

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIA EDUCATION: THE MISSING LINKS

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Abstract

This article is a product of an intention to bring to bear the concept of quality assurance and its practice in Nigeria, mostly in the education industry. The target is to identify missing links believing its efficacy in developing the sector and its seeming observed failure in that direction. A critical analysis of the concept and the background for its emergence will lucidly ex-ray how it is supposed to be practiced for effectiveness. No doubt quality assurance has subsisted for a period in the education industry that is sufficient to create significant impact but the narrative does not appear to convincingly present it as one to be desired or cherished; hence the need to examine the missing links.

Keywords: Quality, assurance, education, goals, effectiveness.

Introduction

There is no better definition to education than the explanation by Daveny amplified by Aminigo (1999) that, education builds the individual for the society or the society for the individual. In other words, when society needs services, education builds individuals with those skills and when there are skills education also provides ideas with which society develops to occupy individuals in their different areas and rights. It is in this direction that, not just education but standard becomes central in any educational system. It is on this note too that standard is not for the sake of it but a basis for building not just the individual or the nation but that which will stand the test of time and also meet global expectations given that the quality of outcome is determined by the standard of the process of production.

The above arguments, if it is anything to hold, is the reason for which educators should always examine or appraise the process rather than the individual, the activities rather than the actors, the infrastructure rather than who supplied them viz-a-viz minimum acceptable standards with a view to ascertaining whether or not they could drive an outcome that will meet the required

quality of products anticipated by society. On this ground quality assurance finds a lasting place in the industry. If the above analogy is reliable then with quality assurance the standard of educational process will be reliable to drive a reliable outcome. It implies that, graduates or society or both will be meeting the developmental challenges of the day locally and internationally.

Then the question, do we have the needed skills for the society? Can we rely on our graduates? If these questions are difficult to answer in the affirmative then one is bound to ask further, is there anything wrong with the quality assurance programme or is the system faulty? The answer is there are likely missing links that must be closed; both in the quality assurance process itself, and in the industry. The reason being that if quality assurance is not yielding the desired results, and if the whole industry is not allowed to be quality assured, those areas that, are lacking will be deficient; and to detect which areas the gaps are prevalent, the concept, its history and indicators are critically analyzed in the following paragraphs.

What is quality Assurance?

Two words make the concept, hence, easier understood if they are first explained separately. The Advanced Learners Dictionary defines quality as “level of excellence, “a property or an attribute that differentiates a thing or person; the degree to which a man-made object or system is free from bugs and flaws as opposed to scope of functions or quantity of items”. Quality from the dictionary explanation is specific and is not about scope or quantity but how well or how good it is. It is also worthy of note here too that in considering quality, reference should always be made to others and the extent to which it satisfies users. It is therefore beyond global acceptance and modernity. For instance, the quality of biro cannot be measured on how beautiful it looks or how many or modern but how well it writes and how durable the ink when written.

Educational quality should not be measured by the number of schools, how modern facilities are, and not even how effective is teaching across the schools but how useful are the graduates and to what extent do the processes lead to the achievement of those useful graduates. In other words, no matter how sophisticated the classes, instructional materials, teaching methods, the level of education, teaching and so on, if they do not produce the graduates needed by society, the quality is questionable and vice-versa. In the same vein, no matter the degree or grade of

graduates and where they schooled, if they are unable to address the societal challenges the quality is in doubt.

Assurance on the other hand is defined in the Dictionary as “the state of being assured; firm persuasion, full confidence or trust, freedom from doubt; certainty or firmness of mind; undoubting, steadiness among others. “It can be explained from these definitions as condition of holding on to something without fear of interruption or interference. The confidence that something is in place uninterrupted. It is on the above explanations that Abiodun, John and Florence (2017) define quality Assurance as:

The process of assuring that the educational Outputs (graduating students) are processed with all required personal and quality programmes, facilities and materials to meet the global acceptance. It is a guarantee of confidence and certainty by a programme of studies given by institutions that standard is being maintained. . .

Quality Assurance is also defined as: “an all-encompassing concept which includes all processes, policies and actions through which the quality of basic education is developed, improved and maintained,” (Universal Basic Education – UBEC, 2012:2).

Eyinaya (2016) was more concise when he defined quality assurance as an internal mechanism that seeks to sustain minimum acceptable standard in education. Two concepts are obvious in the definitions above namely, ‘standard and sustenance. Quality cannot be thought about without reference to standard and standard will have no relevance if it is not sustained. Quality assurance is therefore an attempt to identify and sustain standard that can drive the achievement of educational goals and national development. However, it is worthy of note here that quality assurance will be clearer if a brief history about it is examined. Another important concept of quality Assurance is the scope (all encompassing) it implies that any attempt to down play quality assurance in any of the sections will deflect the system.

A Brief History of Quality Assurance

The history of quality assurance may not be long in words, paragraphs and pages; because the ideas and events are brief and few. The concept was borrowed into education from management (total quality management) in the second half of the 20th century. Total Quality Management, the root of quality assurance is credited to Deming William Edwards (1900 – 1993). It is a management theory that, in 1963 and 1986 emphasized on the need to eliminate wastes and improve quality for quality products. Stephen (2009) has a fair share of the history of quality assurance, linking it to the above background as will be seen in the following paragraphs.

As the industry developed, and mechanized factories started to be the dominant mode of manufacturing, each individual worker started to produce only small bits of a total product. They had no more control over the end product, and had less interest in it. To make sure that their factories were producing items that did not have defects (already observed) factory owners introduced inspectors who would only check a sample of completed items, assuring that their quality was representative of all the items produced. This led to the development of a whole series of different ways of defects to manufactured items. These are usually referred to as “quality control” mechanism.

As companies tried to reduce number of defects in their products, more and more complex control mechanisms were developed, quality Assurance” came out of attempts to prevent defects from using the knowledge of engineers as well as people who started to develop expertise in quality management systems and processes were developed to check on quality at all stages of production.

Total Quality Management (TQM) is the approach which is most often associated with quality assurance. It refers to systems which are developed to monitor all processes that are part of the work of an organization. Supporters of Total Quality Management Systems believe that their systems are different from earlier ideas of quality control. Instead of only looking at finished products, all the steps of the production process are examined. Many known commercial and business, organizations have subscribed to total quality management and the essence is to monitor the key processes of the subscribing organization to ensure that they are operating as they are supposed to. These bodies ensure that records are kept for all key processes. Advocates of this and similar models claim to ensure that organizations constantly improve at all levels. With the move from examining finished products to examining systems and processes, quality management started to be introduced in other areas of the economy. Quality systems are now compulsory in many areas of work and not just manufacturing. furthermore, quality assurance has become an accepted part of business. Since the 1970s, governments have been influenced by business models that have partly been based on a brief that business models are more efficient than the traditional bureaucratic models of governments. Also governments have tried to privatize some aspects of areas which used to be seen as government responsibility. Both of these factors have led to government being increasingly concerned with the regulations of different areas of work. As a result, governments have started to adopt ideas as quality assurance in businesses. In nearly all countries, governments have some responsibility for

education. This has led to the introduction of Quality Assurance as an important part of the organization. Nigeria is not an exception.

Ideas from the Definitions and Brief History

The definitions and brief history above have not only clarified the concept of quality assurance but have also brought to the limelight salient ideas that constitute it.

Quality Assurance is an integral part of the industry. Consequently, it is supposed to bear the burden of the industry with passion and commitment. The industry should, therefore, give the financial and administrative support it deserves, bearing in mind that not just the success, but the quality of quality assurance, quality of products, structures, and administration of any organization is an expression of quality Assurance.

Quality assurance is a shift from supervision and monitoring of finished products for sustenance of quality to monitoring and supervision of processes (activities) believing that quality process will lead to quality product.

No sector of the organization should be left out since no process is free. Hence, quality assurance should be seen from input, process to output/outcome including infrastructure.

Finally, quality should be determined by standard, which is the basis for ascertaining the acceptability of a product by the market, believing it will address both the problem of availability and ability to practically address the problem for which the commodity is bought successfully.

Quality Assurance in Nigeria

What appears more conspicuous in Nigeria education that expresses the departure from Universal Primary Education (UPE) [1975] to Universal Basic Education (UBE) is the emphasis on the inclusion of Quality Assurance in the UBE [1999]. However, the System seems not to be free from the known UPE problems which is an expression of the presence of missing links. To address this problem the system should be examined from the vision through the mission to practice.

Vision

To have a dynamic Quality Assurance service that ensures the delivery of high quality education of every child through collaboration with the other stakeholders. (Federal ministry of Education, Federal Inspectorate Service (2010)).

Mission

The ministry writes that: to support the improvement in the quality of educational provision and outcomes for pupil in all schools below tertiary level by:

1. Supporting and validating each school's own self-evaluation.
2. Undertaking quality Assurance (QA) external evaluation (Inspection) of schools on regular basis.
3. Providing regular support and challenge to schools.

Functions

The ministry added that to work with the National Agency for Quality Assurance; there is need to:

1. Schedule all QA external evaluations (Inspection of public and private schools over agreed cycles).
2. Coordinate, structure and deploy teams of QA evaluators (inspectors) to carry out external evaluations (inspections).
3. Quality assures the work of quality assurance evaluators (inspectors) by monitoring a sample of QA evaluators (inspectors) each year.
4. Coordinate the number of state evaluations (inspections) that will involve other quality assurance agents each year.
5. Coordinate logistical issues such as transportation and accommodation for quality assurance evaluators (inspectors) where such is needed.
6. Formulate, maintain and disseminate all necessary QA evaluation (inspection) related documentation to schools, quality assurance evaluators (inspectors) and the wider public.
7. Collate all QA evaluation (inspection) data and use this to identify state wide trends and patterns in the quality of education and disseminate this information to schools and the wider public by producing an annual report on the condition of education in the state and the country.
8. Provide or commission training for quality assurance evaluators (inspectors) and accredit and maintain a data base of all trained quality assurance evaluators (inspectors).
9. Establish a programme that provides support and challenge visits to aid school self-evaluation processes and improvement following QA evaluation (inspection).

Aspects Covered by Quality Assurance in Schools

Every system has three aspects namely, input, process, output/outcome. In the school and indeed educational system, these three sections also subsist. However, the focus of quality assurance is more on the process; even though the input and output/outcome still attract important attention. It implies that quality assurance is concerned with the activities and infrastructure of the school.

Practically, three aspects are considered in every whole school evaluation namely, quality of outcome, quality of provisions and quality of leadership and management. They are further subdivided in to seven aspects as will be discussed below. The essence is to ensure the sustenance of minimum standard believing that once it is sustained education perform its functions.

1. Quality of outcome

a. Quality of Achievement and Standard. The performance of students and pupils in the school. Their examinations, continuous assessment scores, and answers. They give to questions in class including test and assignment results are juxtaposed with set standards.

(b) Quality of Lsearners Personal Skills and Participation. The skills of pupils/students, how they attend school and classes, handle the biro, write and arrange their note books, participate in leadership, identification, labour (farm) and relationship with other learners, sports etc are evaluated.

(2) Quality of Provision: four (4) indicators are evaluated under this subheading thus:

(a) Teaching and learning

Evaluators always observe teaching and learning in the class during whole school evaluation. Their concern is how teaching and learning is administered. They observe lesson notes, teaching method, language, use of the chalkboard, discipline of learners, use of instructional materials, seating arrangement, the class size, number of seats/ students and sanitation, learners participation classroom management etc.

(b) Curriculum and other activities

Evaluators also observe how activities in the school including topics thought and all other activities conform with the curriculum. However, other activities in quality assurance mean all activities outside subjects and topics primarily taught in classrooms such as sports, cultural shows, excursion parties etc.

(c) Learning environment

Evaluators also observe the school facilities such as classrooms, conveniences, seats, ventilation, fields, buildings, offices and office facilities and so on. They are observed not only to find out availability but also whether or not they meet the standard. The classroom for instance should have a size that given the number of student will not be congested since a congested class cannot support effective teaching and learning.

(d) Care safety and support

As human beings, at one time or the other, learners need help from their neighbours, such times could include sickness, hunger, disability, stress, depressive tendencies etc. if such assistance is not given to the learner, it will be difficult for him to learn. Teaching will be ineffective not because the teacher does not understand how to teach but the child was not supported or cared.

3. Leadership and management

All the indicators above are administered by the head of the school-including teacher's discipline, record keeping and internal evaluation. The indicators do not only specify the scope of Quality Assurance but also bring to bear the fact that in practice the input and output and/or outcome are not evaluated or emphasized in evaluation. No section on these two areas are in the quality assurance reports. It is also worthy of note here too, that the essence of quality assurance is to sustain quality which will be relevant if educational goals are achieved and by extension the nation is developed. It becomes necessary therefore to be reminded of the concept and goals of education in the country.

Concept of Education

There are many definitions as there are many scholars of the concept. Okoh (1985) describes education as an art, a product and a process. However, all the definitions support the position of Daveney emphasized by Aminigo (1999) as seen above that education can better be explained in terms of its functions. Consequently, he writes that education is a process or an

art of building the individual for the nation or the nation for the individual. However, education critically examined in theory and practice could best be defined as that aspect of nature (human) that desires to examine, analyze, assess (study) nature with a view to building a better nature. As it develops over the years, it is confined and brought close to man and also made reward driven. Anything done in education should therefore, build the nation or the individual for each other hence quality should be adjudged quality if it supports or facilitates the achievement of building either the nation or the individual.

Goals of Education in Nigeria

Any organization without goals is like a ship without destination. Like any other organization in Nigeria education has goals. The five main national goals of Nigeria which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National policy on education are the building of:

- (a) a free and democratic society
- (b) a just and egalitarian society
- (c) united, strong and self-reliant nation
- (d) a great and dynamic economy
- (e) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens, source: Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013).

By the above goods, the education activities should drive the achievement of building democrats just and egalitarian, strong and dynamic graduates, that can create employment and are also employable. An analysis of the concepts and indicators of quality assurance and its vision, missions and function viz-a-viz the concept of education and goals will reveal the missing links of quality assurance as practiced today.

The Missing Links

When a theory is examined, a picture of activities will be seen and when activities are observed a particular theory or model will be remembered but beyond this, if there are missing links, in any of the divides they will be very obvious. The above examination and analysis have obviously brought to bear the inherent missing links in the Nigeria Quality Assurance activities and if they are not bridged, the purpose will be defeated. The doubt in Nigerians on the present educational system expresses a convincing defense to this thesis. Nigerians now prefer private schools with less qualified teachers to the public (Government) schools with seemingly more qualified teachers. However, some of the missing links will be discussed below.

Definition/Practice

The concept of quality assurance in education was borrowed from human resource management theory (Total Quality Management) and the definition also emphasises the meaning of the theory in their register rather than the literary meaning. Consequently, all the scholars and educators with interest in QA have emphasized on the “total” from the policy through input to process and output/outcome. It implies that for sufficient quality assurance in education, the policy, input (buildings or infrastructure, staff, activities in the system and output/outcome) must be evaluated; and this cannot be argued against but appears missing.

Quality Assurance and Policies/Models

Policies of actions for instance, are like foundations in a building. No building stands without a foundation neither does a poor foundation hold any building? Foundations are also dictated by the type of building and that is where standard (quality) stands supreme. In the same vein, actions without commensurate and quality policies cannot stand the test of time. It is on this note that education policies should not only be expected from educators and or politicians but also from evaluators (Quality Assurance officers). This, experience has revealed that it is lacking in the system. The introduction of the Basic Education (UBE) skill acquisition (agric farms) and so on started with policies which were not known to quality Assurance officers (evaluators). At the policy formation stage of Nigeria to say the least, evaluators to the best of the writers’ knowledge are not involved.

Quality Assurance and School Projects

It is also undoubted that projects such as buildings, seats, chalk/marker boards and other infrastructures in the school are supplied or constructed without quality Assurance. Consequently, schools that are renovated still have the issues of congestion, schools recently supplied with seats still suffer lack of seats and so on.

Quality Assurance and Private Schools

It is also worthy of the note here that private schools which have more than 60% (percent) of basic education schools are not covered in any Quality Assurance education activity. Consequently, if QA is the basis for quality and by extension positive national development then more than 60% of schools in the country will stand the risk of having poor quality education, despite the fact that the first function of QA is to “Schedule all QA external

evaluations in Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board, the private schools have not been visited for the purpose of quality assurance which is an aberration from the QA functions which deserves being taken seriously by public and private schools. . . “as stated above. The function is not stated as a prescription but an assurance. However, for the number of years I have served as a QA officer one of the reasons for gender education agitation is premised on the fact that education for all cannot be achieved within any duration if the girl child is deliberately not educated Shagari (2001).

If the above is true then Nigeria educational quality cannot be assured by any strategy if the private schools which have taken more than 60% of the industry is deliberately skipped. It is therefore a serious missing link.

Quality Assurance and the educational Process

The concept is not expressed in all the processes in Nigeria education in the present dispensation for example, Quality Assurance officers are not aware of the agricultural programs carried on in UBE schools from policy to implementation. Consequently, no proper analysis of the policy and implementation is done. Nobody, not even the principals know what is really the aim and concept of the programme, maybe it is entrepreneurship or skill acquisition. But the absence of the learners in the process makes it difficult for anybody to give any of the two concepts to the programme. If it is entrepreneurship for the learners meaning, practically teaching them business management together with the skill, then the learners would have been involved in every stage of the process from the construction to stocking, feeding and marketing which is absolutely not the case.

Quality Assurance and output/outcome

Experience has also revealed that much effort is not put on the evaluation of output/outcome apart from discussing with Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A) and School Base Management Committee (SBMC) chairmen. The fact remains that evaluators do not have any idea of the activities of graduates from QA activities. It is difficult to conform the quality of the process if “means” should justify “ends”. It is worthy of emphasis here that this remains a crux in the success and failure of education in Nigeria and many other African countries and one reason for our industrial or scientific underdevelopment. One of the goals of Nigeria education is self-reliance and job creation which is possible if skills and/or entrepreneur knowledge are not only produced but graduates with a passion to practice such skills and competence are targeted by

our schools and if graduates are not evaluated, it will be difficult for the system to have feedback and the need for adjustment or transformation. Transformation without a comprehensive evaluation of the graduates with the goals as the standard will be an impossibility.

Though there is a paradigm shift as will be examined below, the value of any process cannot be taken seriously if it is separated from the product. While it is true that quality of process will determine the quality of product most times there are areas that need more attention. These areas will be identified only if there is an elaborate evaluation of the product.

Quality Assurance and other Departments

Quality assurance (QA) is the hub of any organization because of its responsibility as the evaluator of every activity and product of the industry. Consequently, it first identifies the area(s) of needs in the organization and encourages its reinforcement, sustenance and the areas for improvement. The same is applicable to the education industry. Once there is gap between quality assurance and other departments the industry is bound to fail or malfunction. For instance, Planning Research and Statistics (PRS) is responsible for projects social mobilization and awareness while the legal department or unit is for law practice. Teacher development for training and so on; while quality assurance is for standard of the assured and to sustain standard evaluators go for evaluation in order to enhance quality. It therefore, presupposes that once quality assurance return from there exercise and to give reports, the other departments should be in attendance to hear and also get informed of which schools and areas of the schools they should give attention. This has never been practiced and the result is that most of the projects and other activities carried out by the board could be described as misplaced priorities or below standard.

Concept of Paradigm shift

The concept of paradigm shift is central in the existence of quality assurance and first remembered once it is mentioned. However, the history of the concept calls for a little concern for consistency in practice. It is worthy of note here that the concept is describing how concepts like inspection, supervision, monitoring has been replaced with evaluation in whole school evaluation (supervision). While it is difficult to argue that style has not changed or shifted from persons to activities, what has really changed practically in the domain of evaluation or supervision or inspection and so on? Quality assurance evolved when entrepreneurs discovered

that with the expansion of the industry (thanks to technology), emphasis was laid on units that make each big industry hence, continuous evaluation of products rather than the units leads to defects in the units and the quality of the product at the end. There was the need to shift from the products to the units (process) believing that once quality of process is assured, quality of the product will be guaranteed. It is on this note that evaluators seek to:

- (a) Observe activities and infrastructure as they are without interference.
- (b) Write reports in present tense meaning the prevailing quality or standard of process in the school in questions for immediate action where necessary
- (c) Concentrate on activities more than the individuals
- (d) Write reports in the school.
- (e) Always address the school, praising them where they do well and pointing to them where they need to improve and the direction of improvement and so on.

Sources of Data

Critically examined, there is an obvious missing link in the source of data. Observation, Discussion and Documentation (ODD) are identified as the major sources but the question asked is, can any of these be used to determine the size of a field or class? There is therefore another source missing-measurement.

Conclusion

Education for all is the responsibility of all “presupposes that education is not meant for few but all citizens. It implies that every child within the age limit for a particular level of education is supposed to be in school and be educated. It is to guarantee this freedom that education, mostly at the nursery, primary and junior secondary is free and compulsory. However, beyond this law and slogan, equal education should mean equal opportunity to learn but closely examined, there appears a wide gap between private and government schools and quality assured, the gap is rather assured rather than the quality practically.

Secondly, whole school evaluation is done once in five (5) years and only a very few number of schools are evaluated. In most cases, the rural schools are never evaluated and quality assured which results in the assurance of the disparity between the rural and urban schools. This is further supported with the fact that only a sample of less than 25% is always evaluated not to talk about those affected by flood and insecurity which are forbidden. This negates the

emphasis on the vision – “quality for every child”. There seems not to be an obvious presence of quality assurance in the input and some of the processes like the entrepreneurship projects in the schools. Quality assurance activities are concentrated in the classes and examination records only which is considered as the reason for the failure of the system and the failure of the entrepreneurial impact on the learners. The agricultural projects/programme may suffer the same gradual disappearance like the physical education and local crafts of old in our schools.

Finally, evaluations of sizes are not done in quality assurance because officers only observe, discuss and check records (documents). There is no measurement/counting. Consequently, size of play grounds and number of seats and such other facilities that require counting and measurement for data are always never practically evaluated and reported. This constitutes a major missing link.

Recommendations

For effective quality assurance which should result in quality education for all: and national development:

- i. Quality Assurance should start from the input through every other sector of education.
- ii. Private schools should also be quality assured for equal opportunity
- iii. Every process in education should be quality assured including the policies to ensure that minimum standard is maintained.
- iv. All the other departments in the board should access the report from quality assurance officers mostly after a whole school and
- v. The graduates should also be quality assured.

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