MAINTAINING ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR TEACHER PREPARATION IN THE NIGERIAN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

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Abstract
The essence of academic quality is to bring about totality of an improved classroom teacher for effective service delivery in the school system. Colleges of Education whose mandate is concerned with teacher preparation for basic education must consider students admission policy, funding, facilities and the entire curricula programme as major factors to put in place to ensure the administration of academic quality. This paper examined the imperatives of maintaining academic quality assurance as a minimum benchmark in the overall aim of teacher preparation. The paper advocated the institutionalization of quality assurance units (QAU) in Colleges and compliance with minimum guidelines in the accreditation of programmes to attain quality in teacher preparation in Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Quality, teacher, education, maintenance, students

Introduction
In any society in the world, education has become a key factor in the development of human and material resources. Education provides the much needed manpower required for tapping and utilizing the resources of society and meaningful development can take place in a country that lacks trained manpower no matter how well endowed such a nation might be.

Nigeria has over the years recognized the need for a trained manpower in the nation’s educational system. Past governments at various levels (Federal, State and Local) have taken steps by ensuring the training of manpower especially teachers in the management of her primary and secondary schools for quality education delivery. Obioma, Chukwuma and Ajudeonu (2007) in their view asserted that teachers play a vital role in the accomplishment of any educational system as the quality of any education depends greatly on teachers. Meanwhile, Abdulsalami (2002) has identified that teachers quality is one important factor for the nation to ensure performance standards and achievement of societal goals and human development.

The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (2005) for this reason, envisioned to control and regulate teacher education, training and practice at all levels and sectors of the Nigerian educational system in order to match teacher quality, discipline, professionalism, reward and dignity with international standards to maintain standards in teacher education. This is to achieve the mandate of the National Policy on Education NPE (2004) which stipulates that the minimum standard for entry into the teaching profession should be qualified persons with holders of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). In this regards, Ojo (2006) highlighted that institutions recognized for providing professional training for teachers are the Colleges of Education, faculties of education in Universities, Institutes of Education, National Teachers’ Institute and school of education in the Polytechnics. Salisu and Olusanya (2007) equally identified the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) and the National Mathematical Centre (NMC) are other institutions mandated in the training of teacher education in Nigeria.

Essentially, Isyaku (2002) observed that the Colleges of Education run courses primarily in various subject areas to produce the caliber of teachers needed for the primary and junior secondary schools in specialized disciplines. Programmes undertaken in the Colleges of Education are in the areas of Agricultural Education, Technical/Vocational Education, Business Education, Social Science Education, Arts Education, Science Education, Special Education, General Education etc. In terms of number, Isyaku (2001) enumerated that there are 75 Colleges of Education running courses in General Education and those of technical and vocational education to provide the much needed trained manpower for the educational system.

In training of the manpower needs of the educational system, it is expected that the
Colleges of Education must ensure that the quality of their programmes is in line with the goals and objectives of the nation. This entails that they must maintain minimum standards in their admission processes, ensuring also that there are the same standard between their regular and sandwich or distant education programmes, ensuring that examination malpractices are eliminated to a minimal level, provide the necessary facilities for effective teaching and learning, making sure that staff are properly and promptly remunerated and so on. The totality in galvanizing the training of teachers towards optimal performance is what is required in achieving quality assurance of educational programmes in Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

The concept of academic quality assurance (AQA)

The concept of quality assurance refers to the practice of managing the way goods are produced or services are provided to ensure high standard. According to Agih and Christian-Epe (2004), the concept originated in the manufacturing industries designed to ensure customers satisfaction, commitment to excellence, quality of service, performance, standardization across board and continuous improvement. In education, it is important that necessary measures are employed to reduce wastages of school resources (men and materials) in order to enhance the internal efficiency of the educational system. Academic quality assurance in the education system therefore brings about the totality in the fitness of educational programmes in accomplishing set goals and objectives for attaining better comparative standards.

Quality assurance in education is very essential to achieve quality of academic (teaching-learning process and the curriculum) and structural (building and physical facilities) provisions of courses to realize objective attainment of set standards. Whitely (2001) emphasized that quality assurance in education has become an all-embracing concept that includes all policies, processes and actions through which the quality of education provided is developed and maintained. Similarly, Maple (2011) asserted that quality assurance is a systematic mechanism for ensuring that the school system meets the expectations of people and conforms to predetermined specification. Importantly, since the national policy on education acknowledges that no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers, it follows that quality assurance in Colleges of Education is a very critical issue. By their very role, Colleges of Education are mandated in the task of teacher training and development. Excellence, competence and functionalism are the virtue of what the nation expects as bye products from the COE academic programmes. Borishade in 2002 while quoting the words of Jubril Aminu maintains that “poor quality in teacher education will be a national disaster which we must avoid by insisting on only the best. The development of the Nigerian society can only be possible with adequate manpower resources and no adequate manpower training can take place without competent teachers who are the products of a good teacher education.

Maintaining academic quality in the educational system is a process of a multi-dimensional framework involving different stakeholders. Against this background, UNESCO (2004) developed a systems mechanism through an input-process-output framework to achieve quality assurance in a typical school. The interplay and overall success in the input-process-output framework requires every individual to play their role(s) in the school system. This is the only way to engender academic quality assurance to produce the desired standards in the Nigerian educational system.

The Content and quality assurance of the Nigerian Colleges of Education curriculum

In Nigeria, the aim for the establishment of Colleges of Education is to meet the medium level manpower in teacher education for the award of the Nigeria certificate in education (NCE). According to Ojo (2006) there are some colleges due to the content of their curriculum that run degree programmes through university collaboration in the form of college affiliation. Some of the colleges by their nature are granted university status to award various degrees in the field of education.

Every college of education or institution is expected to offer courses or programmes leading to the award of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) to meet the minimum teaching requirement. In course of implementation of the
UBE, Nwabueze (1995) explained that the minimum entry point stipulated for teaching is for all teachers in the Nigerian educational institutions from pre-primary to the university to be professionally trained. In this connection, Adiele and Abraham (2004) noted that the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) shall be the minimum qualification accepted by the government for entry into the teaching profession.

This policy was intended to ensure the compliance of quality assurance to be attained in the Colleges of Education. Meanwhile, the colleges are to mount variety of courses which are offered as double major in a single teaching subject like Agriculture, business education, physical and health education or as subject combination like Social studies/ Islamic Studies, social studies/English, primary education studies/mathematics and so on to produce subject teachers for implementation of the UBE programme.

In the administration of educational institutions, Agih (2013) advocated that the use of quality assurance has become important to demonstrate responsible actions towards accountability in the different components of the educational system. He maintained that administration of quality measure involves both internal and external approaches. The internal measures is concerned with in-built self-regulating factors while the external measures consist of the roles of agencies such as National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) etc.

In the Colleges of Education, Amadike (2007) affirmed that the (NCCE) was instituted in 1989 to maintain minimum academic standard (MAS) with the following mandate:

a. laying down of standards in all programmes of teacher education;  
b. accreditation of certificates; and  
c. award including approval of guidelines for accreditation of programmes in all Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

The practice of quality assurance requires that graduates from the Colleges of Education should become very functional to meet the challenges of the teaching profession especially in actualization of the Universal Basic Education Programme.

The NCCE is to undertake constant reviews of programmes to keep pace with, and reflect on modern trends in teacher education. They are to promote a sound, just, and utilitarian (value) education in the country through periodic accreditation exercises. In this regard, the commission is expected to initiate changes to broaden the scope of the curriculum of colleges to meet the daily demands of public expectation in education. However, the success of any innovations in academic quality assurance of the colleges may depend on a number of factors.

Factors affecting academic quality assurance in the administration of Colleges of Education

As stated earlier, worthiness in the administration of Colleges of Education to maintain academic quality assurance will be depended on an input-output process of its programmes and products. In the views of Buseri (2011), he advocated that universities and colleges in Nigeria ought to raise the bar in teacher production to achieve some form of quality assurance as a veritable way of maintaining standards of teaching and students performance to meet international best practices. This can be realized based on the following:

1. Quality of student intake or enrolment

The type of student to be admitted for a programme matters a lot for quality to be maintained. As a policy, admission into NCE programme requires a minimum of five passes with three credits at a sitting or four credits at two sittings in the SSCE, GCE, RSA or City and Guilds as entry requirements. However, Olusanya (2002) observed that some institutions as a way of attracting students do lower their standard by adopting unconventional procedure like internal sale of forms for admission other than the nationally accepted JAMB procedure. Others equally admit students without the minimum entry qualification. This trend no doubt, is bound to have adverse effect on the process of implementation of the NCE curriculum on admission which Salisu and Olusanya (2007: 364) pointed out that could result to the following indicators:

a. how well will the students perform? (Academic performance).
b. Can they stand on their own? (Marketability of products).
c. How far will the nation move educationally and technologically? (Educational and Technological advancement).
d. How well will the products of COE impart knowledge in their duty as teachers? (Quality of teachers).
e. How disciplined are these future teachers who are to maintain discipline in our schools? (Level of Discipline).

The achievement of an overall output in these factors is very important if training of students is to ensure the quality standard of graduate in the colleges.

2. Staff quality and quantity

Admittedly, no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers as the National Policy on Education (2004) acknowledged. This implies that the caliber of lecturers employed to train teachers for the nation’s education system is very crucial. Consequently, as minimum criteria, the NCCE (2002) stipulated that the qualification of an academic staff required to teach at any level shall be:

a. a professionally qualified teacher having a minimum of NCE or PGDE.
b. a good Bachelors Degree of not less than a second class lower division in the relevant discipline.
c. Holder of an HND with a minimum of a merit to be appointed as instructors.
d. Higher degrees or additional professional qualifications in the relevant disciplines are added advantage.

The NCCE stipulates that the work-load of a full-time lecturer should be a minimum of eight credit hours per semester. Nevertheless, it is observed that some lecturers are given work-load that exceed far more than the minimum standard. With large class size therefore, teacher effectiveness becomes very questionable and the quality of students so taught also leaves much to be desired.

3. Facilities, curriculum and minimum standard

According to Salisu and Olusanya (2007), the link between availability of facilities, programme curriculum and minimum standard is very strong. No curriculum can be adequately covered without adequate facilities to work not to talk of standard. The expansion of the NCE curriculum implies that adequate facilities should be put in place to ensure its full coverage. Such facilities includes good libraries and books, ICT facilities, classrooms and office accommodations, technical workshops and laboratories, vehicles to facilitate mobility amongst others. These facilities are very essential to fast track the attainment of quality in the teaching and learning environment. When such facilities are put in place, it will motivate teachers to put in their best to enhance productivity and ultimately promotes quality service delivery in teaching.

4. Funding

In Nigeria, investment on education has suffered a considerable neglect. Despite the fact that education is a huge capital investment enterprise, there has been poor budgetary allocation to the education sub-sector. It is sad to note that our leaders have not recognized the importance of education due to the lack of political commitment in terms of funding.

As a policy to the funding of education, government around the world committed themselves to UNESCO convention by earmarking 25 percent of state budget to education. Regrettably, Osho (2012) lamented that the non-compliance of the UNESCO convention by the Nigerian government has hampered teachers’ professional development and welfare. Over the years, budgetary allocation to education has continued to witness an abysmal rate. It is not surprising that monies budgeted for education are not always released particularly to the various institutions. Under the face of meager financial resources, there is the tendency for academic quality to be compromised in the colleges due to deplorable financial state to implement programmes.

5. Implementation of educational policies

Nigeria has experimented different educational system aimed at producing an economically and politically virile nation. It operated a 6-5-4 system, a 6-3-3-4 system and currently, a 9-3-4 system under the UBE programme. In assessing the educational programmes, Salisu and Olusanya (2007) noted that none of the systems is absolutely better than the other. The gap in policies is however on the process of implementation.
Of recent, it is noticeable in UTME admission intake an unhealthy trend of dwindling enrolment of students in the Colleges of Education. This is in spite of the demand for more teachers to manage the UBE programme in the country. This development would necessitate a review of the National Policy on Education to give relevance to Colleges of Education graduates to be rated at par with graduates from other institutions of higher learning. This will boost the prestige of the Colleges of Education and the ego of the graduates, which will attract candidates with entry qualification, high zeal and moral that will ensure quality of products of Colleges of Education nationwide.

Challenges of academic quality assurance in Colleges of Education

Maintaining an academic quality assurance in our Colleges of Education is faced with enormous challenges. The enormity of these challenges is summed up in the following ways:

1. Unhealthy trend and dwindling of students’ enrolment in college programmes. This has led to heavy reliance on pre-NCE programme for admission of entrants into NCE programmes.
2. Inadequate facilities and infrastructures to cope with the ever increasing demand of both staff and students.
3. Dearth of academic staff both in quality and quantity to man the discipline and subject areas.
4. Poor funding of the nation’s educational system with emphasis on the Colleges of Education. This is responsible for lack of infrastructure and decay on existing ones.
5. Lack of preparation by some students before entering into the colleges. Some students do not see teaching as a noble profession. They develop poor vision for education and adopt lackadaisical attitude towards education as a profession.
6. The stigma of the hydra-headed problems associated with examination malpractices, cultism and other academic vices. These perennial rituals are seen as major obstacle working against academic excellence and quality assurance in our educational institutions in general and the Colleges of Education in particular.
7. Lack of regular supervision (both internal and external) by government, college management and regulating bodies like the National Commission for Colleges of Education.
8. Corruption, favoritism and political interference. In some cases, appointment of key officers into positions of trust in colleges is sometimes politically motivated. This syndrome is bound to breed mediocre in the system and lack of transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

An educational system whose product cannot contribute to the development of the society raises doubt about the credibility of its existence. That is why Nigerian institutions of higher learning are striving to realize total academic quality assurance in their educational programmes. Colleges of Education whose mandate is to train the manpower needed for our primary and junior secondary schools in the educational system should not be left out. There is the need for stakeholders to adopt alternative strategies that will help to bring about academic quality assurance in our Colleges of Education particularly in the training of teacher. The government, NCCE, voluntary agencies, school managers, teachers and students should make concerted efforts in ensuring quality control measures in teachers’ education in the country. This will help to upgrade the COE curriculum in teacher preparation to meet the needs of the society in the 21st century.

Recommendations

The teacher factor has been identified to be a very crucial element in all educational programmes all over the world. This is because the quality of teaching is very fundamental to effective learning. It therefore follows that the training or entry point of teachers before they are employed will go a long way in recording success in their job. In the Colleges of Education, the process of attaining academic quality assurance can be enhanced through the following ways:
There should be public accountability and transparency in the management of the school system. This will enable government to monitor the institutions to instill financial and moral discipline in college administrator to judiciously utilize resources to attain academic excellence.

Students’ admission into the programmes of the colleges should be based on merit as the quality of entrants to a large extent determines their outcome. Colleges should adhere strictly to minimum entry qualification through the unified UTME examinations. They should maintain the same standard of admission for both regular and sandwich programmes and de-emphasize students’ admission through sales of internal forms to maintain uniformity across all the Colleges of Education in the country.

Government should provide adequate funding and financial resources for the administration Colleges of Education. Since the task of nation building lies heavily on education and teachers in particular, teacher education programmes must be adequately financed. Funds are needed to secure necessary training facilities, build lecture rooms, laboratories, libraries, and so on. The federal and state governments should comply with the 25% UNESCO budgetary allocation to education to ensure sufficient release of funds to colleges to enable them meet their financial obligation and running cost.

Government should ensure the recruitment of professionally qualified lecturers and staff in the institutions. To this extent, there should be sufficient number of both teaching and non-teaching staff using the provisions of the prescribed NCCE as a bench mark to enhance quality.

The preparation towards students teaching practice exercise should be strengthened. Just as the medical or legal practitioner who goes to the medical college or law school, the T.P exercise is the only training needed to certify someone as a professional teacher. Hence, Colleges of Education should observe this exercise with seriousness in terms of quality supervision of students for them to master the rudiments in the art and science of teaching.

There should be effective accreditation of NCE programmes by the NCCE to ensure curricula improvement. Accreditation of programmes is needed both for self regulation and comparative evaluation (peer review mechanism) with other institutions to maintain minimum standard in the quality of education curriculum.

Finally, College managements should demonstrate compliance to NCCE guidelines by setting up Quality Assurance Units (QAU) and Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) in their institutions to ensure:

(i) supervision of curriculum design, content and implementation
(ii) monitoring of students progress and achievements
(iii) supervision of the quality of instruction
(iv) periodic assessment of human and material resources available to each programme
(v) tracing and tracking of graduates for feedback information from employer
(vi) organizing workshops and seminar for academics and
(vii) liaising with external Quality Assurance bodies like the NCCE to be abreast of the latest information.

These measures are bound to guarantee quality in the provision of teacher education in the country.

References


