
Improved Quality Assurance System: An Effective Tool for the Attainment of Basic Education Objectives in Nigeria

Umar Kabir

Department of Education, Faculty of Education, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria

2348065156260, +2348050223036

ukabir.edu@buk.edu.ng, ukabirt@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper reviews literature on the concept and objectives of basic education in Nigeria, the concept, types, goals, principles and challenges of quality assurance system in the management of Nigeria's basic education system. Upon the review, the paper showcases how effective and well-established quality assurance system will be properly used as a tool to improving the management of Basic Education schools thereby improving the quality, competency, and effectiveness of teachers and in turn the attainment of Basic Education objectives. A well-established quality assurance team that is equipped with ICT knowledge and facilities, recognizes concerned members of schools hosting communities etc. will go a long way in addressing numerous Basic Education challenges at the school level. Specifically, the paper submits that since governments have failed over the decades to directly improve the quality of teachers due to poor management and inadequate financing, improving and empowering quality assurance system by increasing the number, competence, funding, etc. of quality assurance officials will be cost-effective means of training and coaching basic education teachers for effective basic education delivery in Nigeria.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Basic Education, Teachers, Management, Funding. **Introduction**

Education is recognized the world over as an instrument for effecting national, societal, institutional, and personal development. Provision of quality education remains an effective tool for governmental and non-governmental reforms. The development of every individual, society, organization, or nation is therefore directly related to educational development (Kadir, 2012). For this undisputable fact, responsible governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals give proper attention to quality education provision at all levels. The positive impact of quality education on national development has been seen and experienced in various parts of the world. Stressing the relevance of quality education to national development, Kadir (2012) stated that "quality education has provided the "magic wand" that transformed Russians in 1913 from an unbelievably, fantastically backward country, poverty stricken into the world's most technologically and economically developed countries." This implies that in every society, including the very advanced ones of Europe and America, education has remained the major social structure for capacity building.

As a country, Nigeria is not left behind in this struggle. Prior to independence to date, various education policies and programs aimed at providing quality education were introduced especially at the basic level. Such policies and programs were tied with strong and effective techniques that ensured quality education provision. Quality assurance system is thus instituted within the current basic education in order to ensure quality in the provision of basic education in Nigeria. Goal 4, target 4.1 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015) requires that "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes." This target stresses the importance or rather necessity of providing quality education especially at the basic and post basic levels.

Concept of Basic Education in Nigeria

The introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 marked the beginning of deliberate attempt by government to providing quality primary education to all school aged children. Despite its achievements, UPE failed due to many reasons including lack of political will, improper planning, inadequate funding, inadequate qualified teachers, etc. (Tahir, 2001; Bloom and Cohen, 2002; Amaele, 2006; Okoroma, 2006). With the introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) Program in 1999, primary education continued to be given more importance as bedrock upon which all other education is built. It's expected that UBE will ensure access to quality basic education to all Nigerian school aged children.

Different documents and scholars from different context defined basic education differently. These interpretations are due to changing dynamics of basic education the world over and Nigeria in particular. According to the Universal Basic Education Commission ((UBEC) (2012), basic education is “the education offered to children aged between 3 and 14 years. It comprises: 3 years of Early Childhood Care Education, 6 years of Primary Education and 3 years of Junior Secondary education.” This source defined the 3 years of early childcare education as education given in an education institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their entering the primary school while the 6 years of primary education is the education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years plus. The 3 years of junior secondary education according to the document means a school which provides a three-year post-primary course of full-time instruction suitable for students between the age of twelve (12) and fifteen (15) years.

Redefining the concept of basic education in Nigeria, the current National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) explained that “Basic education is the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses Early Child Care Development and Education (0-4) and 10 years of formal schooling.” Based on this definition, the duration of the formal basic education is now 10 years not 9 years as provided by the UBEC (2012) document and the former National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). With this development, appropriate governments oblige themselves to providing resources for the 1 year of pre-primary education in addition to the 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. This is to the fact that the policy states in section 2, item 12 that “Basic education, to be provided by government, shall be compulsory, free, universal and qualitative. It comprises: 1 year of pre-primary, 6 years of primary, and 3 years of junior secondary education.”

Objectives of Basic Education in Nigeria

According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), there are five (5) objectives of basic education in Nigeria:

1. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
2. the provision of compulsory, free and universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
3. reducing the incidence of drop-out from formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency;
4. catering through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the promotion of basic education, for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling; and
5. ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral, security and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

With adequate provision of resources (human, material, financial, information, and time), the above objectives will be achieved and in effect, the achievement of the five goals of basic education in Nigeria. Not only the establishment of basic education schools and the provision of the needed resources but ensuring quality of whatever resource to be provided and its effective utilization thereby achieving quality of output. This means effective and efficient quality assurance system is necessary within the basic education program. It's the effective quality assurance that will ensure the achievement of minimum standards of instructional activities through regular inspection and continuous supervision (Federal Ministry of Education, 2010).

Education Quality Assurance: Concept and Types

Quality cannot be attained on a platter of gold but must be doggedly pursued, maintained and sustained for the educational goals of any nation to be realized (UBEC, 2012). And because quality education system is part of what politicians are elected to deliver, (Birzea, Cecchini, Harrisson, Krek, & Spajic-Vrkas, 2005), quality assurance system is employed by various governments to provide to the citizenry quality education at all levels. Quality assurance is usually regarded as an effective way to bridging the gap between policy and practice in education. The Education Quality Assurance Handbook for Nigeria (FME, 2010) explained that "Over the years, the mode of inspection in Nigeria has not provided the desired effect on the improvement of the quality of education provision and performance of learners." There is thus a paradigm shift from school inspection to Education Quality Assurance which is a holistic monitoring and evaluation process and practice." Therefore, when UBE was launched in 1999, passed into law in 2004, quality assurance was instituted within the program, replacing the former practice of inspection and supervision. Directive was given to all States Ministries of Education and their sub-sectors (e.g. SUBEBs) to replace inspectorates departments with education quality assurance units.

Generally, quality assurance is seen as 'fitness for purpose' or 'conformance to requirements' i.e. the condition of satisfying the needs of consumers or achieving the set objectives. In line with this, Oduma (2013) considered quality as "that which best satisfies and exceeds customers' needs and wants." To Okebukola (2008), quality assurance refers to "the policies, systems, strategies and resources used by the institution to satisfy itself that its quality requirements and standards are being met." This means quality assurance is an established system within an organization or program aimed at ensuring quality input, processes, and output. Defining quality assurance from the perspective of education, the Education Quality Assurance Handbook for Nigeria (FME, 2010) explained that "Quality Assurance involves the process of monitoring, assessing, and evaluating as objectively as possible, all aspects of school life and communicating the outcome to all concerned with a view to improving standards." Okebukola (2010) maintained that quality assurance in the education system is 'an umbrella concept for a lot of activities that are designed to improve the systems input, process and output of education'. This means quality assurance covers all aspects of education system.

UBEC (2012) defined quality assurance in basic education sub-sector as "an all-encompassing concept which includes all processes, policies, and actions through which the quality of Basic Education is developed, improved and maintained. It goes beyond quality control and lays more emphasis on the quality of the end-products with the presumption that minimum standards exist." This implies that through quality assurance, basic education can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its provisions are being met, maintained, and enhanced. Quality assurance in the education system therefore is a multi-dimensional concept involving all the various functions and activities of the education system. Such functions and activities include teaching, research, staffing, students, buildings, facilities and equipment, service to the community and academic environment.

There are two main types of quality assurance i.e. internal and external. Internal quality assurance involves all activities carried out by school heads and teachers with a view to understanding whether their managerial and instructional provisions meet the minimum standards expected. It's a way of identifying strengths and weaknesses of a school thereby focusing on areas that need improvement. External quality assurance refers to the process of assessing all aspects of the school by external evaluators with a view to understanding how a school can be assisted to meet, maintain, and/or improve on its present level of performance. This means internal and external quality assurance evaluations are not focused on fault finding but on how best to work together towards attaining, sustaining, and improving the minimum standards set.

UBEC (2012) document explained that in the context of quality assurance, there are three main types of evaluation in the school system viz-a-viz Whole School Evaluation, Special Evaluation, and Recognition Evaluation. Whole school evaluation is divided into two; Self-Evaluation and External Evaluation. Self-Evaluation is like internal evaluation which is a continuous process of assessing school's performance carried out by the school heads and other teachers while External Evaluation according to the document refers to the educational process of appraising all aspects of the school by external evaluators/organizations/agencies. Special Evaluation on the other hand assesses any aspect of a school's provision to either get a State or National view of a topic or an issue. It can be used to collect a view of specific subjects in a State or to evaluate girls' education, for example. Recognition Evaluation is conducted with the primary purpose of approving subjects for external examinations such as Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) conducted by West African Examinations Council (WAEC) or Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) conducted by NECO and the States.

Goals of Education Quality Assurance in Nigeria

Generally, there are four (4) goals of education quality assurance in Nigeria as set by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). These goals are to:

- a. Set, maintain and improve standards in all aspects of the school system;
- b. Ensure minimum standards and quality assurance of instructional activities in schools through regular inspection and continuous supervision;
- c. Disseminate on a regular basis, information on problems and difficulties of teachers and institutions and offer practical solutions to them; and
- d. Encourage dissemination of information on innovative and progressive educational principles and practices in the school system through publications, workshops, meetings, seminars, conferences.

The achievement of these goals means the accomplishment of quality education across all school system. This being the case, quality assurance should be given prime importance as a strong mechanism for meeting, sustaining, and improving quality education in Nigeria.

Responsibility of Education Quality Assurance in Nigeria

For the accomplishment of the above goals of education quality assurance in Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) provides five (5) responsibilities of education quality assurance officers in Nigeria:

- a) Undertake inspection visits;
- b) disseminate information about instructional materials and tested effective teaching methods and good practices;
- c) obtain information in respect of challenges experienced by teachers in schools and institutions as well as provide advisory solutions through appropriate authorities;

- d) monitor, document and publish the overall quality of education in schools and proffer practical and positive advice; and
- e) organize meetings with and workshops for teachers when necessary with a view to improving their professional competence.

The above responsibilities, if adequately and successfully carried out, will surely help maintain standard and improve quality educational provision in Nigeria.

Principles of Education Quality Assurance in Nigeria

For the successful discharge of the above responsibilities, the Education Quality Assurance Handbook for Nigeria (FME, 2010) provided six principles to guide the conduct of quality assurance in Nigeria. These principles are that:

1. the effectiveness of quality assurance evaluation, both internal and external, contribute to school improvement;
2. the process of quality assurance promotes inclusion of all learners;
3. quality assurance is carried out openly with those being evaluated;
4. all quality assurance evaluation uses the same quality standards and the quality indicators must be made known to all stakeholders;
5. the findings of quality assurance evaluations are valid, reliable and consistent;
6. the outcomes of evaluations shall inform National and State policy, planning and training.

These principles set by the Federal Ministry of Education are designed to guide, regulate the conduct of quality assurance in Nigeria. It's assumed that if these principles are strictly adhered to by quality assurance agencies at the state and federal level, the achievement of quality education across the country will be attained. For instance, if similar quality standards are used and same quality indicators applied throughout the country, quality education can be enhanced significantly thereby addressing the gaps among various regions of Nigeria. Education stakeholders being aware of all these will concentrate on achieving what Nigeria Education system is set to achieve. Also, learners, teachers, head teachers, communities and NGOs must be fully involved in ensuring education quality so that the findings can be applied to all, inform education policy making, planning and training. The principles also suggest that quality assurance activities involve trust to all affected as it is carried out openly. This guarantees validity, reliability and consistency of the quality assurance body and their findings by all and sundry.

Areas of Education Quality Assurance in Nigeria

In discharging the above responsibilities, Quality Assurance Instrument for Basic and Secondary Education in Nigeria (FME, 2010) document provides four areas which basic and secondary education quality assurance evaluation shall focus on:

Outcomes for Learners
Quality of Provision
Impact of Leadership and Management, and
Overall Effectiveness

While outcomes for learners requires quality assurance officials to measure the quality standards set against the pupils' performance, quality of provision requires them to assess four important aspects of implementation i.e. quality of teaching and learning; quality of curriculum and other activities; quality of care, guidance and support; and the learning environment. This entails assessing the quality of

teaching and learning and proffering appropriate recommendations on how best to improve. On the other hand, the impact of leadership and management deals with the quality of leadership and management of the school, particularly by the head teacher, senior team, and those with responsibilities. The overall effectiveness is concerned with evaluating the general efficiency and effectiveness of the three areas discussed. It involves harmonizing the results of the three areas evaluated above.

Challenges of Quality Assurance in the Management of Basic Education in Nigeria

The Dakar Framework for Action (Dakar, 2000) provided six goals (often referred to as Dakar EFA Goals) to be achieved by 2015 the second of which seeks to “Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.” While access was said to have significantly improved in many countries, quality remains a serious challenge (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005; Pratham Education Foundation, 2017). Quality assurance system in basic education is bedeviled with the following challenges:

1. **Inadequate number of quality assurance officials:** the amount of quality assurance officials within the basic education system in Nigeria is not enough considering the large number of basic education schools.
2. **Supervision:** this is one of the major challenges of quality assurance. Their visits to schools were found to be irregular, unscheduled and did not improve the organization of staff development program in basic education (Mu’azzam, 2018; Kabir, 2017), making it difficult to ensure quality within the basic education system.
3. **Poor training of quality assurance officials:** because the current quality assurance system inherited its personnel and structure from the erstwhile inspectorate and supervision, the challenge of poor training was transferred to the current quality assurance system.
4. **Inadequate funding:** Allen (2015) included poor inadequate funding amongst the challenges of quality assurance system. This makes it difficult to employ and train adequate number of quality assurance within the basic education system.
5. **Poor infrastructure:** the challenge of inadequate funding makes it difficult to provide adequate necessary facilities like cars, motorcycles and needed training for efficient service delivery.
6. **Politics:** the appointment of quality assurance is sometimes affected by politics. Also, since quality assurance (internal and external) can only make recommendations to inform best instructional practices (UBEC, 2012), some of their recommendations are not always utilized and adhered to especially for political reasons.

Conclusion

Quality assurance is an offshoot of inspection and supervision. It’s a more comprehensive term instituted within the Nigeria’s basic education system in order to maintain, sustain, and improve quality standard within the basic education. Twenty years after the launching of UBE Program with its quality assurance system, the program is characterized with a lot of quality challenges. This in effect means quality assurance system as an instrument for ensuring quality has failed below expectation. Its failure makes it difficult to ensure, maintain, sustain, and improve quality standards within the basic education system. Some of the reasons for its failure according to some scholars include underfunding of basic education leading to a lot of problems like inadequacy of nearly all resources (human, material, financial, information) including quality assurance officers themselves, lack of training and retraining, politics, etc. Addressing the challenges of basic education quality assurance system is one of the cost-effective, sure way of improving quality of basic education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. More experienced teachers should be appointed as quality assurance officials by LGEAs in order to bridge the deficit. Retired and/or resigned head teachers and quality assurance can be reabsorbed;
2. UBEC, SUBEBs and LGEAs should increase the amount of visits of quality assurance officials to schools by reducing the number of schools each quality assurance team is assigned to visit within a given time;
3. SUBEBs and LGEAs should Improve the capacity of quality assurance officials through regular training so they (quality assurance) will be saddled with the responsibility of continuous training and coaching teachers in basic education schools;
4. SUBEBs and LGEAs must increase funding for quality assurance so as to provide allowance, transport facilities, tablets/android phones etc. so that quality assurance can easily and effectively supervise and couch teachers and provide appropriate feedback;
5. SUBEBs and LGEAs should mobilize schools hosting communities through radio programs, social media, meetings, Fridays and or Sunday summons etc. to be actively involved in the activities of quality assurance;
6. Criteria for the appointment and posting of quality assurance should be developed by UBEC, SUBEBs and LGEAs so that politics will be avoided as much as possible in their appointment, posting and activities.

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