

Presentation on

**Roles of stakeholders in enhancing the quality assurance status
of the Nigerian university system**

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Introductory overview

There is no doubt that every sphere of human activity requires a culture of ensuring high standards, commonly termed as quality assurance (QA). Of course, for the national educational sector, and specifically the university system with the prime mandate of advancing teaching, research and service, it is mandatory to maintain world-class quality in all its facets, components and affairs.

Stakeholders of the Nigerian university system (NUS)

Worldwide, every person engaged in any occupation of providing goods and services, is invariably a product of some form or level of education and/or training. Notwithstanding the variations in the prevailing educational policy, the university system is normally the highest stage, as in Nigeria.

Consequently, as a national enterprise, all individuals and sectors of the country essentially constitute the stakeholders of the university system, and despite the overlapping roles, interests and affiliations, they may be categorized as outlined below.

1. The Federal Government and its organs, agencies, agents and clients; including the relevant ministries, departments and parastatals
2. Proprietors of the universities; comprising governments and private operators
3. The institutions; consisting of staff and students, and may constitute the different arms, divisions, sections, segments and groups
4. Domestic and foreign sponsors, donors, benefactors, collaborators and partners
5. External components, linked elements, beneficiaries and the public

Framework and determinants of QA appraisal

The determination of the overall quality assurance situation of each institution or its arm, is generally obtained from the evaluation of, and performance on some key parameters or criteria; and the ranking of institutions is hence, largely derivable from the comparative values of the respective cumulative or aggregate scores.

There are however globally, several grading schemes based on various indices with different degrees of subjectivity. In any case, the modes of assessment are commonly hinged on such major areas as itemized in Table 1.

Table 1. Main determinant variables in tertiary education QA study

- i. Institutional philosophy, vision, mission, objectives, strategic targets and projections
- ii. Governance structure, management and administration
- iii. Resources, assets and infrastructures
- iv. Quality of teaching, learning and research
- v. Operational efficiency and effectiveness
- vi. Extension services, external relevance and community relations
- vii. Nationality-mix and international outlook, linkages and partnerships
- viii. Environmental, security and safety conditions
- ix. Transparency, financial management, accountability, responsibility, orderliness and stability
- x. Overall traditions, ethical values, reputation and image

Options and strategies for advancing quality university education in Nigeria

From recent publications of the NUC, the prevailing total numbers of federal, state and private universities, with the surmised equivalents of those operating geology/geoscience programmes in parentheses; are respectively 40 (18), 39 (15) and 50 (10). These figures and Table 2 vividly illustrate that apart from the 9 most recently approved private institutions, the durations of 67 (1948 – 2015) and 55 years (1960 – 2015) essentially witnessed correspondingly the founding of about 130 universities and possibly 45 departments of geology/geoscience. In addition, the evolution involved tremendous diversity in proprietorship, especially of the private operations, the first three of which were inaugurated in 1999; implying the creation of the 50 within 16 years. It is likewise noteworthy that there are 36 universities with approved part-time /sandwich programmes, others having affiliated and distance learning programmes and 56 study centres operated by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN); plus over 60 illegal institutions.

The universities in the country, invariably display marked variability in character and various fundamental features. In terms of comparative placement, none of them occurs in overall ranking, within the topmost 10 and 1000, respectively in Africa and the world. Actually, the best standing occupied by Covenant University, Ota, is correspondingly 12 and 1401 (Table 2) in each of the two applicable international (continental and global) rankings.

Table 2. Adaption of the Webometrics overall ranking of universities in Nigeria

Institution	Foundation Year	Position		
		National	Continental	Global
Covenant University, Ota	2002	1	12	1401
Obafemi Awolowo University	1962	2	15	1791
University of Ibadan	1948*	3	22	2310
University of Lagos	1962	4	28	2597
University of Ilorin	1975	5	30	2742
Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	1988	6	36	3424
Ahmadu Bello University	1962	7	39	3599
Federal University of Technology, Akure	1981	8	42	3872
Landmark University, Omu-Aran	2011	9	46	4022
University of Nigeria	1960	10	48	4100

(2014 – 2015 World University Rankings, *The Times Higher Education*)

* The first (and with the prime Department of Geology fully established in 1960)

Therefore, prescriptions for meaningful and effective upgrading of the collective QA score, would inevitably be wide-ranging. However, those considered expedient, are essentially enumerated as follow.

- All the stakeholders must adopt the universal ethical rule of upholding and advancing excellence and merit in all spheres, processes, activities and components of the NUS; being the basic hallmark of sound institutional autonomy and academic freedom
- The governance concept and policy of each university should be predicated on well – defined organogram and hierarchical structure; and the procedures and tenure of appointment of all functionaries and officers have to be devoid of unnecessary politization and unduely prolonged duration of service
- Implementing standardized benchmark guidelines for the appointment and promotion of teaching and research staff, especially in ensuring adequate requirements on intellectual contributions, notably to achieving proper balance with respect to their quantity and quality
- In the assessment process for every appointment/promotion, efforts must be devoted to detect any unethical act, particularly plagiarism; and if proven, commensurate sanction must be enforced on the candidate
- Attempts have also to be made to identify and ameliorate/sanction non-productivity and redundancy in staff members
- There should be considerable involvement of renounced foreign scholars in the external assessment component of the appropriate appointment and promotion procedures
- Evolving robust framework with the injection of pragmatic incentive regimes, to achieve vibrant human capacity building (HCB)/staff recruitment, development and retention

policy and dynamics; and the machinery has also to propel the preference for utilizing academic leaves in engagements on specialized research work and advanced training for self improvement in foreign or even local institutions and establishments

- Concerted attention should be urgently focused to revise the introductory course(s) on the use of English, to guarantee that the generality of students acquire satisfactory proficiency and communication skill in the language
- As for the students in geology/geoscience discipline; intensive exposure to geoinformatics and training in geoscientific report/paper writing and presentation, should be mandatory, especially at the higher levels/advanced stages
- The admissions policy for the postgraduate programmes, specifically in geology/geoscience, should afford appropriate balance between the applied/technical and the basic/academic specializations and options
- Reinforcing the quality control dimension of the external examination scheme, by rationalizing and revamping its scope and modalities, and having adequate provision for the engagement of relevant distinguished practitioners/practicians and specialists from outside the university system, particularly for the applied/practical aspects of professional disciplines
- The external examination plan, especially at the higher degree level, must also be targeted at boosting the appointment of eminent foreign scholars
- Necessary attention has to be given to actualize the setting-up by each university, of a QA arm to be headed by a professor, and with clearly defined structure, mandate, guidelines and support; and its major functions should comprise the regular conduct of staff and

students audit and internal/self evaluation exercises based on key performance indicators, for the different segments/components, preferably at least biennially

- It should likewise design and introduce appropriate questionnaire and procedures for students to carry-out online assessment of the performance and impact of teachers and instructors in the delivery, coverage and examination of the offered subjects/courses
- In addition, the entity has to be actively linked to the relevant national, regional, continental and international bodies, and involved in the implementation of current global trends, innovations and advances in QA, like the tuning methodology, modelling application and networking tools, to ensure that the students, products and services attain advantageous positioning in global transferability and competitiveness
- Each university likewise has to concentrate on achieving the provision of sustainable infrastructure for regular power generation, water supply and information communication technology (ICT) deployment, accessibility and application in the academic, administrative, financial, technical and welfare spheres
- Besides, efforts are required to maintaining purposeful and dependable security, safety, environmental and health awareness, measures, outfits and facilities
- Similarly, sanitizing and overhauling the institutional culture, such that the assumption of any position, particularly of academic leadership including every professor at the initiation event; invariably implies the acceptance of absolute dedication to excellence in character, teaching, research, mentoring, efficiency, effectiveness and productivity
- Another area of focus is carrying out with uncompromising vigour, zeal, determination and thoroughness, the rationalization, harmonization and revamping of the various arms, including the academic, administrative, financial, utility and welfare segments

- The NUC should adapt the exercises and processes of accreditation and inspection as means to achieve synergies with the duly recognized external bodies, by appropriately accommodating their representation in the correspondingly related teams
- For any discipline/programme which by law, also requires the accreditation/certification of the relevant professional regulatory council/board, there should be harmonization for the execution of joint visitation
- Besides, the NUC should urgently strategize on evolving regular interface between the respective trade unions and the governing councils, to serve as veritable forum in maintaining persistently calm and orderly industrial climate
- Much energy should be devoted to institute through the collaboration and commitment of the principal stakeholders, a national loan/scholarship scheme to support the indigent and needy, and to reward and encourage excellence and merit in all the students of at least each of the public universities, in the early stage of the operation; while the availability and accessibility of this financial platform should ultimately ease the introduction of appropriate fee regimes and improvement of internally generated revenues (IGR)
- NAPE, it should through the UAP, interface with the departments, to facilitate a model of adjunct appointment plan that could be coded as the university lectureship support scheme in geosciences; by which identified resource persons, especially in the industry, are directly engaged in teaching and training of students, as part of the coverage of specific courses, particularly at the final year undergraduate level and the postgraduate programmes, and the participant can contribute meaningfully to curricular review and enrichment

- In improving the knowledge on the geology of the country, and expanding the competence of the trainers, it is also highly desirable that in cooperation with all the relevant organizations and establishments, to undertake the yearly sponsorship of appropriate field school/geotraverse programme for the respective university staff, preferably on zonal basis

Of course, this proposition stimulates enquiring on the current state of the publication of the “NAPE national field excursion guide compilation/compendium”.

- Similarly, there is need to create under the aegis of NAPE and the linked organizations, and in consultation with the institutions, special intervention funds dedicated to promoting the publishing of books and instruction/demonstration materials notably in electronic format, specifically on spotlighted critical subjects/topics and courses; and the necessary intellectual contributions being solicited from the relevant pool of eminent scholars and experts
- Such funds can also be extended to augment the finances for upgrading the international bibliographic quotation of the existing relevant journals, especially the Journal of Mining and Geology, the NAPE Bulletin and the Water Resources, Journal of the Nigerian Association of Hydrogeologists. Incidentally, the first was personally nurtured for 15years (1994 to 2009) as the Editor-in-Chief (E-in-C); while one of those groomed within the same tenure, is the immediate past E –in – C of the second

Conclusive remarks

Firstly, it is worth observing that in the enabling laws, acts, statutes and regulations, plus the operational guidelines and stipulations, there are adequate provisions for the involvement of the major players in contributing to the quest for high standards in the NUS. Consequently, the attainment and sustainability of internationally acclaimed best practices and academic excellence essentially demand that all must primarily guarantee unconditional compliance to the relevant specifications and requirements; even in the entry screening processes for staff and students.

In particular, the NUC has to be subtly more proactive and assertive in its pivotal roles, while the institutional functionaries, officers and members have to be consistently complementary in enforcing excellent levels of commitment, orderliness, harmony, accountability and productivity. These definitely would demand suitable augmentation in several modes, from the external sectors. On the whole, the collective posture, inclinations and initiatives should drive the realization of the desirable world-class ranking for the NUS, and ultimately yield sustainable national development and growth.

It is likewise of significance that with respect to NAPE, some of the articulated QA enhancement reforms and innovations would not only spur the involvement of the members, but should foster purposeful and fruitful interface with the main related bodies. Actually, the envisaged collaboration should exemplify the anticipated synergies between the professional/industrial realm and the academia, geared towards enhancing appropriate skills acquisition in the products of the NUS.

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