

ACHIEVING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT THROUGH THE ERADICATION OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES

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Abstract

The National Policy on Education (NPE) recognized Polytechnic and Colleges of Technology as tertiary Institutions (Higher Education) in Nigeria whose sole aim is to produce middle-level manpower to man the various sectors of the economy. The paper examined how to achieve quality assurance in Office Technology and Management through the eradication of examination malpractices. The nexus between effectiveness and assuring quality is a fundamental requirement particularly for Office Technology and Management graduates, where deficient graduates could infect the organization with incompetence and corrupt further the organization and economy. Deriving from the NPE's goals of tertiary education, the paper ex-rays the activities of NBTE as quality assurance agency for the ND and HND programmes of Office Technology and Management and highlights some challenges to quality assurance at those levels. The paper therefore offers recommendations among which are that each Polytechnic should establish a special quality assurance unit to monitor adherence to minimum academic standards; and a huge investment on knowledge and use of ICT to the Office Technology and Management.

Introduction

Quality assurance connotes upholding the most acceptable standard in the execution of all manner of activities that constitute educational institutions' operations. While quality refers to adherence to the finest standard, assurance depicts freedom from uncertainty. This freedom from uncertainty can be achieved in Office Technology and Management through the eradication of examination malpractices in the department.

Examination malpractice is a misconduct and improper practice in any examination, with a view to obtaining excellent results through fraudulent actions. This social menace has crept into the fabrics of all levels of the educational sector in the country with its inherent devastating effects. Examination malpractice ranges from cheating (copying from another person's work or extraneous materials brought into the examination hall, impersonation, plagiarism, unauthorized communication, influencing an examination official, unauthorized change of sitting position, disobeying examination instructions, possession of examination materials e.g. examination question papers before the examination, attacking or threatening of invigilators e.t.c. Examination malpractices in short are now a national problem.

According to (Njoku, 2006) during the colonial regime, there was scarcely any form of examination malpractice in Nigeria. Good moral upbringing and intellectual excellence characterized our educational system. People work hard and there was a healthy academic competition in institutions of learning throughout the country. People maintained their intellectual and cultural virtues and integrity in all spheres of lives. They held high and firm their aspiration as far as academic pursuit is concerned.

According to (Olajuwon, 2008) as a way of appraising the mismatch that has become endemic in tertiary level of education between policy and practice, one can point towards both internal and external factors. The internal factors would include strikes, inadequate employers' motivation and weak accountability for educational performance. Some of the external factors comprise of prevalence of corruption among stakeholders, shortage of qualified manpower, inadequate funding, inconsistent government policy which comprise of merit in admission practice among several others. El-Rufai (2006) traces the pitiable state of Nigeria's educational system to declining morale, flight of talent, ill-equipped libraries and laboratories, the open and shut syndrome, the sceptre of violence and cultism, explosion in students' enrolment and self-triggering re-direction of value system.

Literature Review

According to Okebukola (2010) quality is an all-encompassing term that include a host of activities that are put together to facilitate the finesse of input, process and output of the tertiary education system. He states further that the major thrust of quality assurance covers activities an institution engages in to assure itself that it is on course to fulfilling its vision and mission in terms of quality of input process and output. Examination malpractice on the other hand is an attempt to pass an examination or obtain positive result in an examination by not following the official laid down rules of such examination. He equally averred that, sometimes examination malpractice could be an act by someone to make another person fail an examination, which that person would have otherwise passed (Okonji, 2006). Examination malpractice is an illegally, an unacceptable etiquette, an act or any act(s) of misconduct such as leakage, impersonation, writing on hidden parts(s) of waxes, encoding/decoding of the fingers for objectives tests, exchanges of question papers and answer booklets committed before, during or after the examination by either student taking the examination or by officials assigned with the administration, evaluating or measuring the examination result.

Causes of Examination Malpractices

Examination malpractice is a by-product of societal ills. Its astronomical rise and the innovative manners employed by the cheat to perpetrate this ugly menace is what is now causing sleepless nights and concern to stakeholders, government and parents at large. Some authors, researchers and experts in various field adduced reasons for the continuous increase in examination malpractice. These are amply elucidated below:

- (a) Over-Crowding in schools and examination halls: Denga (1983), tagged this as an environmental factor. He posited that most classrooms/theatres are often over-crowded hall can never guarantee a very good atmosphere for effective supervision of any examination, particularly when the supervisors of such examination are very few. Such an atmosphere would definitely encourage cheating and various vices in an examination.
- (b) Again, the much importance placed on certificates and paper qualifications in our society, irrespective of how they are obtained is a major cause of examination malpractice. According to Okonkwo (1976), the society is to be blamed for such misconduct because of its respect for mere paper qualification and presentation at the detriment of real knowledge and skill acquisition.
- (c) Moreso, the change in societal values is another reason for the increase in examination malpractices in schools. According to Nkwokocha (1980), the society to him, no longer gives values to honesty, patience, industriousness and social ethics. Good etiquettes are no longer praised or encouraged. For instance, some parents contribute in this menace by buying 'Live question papers' or even hire people to sit for examination on behalf of their wards. This is totally disheartening and repugnant.
- (d) Truancy, Absenteeism and Laziness are factors that results in examination malpractices. A student that is lazy, absent from school always and indulges in truancy would certainly be ill prepared for any examination and as such the only alternative therapy would be to indulge in examination malpractice. For the lazy students, the lack interest in studying their books. Such students are found dissipating their time through partly attendance, and partaking in wasteful expenditure and expeditions that are not academic.
- (e) According to Bunza (1996), unqualified teacher and lack of adequate infrastructural facilities have equally been identified as some of the causes of examination malpractices. If students are ill-taught either because the teacher is inexperienced or not qualified, the assimilation rate of the students will be jeopardized. This situation can be aggravated, if the equipment and facilities for training are lacking or insufficient. Coupled with these, are non-completion of syllabus before terminal examination. These can affect the students adversely, particularly when the desire and spirit to pass at all costs is already built within them. Bunza went further to add that constant closure of schools, inadequate proper tutelage, immorality in the wider society, inadequate supervision of teachers by inspectors, tying of promotion of teachers to excellent performance of candidates in public examinations, high enrolment fees and lack of confidence on the part of students are the causes of examination malpractices in our education institutions.

Forms of Examination Malpractices

Evidence from renowned researchers depicts that examination malpractices take different forms. The following are identifiable as emphasized by Ivowi (1993) and Denga (1998):

- (a) **Impersonation:** Impersonation involves pretending to be somebody whom you are not. It is deliberately done to deceive people about real personality. As regards examination malpractices, it is the act of impersonation for another students or entering into an agreement with another person to be impersonated for the purpose of writing examination or test or carrying out laboratory or other given assignments on behalf of another person. Impersonation which is a misconduct has surprisingly, grown in dimension and complex in our educational institutions in Nigeria. It is prevalent in our secondary and tertiary institutions with its attendant effects of backwardness.
- (b) **Examination Leakage and Possession of Examination Materials Before The Actual Examination:** Examination leakages involves passing out examination question paper which ought to be highly confidential to students illegally before the actual examination. In Nigeria the first major incidence of examinations malpractices (leakages) was in 1914, when the Senior Cambridge Local Examination leaked. The incidence took an unprecedented rise in 1967, 1977, 1981 and 1987 when two public examinations leaked. The aftermath was the promulgation of Decree 27 of 1973, and miscellaneous decree 20 of 1984 to curb examination malpractices by the Federal Government of Nigeria.
- (c) **Plagiarism:** This is the act of presenting the ideas or words of another as one's own. It can be through dubbing from others work without due acknowledgement or referencing of the source. It is an unacceptable form of academic behaviour.
- (d) **Insult/Assault on an examination officials or unauthorized change or sitting position in the examination:** Insult or assault words or any physical attack on them. It can lead to intimidation of examiners and consequent collapse of education if left unchecked. Changing of sitting positions in the examination hall arises when a student who has nothing to write or ill-prepared changes his or her sitting position in hall, with the sole aim of copying from a co-student. It is an abnormal trend which should be curbed.
- (e) **Smuggling of Relevant Materials into the Examination Hall:** Smuggling of unauthorized relevant materials into the examination hall with the intent to copy from it into the answer booklet of an examination is a form of cheating. This illegal act has been nick-named 'omo kirikiri', 'reminder', 'bullet', 'backup' etc. They are all devices by students to cheat in examinations in order to gain unmerited advantages.

The lists of methods adopted to perfect examination malpractices are inexhaustible. Others are through mass cheating, networking, and refusal to submit answer script at the end of examination in the hall, refusal to complete malpractices forms and victimization of students by invigilators resulting from previous misunderstanding. These have given great concern to stakeholders in education, as its menace has given rise to the present falling standard in education.

Agents of Examination Malpractice

From the facts and data gathered in the process of this study, some agents of examination

malpractices are: the students, the parents/guardians, schools' management and their staff and examination officers. This view is further supported by the works of Aina (1993) and Bunza (1996). Most often, parents/guardian go in search of 'live' question papers for their wards in some national examinations and some even go to the extent of bribing examiners or invigilators. In some institutions, school heads and teachers, collect huge sums of money illegally in order to aid, abet and connive with students to cheat during examinations. This is highly regrettable.

Again, examination malpractice is also perpetrated by indolent students. Some students are never at anytime serious with their studies and yet desire to make good results. For such students, the last option is to indulge in examination fraud to pass his/her examination.

Effects of Examination Malpractices

The problems associated with examination malpractices are numerous and has enormous adverse effects on students and nation's education system. Some of its devastating effects are discussed below:

- (a) **Falling Standards in Education:** This one of the ominous consequence of examination malpractice which is a gradual decline in the standard of education. The former Nigeria President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo stated that by 2010, if educationist and stakeholders do not pay attention on the re-orientation and re-channelling of the youths at the post-primary schools to a more acceptable and drastic reduction in examination malpractices, the nation's educational standards is bond to rot in pains. Therefore, examination malpractices bring distortion in our educational manpower development as well as societal values. The end result is decrease in productivity.
- (b) **Rustication and Suspension from School:** Examination malpractices can result in the rustication and suspension of culprits from an institution. There are laid down laws in schools guiding examination malpractices. Any one caught and convicted is made to face rustication or suspension from the school. Such punitive measure can be devastating and frustrating.
- (c) **Decrease in Productivity and Disillusionment:** A citizen brought up through the formal or informal education, but succeeded through various examination malpractices or misconducts, can hardly contribute meaningfully to the economic growth of any society. For instance, a secretary who went through higher institutions by means of examination malpractice environment cannot effectively perform in the office. Such staff cannot plan effectively in the office, would be inefficient in the organization or controlling the office and may not even be able to communicate effectively in oral or written form. In the situation described above, the resultant effect is a state of static or declining productivity. In order words, examination malpractice brings about poor performance at the macro and micro levels of the economy.

Strategies for the eradication of examination malpractices

In order to eradicate examination malpractices in our educational systems, the following strategies should be adopted:

- (1) Elimination of sexual harassment of students: Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conducts of sexual nature that has purpose or effect of substantially interfering with a person's work, performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive academic environment on the students. This is one of the most sensitive problems in our academic environments. Some lecturers are known to have sexually harassed their students with a threat of failing them in the examination.
- (2) Eradication of Corruption: Some lecturers believe that they must get something extra before they do the job they are paid to do. They sale grades and do other things unnecessary just to enrich themselves at the expense of academics.
- (3) Not doing what you have the right to do. That you have the right to do a thing does not mean it is right.

Statutorily, three bodies are charged by the Federal Government of Nigeria to regulate, harmonize and set minimum academic standards for the core higher institutions in the country. They are the National Universities Commission (NUC) founded in 1964, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) founded in 1977 and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) established in 1989. The practice of quality assurance in Office Technology and Management Department in tertiary institutions can be internal and external. Even though it can be seen that the external quality assurance is more visible and largely emphasized than the internal among Nigeria's Polytechnics. Quality assurance involves the process of monitoring, assessing and evaluating based on laid down best standard, and communicating value worth of existing order to concerned quarters as a way of ensuring standard and consistently making operations accountable and amendable to positive changes (Iliyas and Mohammed, 2012)

The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) is by law mandated to assure quality at the National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) levels in Nigeria Polytechnics. This agency releases constantly revised and updated minimum academic standard for prospective ND and HND holders. It as well undertakes the process of various forms of accreditations of academic programmes. The supervisory roles of NBTE constitute a significant extrinsic quality assurance mechanism on the Polytechnic system. The others in this category are the external moderation of the Polytechnics' examinations, occasional visitation panels raised by visitors (President and State Governors as the case may be) of the various Polytechnic among others.

The concept of school effectiveness has been variously described. Ayoku (2005) list scales used in measuring school effectiveness as employment satisfaction, professional

development, student carrier development and system openness. These scales, Ayoku compressed to moral dimension, academic dimension and external dimension. Ogunsaju (2005) identifies three parameters as to the determination of school effectiveness, namely school achieving its goals, maintaining itself internally and adapting itself to the challenges of the host community.

However, for the ND and HND levels of education of the Office Technology and Management to achieve its pre-determined objectives in relations to the National Policy on Education (NPE), there is the need for a quality assurance mechanism (internal and external) that would be responsive, functional in real terms and that which would meet best international practices. This is germane to meeting the target of Education For All (EFA), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) and the vision 2020.

The Goals of Tertiary Education

According to the National Policy on Education (2009), the following are the basic goals of tertiary education in Nigeria:

- i. Contribute to national development through high relevant manpower training;
- ii. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
- iii. Develop and inculcate proper value for the survival of the individual and society;
- iv. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self reliant; and useful member of the society;
- v. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- vi. Forge and cement national unity; and
- vii. Promote national and international understanding.

The NPE intend to pursue the actualization of these goals through teaching, research and development, robust staff development, and so on. In spite of the flowery tone and lofty optimism contained in this policy, realistic appraisal of what really obtains in the institutions manifest a mismatch between plan (the policy) and what is practically implemented. The simple question therefore is why has the operations of these institutions not lead to the attainment of the noble visions enshrined in the national policy for the strata?

As a way of appraising the mismatch that has become endemic in tertiary level of education, one can point towards both internal and external factors. The internal factors would include strikes, inadequate employer's motivation and weak accountability for among stakeholders, shortage of qualified manpower, inadequate funding, inconsistent government policy and compromise (2006). El-Rufai (2006) traces the pitiable state of Nigeria's educational system to declining morale, flight of talent, ill-equipped libraries and laboratories, the open and shut syndrome, the sceptre of violence and cultism, explosion in students' enrolment and self triggering re-direction of value system.

Assuring Quality

Making quality assurance a discourse as it relates to effective Office Technology and Management Education in particular and the Polytechnic education in general focus would have to be sustaining effectiveness in the operations of the ND and HND programmes of the Polytechnics in tandem with national aspirations for that stratum of the Polytechnic education system and the secretarial profession. Others include, help teachers to adapt into the social life of the society and further their commitment to national aspirations, and so on. To properly appraise the situation, it is apt to restate that at the moment, external and internal measures are employed to assure quality in the Polytechnic system. The internal measures include moderation of examinations questions and results by competent academic in relevant field outside the staff list of the Polytechnic (Senior Lecturer and above). Departmental and Schools' moderation of examination questions and results; and academic board perusal, moderation and confirmation of examination results.

However, external quality assurance measure is the exclusive preserve of National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). This Board does this in two ways apart from setting out a uniform minimum academic standard that all Polytechnics are expected to meet and be guided by. The minimum academic standard contains programme of studies (courses) approved for the ND and HND programmes, staff (academic and non-academic) entry requirement and mobility guidelines and basic plants required for effective operations of studies leading to the award of both ND and HND certificates among other things.

The NBTE system of measuring quality therefore are:

- i. Routine re-accreditation of programmes; and
- ii. Accreditation of new programmes.

The routine re-accreditation of programmes has five year duration. A programme accreditation would enjoy that clearance until the fifth year when such programme would be re-accredited. In the same vein, a programme given interim accreditation would have to be fully accredited after the first year. However, a programme denied accreditation would not admit new students graduate.

The new programme accreditation of NBTE on Polytechnic is done when Polytechnics desire to mount a new academic programme. A resource visit is carried out to assess available human and material resources for the academic programme. Consequent upon this visit, students are admitted and in the second year of study by the students, full accreditation is carried out to generally evaluate the extent of compliance to specifications in the minimum academic standard with regards to staff, materials and plants.

An appraisal of the process of ensuring quality and effectiveness at the ND and HND levels with relation to both internal and external bodies is that they should inspire and effect positive changes and sustain standards. Such processes, it is a process through which changes are initiated within existing forms.

Challenges to Quality Assurance at ND and HND Levels

A critical overview of the processes that constitute quality assurance at ND and HND

levels manifest quite a number of impediments that can be described as the sources of disconnect between the noble and inspiring goals of assuring quality and what really obtains. Okebukola (2010), identifies depressed funding, capacity deficit in Polytechnic administration and governance, political interference, low carrying of the Polytechnics and incidence of corruption as major areas of impediments to assuring quality through government agencies mandated to oversee minimum standard compliance over tertiary institutions (NUC, NBTE and NCCE).

Nevertheless, as all-encompassing as Okebukola's identified impediments are, it may yet be apt to give concise illustrations of those points as a way of contextualizing the impediments as found at the Polytechnics. A gloomy situation pervades the Polytechnics when in some cases management have to augment government subventions to meet monthly overhead cost (particularly among private owned Polytechnics), zero allocation for capital projects, dearth of consumables and ancillary network among several others suffice as evidence of depressed funding. Instances of perversion and compromise in staff recruitment, misplacement priority in allocation of funds, personnel and Polytechnic materials; disparity in emoluments of some cadre staff among states and between Federal and States owned Polytechnics and brain drain as manifestations of capacity deficit in Polytechnic administration. Other common cases of impediments to quality assurance procedures include hijack of management duties by governments to constituted governing council, undue meddlesomeness by Ministry of Education officials, and outright disregard for provisions of the Polytechnic enabling laws-political interference. Low carrying capacity affects attempts at ensuring quality in Polytechnics most. This is attributable to the stiffer admission procedure into the Universities which leave the too numerous tertiary education seekers with relative ease of admission. In this connection, most Polytechnics admit students for more than the available human personnel and material resources can reasonably sustain.

Conclusion

Quality assurance involves the process of monitoring, assessing and complying with standard and communicating judgments to all concerned to guarantee effectiveness in Office Technology and Management education. Even though the duties and mandate of NBTE as custodian of quality assurance is germane and quite desirable, an overhaul of the entire process is necessary. With the Polytechnics, formidable and reliable quality assurance structure should be instituted so that cases of window dressing and compliance only during NBTE accreditation would be eliminated. And that the NBTE accreditation should genuinely assure transformation in its supervision of ND and HND programmes in Nigeria Polytechnics. It is only when impediments to quality assurance are confronted by a consideration of suggestions offered and many more that the nation could attain effectiveness in its Polytechnic education programmes.

Recommendations

As long as there would be continuous need for holders of ND and HND in the nation's economy, it is imperative that enduring mechanism is put in place to constantly assure quality in the operations of Polytechnics in Nigeria. This becomes quite necessary now than ever before for the geometric rise in students enrolment, over stressed facilities, abnormally high student-teacher ratio and the seeming wide spread official endorsement of compromise among other salient challenges to school effectiveness at that level. The following are suggested as measures that can broaden quality assurance in Office Technology and Management in particular and Polytechnics in general:

- i. Close monitoring of continuous assessment scores by the department.
- ii. Establishment of examination malpractice committee in all the Polytechnics.
- iii. Immediate restoration of institutional autonomy. Cases of political interference and such external influences on Polytechnic administration should be checked by way of strict adherence to the statute establishing and guiding their operations. Only men and women of integrity and vast related experience in tertiary education should be appointed into Polytechnic Governing Councils.
- iv. Improved financial allocation and funding of Polytechnic Education. Cases of compromise of standard occasioned by lack of fund and instances of dilapidated infrastructures constitute great obstacles of effective Polytechnic education.
- v. Invest in the knowledge and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in all Office Technology and Management departments of Polytechnics. This, when well done, would make students of Office Technology and Management to benefit from modern trends of learning and knowledge; and would ease the process of monitoring quality for both internal and external agencies. With ICT, OTM data could be accessed easily; teaching and assessment of learning can be followed as they are carried out.
- vi. Establishment of a special quality assurance office/committee/unit by management for Office Technology and Management for each Polytechnic. This committee should be adequately mobilized and consist of officials of proven integrity renowned for fairness and quite impartial. Members of the committee should not be unduly large to make it effective. This committee would serve as internal watchdog as constantly reviewed by the NBTE. When this committee effectively carries out its task, the routine accreditation would become a mere formality and less tortuous for the Polytechnics and NBTE.
- vii. A review of NBTE operational strategies. The NBTE should evolve such internal checking mechanism that would make its assignments on Polytechnics devoid of any nepotism and corrupt tendencies. Since the verdict of NBTE is taken as sacred as to what institution is qualified to run ND and HND programmes, compromise of any form is a great disservice to the nation because of the implications of half baked graduates. NBTE should device means that would make its accreditations thorough, fair and impartial. Its verdict should truly be reflective of what abounds in government owned and especially privately owned Polytechnics in the country.

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