

## Quality Assurance and the Assurance of Quality in Vocational Education in Nigeria

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### Abstract

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*This paper examined the issue of quality assurance and the assurance of quality in Vocational Education in Nigeria. It discussed the concept of concept of quality assurance and the need for assurance of quality in Vocational Education in Nigeria. It also considered the mechanisms for assurance of quality in Vocational Education as well as its implication for international best practices. The work recommended among other things that relevant supervisory bodies like Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, National Board for Technical Education and National Universities Commission should check entrant of non-professionals into the teaching profession while ensuring that only qualified teachers are employed to teach.*

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**Keywords:** *Quality Assurance, Assurance of Quality, Vocational Education in Nigeria*

### Introduction

Vocational Education is the bedrock of the economy of any Nation. It is not just a profession that provides knowledge to the learners but that which involves the development of the entire being for the individual to contribute his quota to the development of the society (Inwezerua, 2013). Recently,, the issue of quality assurance of the teaching of Vocational Education has formed top agenda for discussion by all providers of education. Experts, opinion leaders and academics have consistently lamented in most academic fora, conferences, seminars, and workshops on deterioration in quality of Vocational Education, and its attendant poor quality graduates (Ekpo,Uwa,Uwalaka,Bassey&Isong, 2013).

The deterioration in quality is brought about by a combination of factors among which are poor state of economy, weak internal capacity, poor implementation of policies, and effects of politics on Vocational Education policy formulation. Others include: poor funding, unexpected consequences of government policies at schools with its devastating

effects on the quality, poor administration and supervision, inadequate teaching facilities, staff development, poor and inconsistent emoluments as well as poor quality teachers.

Vocational Education through such units as Agricultural Education, Business Education, Computer Education Home economics Education and Technical Education is regarded as one of the most veritable instruments for political, social, cultural and economic development in every society achieved through teaching. It is a dynamic instrument of change. Vocational Education teaching involves the application of methods in the arrangement of learning experiences to help a learner achieve a desirable change in behaviour, and by extension, a change in the society. Nigeria as a nation strives to ensure that qualitative Vocation education is delivered to its citizens in line with the Nation's philosophy of education as reflected in the National policy on Education (FRN, 2013). The document states that education in Nigeria is adopted as an instrument "par excellence," for effecting national development and growth so as to produce citizens that are dynamic, both in thought and deeds, self-sufficient, effective, united and show civil responsibility. Thus, there should be quality assurance in the teaching of Vocational Education courses..

Quality means conforming to a standard, and standard here refers to the level of excellence or adequacy aimed at expected improved productivity, competitive position and reduce (Ekpo, 2013). It is a truism that the government alone cannot shoulder the high cost of qualitative Vocational Education for her citizens. Hence, the government encourages the participation of voluntary individuals. The government however in a bid to sanitize and ensure that some measures of quality control are put in place in the educational system, took a step further to state its determination to regulate the establishment of schools, supervision and inspection on regular basis to enhance and ensure conformity to stipulated standards (FRN, 2013). Quality assurance is therefore the measure of attaining desirable levels of accountability in the educational institutions.

The concept of quality assurance could be viewed from two perspectives: internal and external control measures as well as checks and balances by regulatory agencies (Enahowo, 2013). The State Secondary Education Board(SSEB), State Technical Education Board(STEB),National Board for Technical Education(NBTE) and the National Universities commission (NUC), were established as administrative unit charged with the responsibility of

ensuring orderly development of educational institutions at different levels, maintenance of its high standards and ensuring that it is adequately funded (Uwah, 2013).

Investment in education is a viable condition for positive change to take place in the society. This is why the quality of Vocational Education especially at higher levels is hinged on ground teaching, learning, research and production of qualified skilled personnel who are needed for national development (UNESCO, 2002). This simply mean that the value of education at all levels must be qualitative. Quality assurance in Vocational Education can only be achieved by assurance of quality through quality assurance mechanisms. Fadipe (2000) asserted that quality of inputs influences to a large extent the quality of output. It is against this background that this paper sets out to examine quality assurance vis-a-vis the assurance of quality in Vocational Education in Nigeria.

### **Concept of Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance was first used in the western world as a proof that a product meets certain acclaimed standard (quality). The purpose was intended to build consumer confidence on the products. The term quality is a loose concept, which can be measured only in line with ascribed indices (Ijeoma & Osagie, 2005). It is a guarantee which implies that all necessary precautions have been taken to produce certain products to meet the needs, expectations and satisfaction of consumers.

Quality assurance was developed in the 1950s and 1960s as a business methodology (Ekpo,et.al., 2013). Quality here was seen as a judgmental concept which helps the consumer to differentiate one product from another. Such judgment was usually made by a consumer, and this helps him to determine whether to continue to patronize a particular manufacturer or not. In Nigeria the body charged with the responsibility of quality assurance in consumer goods is National Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) while for service provision in both public and private sectors, it is Service commission (SERVICOM). For telecommunication it is National Telecommunication Commission (NCC) that is charged with that responsibility. However, although such bodies like National Universities Commission (NUC), Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria(TRCN), National Board for Technical Education(NBTE), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) exist

,except for NUC the efficiency of the other bodies in ensuring quality service delivery in Technical Vocational Education and Training programme is suspect judging from the way these programme is run particularly at the Colleges of Education and Technical colleges. This therefore leaves quality of Vocational Education service delivery rather porous. In the teaching of Vocational Education, quality assurance is relatively a new concept. The key rationale for quality assurance vis-à-vis assurance of quality in Vocational Education is the need to match programmes with industrial requirements for man power development. Recently, the teaching profession like other professions has been affected by globalization, where quality has become a yardstick by which the standard of teaching/learning as well as the programmes run (curriculum) are determined.

In most countries of the world, ascertaining quality has been a continual practice, where there is regular peer review of curriculum quality. The quality of global education and the need to compare the standards of one country's education system with another has therefore brought more emphasis on quality assurance. Ijeoma and Osagie (2005), conceptualized quality assurance as the concern that certain accepted criteria of minimum standards should be achieved in the production of goods and services. This means certain techniques and procedures that ensure quality of products are put in place. By this every product or outcome of an industry is a function of a variety of activities or inputs, assumed to have a value added effect on the initial input into the process.

Accordingly, Uwa (2013) opined that quality assurance involves the provision and maintenance of the conditions determined to guarantee a high standard of the outcomes and products of education. Quality assurance is the guarantee of confidence and certainty by a programme of study given by an institution that standards and quality are being maintained and enhanced (Esib, 2005). By this conceptual understanding, it can be said that the emphasis on quality assurance is the training of personnel to enhance their performance in work places. Efue (2005) see quality assurance as a holistic term which applies also to education as an entity. This implies that all the various activities are put in place to produce quality products and services. Akpan (2005) opined that quality assurance in any educational institution is the pre-eminence and special features that make the institutions distinct from others.

According to UNESCO, quality is multi dimensional and embraces all functions and activities of an educational institution including academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment. The philosophical objective behind quality assurance in Vocational Education is government's decision to train individuals to achieve competency in a given area of industrial production function. The recent concept of quality assurance therefore is the ability of educational institutions to meet the need of the user of manpower, in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their products.

Quality assurance is about what people at different levels or units of the organization contribute to the accepted standard of product quality (Ijeoma and Osagie, 2005). This involves a coordinated quality assurance system with four pillars that support the quality process in any organization. These pillars relate to Management participation and attitude, Professional quality management, Employee participation, and Recognition.

These pillars support the quality improvement process that makes for customers' satisfaction, internal and external welfare control system and achievement of organisational goals. Quality assurance in Vocational Education can be related to the business concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) which is a philosophy of managing an organization in a way which enables it to meet stakeholders needs and expectations efficiently and effectively without compromising ethical values. Quality assurance vis-à-vis assurance of quality make quality improvement the institution's goal. Ekpo,et.al., (2013) suggested that TQM models should be linked to the institutions with modifications. Specifically, the models should be appropriately linked to the institution's mission, culture, strengths and weaknesses, its opportunities and threats.

A strategic implementation framework is vital to the success of quality and its workability efforts. In Vocational Education, the implementation of (TQM) should begin with a quality policy statement and the establishment of an organizational framework for both managing and encouraging the involvement of all parties in attaining quality through teamwork. It is important that all workers be trained in quality assurance methods. It is equally important that evaluation be done at all levels including consumers perception. Many sectors of the Nigerian economy such as Telecommunications as well as Food and Drugs

have already achieved success from their quality improvement programmes. The TQM philosophy has been found to be effective in solving many problems including low staff morale (as is the case in Vocational Education), low student performance, class cutting and student failure.

However, some benefits accruing from quality assurance and assurance of quality in Vocational Education include attitudinal change and team work from all stakeholders as well as a mentality that accepts and sees the students and other stakeholders (Parents) as deserving the best possible services. The teaching from literature that the teaching profession cum educational institutions as well as businesses and industries can benefit from TQM principle as they strive to improve quality and cost effectiveness of their operations.

### **Quality Assurance and Vocational Education in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, quality assurance in other sectors is planned and systematic, and it is implemented to ensure that a product or service is improved. Moja (2005), maintained that, it is the systematic monitoring of processes and an associated feedback which confers error prevention and assures quality. This demands an x-ray of the indicators of quality assurance in Vocational Education such as quality of instruction and learning, laboratory and workshop facilities, library facilities, quality of teachers, student : teacher ratio, teaching facilities, staff quarters, staff development, school environment, emoluments as well as funding and their implication on Vocational Education in Nigeria which from experience has left much to be desired. To this end, it is imperative for the operatives of Vocational Education to ensure that workshops and laboratories are adequately equipped with functional machines, tools and equipment. Also that school farms are established for crop and livestock production, functional computers are installed in the computer laboratories while Home economic Education laboratories are well equipped all in an effort to assure quality instructional delivery in schools, colleges and Universities. Otherwise skill acquisition by students will be compromised.

In the contemporary world, developing and reviewing the curricula should be a regular process. The school system at all levels should review their curricula every two or three years in order to ensure that the content of their teaching reflects the rapidly advancing

frontiers of technological knowledge. This however is not the case in our Vocational Education departments and Technical colleges in Nigeria. According to Offiong,(2007) a look at most public primary, secondary and tertiary institutions today still pictures the use of traditional chalk and talk teaching methods with no bearing on contemporary curricula need of practicals to enhance effective teaching and learning process for skills acquisition. This is contrary to the situation in developed nations that deploy advanced technology in knowledge dissemination such as e-learning, video conferencing etc., (Khawas, 2000). This has far reaching effects on Vocational Education. For instance, William (2004), pointed out that there are observable limited success to students' performance in higher educational level, as bordering on low level of curricula innovation and pedagogical issues while NUC (2002) highlighted the high drop out rates of students at the universities in Kano, Maiduguri and Owerri. These dropout rates were attributed to poor quality issues related to curricular, pedagogical and other institutional factors.

### **Mechanisms for Assurance of Quality in Vocational Education**

To ensure assurance of quality in Vocational education there is the need to consider certain mechanisms such as:

#### **Establishment of Autonomous Supervisory Body**

Lofty ideals of the teaching profession which are relevant for all times and all places, are possible through assured system of quality education at all levels. Based on insights from United Kingdom as a developed as well as in developing countries, what is needed in Nigeria, is an institutional mechanism for monitoring various aspects of Vocational Education against established norms. A watch -dog body is necessary to ensure quality as well as define benchmark against which to judge. Standards and quality such a body could be set up by the government. But to be effective, it should be autonomous and have universal acceptability and credibility (Ijeoma & Osagie, 2005).

#### **Implementation of Enabling Policy Guidelines**

Strict implementation of enabling policy guidelines for the operation of Technical Vocational Education and Training in Nigeria is needed to assure quality of her Vocational

education. The NUC, for example, in an effort to maintain quality assurance in the university system, puts in place enabling policy guidelines. These include accreditation guidelines for various disciplines offered in the Nigerian Universities, visitation of programmes after every five years by peer review panel to determine full, interim and/or derived accreditation. Other measurable ingredients of quality assurance at this level include academic staff of 20 percent as professors, 35 percent as senior lecturers, and 45 percent in the lower cadre, curriculum, non-teaching staff, facilities, programme, finances, as well as employer rating.

### **Student -Teacher Ratio**

At the secondary level, areas of quality assurance in Vocational Education include standardization, working conditions, controlled quality of teachers; student-teacher ratio, administration/supervision and funding. A good student-teacher ratio of 30:1 that takes cognizance of available instructional facilities would enhance quality output of instructional delivery. However, the Ministry of Education and the Secondary Education Board through their inspectorate divisions, part of whose duty should be to ensure standard in this regard appears handicapped in this direction because today, As ascertained by Offiong, Usoro & Akpanobong, (2016) although there is population explosion in student's enrolment, occasioned by the declaration of free education there has not been a commensurate political will by the Nigerian government to employ enough teachers as well as build new structures. This has resulted in overcrowded classrooms with inadequate student-teacher ratio.

### **Controlled Entrant of Non-Professionals**

At the tertiary level, National Board for Colleges of Education set standard in Colleges of Education through accreditation of programmes, while the Nigerian Universities Commission does same for the faculties of Education in Universities. Yet at all levels, this notwithstanding, members of these bodies are not involved in recruitment of teachers. In doing this no standard is set in the recruitment of instructors particularly at the post primary and tertiary levels of education where non-education graduates are often employed to teach in the Secondary Schools, Colleges of Education and Universities. This is an aberration when compared to other professions like medicine and law. A teacher for instance, has never for

once been employed to teach medicine or law if he/she is not a medical Doctor or a Lawyer as the case may be.

At the Secondary school level, though in principle no serving teacher should be below the status of National Certificate in Education(NCE) holders, some people without teaching qualification are still drafted to teach because of political connection while qualified teachers are left to roam the streets. With these, it becomes doubtful if any standards are maintained. Assurance of quality at this level will be addressed when Bachelor of Science degree in Education (B.Sc.Ed), Bachelor of Arts degree in Education(B.A.Ed) or at least Nigerian Certificate in Education(NCE) is enforced as the minimum qualification for teaching in primary Schools. Controlled entrants of non-professional can serve a good purpose for assuring quality in vocational education. For some time now, an irksome issue with teaching is that so many people are birds of passage, using teaching as a stepping stone to some other jobs necessitated by increasing rate of unemployment in Nigeria. This situation becomes worse in private Secondary, Technical, Polytechnic and Universities where there is continuous patronage of quack teachers by proprietors and their continuous retention which has so far spelt doom to the system as well as the products of the system. These people are quacks because they do not possess teaching qualification. At their tertiary levels of education they did not consider studying education because of lack of interest and passion for it. Although these quacks viewed teaching with contempt and disdain while at school, today they perform the role of teachers with no professional qualification. Considering the nature of vocational education that deals with skill acquisition, only qualified instructors should be employed to teach. But it is quite pathetic to see that even in public schools when employment opportunities are open for recruitment of teachers, everyone from all walks of life apply and are oftentimes recruited.

According to Udosen (2004), such are those who turn classrooms into markets for the sale of wares, blouses, shoes, underwear's and sometimes food items, action reminiscent of the business they were used to before they mistakenly found their way into the teaching profession. Similarly, these people masquerading as teachers are associated with all sorts of professional misconduct such as absenteeism, lateness, lack of seriousness, and the likes, most unbecoming of the teaching profession.. This is because these non-professionals lack

the code of Ethics of the Teaching Profession. Most private schools today are owned and run by non educationists. Their teachers are also unqualified. Hence, they lack the wherewithal to operate and subsequently perpetuate examination malpractice as well as turning themselves to examination malpractice centres. The teaching profession should not be allowed to become an occupation for non- professionals or businessmen who establish private schools to get money instead of ensuring quality service delivery. This is a complete contravention of the good intention of the Nigerian government for education as stated in the National policy on Education (FRN2013) and should be considered as corruption of education and professional practice. As it is in other professions, those who really want to become teachers or open schools should be certified by the TRCN as qualified professionals in the teaching profession just as non- professionals are not permitted to operate a Law firm, Hospital or Engineering company.

### **Re-training of instructors**

Refresher course for instructors may also serve to improve standard and consequently assure quality in vocational education especially when they serve as a condition for promotion. This is considered against the premise that most vocational educators, since after graduation, have not been re-trained either through in-school programmes or relevant seminars and workshops despite the fact that knowledge doubles after every ten years. This implies that most vocational educators are operating on out-dated knowledge and does not therefore guarantee quality in vocational education

### **Implications of Quality Assurance in Vocational Education**

No amount of investment in facilities used in teaching and learning will result in qualitative education without improvement in the quality of teachers. This is because the quality of education of any nation is dependent largely on the quality of teachers. The human resources of any country are its greatest assets. The right quality of human resources in the right quality, where appropriately deployed, would be able to convert the country's natural resources to useful products and catapult the nation to prosperity.

Poor quality education could deter or delay the economic social and intellectual growth of Nigeria. It is therefore important for the Vocational Education to establish and

maintain sufficient stability to be able to fulfil their mission, not only to continually produce qualitative graduates with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to drive national development, but also to conduct researches that are relevant towards improving the quality of education and the teaching profession.

Globalization characterized by speedy movement of people, goods, services and information, has created a milieu of international competition. For the Nigerian Vocational Education to compete favourably with their counterparts from other countries of the world, and if it is to be counted for national development in the committee of Nations, only the best will suffice. Therefore, the challenge of Vocational Education should be to regain and maintain stability as well as standard as an ingredient of quality. The Ministries, Department and Agencies associated with Vocational Education should also ensure that the corresponding increase and growth in learners' enrolment are in perfect concomitance with quality.

### **Conclusion**

This paper considered quality assurance and assurance of quality of the Vocational Education in Nigeria and observed that from reality on ground. Nigeria's Vocational Education is experiencing difficulties in assurance of quality as could be seen in lack of standardization, entrants of non-professionals, and even public image with multiplier negative effects on its products in terms of skill acquisition, acceptability, marketability and employability in the labour market. It was then concluded that Vocational Education must be adequately and professionally managed for improved pedagogy, quality output and parity with other professions in line with international best practices by the relevant supervisory bodies.

### **Recommendations**

From the forgoing, it is hereby recommended that:

1. Government through the Federal and State Ministries of Education should withdraw approval and close down all private schools owned and run by non-professional teachers to ensure quality service delivery as well as maintenance of the ethics and status of the profession.

2. To ensure quality in vocational education, NBTE, NUC, NCCE and TRCN in collaboration with the various State Ministries of Education should check entrant of non-professionals into the profession and ensure that only qualified teachers are employed at all levels of educational institution.
3. The Federal and State Ministries of education should ensure that students enrolment do not exceed the capacity of the available teachers and facilities while ensuring that such teachers are frequently re-trained through refresher courses, workshops and conferences.

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