



Beyond Measurement: Nigeria University Quality Management

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Abstract:

This paper is designed to discuss features identified in existing literature and findings that had previously defined quality in universities with the aim of measuring quality. These processes have unintentionally ignored issues beyond measurement in determining quality of education in Nigerian universities. This paper is a continuation of previously published paper of the same title. The first paper focused on issues that cannot be measured, however the attention was centered on internal issues; those issues that are independent of stakeholders' control. This paper focused on issues beyond measurement that are related to stakeholders' involvement. The paper finds that human involvement and behaviour are very important in the implementation of quality management that will effect meaningful change in the development of quality practice in the Nigerian university.

Keywords: Measurement, Quality, University, Nigeria

Introduction

When talking about quality, the first thing that comes to mind is the essence of being the best, excellent, fit for purpose, value for money (as define by Juran, 2003, Harvey and William, 2010; Ndirangu and Udoto, 2011). However, there are some elements of these definitions that can be measured freely, especially in the manufacturing industry where it is easy to measure every element of quality as a tool to assure perfection. This was because every component that can be put together in the manufacturing industry can be ascribed a number or value, which can be compared to a set standard. This standard can be used as a yardstick for the production centre to achieve best practice, conformity, and fitness for purpose, as defined by Alani (2008). On the contrary, university education does not lend itself to simple quantification to determine quality of production, as it rather adds value to knowledge. While Knowledge can be seen as gaining awareness and understanding of something or someone, it may be in the form of acquiring knowledge through skills and experience of education, theory or practice. There are no such elements that exists in university education as components exist in the manufacturing industry. Therefore measuring university process will mean that there are some issues that cannot be measured accurately. Adetunji (2014) debated that it is not impossible to measure quality in higher education but the possibility to be definitively accurate is not always there. Likewise, Adetunji (2014) expressed that what quality means to one person in the university sector may be different to what quality means to another in the same sector. He stressed further that ascribing meanings to quality is borderless as within the same department, the meaning of quality may vary (ibid).

A number of authors (Adelabu & Akinwumi, 2008; Salmin, 2001, 2009; Ogundare, 2009) have studied

quality as it relates to the university; they do not claim to measure quality nor advice that quality should be measured. Although other authors (Welsh & Dey, 2000; Alani, 2008; Harvey and Williams, 2010; Duze, 2011) insist on measuring quality in universities, Adetunji (2014) does not fault their approach but classified it as managerial control for efficiency. He claimed that the management of the totality of every element that forms major activities of the university is what matters when considering quality management in tertiary education. However there are other factors that cannot be quantified or assigned numerical values through instrumental measurement, which has direct effect on the other elements identified for measurement. This paper intends to unveil these components that do not form a single, separable element but constitute a less-defined aspect of the whole. Human involvement cannot be measured precisely; this study fills gap in knowledge on issues beyond measurement in the university sector.

Quality management

Quality is a slippery concept, which implies different things to different people (Adetunji, 2015). Then why do people assume that quality can be measured in higher education? There has been considerable debate around the study of what to measure and how it can be measured. This literature set out to explore issues beyond what can be measured in the conventional sense. But, to start with, it is prudent to understand the concept quality itself and what it means to Nigerian universities in context of this study. Green (1994) defines quality as that event or item which best satisfies and exceeds customers' needs and wants. Quality can be said to lie in the eyes of the beholder. No wonder Adetunji (2014) stated clearly that customer's makes judgement on quality based on past experience of similar events or items by reference to the best comparable performance. Then we can agree that quality can be referred to as a standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to other things similar to it: how good or bad an item or event is, that is, to be of good/poor/top quality or of a high standard. Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) defined quality as a measure of how good or bad the products of higher education institutions in Nigeria are in terms of their academic performance and meeting established standards. Surprisingly, Oko (2011) contends that quality education is measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment.

This debate might appear irrelevant today because the approach used by Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) and Oko (2011) was a quantitative approach which does not evaluate the existence of other, unquantifiable things. Their study based its consideration on the environmental problem the university was facing in defining quality. The definition was not a bad one, it touches most aspects of university education's expected results but the debate here is: is it the expected result that determines the quality of a service? The answer is simple yes or no, because the judgement on whether quality is put into services or not can only be determined qualitatively by the customer. However Adetunji (2015a) posits that students are not be classified as customers in the Nigerian university context, therefore no one can accurately measure the true value of service quality received. Adetunji (2015) expressed that quality provision of a university can be determined by employers but put forward a further argument that an employer cannot accurately measure the true value of education, in terms of knowledge gain or what has been impacted in a student due to multiple reasons among which he mentioned that student involvement and contribution will determine what a student will take out of a programme of study. Therefore if a graduate from university A, who graduated from the chemistry department cannot mix chemicals effectively and a

graduate from university B who graduated from a similar department can perform the task, it does not mean both universities have produce quality graduate. It means many different things as explained by Adetunji (2014); maybe they have been taught differently, maybe one has taken his own learning into his own hands while the other has not; maybe the one from university A has not seen such chemicals before while the one from university B had gone through extra-classes and personal development to be able to perform the task.

The debate is borderless, just as Ojerinde (2010) distinguished two aspects of quality in education: both internal and external. The internal aspect applies to the implementation of the school objectives while the external aspect deals with the implementation of national objectives, which are prerequisites to the achievement of quality in any educational institution. This pre-requisites are associated with the 'monitoring and evaluation component of education' to see whether the outcome is good and of the intended standard. In other words, to understand the intention of university education quality, Middlehurst (2001) describes the concept of quality and quality assurance maintained by the National University Commission (NUC) as that which including the following dimensions: i. Regulation (legal frameworks, governance, responsibilities and accountabilities etc.), ii. Educational process (admissions, registration or enrolment, curriculum design and delivery, support for leaving, assessment, etc.),iii.Curriculum design and content (validation and approval frameworks, levels and standards), iv. Learning experience (consumer protection, students experience, complaints and appeals etc.), v. Outcomes (qualifications, certificates, transcripts, security, transferability, recognition/ currency and value etc.) In summary, Middlehurst (2001) sees quality as a grade of achievement, a standard against which to judge others. By this conceptual understanding, it can be said that the emphasis on quality assurance is the training of personnel to enhance their performance in workplaces not to measure the quality of their services.

Methodology

The paper is philosophically located in the paradigm of critical realism which believes that it is of high important to get to the bottom of why a particular event occurs in a certain way in order to identify a solution to the problems identified since events do not occur independently. What does critical realism mean to this study? It is an idea created upon indispensable realities about the nature of the Nigerian universities in a metaphysical idea of human knowledge and how realities are constructed (Edwards, O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). It is a philosophy that suggests that humans are capable of studying the real world, exclusive of intrusion from subjective factors or human thinking that cause an event (Gerrits & Verweij, 2013). In a critical realist study, Adetunji (2014) suggested that 3 things must be present: structure (the university), agent (employees) and mechanisms (functional education processes, for example admissions, registration or enrolment, curriculum design and delivery or support for assessment). Agents, through the uses of these mechanisms within the structure, drive events (such as the admission process, teaching and learning and research) to achieve set goals. It follows that there can only be one reality of an event; however, events do not just happen, they are caused through the involvement of agents using mechanisms either rightly or wrongly. Therefore this study gathers information through the knowledge of agents involved in the processing of university quality assurance to highlight issues beyond measurement from their involvement. This paper uses a qualitative approach to uncover and discuss issues beyond measurement in the Nigerian university context.

The study was centred on 6 selected universities (2 of each categories of university owners in Nigeria: federal, state and private) in the southwest region of the country. 18 participants (agents) were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on position of authority they occupied within the structure: Deputy Vice-chancellor Academic (DVCA), Director of Academic Planning (DAP) and Chairman of Deans (CoD). The selection focused on academics who had influence and experience of academic quality within the university context. This selection cut across the six institutions selected as they share similar organograms relating to who takes custodial duties with respect to university quality enhancement. All the participants selected have been working in the university sector for the past 15years as senior lecturer or in more senior positions. Their universities were represented anonymously, as shown in the table below, for safety and confidentiality purpose. The findings from the interview were descriptive, narrated in a thematic form to help understand issues beyond measurement that determine the quality of university education provision.

Table 1: Respondents framework

Respondents	University					
	Federal		State		Private	
	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
DVCA (1)	*	-	*	*	*	*
DAP (2)	*	*	*	-	*	*
CoD (3)	*	*	*	*	-	*

DVCA, is represented as 1, DAP is represented as 2 and CoD is represented as 3. Therefore, A1, to A3, B1 to B3 are participants from federal universities. C1, to C3, D1 to D3 are participants from state universities while E1, to E3, F1 to F3 are participants from private universities.

Beyond Measurement

The findings reveal that participants find it difficult to fully understand why they have been asked to measure quality of service in the university, most especially when it is difficult to understand who their customers are. They ascribed most of the faults in misleading academic managers to the leadership of the university administration. In the discussion with these participants four major themes emerged, as discussed below.

Leadership/ Administration of the university:

Four of the participants were of the view that individuals appointed as university vice chancellors are weak (A2, B3, C3, F2). Two of the interviewees were unsure whether that is the right word to use but clear that some of the vice-chancellors who are meant to be the heads of all administration in the university are not competent and lack administrative potential (A2, F2). One of the respondents claimed that

I think such appointees (vice-chancellor) must possess administrative qualities and must lead by example (A2).

Five other participants were clear that sometimes the governing council gets it all wrong in the selection of administrative heads. They claimed that in such cases you cannot set appropriate goals for the university or to talk of measuring quality of services provided by such administrators (A1, B2, D1, E2, F3). Two other respondents asserted that a university's leader must be knowledgeable, must have integrity and practice modern styles of management and leadership (C1, B3). One individual explained that

I think He or she must be visionary and ready to adjust to situations in the system (C1).

Another respondent points out that such a position is not one which should be occupied based on academic excellence only, he claimed that other factors should be considered,

I think he or she performance must be sustainable through the proper utilization of right materials and human resources in the achievement of the institutional goals and objectives [sic] (B3).

To sum up, two of the respondent asked, 'please how can you measure leadership effectiveness to determine quality?' (A3, F1). One of them exclaimed,

I think that is why we all get it wrong, wrong person in wrong position will mean wrong output[sic] (F1).

Poor leadership

Several Interviewees were of the view that, obviously, when you have an inadequate or inappropriate leadership style, or the wrong person leading the team, things will go wrong all the more. Three of the respondents were very quick to mention that poor leadership both at the government level and at the institutional level have been a major challenge to assuring quality in higher education in Nigeria (D1, E2, F3). Two of the participants pointed out that on the part of the government, since the 1990s less commitment has been showed to the development of university education in the country (E2, F3). One of the informants explains that one out of many indices for properly evaluating government commitment to educational development in any country is budgetary allocation and disbursement of funds to the university education sector (D1). Another participant also share that,

I think UNESCO had recommended 26% budgetary allocation to tertiary education based on GNP (F3).

Three academics who blame the government for inadequate contribution to the university education mentioned that the amount allocated to education by successive Nigerian governments has continued to be proportionally smaller than in other African countries (A1, C1, E2). One of the informants gives example, of how the budget had been allocated to education,

I can tell you this because I have been carrying out research on it as well, he pointed that the percentage allocated for education was 0.7% of the GNP in 2005, while Ghana allocated 4.2% of their GNP to education. Kenya government allocated was 6.5% of their GNP to education and 7.9% of GNP was allocated to education by South Africa government[sic] (C1).

Another respondent mentioned that,

I think you should keep in mind that Nigeria has the most huge population in African, most of the young people wants to go to school and they have huge number of student waiting to gain admission yearly[sic] (A1).

Three of the participants drew the researcher's attention to A World Bank Report cited by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU, 2013). They highlighted that in 2012 Nigeria's GNP was 262.2 billion USD while the government's allocation to education was a mere 1.96 billion USD (D1, E2, F3). One of the respondents lamented,

I think the amount spent by Nigeria for the entire education sector being less than what individual universities spend on education in some countries. It is clear that the government of the country is not committed to quality education. Therefore measuring quality will means measuring wrong thing [sic] (D1).

Four informants upheld that poor leadership of some Nigerian university administrators has been a blight on the attainment of quality education at universities in the country (A3, B2, E1, F2). Two respondents mentioned that Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria exist because there is a goal to be reached. They pointed that such goals can be effectively attained when the human resources within the institutions are properly managed for their positive impacts on productivity (C2, F1). One participant pointed out that,

I talk about human resource because it is the bedrock of any organization's success but they are always ignored when taking decisions on the future of the business especially here in the university [sic] (F1).

Three of the informants also expressed that the place of leadership in the management of university education is very important and trying to measure anything without considering the importance of these key officers will mean that quality has been misinterpreted for something else (A3, C2, E1). One of the informants further expressed that the duty of leadership is to reduce problems within the system in order to enhance efficiency (E1). Two others stressed that it is clear that most staff disputes in Nigerian universities since the 80s were attributed to the high-handedness and despotism of some administrators of the institutions (A3, C2). One of the respondents quickly asked,

I hope you not going to mention my name nor the name of my school in your paper because my administrative head can sack me oooooo, please, I don't want to loose my job. However, for the purpose of your study that is making an attempt to locate and correct wrong approach used by the quality assurance agencies. I tell you this university should be the best place where industries should learn, we have resource to test-run our theories but sometimes we are all wrongly managed. What do I mean? No salary to academic staff, and principal

officers are changing their official cars, student accommodation where they are found are not in good condition yet they kept building another one[sic] (C2).

Four participants also argued that poor leadership of some university administrators, through not involving staff union members in decision-making, makes leaders architects of their own failure (A1, C2, C3, E2). One of the respondents argued that,

I think measuring quality is good but you should always remember that we are not all from the school of thought that deals with values (C3).

Another respondent claimed that,

I think it's not about how we evaluate quality rather it is important to know where quality has been put into the service provided. How do I then know without measuring it? I think University is one of the sectors that do not recruit unfinished product for the job. They train their own employees themselves and they should do better, by all indications[sic] (A1).

Likewise, three informants mentioned that dismissal of some academics without following due process were indicative of poor governance, which made many academic staff demotivated toward serious academic pursuit (E1, E2, F3). No wonder, academic staff in Nigeria are not keen to be productive in terms of research or personal development. One of the participants clearly states that,

I think you need to know one thing for sure, when you are committed to give students the best and your salary is not paid, you need to fight for it. When you don't have tools to work you need to fight for it otherwise you will not get it. I told you the other time, having wrong people at the regime of the affairs for the institution is a major problem [sic] (F3).

Additionally, two of the respondents maintained that unfavourable governance by both the government and the university management had led to a series of strikes resulting in the closure of some institutions for up to 177days since 1993, again partially accounting for the low quality of higher education in Nigeria. This unrest cannot be measured even though it is clear that the strike is for a certain numbers of days (E1, E2). One of the interviewees, explained that,

I think the unhealthy situation between university staff unions and management had led to increased hostility and aggression, increased mutual suspicion which had continued to threaten mutual co-existence for the attainment of good quality of service in the country universities[sic] (E2).

Poor policy implementation

All the participants were of the opinion that poor policy implementation is a challenge to quality delivery in education. Three respondents claimed that poor quality delivery is responsible for the woefully low performance of graduates of the universities in Nigeria in their world of work (C1, C3, D1). Two interviewees also expressed alarm over the issue of examination malpractice (C1, D1). One of the respondents asked,

I think, I need someone to tell me why there is still malpractice in the university system. I think I need to say it here that if a lecture is still involved in the examination malpractices of his work or his colleagues' work then that person is not fit to be a lecturer. I think such person should be out of academic system because he or she is not mature enough to work in a sensitive sector[sic] (C1).

Another aspect of the debate, put forward by four participants, was that education policies are written by knowledgeable writers who have foresight and believe strongly in what they write for the future but the problem arises when it comes to translating theory into practice by implementers (A2, B2, B3, F1). One of the participants lamented that,

I think, policies that are meant to be implemented by the educators are not develop nor are the educators carry along with the formulation of the policies, causing a lot of confusion at the point of implementation[sic] (B3)

Three other participants pointed out that several factors could be adduced as inhibitors to smooth implementation of educational policies and thereby resulting to poor quality delivery (C2, C3, D1). One interviewees was clear in stating that any attempt to measure quality in a situation where there is difficulties means that judgment of quality will be wrongly accessed (D1). Five other respondents listed several influential factors such as government underfunding of education and injudicious utilization of available funds by implementation agencies (i.e. vice chancellors, rectors, provosts, deans of faculties, heads of department etc (A1, C1, C3, E1, F3)). Another informants highlighted that when funds intended to be directed toward delivery of quality education are often likely to be misappropriated or embezzled; therefore the education which learners receive becomes worthless (F1).

Two interviewees elaborate that money the government approves for running the institution, as small as it is, sometimes does not get to the institutions and the little that gets there is normally wasted by educational managers (C2, D3). One of the respondents shared that,

I think poverty is our problem, money allocated for university may be small but if they are well utilized then government will be encourage to do more [sic] (C2).

Additionally, three of the informants share a similar view that universities in Nigeria now pay little or no attention to the teaching effectiveness of academic staff (B3, D1, F2). One participant said, 'do you know what academia normally say when I was in training then "publish or perish". *I think the syndrome that places more emphasis on research makes lecturers to be more committed to research and by so doing they discover new things always [sic]*' (F2).

Finally, two of the participants attributed the low quality of Nigerian university graduates to little attention given to teaching effectiveness, they stressed that institutional policies are not geared towards making students' learning a priority (A3, E2). One respondent mentioned that,

I think you will agree with me that placing a yardstick to measure quality will means wasting of time[sic]. These aforementioned issues need to be dealt with first before you can actually set a standard to follow (E2).

Poor Internal Quality Assurance:

Several interviewees mentioned that quality assurance activities, as an approach to organizing work that sets in place a system to check that the programmed activities are carried out according to its plan, are even not measurable. Three of the participants mentioned that on many occasions the way the personnel in the quality assurance unit are set up is wrong and therefore they produce less effective results (C2, D3, F2). One of the interviewees expressed that,

I think sometime universities just set up this unit as part of the requirement of NUC to manage the institution but in practical they are less empower to carry out the duties they should be doing[sic] (F2).

Two informants were of the view that the misrepresentation of the quality assurance unit is a major factor that causes lot of confusion in the management of university quality (A2, B2). One of the informants mentioned that,

I believe the unit checks issues relating to the management of infrastructural facilities and not the university activities. Tell me if you now ask these set of people to measure quality, what will they measure?[sic] (B2).

Four participants were of the opinion that, to ensure internal control and quality assurance, student intake and quality of university products must be controlled right from the admission stage, rather than focusing solely on the material (B2, C3, E1, F1). Three interviewees were quick to conclude that very few universities give room for the internal quality assurance unit to operate because they always see them as fault finders (A3, C3, F2). One of these respondents mentioned,

I believe, you know, that nobody like been corrected especially the academia. You cannot tell them anything because they belief they know more than you, and that is why it is very difficult for us to more forward [sic] (F2).

Another respondent highlighted that,

You know I mention admission the other time, it is because it is the main activities of a university, sometime universities (I mean the management) always fail to consider that as much as checking that the audit unit check the procurement and contractors working for the university, it is important to check all the process of university administration are quality assured[sic] (C3).

Five participants explained that quality in any university goes beyond just measuring activities, they share that the intended purpose of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) is to check the authenticity of National Examination Council (NECO) and West-African Examination Council (WAEC) scores and grades to make sure quality students are admitted into the university (A2, C2, D3,

E3, F2). Four of the respondents mentioned that on top of the activities of NECO, WEAC and JAMB, universities now conducted their own internal quality assurance to validate the process of admission process (B2, D3, F1, F2). One of the interviewees share that, 'yes, these processes are in place, they are good but they have all failed in one way or the other' (D3).

Another respondent expressed that,

I tell you, these process of admission have been wrongly managed from policies to implementation, all the process that are supposed to assure quality are not due to many reason mostly centred around nepotism [sic] (F1).

By extension, one interviewee shared that,

I am not surprise that you asking these type of questions, I am sure you hitting the nail on the head but my fear is who will take this work further because we evaluate wrongly here in the university[sic] (F2).

Yet another informants lamented that,

I have been working in the university for the past 30years. I don't know a certain model that the university is using to measure quality, maybe you will tell me one if you know? Therefore all these problems can be looked into but it will be difficult to measure, again measure what? (D3).

All participants agreed that if quality will be assured in the university someone must first take care of nepotism, fraud, examination malpractice and other minor or major associated problems. One of the respondents mentioned that,

Just as I mentioned earlier, I expected that, the POST-JAMB Policy would prevent morally bankrupt students from gaining admissions (B2).

Other respondents expressed similar views:

I believe we need to understand what to do first before making attempt to measure any part of university activities if we want to get it right, otherwise we will continue to talk about the same thing over and over again[sic] (E1).

I have shared with my colleagues recently that it is time Nigerian university administrators start look at how they can develop a model that they will follow or use to support the system where they work rather than apportioning blames to other agencies[sic] (F1).

The responsibility to measure every activity of the university's business is the duty of the officers and everyone involved in the process of university management (C1).

Another respondent voiced that,

I am always worried when language and approach used in Western countries where everything's are working are applied in a country like Nigeria. I mean country where there is power, water, and road network, Internet to carry out research among others. Then if you ever choose to measure or compare your service with a pre-design approach then it is acceptable[sic] (E1).

The entire study sample agreed that the quality of Nigerian university activities are beyond mere measurement. They point out that no yardstick can be developed to take care of quality assessment and assurance activities without resolving the major problems of the universities, and if no department is created within each university to look into how each university will assure quality of their activities internally, then issues of whether or not the universities are doing their job will remain a topical issue in the country.

Conclusion

It is not a bad idea to make an attempt to measure quality, just as it is done in Western countries, but it would be a mistake to replicate features of measurement in Nigeria that are developed for use in university education elsewhere. This study was clear about the concept of not measuring quality of university education in Nigeria without first rectifying the fundamental issues that institutions are faced with. It is worth mentioning that from this study, it was clear that Nigerian university quality is beyond measurement and there is a need for the government to understand that the economic development of a nation can be contributed to through properly trained graduates of the university. At a time like this when the government and universities are struggling to fund institutions of higher, learning proper management of available funds becomes very important and administrators who are instrumental in the regime of university affairs should set up a monitoring team to see that university administrators abide by the regulations of the university.

The fact that this study claimed that quality cannot be measured accurately in the Nigerian university context does not necessary mean that there is no quality in Nigerian universities. It is important to mention here that quality means different things to different people and the study was not designed to probe the activities of Nigerian universities, but rather to expand our knowledge that there are issues that will make it impossible or impractical to measure quality just as it is done in the manufacturing (or other) sectors.

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