and that that cult members also cheat openly in examinations and threaten lecturers when caught (D1, D3, D4). One of the respondents claimed that,

I know of situation where kidnappers are hunting academic and senior staff of universities in the country and those kidnapped's families or relatives are made to pay huge sum of money as ransom before they are released [sic] (D3).

Two FAOSs shared a similar view that the tensions endured by university management and the communities as a result of secret cult groups' activities and kidnappers often to generate negative impacts on quality of higher education in Nigeria (C2, C5). Four informants also shared that the activities of this cult groups represent an unassailable challenge to administrators of university systems in Nigeria because they are very quick to initiate fresh students into their operation (B2, C5, C6, E4). One of the participants lamented,

I tell you what? Most of this cult group members are sons and daughters of well-known people within the community, their parent are highly influential and they keep going away with any bad behavior they display, I think that is why we still talk about them today, otherwise they should have been wiped out long time ago [sic] (B2).

Four of the FAOMSs share a similar view that these groups had caused the university to shut down on several occasion, especially in public universities contending with demonstrations and strikes by students in protests for their rights to be upheld (A2, A4, A5, A6). One of the respondents expressed that,

I think Government has been insensitivity to demands by the civil society to eradicate these cults group activities, rather they have compounded the problem by not making the right justice [sic] (A2).

Lack of resources

Six of the participants were of a similar view in that they were unwilling to condemn the idea of measuring quality, but indicated that that resources being in place was a necessary prerequisite, otherwise the process would be a waste of time (A2, B5, C3, D3, E1, E5). Two FAOLs shared that quality in higher education is dependent on the quality and quantity of human and material resources put in place in institutions of higher learning (B4, B5). One of the respondents mentioned that,

I think the lack of infrastructures such as science laboratories, workshops, students' hostels, libraries and electricity will affect the quality of education [sic] (B4).

Three other interviewees shared that for good quality delivery, available human and material resources must meet the minimum standard specified by the NUC in order to measure quality correctly, but that doing this is presently beyond institutional capacity (A2, D1, E5). One of the respondents expressed that, for example, when you talk about quality teaching and learning,

I think the class size must be small for effective students/teacher interaction right, but it is quit unfortunately, most universities in Nigeria, the lecture halls are overcrowded with majority of the students standing at the corridors during lectures. Tell me how to measure such performance [sic] (D1).

Two other FAOAs also mentioned that, besides, the libraries in many Nigerian universities are stocked with obsolete textbooks, while current journals and textbooks are lacking (D3, D4). Four of the participants from the sciences agree that the library is at the heart of the academic effort within a university. They stressed that for an institution to be strong academically, it must have a formidable library in place (C2, C3, C4, C5). One of the respondents contended that,

I think the main reason why the top universities of the world (like Harvard, Cambridge, University of California and many more) are academically of high strength and quality is because they are well equipped with current knowledge [sic] (C5).

Three participants shared that one cannot have an acute shortage of educational facilities in a university and still expect to measure quality as one would within a similar institution that is free of such problems (C1, E3, E5). One of the participants articulated,

I think I need to tell you this, we are not producing the same quality of graduate whether you like it or not, I think this problem has led to decline in the quality of our universities (E5).

Another participants cited examples of other problems that are affecting the institution as: empty workshops being used as science laboratories, vocational and technical education studies, lack of equipment required for effective teaching and learning, among a host of other issues (C2). He also elucidated that it is not uncommon to see a student graduating from a chemistry department without handling volumetric analysis apparatus competently, if at all (C2). Other interviewees also pointed out that students in some universities are learning in dilapidated buildings that are poorly ventilated, illuminated, furnished and environmentally depressing creating disabling situations (A1).

Brain drain

Four FAOs were of the view that one of the biggest challenges to the provision of quality education in the university is the problem of brain drain. They claimed that over the past decades, there has been a mass exodus of brilliant and talented lecturers to other sectors of the economy, all in the name of pressure (C2, D1, E3, E6). One of the participants expressed that,

I think some of this pressure is associated with stress, is fair, anti-social behavior of students and staff, unsafe environment and many more [sic] (E6).

Another two informants from private universities expressed that, as a result of fear of anti-social behavior, some of the lecturers left the Nigerian universities to join the business world, some entered the political sphere while others left Nigeria for better opportunities (A6, C6). One other informants explained further,

I don't know how you want to measure quality in the university context when everyone is just after getting more money and not developing the institution [sic] (A6).

As briefly outlined by four interviewees, many experienced and young lecturers are switching sectors of the economy and even emigrating to overseas countries. They claimed that there is diminishing scope of mentoring junior researchers by seasoned and senior lecturers in Nigeria due to brain drain (B1, C2, D2, E6). One of these respondents pointed out that,

I think 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 (E6).

Two of the FAOs from private universities elaborated that research brings about improvement in teaching and learning, but when researchers are not funded, not well supported, then it will be difficult to carry out meaningful research (C5, E5). One of the respondents pointed out that,

I think when there is exodus of brilliant and seasoned academics from the university, the quality of education delivery is threatened (E5).

With continued experience of these problems, it will be difficult to measure quality accurately? This paper is not centered on the debate of what to measure, but on factors that will affect any attempt to measure quality.

Conclusion

This study reveals that it is not entirely impossible to measure quality in the university context, but the huge numbers and magnitude of problems influencing the institution will cause any yardstick set for measuring quality to fail, or rather measure quality wrongly. Therefore the study suggested that rather than measuring quality in Nigerian universities, it would be advisable for each university to first evaluate and properly manage the processes contributing to the provision of education in his or her university. This is because a yardstick designed for public university (that is the methodology for running each public university may differ significantly between state and federal universities and even within state universities) may not measure the true value of the public universities appropriately and would likely be unsuitable for the measurement of quality in private universities. Although it may be difficult to generalise any model for measuring quality in Nigeria's universities, this paper suggested that it would be highly advantageous to the administrators to restructure a working model for their own institution from a broad framework.

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