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**ENHANCING GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION FOR
EFFECTIVE QUALITY ASSURANCE IN
NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract

Tertiary education is central to economic and political development and vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalized society. In recent times, the concept of quality assurance and its related issues have become of topical concern in educational systems Worldwide. This is not surprising since physical structure is increasing daily in higher institutions, while their environmental resources for good learning conditions are rapidly depreciating in developing countries, such as Nigeria. This paper aims at linking developmental needs of students with a favourable learning environment for effective quality assurance in tertiary education. The paper covers issues on quality assurance related to learning and teaching in Nigerian tertiary institutions, including the learning environment

and the use of modern educational resources to ensure and improve the quality of students in both academic knowledge and skills for their future careers. It proposes the need for the enhancement of geography education in preparing students for active citizenship. It intends to fill the gap left by a wide range of studies focused on other aspects of quality assurance rather than on environment conducive to learning. For this reason, the Concept of Classroom Climate, Geography Laboratories, Geographical Garden, Landscaping, and geography teacher effectiveness are part of the major discussion in the paper for improving quality assurance in Nigerian tertiary education.

Keywords: Geography, Education, Quality Assurance; Tertiary Institutions

Introduction

In recent years, one of the most important issues that attract the attention of the educational community all over the world is the issue of quality assurance in education. At the same time, the global perception agrees that for economic and social development to be derived effectively there is a need for advancement in, and application of, knowledge. The global concern about quality education is not new. For instance, in 1968 the International Institute for Educational Planning of UNESCO organized a symposium on the qualitative aspects of educational planning with reference to developing countries. The symposium dealt with the concept of quality both intensively and extensively and most of its deliberation are valid even today (Beeby,

1969). In the early seventies also UNESCO sponsored the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education “Learning to Be”, the World of Education Today and Tomorrow, chaired by the French Politician and Intellectual, Edgar Faure. They dealt with the issue of the quality of education. Part of the report stated that good quality education should give emphasis to scientific development and modernization. It should be relevant to evolving societal needs and learning should be ‘life-long’. Almost two decades later in 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All made in Jomtein, Thailand broadened the scope of the definition and identified “... quality as a pre-requisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity. While the notion quality was not fully developed, it was recognized that expanding access alone, would be insufficient for education to contribute fully to the development of the individual and society. Emphasis was accordingly placed on assuring an increase in children cognitive development by improving the quality of their education in general” (UNESCO, 2004).

On the other hand, the World Bank/UNICEF (1996) reported that education in general, and tertiary education in particular, is fundamental to the construction of the knowledge economy and society in all nations. The report also identified the fact that the potential of higher education systems in developing countries to fulfil this responsibility is frequently thwarted by long standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance. These challenges are linked to the growing role of knowledge in economic development, rapid

changes in the telecommunication and technology and the globalization of trade and labour markets (Saint, Hartnette and Strassner, 2004).

In view of this, topical issues in the Nigerian education system today centred on the quality of education imparted to the citizenry and the relevance of that education to the life of the individual in particular and the nation in general. As a result of this development, a wide range of studies has focused on this issue and approached the topic from different perspectives emphasized on physical structures, management structures, monitoring on staff, researches and internal procedures. There are, however, a limited number of studies that pays attention to enhancement or improvement in the process of teaching-learning for qualitative education in tertiary institutions.

The Concept of Quality and its Associated Notions

There is no widely agreed definition of quality of education that exists today. It is a multi-dimensional concept, depending upon the stakeholders' mission and evolves over time, as will be observed in the following discussion. Quality is the ability or degree with which a product, service or phenomenon conforms, to an established standard and which makes it relatively superior to others. With respect to education, this implies the ability or degree with which an educational system conforms to the established standard and appropriateness of the inputs available for the delivery of the system (Fadipe, 1999; Yoloye 1976 and Thomas 1985).

Quality in education, therefore, means the relevance and appropriateness of the education programme to the needs of the community for which it is provided. In this context, it is associated with the monitoring and evaluation component of education to see whether the outcome is good and of the intended standard. According to Thune (1998), quality is about much more than output measures. It is also about the inputs, including the quality of the teaching staff and the quality of the equipment and laboratories available within higher education institutions. Oderinde (2004) enumerated two aspects of quality in education which are both internal and external. The internal aspect is the implementation of the school objectives while the external aspect deals with the implementation of national objectives, which are pre-requisites to the achievement to quality in any educational institution.

However, Zelvys (2004) perceived that the concept of quality has been one of the most important concepts in contemporary educational terminology. Many educationists have attempted to define the quality of education and educational assurance. Vroeijenstijn (1999a) refers to quality assurance as the “systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement”. Quality assurance, on one hand, is a key component of successful internationalization; a mechanism for building institutional reputation in the competitive local and global arena and a necessary foundation for consumer protection (NUC, 2004). Therefore, quality assurance in the university system implies the ability of institutions to

meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their outputs (Ajayi and Akindutire, 2007). Conceptually, quality assurance refers to performance measures designed by the authorities for assessing the performance of educational institutions with a view to ensuring that the learning outcomes meet the needs of each society (Igborgbor, 2012; Onyesom and Ashibogwu, 2013).

Quality control, as defined by Olagboye (1997), is the arrangement made or the mechanism put in place to maintain the degree of the excellence of a product or service. Applied to education, it means the mechanism by which an education system ensures the services it delivers or intends to deliver serve the purpose for which they are intended. It focuses on the means by which an educational system ensures that the service it provides remains relevant and appropriate to the needs of society. To ensure effective quality control of higher educational services, the government of Nigeria established supervisory agencies to enforce quality assurance in tertiary institutions. The National Universities Commission (NUC) maintains oversight functions over Universities; the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) oversees Polytechnics; and the National Commission for Colleges of Education takes charge of Colleges of Education. These agencies have over the years developed the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) as a benchmark for quality assurance and institutional assessment (Onyesom and Ashibogwu, 2013). From the foregoing discourse, the purpose of the Accreditation Exercise in Nigeria is to ensure that

standard and quality of higher education are strictly regulated, maintained and enhanced by educational institutions in line with changing needs of the society and the industry (Mohsin and Kamal, 2012). To avoid measuring performance haphazardly by the rule of thumb, educationists have developed quality assurance indicators (QAIs) as measures which give information and statistics about educational effectiveness, efficiency and performance in different contexts (Chalmers, 2008). There are several quality assurance indicators, but the common point of convergence among all the quality metrics is the need for objective evaluation and quality improvement. According to UNESCO (2002), the five key components of quality assurance indicators are:

- a) What learners gain;
- b) Quality Learning Environment;
- c) Quality Content;
- d) Process that support Quality; and
- e) Outcomes from the Learning Environment.

Additional quality assurance indices, as identified by (Ehinder, 2004) include:

- The Learners' behavioural characteristics; their attributes, including some demographic factors that can inhibit or facilitates their learning.
- The teachers' entry qualifications, values, pedagogic skills and professional preparedness.
- The teaching/learning process: including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment.
- The outcomes of education

Therefore, stakeholders who prioritize different purposes can view quality in tertiary education differently and quality assurance needs to take into account these different perspectives. Quality, whilst not easy to define, is mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

The Purpose of Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education

Tertiary education aims to fulfill multiples of purposes, including preparing students for active citizenship, for their future careers (e.g. contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. For this reason, tertiary education is an essential component of socio-economic and cultural development for global competitiveness. At the same time, an increasing demand for skills and competences requires tertiary education to respond in new ways. The role of quality assurance is crucial in supporting tertiary education systems in responding to these demands, while ensuring the qualifications achieved by students and their experience of education remain at the forefront of institutional missions.

At the heart of all quality activities are the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement. Taken together, these create trust in the tertiary education institutions

performance. A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure the tertiary institutions and the public of the quality of the higher institutions activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement). Quality assurance and quality enhancement are thus inter-related. They can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all from the students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management. There is an uneasy balance between both purposes, which frequently raises the question of incompatibility (Vroeijenstijn, 1995a).

A wide body of literature discusses the relationship between the two purposes of quality assurance, whether they are incompatible or whether and how a balance could be found between them. However, it is argued that accountability and quality improvement (enhancement) may be combined in a balanced strategy (Thune, 1996). Conversely, Harvey and Newton (2004) point out that most studies reinforce the view that quality is about compliance and accountability and has contributed little to the improvement of students' learning experience.

With regards to this argument, it is a high time now to turn attention to the means for improving the process of teaching and learning, using geography education as reference and covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and a positive learning environment in tertiary institutions. In fact, it is suggested that quality will be enhanced more easily through improvement approaches than through control.

The Relevance of Geography Education to Quality Assurance

Geography occupies a distinctive place in the world of learning, offering an integrated study of the complex reciprocal relationship between human societies and the physical components of the earth. The geographers' canvas is colored by places, space and time: recognizing the great differences and dynamics in cultures, political systems, economics, landscapes and environments across the world and the links between them (Blumhof et al., 2000).

The discipline is characterized by a breadth of subject matter in which the traditional division has been between human and physical geography. The former largely focus on the built environment and how humans create, view, manage and influence space. The latter examines the natural environment and how organisms, climate, soil, water and land focus produce and interact. The difference between these approaches as a third field, environmental geography which combines physical and human geography and looks at the interactions between the environment and humans. This also builds upon the role of geography taught in schools as the main discussion platform for environmental topics and issues. Geographic Information Science (GIS) and Remote Sensing, based on very specialized Information and Technological techniques, is another distinct teaching area, occurring almost wholly within higher education.

Qualitative geography education in tertiary institutions is able to equip students with the knowledge, skills and

core transferable competences they need to succeed after graduation, within a high quality learning environment which recognizes and support good teaching. Quality assurance allows people to have confidence in the quality of tertiary education. Therefore, there is a strong need for flexible and innovative learning approaches and delivery methods to improve quality assurance in the process of teaching and learning geography in tertiary institutions. One key way of achieving this is by creating a '*Suitable Climate for Learning*' to enhance quality assurance. This is to exploit the transformational benefits of information communication technologies (ICTs) and other new technologies to enrich teaching, improving learning experiences and support personalized learning.

The Concept of Classroom Climate for Learning

At all the levels of education, we believe that learning takes place under a certain climate and that effective teaching and learning can only be achieved under a conducive climate. There are certain variables which are extraneous to teaching as an act but which if neglected impinge on the teacher learning process. Among these variables, some are physical in nature and therefore constitute what we call visible ones. Others are not visible and therefore not readily apparent. They include the emotional life of the teacher and learners and how they interact in the classroom. Together these variables (both visible and non-visible) constitute what we call '*Climate for Learning*'.

To suit our purpose in this discussion, 'classroom climate' can be defined as "the prevailing temper and

environmental condition characterizing a group at a certain period”. Therefore, it becomes easier for us to understand that a classroom has a climate. The term classroom climate, according to Schmuck and Schmuck (1979), can be applied to the interpersonal feeling tones associated with informal interaction patterns, emotional responses to the group and to the self-concepts of students, their motivational satisfactions and frustrations.

Classroom in which the climate is friendly also students and the teacher support one another. Such a climate facilitates the development of self-esteem and the satisfaction of fundamental motives. It also provides the opportunity for students to use their intellectual capacities to their fullest. A classroom with such features such has a *positive climate*.

In such classrooms (with a positive climate), one would expect to find students and the teacher collaborating in attempting to accomplish common goals, such as:

- i. feeling of positive self-esteem
- ii. feeling of security
- iii. high involvement in academic learning
- iv. feeling of being influential with the teacher and other students
- v. A high degree of attraction to one’s classmates, class and school.

Therefore, climate is what the classroom activity needs in carrying out educational goals; it is how the curriculum and learning materials are actually used through human exchange; and it is the styles of relating

the teaching – learning process and learners with the learning environment. It becomes obvious to note that a climate that is good to live in can also be a climate in which learning flourishes. This is because psychologists observed that living and learning go hand in hand and the quality of living could have an effect on the quality of learning.

How to create a suitable climate to enhance Geography Education

The relevance of creating positive classroom climate for best quality assurance as well as adjustment of students in the process of learning geography is very vital. The procedure covers the whole school environment and the classroom interaction, which include the following aspects of the process:

❖ **Landscape of the school environment:** Tertiary institutions should create a green friendly environment by planting a variety of decorative plants species. This will provide a natural, favourable and attractive learning environment for qualitative education. By observation, school is a life camp, because it has been estimated that teachers and students live in the school for at least 1500 hours in a year. Also, it was observed that living and learning go hand in hand and the quality of living can have effects on the quality of learning.

❖ **Methods of instruction:** Geographers have suitable methods of instruction at all the levels of learning. What they need to be improved is the provision

of modern instructional equipment and instruments in order to implement the current methods. The modern teaching and learning methods that geographers have experiences to date typically include:

- Lectures
- Seminars, tutorial, supervisions or other small group formats
- Directed reading and electronic library use
- Laboratory practical classes, including the use of scientific laboratories and advanced computer facilities
- Field investigation
- A range of student-centered learning opportunities, which might include electronic mail discussion, resource based learning and problem-based teamwork.

❖ **The teaching environment:** Most activities in geography teaching as other related sciences need a special place outside the classroom. This is because of the practical nature of the subject, which takes place in the following areas:

- Geography Laboratory
- Geographical garden (weather station)
- Soil and Water Laboratory
- Library
- Computer room with enough internet services
- Cartography room
- Large size lecture rooms

❖ **The Provision of Instructional Materials:** the above mentioned teaching environment for favourable

learning conditions should be equipped with essential instruments, such as:

- Computers with projectors
- Globes of various sizes
- Maps, Atlas, Charts, and diagrams
- Models, Samples of rocks, soils, plant species etc.
- Weather records instruments, Surveying instruments, and Cartography instrument

❖ **Teaching staff:** the teacher's role is essential in creating a high quality student experience and enabling the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills. Tertiary education institutions have the primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively. Provision of suitable and relevant learning materials is the essential needs for a teacher to create a positive classroom climate to enhance the learning process not only for geography teaching. Teacher effectiveness has become a standard for teacher preparation, a basis for staff development and a guideline for teacher evaluation in the process of quality assurance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The concept of quality assurance is not new, but the range, terminology and methodologies which are now

used to define, develop and apply it, are relatively recent. It is a means of ensuring that the best practices are encouraged in the educational system. Therefore, the quest for improving the quality of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions developed momentum over 50 years. Rising public demand for better performance of higher education institutions, enrolment pressure, efficiency and accountability demands, the need for better quality graduates to drive the economy, dwindling public resources for higher education and increasing cross border provisions are some of the major drivers of this momentum. Recent studies indicate that expanding physical structures to catch up the increasing number of students, as well as some strategies on accountability and control could not be enough for best quality assurance in our tertiary institutions. Thus, for effective quality education, tertiary institutions are challenged to adjust their program structure, teacher effectiveness, teaching and learning methods, teacher-students ratio, learning environment and more importantly learning equipment. Hence, the improvement or enhancement process is the positive approach to be adopted. However, geography education should be the best subject for practice, because of its contribution in the field of knowledge and preparing students for achieving the national goals of education.

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