

QUALITY ASSURANCE: AN INDISPENSABLE POLICY FOR EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

A critical appraisal of the level of development in Nigeria shows that a lot needs to be done to improve Education and Human Resource development in the country. Quality Assurance stands undoubtedly the panacea for this identified socio- economic gap. Human capacity/ building through conferences, workshops, seminars etc. would make an average Nigerian relevant when the education programs shall have been upgraded in line with the identified areas of needs for national development. Objectively speaking, since the last decade, ICT resources have become imperative for any meaningful development in Nigeria. In other words, ICT is assuming critical dimensions in the classrooms, but deplorably enough, not many teachers in the country are ICT complaint, to help realize this new trend in Education Industry. These innovative resources as computers, projectors, clever boards etc. are therefore becoming highly indispensable in the classrooms. Quality Assurance which refers to the planned and systematic actions deemed as necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirement for quality, will anchor on such tools as insistence on correct choice of Education planners for the system, recruitment of qualified personnel for the implementation, adequate supervision and inspection of the programs, provision of congenial and friendly learning environment and finally, ensure a good system of evaluation that will give confidence on the end products of the system. When this is achieved, by the Education institutions, the needs of the users of manpower/employers of labor) shall have been met in relation to the quality of skills acquired by the products (graduates). Against this backdrop, this paper x-rays the roles that Quality Assurance plays in Education and Human Resources development for standard service delivery in Nigeria, especially as a developing nation.

Keywords: Quality assurance, tool, Innovation service delivery

1. Introduction

Education, world over, is the bedrock of all meaningful development (economic, scientific spiritual social or political). Education is the process of teaching or passing on culture (way of life) of people to the youths. In order to ensure that what is parceled and passed on to the new generations is tested and worthwhile, quality Assurance becomes a sine-qua-non. As a developing nation, Nigeria is investing heavily on Education and human resources development. This is good because countries like China, Indonesia, India, South Korea and Japan have made tremendous progress because they took time to develop their human capacity by embarking on vigorous man power training programmes, guided by quality or Standard Assurance. If Nigeria is to achieve vision 20:20:20, she must ensure that quality assurance in education and human resource development is seriously pursued without compromise.

Hither to, a critical appraisal of the level of development in Nigeria shows that a lot needs to be done to improve education and Human Resource development in the country. Precisely, ICT which is the mover of world economy today, is yet to have a strong hold in Nigeria among the workforce. This fact is more painful to acknowledge despite the country's efforts in her leading roles in Africa. It is unimaginable to find establishments still going analogue in Nigeria in this digital age.

2. Keywords

2.1. Concepts of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance, as a concept, was developed in the 1950s and 1960s as a business methodology in

European Students Handbook on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESIB),2005. The rationale for quality is the need to match programs with industrial requirements for manpower. It is the guarantee of confidence and certainty by a program of study given by an Institution that “standards and quality are being maintained and enhanced” (ESIB) 2005). By implication, the measure/index of this achievement is the extent to which the end products of the system (graduates) satisfy the users of manpower (employers of labor) in relation to the formers’ output as a result of skills acquired.

According to Boraham and Zirati(2002), “quality assurance refers to the planned and systematic actions deemed as necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirement for quality.”

Ijeoma and Osage (2005) posit that “quality assurance in education is the ability of education Institutions to meet the need of user of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by the products (Students)”. Quality Assurance therefore, is a concept that aims at producing good quality, standard, and reliable products with high proficiency to ensure service delivery.

2.2. Concepts of Innovation

Innovation connotes change. It is a deliberate change geared towards achieving a desired goal. The change may be a re-introduction of a discarded concept, idea or practice (e.g. the former January – December school calendar was dropped in 1973 and reintroduced in 1987; the September –June school calendar started in 1973 and was dropped in June 1976 and reintroduced later on). It could also be an imitation of a practice from a foreign land (e.g. Latin language was taught before in our secondary schools. Now it is no longer being taught, but replaced with another language, French). Latin is now taught in only Seminary Schools. Innovation could also be in terms of implements or tools used; a people changing them from crude form to modern and even more sophisticated ones (e.g. Typewriters have been changed from manual to electric typewriters like IBM, Underwood, Remington, Royal, Oliver, Imperial, Olympia, Werke) to the present day computers.

Thus, innovation may be defined as deliberate changes whereby one or more definite changes are accepted by a State, Country, or group of schools for the purpose of achieving some set objectives or goals. This change has to be planned, tested, adopted, or rejected. Innovation implies real combination of some existing parts with new or foreign elements. Relevant innovations include changes in curriculum, evaluation, programs, rules and regulations, systems, equipment, processes, and methods etc. Since the society is dynamic, changes/innovations are a constant factor in the society.

2.3. Concept of Service Delivery

On 19th -21st March, 2004, the former Head of State, President Olusegun Obasanjo, gave a special Presidential Retreat on Service Delivery in Nigeria at Abuja, and declared:

Nigerians have for too long been feeling short-changed by the quality of public service. Our public offices have for too long show cases for the combined evils of inefficiency and corruption, whilst being impediments to effective implementation of government policies. Nigerians deserve better. And we will ensure they get what is better! (Obasanjo 2004:5).

Owing to the identified laxity, combined evils of inefficiency and corruption in the public offices, the Retreat resolved for selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and patriotism; to sanitize the system morally, politically, and economically, as a message from the leadership that Nigerians could trust. Following this, SERVICOM (Service compact with all Nigerians) was born with the following core provision which says: “We dedicate ourselves to providing the basic services to which citizens are entitled, timely, fairly, honestly, effectively and transparently” (FGN, 2004:6). By SERVICOM, the Federal Government enjoins all Ministries, Parastatals, and Agencies and other Government Departments to prepare and publish SERVICOM CHARTERS whose provisions would include:

- Quality services designed around customer’s requirements
- Set out citizens’ entitlements in ways they can readily understand
- Commitment to provision of services within realistic time-frames
- Specify officials to whom complaints may be addressed
- Publish these details in conspicuous places accessible to the public
- Conduct and publish surveyors of customer satisfaction.
- SERVICOM CHARTERS are the operational day-to-day implementation of SERVICOM, which upholds that:
 - It is by the actions of citizens that service delivery can improve.
 - All Nigerians lose with bad service delivery.
 - All Nigerians will gain from quality service delivery. (FGN 2004:7).

3. Quality Assurance

3.1. Nigeria and the Place of Quality Assurance

The Federal government of Nigeria says “Education in Nigeria is an instrument ‘par excellence’ for effecting national development” (NPOE, 2004:5). In pursuance of this, government policies and interventions in strategic areas like education have remained a regular feature. This is why such Agencies as: National Agency for Foods, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON), National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), SERVICOM, Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), etc. were put in place to ensure standards, in their respective fields.

3.1.1. National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC).

This agency is responsible for enforcing laws on food and drug administration throughout the country. It ensures that food and drug items produced in the country are hygienically prepared and scientifically proven to be safe for human consumption. It also monitors the quality of imported food items and drugs.

3.1.2. Standards Organization of Nigeria (S.O.N):

This body has functions similar to those of NAFDAC. Its specific area are in those of manufacture of articles like tyres, wares, etc.

3.1.3. National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA):

This is an agency with many responsibilities with regard to drug related offences in the country. The agency also deals with drug trafficking and drug traffickers and those who farm hard drugs. The agency also deals with those individuals who are involved in money laundering.

3.1.4. SERVICOM:

This is a Federal Government set up in all Federal Ministries and Establishments; to ensure quality service delivery.

3.1.5. Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB):

This is a Federal Government established body in charge of admissions into the tertiary Institutions, (Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, etc.) in the country. It ensures that candidates offered admission possess the basic entry requirements. It provides a level playground opportunity to all candidates into institutions of their choice through a Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). JAMB is an academic quality control outfit that tries to discourage the examination malpractice syndrome prevalent in the society. JAMB provides opportunity for more number of admissions instead of the old system where a candidate might secure admission into up to four Universities only to accept one, thereby denying three less fortunate others the opportunity to gain admission.

3.2. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

According to Whitely (2001) in Ndubuaku and Ezeobi (2012), “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.” As stated earlier, the Federal Government is doing its best to uplift the Nigerian Education system, but deplorably enough, not many teachers in the country are ICT compliant. To this end, the Federal Government of Nigeria states (NPOE, 2004:17):

In recognition of the prominent role of information and Communication Technology in advancing knowledge and skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern world there is urgent need to integrate information and Communication Technology (ICT) into education in Nigeria.

Also, since no Nation can rise above the quality of its teachers, it became imperative to improve the quality of Nigerian teachers. Presently the minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria is the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E). Teachers’ Grade Two Certificate (TCII) used to be minimum teaching qualification until lately, when an up-grade became necessary for improved standards to match with contemporary issues in National development. The Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education on Teachers’ Education posits:

Since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E).

The education system in Nigeria relies heavily on this Policy Document: **National Policy on Education** which is complete but has room for innovations and changes.

According to FGN in the National Policy on Education (2004:4):

Since the publication of the first edition in 1977, the 2nd and 3rd editions were published in 1981 and 1998 respectively in keeping with the dynamics of social change and the demands on education. This 4th edition was necessitated by some policy innovations and changes and the

need to update the 3rd edition (1998) accordingly. These innovations and changes include: (a) ... (d)introduction of information and communication Technology (ICT) into the school system;... (:)...

From the above policy statement, the commitment of the Federal Government to quality education in Nigeria remains definite, unequivocal and uncompromising.

3.3. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

It is a fact that investment in human capital is the bedrock of meaningful national development. Human resources development through quality assurance is crucial in achieving a labour force and managerial know-how, capable of putting the nation on the right track to enviable economy. When human resource development comes up as a discourse what readily comes to mind is that more than 30% of Adult population in Nigeria are illiterates and that about 15% of Nigerian workforce are also illiterates, while only 30% of Nigerians are computer literate. This is the problem Nigeria is facing despite government efforts to eradicate illiteracy through mass literacy, adult and non-formal Education. Federal Government strives at providing functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. These include the nomads, fishermen, migrant families, the disabled and other categories or groups, especially the disadvantaged gender. This policy was enacted in 1991, anchoring on the Universal Basic Education (UBE). These were geared towards developing quality human resources.

Apart from the above less-privileged group in education, the country endeavors to keep abreast with trends of time in education industry to make the Nigerian work force relevant. To this end, computer education continues to attract government attention, hence it states "Government shall provide necessary infrastructure and training for the integration of ICT in the school system in recognition of the role of ICT in advancing knowledge and skill in the modern world" (NPOE, 2004:24). This provision cuts across the three levels of education in the country. Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) provides for the needs of Tertiary Institutions, while State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB) takes charge at the primary and secondary school levels. Science, Technical and Vocational Education are also seriously integrated in the education system to provide skills in all fields.

There is also Special Education, which is a formal Special Educational training given to people (children and Adults) with special needs. This group of people may be classified into three categories:

1. The Disabled
2. The Disadvantaged
3. The Gifted and Talented.

These provisions are the nation's effort to provide for all and harness the different talents (overt or latent) of its citizenry, for individuals and national development. In the same vein, Ogbonnaya (2013) remarked "Education is a process of teaching or passing on culture (way of life) of people to the youths". Similarly, Okafor (2004) saw education as "a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentialities and their maximum activation... his perfect self-fulfillment." National development benefits a lot from this fully actualized individual who contributes his quota maximally. When individuals with various potentialities are helped through quality education, to harness their potentials, they contribute significantly to national development according to their talents.

4. CONCLUSION

Contrary to the lay man's view about the level of Human Resource development in Nigeria, this paper has revealed the degree of Federal Government Commitment to providing for its citizens. Documentary evidence has unveiled a high level of human capacity development in the country with hope for even the unfortunate adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education; who dropped out of school, workers requiring continuing education and also for special groups requiring special attention. ICT is gradually permeating through the society but a lot still has to be desired to that effect. Happy enough, the Federal Government recognizes the pivotal role of ICT in the World Economy today and leaves no stone unturned to achieve 100% Computer literacy among its citizenry.

Every day activity of Nigerians is tending towards this as the Nation is going cashlite. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Cashlite scheme kicks off nationwide on July 1, 2014. The country is adopting ICT (going digital even in the banking sector to encourage the populace in Internet Banking, Money transfers, use of Automated Teller Machines (ATM), Credit Cards, E-transact etc. for convenience and safety in business transactions. It is a welcome process towards improved lifestyle and modernity. These developments and innovative concepts are under the eagle-eyes of Quality Assurance, put in place to moderate activities, check excesses, control quality and standards of products in the country.

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