



## Ensuring Accountability and Quality University Education in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The issue of accountability and quality education service delivery of recent has been at the front burner of public discourse among stakeholders as a result of the perceived fall in standards of education. This is further accentuated to by the increase demand for political, social and economic accountability from government and public office holders by Nigeria citizens. This paper therefore unequivocally declared that key education stakeholders including students should be collectively or individually be accountable for the success or failure of the system. It further recommended that to guarantee sustainable academic excellence and quality university education, university administrators should be committed to the vision and mission of their institutions through effective and responsible leadership. The administrators should also be ingenious, resourceful and prudent in financial management; and be more committed to the welfare and staff development amongst others.*

**Key words:** Accountability, Quality University Education, University Administrators

### Introduction

Generally, education is perceived as a veritable and sustainable tool for the development of man and the society. The critical areas where education is of benefit to man are in technological, economic, political and social advancements (Akpan and Ido, 2014). Based on this hope and faith in the efficacy of education; formal education especially university education has in recent years received active and robust participation by government, private individuals, missionaries and cooperate bodies in Nigeria.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria declared unequivocally in her National Policy on Education (NPE) that:

*education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by educational revolution (NPE, 2004:8).*

The University is thus a citadel where human capital needed to turn the fortunes of individual and collective goals of a nation to reality are recruited, processed and produced.

It is on this strength that successive governments of Nigeria spend a reasonable percentage of her budgets in higher education despite the depressed economy. Parents on their part pay a lot of sacrifices through incurrence of private cost and other incidental cost on the education



of their children and wards. Also, religious bodies and private individual have decided to compliment the efforts of the government by providing university education for all round development of the country.

The goals of tertiary education as encapsulated in the NPE (2004: 36) include to:

- a) Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- b) Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society.
- c) Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
- d) Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- e) Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
- f) Forge and cement national unity; and
- g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Despite the policy trust on the potency of university education in solving the socio-political and economic needs of the Nigerian people, Nwadiani (1998), Ajayi and Ayodele (2004) and Omoifo (2015) lamented that the contemporary education in Nigeria is at a cross road. Probably because the gains of university education to Nigeria society are not commensurate with the investment made by the people and the government. For example there are complaints of graduate unemployment. Worst still employers of labour regard a lot of Nigerian graduates as unemployable! This is an indirect reference to the quality or effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in most public universities in Nigeria. While majority of the graduates are believed to lack functional skills and competencies that can make them to be self reliant others acquired sophisticated skills in social vices such as armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, cultism and thuggery. This scenario probably informs Boateng (2002) to describe Nigerian education service as “market – blind”. Furthermore, some university campuses are plagued with infrastructural decay, arising from poor funding, poor quality academic staff, and students over population, dearth of instructional and laboratory equipment, incessant strike actions and poor attitude to academic excellence (Nwadiani, 1998).

It can therefore be argued that there is a multivariant effect of the crises situation in Nigerian higher institution which has poor quality output and lack of accountability. A manifestation of this is mass number of the youths leaving the shores of Nigeria for further studies abroad. This has resulted to capital flight while a few academia who are unsatisfied with the conditions of Nigeria universities have left the country for their perceived good and better ones thereby leading to brain drain.

The political class, the university regulating body, the vice-chancellor and members of the governing council and other stakeholders are also alleged to be part of the crisis situation in Nigeria ivory towers. How accountable are these stakeholders in their responsibilities with regard to the management of university education? Could the perceived poor functionality and quality university education a consequence of lack of accountability?

### **Concept of Educational Accountability**



Accountability itself is the willingness to accept responsibility for one's decision and action and to justify them to others. This implies that educational accountability is a collective and shared responsibility of active players in the education industry.

Education is not just a social contract between the government and the people, university education demands greater commitment and sincerity in the training and development of man for improved living condition and societal advancement in all its ramifications. This demands accountability in terms of goals attainment by the provider and managers of university education. According to Lulseged (1980) in Nwadiani (1998:216) accountability in education is a function of:

*Goals and objectives setting; Determination of the validity and relevance of these goals and objectives; assessment of how fully these goals and objectives have been achieved; examination of which conditions helped facilitate and which retard such achievement; and modification of methods/and or objectives to improve performance.*

Accountability is thus directed at the benefits derived from education in return for the huge capital outlay for the sector. Time spent in the training and processing of the learner, sacrifices made by both parents and learners including forgone alternatives in the quest for skills and knowledge acquisition for socio political and economic stability of the society should be accounted for. As observed by Oguntoye (1990) education faces tougher competitions from other public and quasi-public organizations for resources. Therefore, there is need for educational accountability at least for prudent financial management.

Alberta's Commission on Learning (ACOL 2003) explained accountability as a comprehensive process for measuring the achievement of students and the state of the education system. It can be inferred from this that educational accountability is a careful and deliberate assessment of the responsibility of all the agencies involved in the provision of education services including teachers and administrators for effective, meaningful and quality education of the learners.

Fundamentally, accountability in Nigeria university system calls for a forensic examination of how all key players including the students are working towards the attainment of the university goals. How effective is the academic planning of Nigeria universities? How faithful and sincere is the government to the funding of the education sector most importantly the higher education sub-sector? The admission policies into Nigeria universities seems unstable and at the whim and caprices of political office holders. The acute shortage of facilities in the universities especially lectures theatres, laboratories and equipment are further worsen by poor maintenance culture by the administrators.

Commitment to effective teaching, research and community services is at the low ebb by the academic staff due to poor supervision and motivation to the students. Only a few students are determine to acquire skills, knowledge and competencies that will be of great impact to their survival and the development of the nation. High poor performances of students in examination across all disciplines are noticed these days. This could be a



consequence of poor time management of a majority of Nigeria undergraduates (Nwadiani & Ogonor, 2006).

Accountability in education therefore entails effective and meaningful synergy between the political class, government, proprietors and educational managers, teachers, parents and students for the realization of educational objectives. It is a collective responsibility of all the educational stakeholders in living up to their expectations in relation to educational goals attainment.

### **Issues with Accountability in Education**

A lot of issues are associated with accountability in university education in Nigeria. One major issue is poor synergy among the key-stakeholders in goals setting. There is usually a wide gap between those that set the goals and the implementers who are the university teachers. This makes it difficult to hold the chief player of the system accountable for poor attainment of the university goals. Another issue is undue politicization of university education. Politics rather than scientific and developmental needs have been placed over and above reasons for the establishment of universities in Nigeria. Besides that, such politically motivated universities are dysfunctional in their objectives.

Leadership crisis in most Nigerian universities has made it impossible for the public to hold some vice chancellors accountable for the failure of the system. This issue is exacerbated by indiscriminate hiring and firing of some universities administrators by their proprietors or the political leaders thereby plugging the system into leadership crisis. In Ekiti State for instance, Oyewole (2015) reported that the three vice-chancellors of the former University of Ado-Ekiti was relieved of their appointments while other principal officers were re-deployed. The recent termination of appointment of the nine federal universities by the government is a threat to public accountability and effective administration of the university system (Oyewole, 2015). Such administrators cannot be professionally and morally be held accountable for the failure of the system to live up to expectation.

The mismatch between universities curricular and technological cum entrepreneurial skills for the survival of the economic vagary is an issue. Graduates from most universities are considered 'illiterate' and 'uneducated' in terms of knowledge and skills possessed by them which are not in tandem with the scientific and technological tools needed to drive global economy. Worst of it all is that some universities run programmes that are not approved by the regulating body (NUC) (Omoifo, 2016). It is also a known fact that some specialized universities abdicate their mandate to patronize liberal courses that attract high students' enrolment at the expense of the market potentials of such courses. At the end of the day, the products are tagged unemployable. Should the students be held accountable for their failure to meaningfully contribute to the growth and development of the society in this circumstance?

Nwadiani (1998), Ajibefun (2016) and Ogbolosingha *et al* (2015) further identified the following issues as constrained to accountability and quality education in Nigeria: poor funding, dearth of relevant teaching and learning facilities, low teachers morale, politicization of admission and inconsistent university admission guidelines.



**Indices of poor quality university education in Nigeria**

Quality education is a dynamic and ambiguous concept. It is synonymous with standards. According to Griffins (1990), quality is the totality of the features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. Beeby (1966) in Omoifo(2016) identified the three levels of quality to include acquisition of measureable knowledge and learning skills as well as behaviours and attitudes; economic goals of the community in which the learners live, and social criteria.

Quality university education is therefore a function of: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarships, staffing, students, building, facilities, equipment, service to the community and academic environment (Oredein, 2007). A quality university education therefore is that which provides all the learning with skills and capabilities required to become economically productive, scientifically and technologically promising cum acquisition of good morals and societal values that predispose man to peaceful coexistence and happy living. Unfortunately, the Nigerian universities have not been able to satisfactorily live up to these mandates.

Ajayi and Ayodele (2014) regarded poor quality in Nigeria educational system as failure to meet the goals and objectives of the educational system. Reeves, (2004) however attributed poor quality education to lack of accountability and responsibility by those trusted with the management of education. Omoifo (2016) lamented that the problem of quality university education has led to a large number of Nigerians leaving for other universities outside the country.

**Table 1: Nigerian students studying in top fifteen countries in the world by 2012**

S/N	COUNTRY	NUMBER
1	Hungary	475
2	Germany	410
3	Australia	398
4	Turkey	342
5	India	326
6	Russia Federation	736
7	Finland	939
8	United Arab Emirates	1249
9	Saudi Arabia	1622
10	South Africa	1906
11	Canada	2031
12	Malaysia	4442
13	Ghana	7100
14	United State	7318
15	United Kingdom	17542

*Source: Omoifo (2016): The dilemma of quality education in Nigeria: is teacher education the problem?*

Other indices of poor quality university education in Nigeria as highlighted by Omoifo (2016), and Amadike (2007), include:



1. Students poor performances in examination
2. Poor teacher quality
3. Brain drain
4. Incessant strike actions
5. Students overpopulation
6. Poor leadership
7. Sharp practices during accreditation

Ineffectiveness and poor accountability of the stakeholders in university education could be a contributory force to the dwindling quality of university education.

### **The Role of Administrators in Ensuring Accountability and Quality University Education**

The principal core of a university mission statement is teaching, research and community service. It is therefore incumbent on university administrators through feedback and accountability assesses the level to which the goals are achieved or otherwise. Consequently, university administrators have vital roles to play in this direction to guarantee quality education.

#### **Actualization of Institutions' Vision and Mission Statements**

The leadership of university administration should always as a matter of policy continually improve on strategies for the actualization of institutions' vision and mission statements. Through effective administration; ethical and environmental management of the institution, education of responsible and supportive citizens, production and dissemination of socially pertinent knowledge; and social participation and promotion of developmental activities should be sustained (Rene, Guadalupe and Ana, 2015).

University administrators should have a shared understanding of and commitment to fairness, openness, respect for diversity and stewardship. In order for all stakeholders to trust one another and be responsible and responsive, university managers should ensure that the objectives of the system are made clear to all and performance of the goals are fair to all including students. Assessment and evaluation of learning outcome should be a responsibility of the vice-chancellor via regular audit of the learning inputs especially the physical and human resources. A shared ethical and professional commitment to the availability, adequacy and utilization of learning resources is imperative for ensuring accountability and quality higher education.

To ensure accountability, it is expedient for university administrators to have diverse ways of gathering variety of information. Sources of such information should be credible and dependable as it will facilitate good decision making process that could lead to quality goals attainment. Information on alternative sources of funding, global best practices in university education and management systems, students' learning needs and aspiration, collaborative and exchange learning programmes and information about pedagogical innovation for sustainable development are germane to accountability and quality higher education. Sound educational and developmental research guide the implementation of accountability in education system. Research findings and reports help to achieve the goals of university education. To this end, university administrators should support and encourage quality researches that will add political, economic and social values to the society.



University administrators need to prioritize capacity building among the academia and other staff in the university system for accountability to be entrenched and made effective. Regular training, retraining workshops for academic and non-academic staff especially is key. This would help them to acquire, update and gained professional knowledge and skills thus promoting their commitment, effectiveness and efficiency in their invaluable services to nation building. In the same vein, university administrators should democratize their administrative strategies. Participatory management style through the use of committee system, team work, and delegated authority will not promote collectivism but stimulate accountability of all the key players within the system.

Reeves (2004) further stated the following responsibilities of an educational administrator towards the promotion of accountability.

- Effective leadership that optimizes teachers' and support staff capacity to meet the learning needs of students.
- Ensuring that school organization and administration are based on collegial, collaborative and sound pedagogical practices.
- Preparing school development plans that reflect school community contexts and dynamics.
- Advocating for adequate funding and sound education programmes and policies from the government.
- Determining the budget requirement to optimally meet the learning needs of students in relation to the provincial programme requirements.

### **Conclusion**

Accountability is a technical, managerial and collective approach to effective and efficient delivery of educational services. It is a state of accepting responsibility for either failure or success of predetermined goals. Therefore, accountability is a predictor of high quality university education. University as a complex educational system with diverse goals and objectives has multiple interest groups that require collective accountability approach. This is necessary if the university must remain an ivory tower for academic excellence, growth and development of any nation. To this end, the government, political office holders, policy makers, educational administrators, parents, communities, corporate organizations and students should be held liable for any failure of the system. Nevertheless, the university administrator as the chief executive officer and supervisor need to play critical roles in ensuring accountability and quality higher education.

### **Recommendations**

If Nigerian universities should continue to be regarded as citadels where high level human capitals are trained and produced for consequential economic growth and enduring social political advancement, the following recommendations are imperative;



1. Accountability and transparency should be institutionalized by the governing council of every University system. Roles and responsibilities of every person who has stake in university management should be clearly spelt out. There should also be hierarchy of authority and responsibility. Therefore, university administrators should be democratic, fair and firm in their administrative styles.
2. Vice chancellors and university governing councils should endeavor to ensure that academic programmes are duly accredited.
3. Vice chancellors especially must ensure that only approved and accredited programmes are run.
4. University administrators should encourage impromptu visit of regulating body like the Nigeria universities commission (NUC) for programme evaluation and quality assurance.
5. Vice chancellors should be ingenious in sourcing for alternative funding options while funds provided by the government should be prudently utilized for maximum attainment of the objectives of the system.
6. Management staff in University system like the Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Bursar, Deans and Directors and Heads of Department should also be held responsible for financial mismanagement.
7. Maintenance of existing pedagogical facilities and other infrastructural amenities that promote teaching and learning should be a major responsibility of the university administrators.
8. Regular training and capacity building of staffers should not be neglected for optimal productivity. On the other hand, the welfare of staff should be vigorously pursued by administrators in order to elicit job commitment, dedication, diligence and positive work attitude.
9. Vice chancellors should see meaningful teaching and effective supervision of students learning activities as a responsibility of all within the system. While taking far reaching decisions that will promote conducive learning outcome and stable work climate both the management staff, union leaders including students union leaders, heads of departments should be consulted.



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