



## **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SKILL ACQUISITION IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focused on quality assurance and skill acquisition in Office Technology and Management for national development. In Nigeria today, there are abounding evidence of youth unemployment, decline in education standards and lack of needed skills among graduates from various tertiary institutions, with its attendant negative consequences. This work therefore examined the concept of quality assurance and how it can be infused into Office Technology and Management programme in our tertiary education institutions. The unique skills associated with the programme and their relevance to graduates is also x-rayed. The paper concluded that various education stakeholders should ensure that quality is maintained in the programme by adhering to laid down academic standards and guidelines. Finally, it was recommended that necessary resources (human and materials) be provided in the programme and that curriculum should be updated periodically amongst others.*

*Keywords: Quality assurance, skill acquisition, Office Technology and Management, National development, Sustainable Development and Education.*

### **Introduction**

Education is very vital in the training and development of human potentials in any nation, as it inculcates appropriate skills, values, knowledge, attitudes and work competencies in individuals for meaningful life and national development. Education invariably is therefore a sure key to a nation's development and sustainability. However, for some time now, the quality of education being provided in various institutions has been a source of great concern and worry to education stakeholders in Nigeria. The education bequeathed to Nigeria during the colonial era was said to be too "bookish" and partly irrelevant to African needs. According to Oduma (2012), at independence, Nigeria as a country, inherited a subservient type of education system meant only to provide and serve the needs of the colonial administration. Education then was geared towards providing personnel who can help the colonial masters to administer her Nigeria colony. Oduma went further to buttress that on that basis, the idea of self-employment with its attendant benefits were completely out of focus. Today, the Nigeria economy appears saturated with the magnitude population of educated unemployed graduates from various institutions of higher learning, roaming the street of urban and rural areas searching for non-existing white-collar jobs. To that extent, the general education systems has therefore failed to yield the desired result as it has not match with the expected pace of industrialization needed in the country. Graduates unemployment has in recent time been one of the major socio-economic problem in Nigeria society. In an attempt to ascertain the way forward and in direct response to the current socio-economic problems of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, questions are raised by concerned stakeholders on what would be the right type of education in Nigeria that would be suitable to propel sustainable development.



One of the proffered solutions was business education, with emphasis on Office Technology and Management programmes in Universities, polytechnics and Colleges of Technology. Office Technology and Management is described by Komolofe and Ajani (2010), as a work oriented educational programme that aims at skill acquisition which are useful and employable in the labour market. The duo further buttressed that the programme is designed to develop participant's skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciation of encompassing knowledge and information needed by individuals in order to enter and progress on employment on a useful and productive basis. The programme is therefore in conformity with one of the goals of National Policy on Education (NPE 2016), which laid emphasis on "the development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Quality Assurance:**

Quality education plays significant role in providing socio-economic activities that culminate in economic and national development. One of the specific goals of education is to ensure the delivery of quality education at all levels. Quality is about the standard of something when compared with other things. According to Stoller in Fadare (2015), quality is the degree to which an item or process meets or exceeds the users' requirement. Fadare further emphasized, that the quality of a programme is normally determined by the quality and quantity of the input. Office Technology and Management (OTM) is a qualitative programme of study, that provides skill, self-reliance, productive and responsive citizens who would find themselves functional and effective in the world of work. The concept of quality therefore led us to quality assurance. Quality assurance is a major challenge of Nigeria's educational system (NPE 2016). A critical look at the educational institutions reveals low standard in the quality of schools and their products. There exist in most institutions in Nigeria, infrastructural decay, obsolete facilities, poor teacher quality, cultism, examination malpractices, indiscipline and maladministration. All these are crystal indicator of the poor state of Nigeria education. For meaningful and sustainable national development, academic excellence should be the paramount concerned of all stakeholders and this should be complemented with sound character, emotional stability and respect for fellow citizens. Quality assurance as viewed by Abolade in Nwaiwu, Dikeocha and Opara (2013) from the educational angle, is the management of teachers, students, resources, school environment as well as teaching-learning activities so as to ensure that quality is maintained at every stage and that the products who emerge from the entire process conform to national norms, both in terms of academic achievement, moral development and social skill. Again, Maduwesi and Onyeachu in Esene (2013), posited that for quality assurance to be achieved, some strategies should be applied to achieve it. These include constant monitoring, evaluation, supervision, inspection, quality control and reporting: Esene further posited, that the guidelines specified by the National Board for Technical Education for Office Technology and Management (OTM) curriculum and course specification in order to achieve the minimum academic standards set for Nigeria polytechnics include: (a) Enhancing the



new OTM curriculum; Provision of adequate infrastructural facilities; Provision of adequate textbook and text-materials; Time management, adequate number of professionally and academically qualified lecturers. (b) Proper screening of candidates in order to ensure that only qualified students after ability and aptitude tests are administered on them; Adequate funding; Provision of functional instructional materials and equipment; Adequate provision of recreational centres; Visitation exercise to institution by National Board for technical education (NBTE) and other supervising bodies, to institutions to ensure that graduates of OTM compete favourably with their counterparts nationally and internationally through accreditation of programme and (c) Ensuring that institutional administrators, through deans, head of department and lecturers concerned with the conduct of examinations, tests, tutorials, quizzes, assignments, term and seminar papers presentations follow the laid down rules and regulations.

### **Quality in Higher Education**

The term quality assurance refers to “systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement” (Vroeijenstijn, 1995a). According to Watty (2003), a further review of the literature around change in higher education reveals two schools of thought: The first attaches quality to a context and as a consequence quality becomes meaningful if standards are observed and expectation met. (Baird, 1988; Fry, 1995; Nordvall and Braxton, 1996). For example, references to the quality of assessment, student intake, academic programmes, teaching and learning, the student experience and programme designs are not uncommon. Any attempt to define or attach meaning to the term is largely ignored and one is left to assume that it is ‘high’ quality that is being referred to as opposed to ‘good’ or ‘poor’ quality. A second way of thinking about quality relates to a stakeholder-specific meaning. Here quality is considered, having regard to a variety of stakeholders with an interest in higher education, each having the potential to think about quality in different ways. In particular, the early works of Vroeijenstijn (1992), Middlehurst (1992) and Harvey and Green (1993) highlighted the importance and value of considering quality from a variety of stakeholder perspectives. Harvey and Green (1993) identified five categories or ways of thinking about quality. As cited in Watty (2003) key aspects of each of these categories can be summarised as follows: Exception: distinctive, embodies in excellence, passing a minimum set of standards. Perfection: zero defects, getting things right the first time (focus on process as opposed to inputs and outputs). Fitness for purpose: relates quality to a purpose, defined by the provider. Value for money: a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, measuring outputs against inputs. A populist notion of quality (government). Transformation: a qualitative change; education is about doing something to the student as opposed to something for the consumer. Includes concepts of enhancing and empowering: democratisation of the process, not just outcomes.

Watty (2003) suggested that the dimension of quality as perfection can be removed, since higher education does not aim to produce defect-free graduates. Lomas (2001) suggests that fitness for purpose and transformation seem to be the two most appropriate definitions of quality, according to small-scale research with a



sample of senior managers in higher education institutions. In the view of Woodhouse (1999), quality assurance agencies can adopt one or more of these according to different educational systems and traditions. The three main approaches to quality are accreditation, assessment and audit. Accreditation and evaluation (which includes assessment and audit) differ in their perspectives. Both accreditation and assessment monitor the quality of teaching and learning, while audit focuses on internal procedures adopted by a higher education institution in order to achieve its objectives.

### **Accreditation**

Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution or programme meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. Obtaining accreditation may have implications for the institution itself and/or its students (eligibility for grants) (Woodhouse, 1999). The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources, and procedures of an institution or programme (Dill, 2000). The output of an accreditation is a yes/no decision, though graduations are also possible (Woodhouse, 1999). Accreditation is a widely used method in quality assurance in most countries. In the United States accreditation of both programmes and institutions is the main quality assurance method (Eaton, 2004). Accreditation of programmes is used on a regular basis by about half of the European quality assurance agencies. This method is frequently used in German-speaking countries, in the associated countries, by the Dutch and also Nordic and southern agencies. Accreditation of institutions is done on a regular basis by 22% of the agencies in Europe such as by German, Austrian agencies and some in the associated countries. US accrediting organizations also undergo a periodic external review based on specific standards; this process is known as 'recognition' (Eaton, 2004).

### **Assessment**

Assessment is an evaluation that makes graded judgements about quality, in this respect it goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary judgement (Dill, 2000). Assessment asks "how good are your outputs?" The output of an assessment is a quantitative evaluation, a grade (whether numeric, literal or descriptive) (Woodhouse, 1999). Programme and institutional assessments are widely used by European Quality Assurance Authorities. Programme assessment is one of the most frequently used methods. It is done on a regular basis by 53% of the European agencies, mainly in the Nordic, Dutch or English-speaking countries. Focusing on programmes is particularly frequent in the non-university sector. Institutional assessment is less widespread; 22% of the European agencies are using it regularly (ENQA, 2003).

### **Audit**

A quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives (Woodhouse, 1999). As cited in Woodhouse (1999) "ISO (Standards New Zealand, 1994) defines quality audit as a three-part process, checking 1) the suitability of the planned quality procedures in relation to the stated objectives; 2) the conformity of the actual quality activities with the plans; and 3) the effectiveness of the activities in achieving the stated objectives". Audit asks 'are your processes effective?' The output is a description of the extent to which the claims of



the higher educational institutions are correct (Woodhouse, 1999). Academic audits are carried out at the institutional level. However, unlike accreditation or assessment, audits do not aim at making a comprehensive review of a higher educational institution's or programme's resources and activities, nor do they directly evaluate the quality of teaching or learning. Rather audits focus on those processes implemented by HEIs in order to assure and improve the quality teaching and learning (Dill, 2000). In Europe, institutional audit is regularly used by 28% of the quality assurance agencies. It is used on a regular base in Ireland and the UK and by some of the agencies in Nordic and associated countries. The use of programme audits is not very common in European quality assurance (ENQA, 2003).

### **Level of Quality Review in OTM**

Subject to wide debate is whether the quality review should focus on the institutional level or, instead, on academic programmes. Practices vary widely amongst countries of the world. In Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal and even Nigeria, the focus is on academic programmes, while in some higher educational institutions in Germany the reviews focus on the institutional level. In the United Kingdom and Ireland both institutional and programme reviews are carried out. Outside of Europe, many countries have begun with institutional reviews but, as their systems experienced growth in professional fields of study, there has been a trend towards programme-wide approaches (El-KhawasPietro, Nielson, 1998).

### **Scope of evaluation**

The scope of quality assurance authorities (QAAs) varies considerably between and within different national education systems. A first categorization can be made by territorial level. Agencies may carry out evaluations of higher educational institution in a determined region, as it is the case in those countries where education is the responsibility of regional entities (Canada, United States, Belgium, Germany, Spainetc). In other countries national QAAs operate all over the National territory.

A second categorization is by type of HEI. In some countries agencies cover both university and non-university HEIs (Germany, Iceland, United Kingdom, Nordic countries except Sweden, Portugal among others.) In others, separate agencies are responsible for quality assurance in the university and non-university sector. In both cases, a further distinction can be made between public and private HEIs (Van Damme, Campell, 2004).

### **Agencies and Organizationsinvolved in Quality Assurance**

The identity of the relevant stakeholders in higher education and how their interests may be utilised in the context of quality assurance is subject to discussion in the literature. The first question is whether stakeholders should be actively involved in quality assurance processes or whether the reviews should involve only quality assurance agencies and academics. Also, if stakeholders should have an active role, the question is what organisational implications this could have within quality assurance systems (Thune, 1998).

**Government body:** Government bodies often play an important role in the quality assurance of higher education. In the US for instance, the United States Department of Education, a federal agency is one of the two institutions that carry out the recognition



of accrediting agencies (Eaton, 2004). Similarly, in Japan independent evaluation bodies must be recognised by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology (Kimura Yonezawa and Ohmori., 2004).

**Autonomous agency:** Almost all European countries have an agency co-coordinating quality assurance. External quality assurance agencies are usually established either by the national or regional government or by the HEIs themselves, often at the requirement of the government. The agency is by nature an independent organisation with a steering body. However, institutions and government may be represented on the board of the quality assurance agency, or contribute to the funding of the agency or evaluations (QAANZ, 1999). In Europe, the main source of funding of quality assurance in higher education is the government, but also the HEIs are a source of funding in 1/3 of the cases (ENQA, 2003). In Denmark, evaluation system is owned by the government, while the Dutch system has both a government owned and a university owned level (Thune, 1996). The QAAs that are not funded by government are in virtually all cases funded by the evaluated higher education institutions.

**Other stakeholders:** Generally, other stakeholders (students, graduates, employers, government and other budget providers) have a limited role in the European quality assurance procedures. An example for participation of other stakeholders can be seen in Denmark, where the expert panels always include employer representatives and extensive surveys are conducted of the attitudes of employers, recent graduates and students in the evaluation processes. Sweden, where students are included in the expert panels can be mentioned as another example (Thune, 1998).

### **Imperative for Employable Skills Development in Nigeria**

A greater proportion of workers in Nigeria today, have literacy and other basic skills deficiencies in terms of the levels of what most workplaces today require. The higher level skills list includes literacy, basic, employability, essential, job-specific, sector-specific, technology and advanced office procedure, as well as, a wide variety of basic technical skills including vehicle and pump repair, house and building construction, furniture making, printing and book binding, etc. Absence of these skills are viewed as contributing to decreased economic performance, productivity, innovation and quality of life via wage and consumer sustainability. Generally, investing in knowledge and skills is seen by many governments as the cornerstone of developing an employable and globally competitive work force. A skilled and knowledgeable work force improves the investment climate because skilled workers create an attractive economic environment for investors. The returns to increasing investments in skills development tend to be high in rapidly growing economies, and can be low or non-existent in situations characterized by weak growth and poor governance. Nigeria is terribly lagging behind in preparing its labour force for the 21st century economy. Dike (2000) contends that no nation would make any meaningful socioeconomic stride without well-equipped technical and vocational institutions. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have noted that revitalizing this important sector is among the best ways to improve economic opportunities for the youths. Today, every facet of the economy



has been affected by lack of adequate skilled technicians. The financial sector lacks technicians to regulate the banks and to develop financial software to properly tackle the rising fraudulent activities in the banking sector. The society lacks skilled technicians: bricklayers, carpenters, painters and auto mechanics; laboratory and pharmacy technicians, electrical/electronic technicians and skilled vocational nurses, secretaries, etc). The half-baked roadside mechanics in the society, Dike noted because more harm to vehicles when contracted to service vehicles, and because of poor training, some of the commercial drivers have sent many people to their early death. The shabby performance of Nigeria's house builders (mason/bricklayers, etc) resulting to collapsed buildings in most parts of the country is no longer news. All these require technical skills that could be obtained in technical and vocational programme.

It cannot be overemphasized that technical education is the engine for economic growth. Dike (2000) argues that no nation can fight a war without an army; which in the same token, Nigeria cannot develop without well-equipped technical and vocational institutions. In fact, he sees it as the missing link in Nigeria's development policy. Because of poor training and ineffective institutions, Nigeria suffers from low productivity. But the progress of any society lies in the productivity of its citizens. Higher productivity gives a nation advantage of economies of scale and lowers the costs of production and prices of goods and services. Skills, properly harnessed can open doors to economically and socially rewarding jobs and can help the development of small informal-sector businesses, allow the re-insertion of displaced workers and migrants, and support the transition from school to work for school drop-outs and graduates. Ultimately, developing job-related competencies among the poor, the youth and the vulnerable is recognised as crucial to progress in reducing poverty. The development of job-related skills is, therefore, not only part of any government's human resource strategies but also of their economic-growth and poverty-reduction strategies. For example, the inclusion of a skills-development component in any country poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) and national development plans is, thus, becoming more common. South Africa, for example, has put the development of skills at the centre of the new Country Development Strategy (Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative-AsgiSA), which aimed at halving poverty and unemployment since 2014. Skills and competencies can be acquired either through structured training in public or private institutions/designated centres or through practical experience on the job in enterprises. It is generally recognized (and is key to the ILO Decent Work Agenda) that the development of relevant skills is an important instrument for improving productivity and working conditions, and the promotion of decent work in the informal economy, which represents the major employer in Nigeria.

For over two decades now, experience has shown that unemployment problem has become endemic in the Nigeria economy. So many reasons are accountable for the scourge of unemployment in Nigeria. It is the candid opinion of some Nigerians, that the jobs exists in the global market, but the people with the right skills are not found because of the much emphasis on paper or academic qualifications. Nyanabo and Ahukannah in Odiachi (2015), posited that employees need creative, flexible and visionary skills in this new millennium to be able to cope effectively and efficiently at



the local and global work environment. Skill acquisition according to Daniel in Ejeka and Mgbonyebi (2016), is a learned response, often as a result of specific training which afford someone the ability to perform a particular task and achieve a particular objective. Similarly, Bleak in Uzor and Ike (2010), described skill as ability to do something well, gained through training and experience. The duo further pin-pointed, that skill is one's personal competencies in the performance of specific tasks, acquired after a period of training or experience. Skill therefore involves a practical knowledge, coupled with clearness, expertise, dexterity and ability to carry out a duty which must have been acquired or learnt in a formal or informal setting through learning, practice and experience. In the world of business, those with relevant multi-skills and office competencies, coupled with entrepreneurial zeal have better chances of gainful employment and personal exploit.

### **The nature of OTM programme in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions**

Office technology and management is one of the educational programmes offered by Universities, Polytechnics and colleges of technology under the supervision of NUC and NBTE, these agencies have the responsibility of ensuring quality and high standard of academic programme. According to Oyinkoye and Oluwalola (2010), office technology and management is a new nomenclature that emerged to replace the former secretarial studies programme and was introduced by NBTE in 2004. Similarly, Ohakwe and Njoku in Esene and Ovbiagele (2014), noted that between Wednesday 17th November, 2004 and Friday 26th November 2004, the UNESCO Nigeria project in support of revitalization on Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) in Nigeria, held a workshop at Kaduna on a "Train the-Trainer", for the review of business and management curricular for polytechnics. The review was aimed at producing office technology and management graduates who could be effective on their management roles and have the confidence and practical skills necessary to put theory into practice. The present OTM curriculum presently in operation has been described as having apparent merits because of UNESCO assistance during their view which introduced an international perspective in the curricula and enable the recipients to benefit from some of the best practices around the world. This joint effort brought the convergence of computer, telecommunication, the internet and microelectronics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills that were lacking in the curricular that produced secretaries in Nigeria in the past. The programme is therefore, an educational programme meant for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, office ethics, work habits and competencies needed to prepare the individual to enter gainful employment in specific business and office occupation.

### **Objective of OTM Programme in Nigerian Polytechnics**

According to Uteh and Ihuekwumere (2013), the National Board for Technical Education NBTE (2004) office technology and management programme is structured to achieve the following grand objectives:

- Equipping individuals with office secretarial skills.



- Creating general entrepreneurship awareness in the students with a view to inculcating in them the right knowledge for productive purpose.
- Laying foundations for advance studies.

Ahukannah (2008), further added that owing to the development in information and communication technology, teachers in OTM education are mandated to equip students with the following competencies to ensure quality and also produce global graduates that can:

- provide office document and reports, using word processing.
- produce numerical information, using spreadsheets.
- produce office information in graphic form;
- manipulate access and retrieve information from computer based system;
- access a wealth of information in internet through the knowledge of webpage and
- manipulate office tools, and other modern technologies found in the virtual office.

### **Quality assurance, skill acquisition and their relevance in OTM programme.**

In their study of the idea of skills shortage, Shah and Burke (2005) propose a typology that reserves the term 'shortage' for situations where in:

- There are few people who have the essential technical skills who are not already using them and,
- There is a long training time to develop the skills and/or
- The capacity of training organisations in the relevant field is fully utilised.
- There are few people who have the essential technical skills who are not already using them but
- There is a short training time to develop the skills and/or
- The capacity of training organisations can be readily expanded.
- There are sufficient people who have the essential technical skills who are not already using them, but they are not willing to apply for the vacancies under current conditions.
- There are sufficient people with the essential technical skills, not already using them, who are willing to apply for the vacancies, but who lack some qualities that employers think are important.

For a clearer understanding, the Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations in 2006 makes the following distinctions when considering the extent and nature of a skill shortage:

- *Skill shortages exist when employers are unable to fill or have considerable difficulty in filling vacancies for an occupation, or specialised skill needs within that occupation, at current levels of remuneration and conditions of employment, and reasonably accessible location.*
- *Skill gaps occur where existing employees do not have the required qualifications, experience and/or specialised skills to meet the firm's skill needs for an occupation. Workers may not be adequately trained*



*or qualified to perform tasks, or may not have up skilled to emerging skill requirements.*

The above skills ‘shortage’ all the same makes investment in OTM very relevant if we are to overcome the identified gap in the supply for these employable skills. Uteh and Iheukwumere in Ejeka and Mgbonyebi (2016) asserted that quality assurance in OTM programme means bringing together such variables as general pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, Knowledge of student, knowledge of strategies to sustain learning and knowledge to use technology to produce a competent graduate. It also stands for the effective response by OTM programme to the challenges posed by global, local and technology related forces in producing OTM graduates. Quality assurance is important in OTM programme in order to ensure qualitative teaching and learning. To this effect, Adegbesam in Idih and Umunnah (2013), outlined the following major relevance of quality assurance in OTM programme in tertiary institutions:

- To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in office education.
- To ensure and maintain high standards of education at all levels.
- To assist in monitoring and supervision of office education at all levels
- To determine the quality of teachers input.
- To determine the number of classroom needed based on the average control of office education.
- To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control of office education and;
- To determine how the final resources available for quality education could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

The relevance of skill acquisition in OTM cannot be overemphasized. Skills and office competencies acquired in the programme prepares its recipients with multi-skills necessary to function efficiently in the modern office. Esene in Agbongiasede (2014), outlined the following skills and office competencies need of OTM to include, ability to use ICT equipment for communication, ability to manage information at the right time, ability to recognize and utilize office automation, ability to communicate effectively, using oral and written skills, ability to acquire management and supervisory skills, knowledge of accounts, costing and preparing financial statement, ability to acquire the knowledge of law and ability to recognize trends such as technological trends and government action amongst others.

Quality assurance in OTM is enforced through adequate monitoring, evaluating, supervision and inspection of programme, funding and quality control. Also to establish high standards, NBTE is expected to have a share responsibility with the institution’s management in addressing key areas such as minimum academic standards, accreditation, carrying capacity, admission quota and students enrolment, product/research programmes, structures, utilities and infrastructures.

## **Conclusion**



National development that culminates in sustainable development of a nation is the core desire of any responsive government. In achieving this feat, high premium is placed on functional educational programme that ensures qualitative education (quality assurance). Office technology and management, an academic programme of study in tertiary institutions is adduced as one of such programmes that is geared towards national development, as it lays emphasis on skill acquisition, development of office competencies, work habits, positive attitude and socio-psychological skills needed to propel the work force of the 21st century.

### **Recommendations**

Arising from the discussions and the conclusions arrived at this work, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be adequate supply of manpower needs in OTM programme (academic and non-academic staff), for efficient implementation of the programme in higher institutions.
2. Regulatory agencies, such as NBTE should pay periodic visit to institutions offering OTM programme to ensure that standard are maintained without compromise.
3. The provision of modern office technologies and other school facilities should be provided in OTM programme to encourage academic activities.
4. Well qualified educators should only be engaged in the programme for academic excellence and re-training should be periodically organized for them to update their knowledge.
5. The curriculum and instructional methods should be re-examined periodically for relevance.

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