

Assessing Quality Assurance Strategies in Kwara State Government-Owned Colleges of Education, Nigeria

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Abstract

The issue of quality in education delivery is of great concern to stakeholders because it is a fact that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. This study was designed to examine the quality assurance strategies adopted in public colleges of education in Kwara State with a view to identifying the specific quality assurance techniques put in place in the institutions. The study adopted a survey research type. "College of Education Quality Assurance Questionnaire" (CEQAQ) was designed to collect relevant information. The instrument was validated and tested for reliability. The coefficient of reliability was found to be 0.74. Six research questions were raised to guide the study. The findings indicated that accreditation, visitation process, external examination system, monitoring and evaluation and students admission policy were the major quality assurance strategies adopted in the colleges. Improved physical and human

resources were required to achieve the desired quality in the institutions. Based on the need to improve on the present state of quality assurance strategies adopted in the institutions, it was recommended, among others, that the institutions should adhere strictly to quality assurance strategies identified for improved performance.

Introduction

Concern about the quality of teacher education in Nigeria is on the increase. It comes at a time of the growing recognition of the significant role of teacher education in the development and growth of the nation. In response to social demands for education in the country, school enrolment at all levels of the Nigerian educational system has hysterically expanded (Durosaro, 2012). In spite of the fact that teachers are believed to be the fulcrum of the education lever (Abdulkareem, 1997), there is a general outcry that the standards of attainment of the products of our teacher education programmes, especially at the college of education level, are declining (Jaiyeoba & Atanda, 2007).

The falling standard of secondary education in Nigeria could be described as a retroactive influence of quality depreciation in teacher education programme in the country. There is no gainsaying the fact that teacher education could be an instrument for national development, as Adegoke (2002) cited in Salisu & Olusanya (2007) that no meaningful development can take place without adequate manpower resources and no adequate manpower training can take place without competent teachers who are products of good teacher education. Education is seen in the modern world as being vital to the progress and survival of the state and a pertinent ingredient for the formulation of national policies. In fact, one of the national education goals is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individuals to live and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

Globalisation has led to greater awareness of the value of specialised knowledge and advanced skills worldwide. In view of this, the public has come to realise the need for high quality at all levels of the Nigerian educational system. In most cases, the question of the quality of teacher education is raised looking at the products of both primary and secondary levels of education in the country. Education experts as well as members of the public have expressed concern over a perceived lack of accountability among teacher education institutions for the actual teaching ability of their graduates (Jaiyeoba & Atanda, 2007). In Nigeria, teacher education programme at Nigeria College of Education (NCE) level is directly monitored and supervised by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The growing complexity and independence of teacher

education institutions in the country have led to the need to evaluate their quality of instruction in the light of the skills expected of their graduates. Thus, the accreditation of teacher education institutions or programmes within an institution is an important element of developing a quality assurance system. To establish a common standard and process for the recognition of any college of education in the country, the institution must meet nationally specified criteria. A nationally recognised NCE-awarding institution must demonstrate the following features, according to DEETYA (2000, p.7):

1. Authorisation by law to award certificates across a range of fields and to set standards for those qualifications which are equivalent to local and international standards;
2. Teaching and learning that are engaged with advanced knowledge and inquiry;
3. A culture of sustained scholarship extending from that which informs inquiry and basic teaching and learning to the creation of new knowledge through research and original creative endeavour;
4. Commitment of teachers, researchers, course designers and assessors to free inquiry and the systematic advancement of knowledge;
5. Governance, procedural rules, organisation, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes, which are underpinned by the values and goals outlined above and which are sufficient to ensure the integrity of the institution's academic programmes; and
6. Sufficient financial and other resources to enable the institution's programme to be delivered and sustained into the future.

Teacher education, particularly at the NCE level, has however come under serious criticism in recent times. Products of colleges of education and other NCE-awarding institutions are said to be inadequately prepared for the task of teaching at basic education level (NCCE, 2008). Ensuring the production of good quality teachers will depend on close and effective supervision of teacher education programme through strategies designed to ensure quality. It is against this background that this study was designed to examine the current quality assurance strategies used in colleges of education. The study provides an examination of the existing national quality assurance mechanisms for NCE programmes in Nigeria. Finally, it provides an account of the current empirical evidence on the quality assurance techniques in colleges of education in Kwara State.

Quality Assurance

Quality is a multidimensional concept and cannot be taken for granted but must be defined everytime when it is used for an investigation. Quality as a concept is fluid and can be interpreted within the broadest sense. It is often considered against local content and benchmarks (Ottan, 2010). Generally, it is most often defined as 'fitness for purpose' in relation to user and customer needs. Quality can also be taken to mean 'product conforms to standards, specification and requirement' (Grosby, cited in Wilkinson, Redman, Snape & Marchonton 1998). The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy state needs is called quality. Babalola *et al* (2006) opined that quality is the ability of education to satisfy customer's needs including the learning environment (process) and students' outcomes (graduands). Furthermore, Babalola asserted that the graduates should be able to go out to the society and prove their worth by their level of performance in the society.

Harman (2000) defined quality assurance as a proactive means of ensuring quality in any organisation. Quality assurance may also mean a systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by educational institutions and systems, in order to monitor performance against objectives. Quality assurance in education, therefore, aims at preventing quality problems and ensures that the products of the system conform to standards. In the view of Ebong & Efue (2005), quality assurance is a holistic term that is directed towards education as an entity. According to them, it entails the suppliers and consumers and all the various activities put in place to produce quality products and services. Thus, quality assurance is a planned and systematic review process of an institution or programme to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced. A tertiary institution is only as good as the quality of its teaching staff—they are the heart of the institution who produce its graduates, its research products, and its service to the institution, community and nation (Mantreru, 2007).

Okebukola (2011) defined quality assurance, using system approach that involves a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the higher education system. The utility value of quality assurance in education can be seen through the provision of information to the public and other interested parties about the worth of the higher education delivery system. It equally ensures accountability in respect of the investment of public funds on education. The input segment includes students, teachers, curriculum and facilities. On the process side, emphasis is on teaching/learning interactions, internal efficiency, research, evaluation procedure and management practices. The

output includes the quality of graduates as well as the system's external efficiency. The term 'quality assurance', according to Vroeijenstijn (1995), refers to systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement.

There are two schools of thought based on Watty's (2003) definition of quality assurance. The first attaches quality to a context and as a consequence, quality becomes meaningful. For example, references to the quality of assessment, student intake, academic programmes, teaching and learning, the student experience and programme designs are not uncommon. A second way of thinking about quality assurance relates to a stakeholder-specific meaning. Here, quality assurance is being considered, having regard to a variety of stakeholders with an interest in education, each having the potential to think about quality in different ways. Sofowora (2010) described quality assurance as a mechanism used to evaluate the efficiency and appropriateness of teaching and learning in schools so as to ensure the delivery of high quality education.

Strategies of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Higher educational institutions have established strategies/techniques for quality assurance. These include accreditation, assessment, external examiner system, visitation process, monitoring and evaluation, student admission policy and institutional audit.

(a) Accreditation

Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution or programme meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. Obtaining accreditation may have implications for the institution itself (e.g. permission to operate) and/or its students (e.g. eligibility for grants) (Woodhouse, 1999). The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources and procedures of an institution or programme (Dill, 2000). The output of an accreditation is a yes/no decision, though graduations are also possible (Woodhouse, 1999). Accreditation is a widely used method in quality assurance in many countries of the world. It is primarily part of the process of building accountability by which an institution is recognised as meeting national and/or professional standards for the content and operation of its teacher education programme as well as for the performance of its candidates. According to SACS CASI (2006), accreditation engages the school community in meeting high quality standards, implementing a continuous improvement process and engaging in quality assurance through internal and external review.

There is a need for an alignment of teacher education programme with the tasks needed to create a positive student-learning environment and strong learning results in the school system. Having sound performance standards can help provide needed guidance to institutions for the expected levels of excellence as well as a means to increase professional accountability. Accreditation is a means to facilitate this. Thus, it is an important element of quality assurance. Beyond the professional recognition, the accreditation process should also help an institution reflect on its core goals, functions, values and relationships and become a better learning organisation. Every organisation is a product of how its members think, interact and explore new ideas. Improving standards and requirements in an institution will not change the institution, unless consideration is given to how people within it think and interact together.

The major steps in the accreditation process in the Nigerian university system, according to Okebukola (2006), are:

1. Communication to National Universities Commission (NUC) by the university of intention to mount a programme after feasibility study;
2. NUC checks alignment of programme with national needs and global relevance. On satisfactory fit, a resource assessment team is sent to the university;
3. Upon satisfactory resource assessment, NUC grants formal approval for the running of the programme;
4. Two years into the life of the programme, it is deemed mature for accreditation. An accreditation panel is commissioned to evaluate the programme; and
5. Based on the quality of the programme and its delivery in relation to the Minimum Academic Standards, accreditation is assessed as FULL, INTERIM or DENIED.

Accreditation serves several important quality functions in teacher education programme. These include:

- i. assuring the public that institutions have met rigorous standards;
- ii. establishing common professional standards for the preparation of teachers and other school personnel;
- iii. encouraging excellence in curriculum, student performances, faculty and resources in college and university faculties of education;
- iv. linking national standards for teacher preparation with national standards for student learning;
- v. helping to mobilise adequate resources to prepare quality personnel to improve student learning; and

- vi. bringing previously unaccredited institutions into the profession's emerging quality-assurance system.

(b) Visitation Process

A visitation is an official visit organised by the proprietor of an educational institution in order to examine the overall development of the institution. The visitor may from time to time conduct a visitation of the institution in person or after consultation, direct that visitation should be conducted by a selected team of experts as the visitor may appoint on his behalf for the purpose of advising on the effective fulfilment of the objectives of the institution. A visitation is often empanelled every five years by the visitor of an institution. In the higher education system, the regularity is indeterminate, oftentimes determined when, for instance, the institution-wide problem demands investigation and resolution by the visitor or proprietor. Okebukola (2011) elucidated that according to most university laws, the visitor shall, as often as the circumstances may require, not being less than once in every five years, undertake a visitation to the university or direct that such a visitation be conducted by a selected team of academics, university administrators and/or professionals set up by the visitor for the purpose of ascertaining that the objectives of the university are being met and to this end they:

- i. conduct an evaluation of the vision and mission of the university;
- ii. ensure that the academic standards envisaged are sustained; and
- iii. enquire whether the administrative and financial affairs of the university are being conducted in accordance with the provisions of these law, statutes, ordinances and regulations and in consonance with acceptable ethical and professional standards.

(c) External Examination System

External examination system could ensure that the quality of the examination process is high and anticipated to be a good proxy for the curriculum delivery process. In fact, external examiners are top-rate scholars drawn from highly reputable higher education institutions within and outside the country (Okebukola, 2011). The quality of the external examination system keeps the university teachers on their toes with regard to keeping faith with curriculum delivery. The external examiner system, where it exists, helps to ensure that academic programmes and final examinations are reviewed on a regular basis by experts committed to maintaining academic standards. In many higher education institutions, external examiners are given substantial power over final marks, lending credibility and legitimacy to the final grades in the eyes of the students, the institution and the

public (Materu, 2007). Although, the external examination system continued to provide a level of quality assurance in many countries well beyond the end of the colonial era, often using external examiners from neighbouring African states, it began to weaken in the 1980s and 1990s. This was due to the growing size of the student populations and the resulting difficulties for effective external examination (the inability of external examiners to read all of the examinations in very large classes) and the high cost of the system itself with the increasing prices of air fares and lodging for growing numbers of examiners (Materu, 2007). In Nigeria today, there is a lot of outcry about the standard/quality of the education process delivery and output. Ironically, external examination system that is expected to maintain quality in standard is being misapplied/mismanaged, as elucidated by Okebukola (2011, p.17) that:

In the early days of the Nigerian university system (1960-70), the external examiner was typically a top-rate scholar from a highly-reputable university outside Nigeria. Many were from European and North American universities who were the household names in their disciplines. They vetted examination questions, moderated marked scripts and sat in judgement over the defence of projects, dissertations and theses. They applied the strict and stringent conditions for curriculum delivery and evaluation that prevailed in their institutions. This translated into adoption of the same culture of quality by the Nigerian university of the top-rate university where the external examiner came from. In contrast, the external examiner in contemporary times is not cut in the same mould. Many are friends of the heads of department who are invited not to rock the boat but paper over quality cracks in the curriculum delivery and evaluation processes. The good external examiner who stands the chance of being invited again (and makes some little money on the side) is one who makes positive recommendations on a poor quality process. The "wicked" examiner who will hardly be invited a second time is one who applies the quality rule book and penalises as appropriate. With the ever-growing number of professors appointed or promoted on doubtful research and publication output, the ranks of the mediocre external examiner, if not checked, may swell in the coming years and lead to severe compromise of quality.

The situation needs to be drastically addressed by all stakeholders involved in the education system management. But due to the teeming number of applicants seeking admission into the Nigerian tertiary educational institutions including

colleges of education, which of course make face-to-face interview of candidates tedious, the institutions have resorted to post UTME screening exercise using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for quick results. Nevertheless, the exercise could be considered to be a valid means of ensuring the quality of students to be admitted into the institutions.

(d) Assessment as Quality Assurance Strategy

Assessment is an evaluation that makes graded judgements about quality; in this respect, it goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary judgement (Dill, 2000). Assessment probes on the quality of outputs of an institution. The result of an assessment is a quantitative evaluation, a grade (whether numerical, literal or descriptive) (Woodhouse, 1999). Programme and institutional assessments are widely used by European higher education institutions. Programme assessment is one of the most frequently used methods in developed countries. It is done on a regular basis by 53% of the European agencies, mainly in the Nordic, Dutch or English-speaking countries. Focusing on programmes is particularly frequent in the non-university sector while institutional assessment is less widespread. In fact, 22% of the European agencies are using it regularly (ENQA, 2003) cited in Kis (2005). This is not yet common in Nigerian educational system; although, it is very desirable for quality assurance in the system.

(e) Audit as Quality Assurance Strategy

A quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives (Woodhouse, 1999). Audit, according to Manteru (2007), is a process of review of an institution or programme to determine if its curriculum, staff and infrastructure meet its stated aims and objectives. The assessors are looking primarily at the success of the institution in achieving its own goals. An audit focuses on accountability of institutions and programmes and usually involves a self-study, peer review and a site visit. Such an evaluation can be self-managed or conducted by external body. The key difference between audit and accreditation is that the latter focuses on standards external to the institution, usually national and an assessment of the institution in terms of those standards.

Academic audits are carried out at the institution level. However, unlike accreditation or assessment, audits do not aim at making a comprehensively review a HEI's or programme's resources and activities nor do they directly evaluate the quality of teaching or learning. Rather, audits focus on those processes implemented by HEIs, in order to assure and improve the quality teaching and learning (Dill, 2000).

(f) Monitoring and Evaluation

Colleges of education in Nigeria have often been criticised for the quality of their products over the years (Salisu & Olusanya, 2007). The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), which is the regulatory body for the production of NCE teachers, has been saddled with the responsibility for the quality of academic programmes in the Nigerian colleges of education over the years but has continued to emphasise on accreditation and re-accreditation without any feedback mechanism to track the extent of compliance with laid down academic policies. The Minimum Academic Standard, according to NCCE (2008), provides for:

- quality and quantity of staff ;
- quality of leadership;
- quality of student intakes;
- quality and quantity of space and facilities;
- management tools that should be in place;
- curricular issues; and
- staff and students welfare.

These requirements need to be constantly monitored and evaluated. In addition, several teacher education policies have been made over the years, most of which are in response to changing needs and governance. The extent of implementation of such policies needs to be established from time to time. Effective planning for and managing education at all levels require adequate and continuous feedback mechanism on the implementation of policies and programmes through a system of monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation outcomes are essential ingredients for the improvement of quality of educational policies so formulated and the implementation strategies designed to achieve the various goals set for the system. Probably it is in realisation of this imperative objective that the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Nigeria is saddled with the responsibility of monitoring and evaluation of teacher education policies and programme implementation in the NCE-awarding institutions in the country (NCCE, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

The Federal Republic of Nigeria adopts education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development (FRN, 2004); having recognised the fact that national development is premised on qualitative education. The decline in the

quality of teacher education programme has been attributed to a number of reasons caused by stakeholders in the system. It is in recognition of this that this study was designed to examine the extent of the application of quality assurance strategies adopted by the colleges of education in their teacher education programme, using Kwara State-owned Colleges of Education as a case study.

Purpose of the Study

In spite of the commitment to the enforcement of academic standards in all NCE-awarding institutions in Nigeria, graduates of colleges of education have been criticised for poor performance by members of the public (Jaiyeoba & Atanda, 2007). Due to the fact that holders of NCE are the classroom implementers of Universal Basic Education policy of the Government, no efforts should be spared in ensuring that the institutions producing them abide by the minimum academic standards and other teacher education policy provisions put in place to ensure that they meet the required standards.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the quality assurance strategies in colleges of education using colleges of education in Kwara State as a case study. The study was designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

- i. to examine the frequency of application of quality assurance strategies identified;
- ii. to identify the bodies that are in charge of each of the quality assurance strategies identified;
- iii. to examine the areas of improvement required as a result of the implementation of quality assurance strategies in the institutions; and
- iv. to identify the steps taken to ensure improvement in the areas identified.

Research Methods

The study was a survey research type with three colleges of education selected from Kwara State of Nigeria. In the state as at October, 2011, there were eight colleges of education (four private, three public and one military). All the four private colleges of education were relatively young to be considered for the study and the only military college of education is unique in its organisation, control and management. Thus, only the three public colleges were purposively selected for use. The Provosts or their representatives were purposively used as respondents to the instrument. Relevant pieces of information were collected with the aid of a 20-item instrument named "Colleges of Education Quality Assurance Strategies Questionnaire" (CEQAQ). The instrument was validated and tested for reliability. Its reliability coefficient was found to be 0.74, indicating that the instrument would

measure accurately what it is intended to measure. The instrument is an open-ended questionnaire, where the respondents were allowed to give their candid opinions about the current situation on quality assurance in their institutions. The instrument enquired the application of accreditation, external examination system, monitoring and evaluation, students admission policy, visitation process, programme audit, assessment and academic review as they affect quality assurance in the institutions. Six research questions were raised to guide the study. Data collected were analysed, using descriptive statistics.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions:

- i. What are the quality assurance strategies used in the colleges of education?
- ii. What is the frequency of application of quality assurance strategies in the colleges?
- iii. What are the types of external examination system used in the colleges?
- iv. Do the colleges apply government established student admission policy?
- v. What are the areas of improvement required as a result of the application of quality assurance strategies in the colleges?
- vi. What are the steps taken to ensure improvement in the areas identified for quality assurance in the colleges?

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question (RQ) 1: What are the quality assurance strategies used in the colleges of education?

Answers to RQ1 are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Quality Assurance Strategies Used in the Colleges

Inst.	Quality Assurance Strategies							
	Accd.	Ext. Ex.	M&E	Prog. Audit	Visitation	Std. Adm.	Assmt.	Aca Rev
Ilorin	Used every five years	Used sessionally	Used regularly	Not used	Used Only once	Used sessionally	Not used	Not Used
Oro	Used every five years	Used sessionally	Used regularly	Not used	Used Only once	Used sessionally	Not used	Not Used
Lafiagi	Used every five years	Used sessionally	Used regularly	Not used	Used Only once	Used sessionally	Not used	Not Used

Key:

Accd. = Accreditation

Ext.Ex. = External Examination

M&E = Monitoring and Evaluation

Prog. Audit = Programme Audit

Std.Adm. = Students' Admission

Assmt = Assessment

Aca. Rev. = Academic Review

Research Question (RQ) 2: What is the frequency of application of quality assurance strategies in the colleges of education?

Data obtained from items A, C and E of CEQAQ, as presented in table 1, are used to answer RQ 2.

Table 2: Frequency of Application of Quality Assurance Strategies for Students' Admission

Questionnaire Items	College of Education, Ilorin	College of Education, Oro	College of Education, Lafiagi
Conducting Post UTME for student admission?	Does it annually	Does it annually	Does it annually
Admitting student based on the Cut Off Point set?	Does it regularly	Does it regularly	Does it regularly

Research Question (RQ) 3: Do the Colleges apply government established student admission policy?

Answers to RQ 3 were sifted from item D of CEQAQ, as shown in Table 2.

Table 3: Application of Government Established Admission Policy

Questionnaire Items	College of Education, Ilorin	College of Education, Oro	College of Education, Lafiagi
The college admits students on the basis of:			
i. Merit	YES	YES	YES
ii. Catchment Area	YES	YES	YES
iii. Educationally Disadvantaged State	YES	YES	YES

Research Question (RQ) 4: What is the extent of application of external examination process as quality assurance strategy in the colleges?

Answers to RQ 4 were sifted from item D of CEQAQ, as shown in Table 3.

Table 4: Frequency of Application of External Examination Process as Quality Assurance Strategy

Questionnaire Item	College of Education Ilorin	College of Education Oro	College of Education Lafiagi
The External examination system adopted in the College:			
i. Moderation of Student Project	YES	YES	YES
ii. Moderation of Examination Questions	YES	YES	YES
iii. Moderation of Examination Results	YES	YES	YES
iv. Moderation of Teaching Practice Exercise	YES	YES	YES
v. Adjunct Lecturer System	NO	NO	NO

Research Question (RQ) 5: What are the areas of improvement required as a result of the application of quality assurance strategies in the colleges?

Analysis of data obtained from items A, C and E of CEQAQ addressed RQ 5, as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Areas of Improvement for Quality Assurance in the Colleges

Institutions	Areas of Improvement
College of Education, Ilorin	i. Construction of more laboratory and staff offices. ii. Centralisation of college account, staff probity and examination regulation. iii. Compliance with student-teacher ratio.
College of Education, Oro	i. Improvement on student-teacher ratio of 1:25 ii. Improvement on staff development programme. iii. Provision of more textbooks in the library. iv. Improvement in the area of continuous assessment test. v. The entire staff should improve on their maintenance culture. vi. College edict and students' welfare to be improved upon. i. Improving on infrastructural facilities.
College of Education, Lafiagi	ii. Improvement on fiscal management. iii. Adherence to college needs in council's allocation of resources. iv. Improving on monitoring exercise by the State Ministry of Education.

Research Question (RQ) 6: What are the steps taken by the college to ensure improvement in the areas identified?

Answers to research question 6 are obtained from responses to items A, C and E of CEQAQ and presented in table 6.

Table 6: Steps Taken by the Colleges to Ensure Improvement

Institutions	Areas of Improvement
College of Education, Ilorin	i. More infrastructural facilities were provided through the Education Trust Fund (E.T.F.) projects to meet the need of the college. ii. Regular financial auditing. iii. Adherence to due process in financial transaction. iv. E.T.F. funds were used for training staff and provision of more staff offices and classrooms.
College of Education, Oro	i. Employment of more lecturers in the deficient departments. ii. Procurement of relevant textbooks. iii. Improving on the use of Continuous Assessment Tests. iv. College Edict is under review by the House of Assembly.
College of Education, Lafiagi	i. Improvement in the provision of infrastructure. ii. Improvement in staff development programme.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 shows that accreditation, external examination system, monitoring and evaluation, student admission policy and visitation exercise were adopted as quality assurance strategies by the three public colleges in Kwara State towards ensuring quality teacher production. It is, therefore, expected that the institutions would be able to mount quality teacher education programme and regulate against sub-standard programmes and products. However, programme audit, assessment and academic review were not used as quality assurance strategies in the institutions in spite of their importance. This probably was due to the fact that these techniques are still relatively not popular for use in Nigeria.

As shown in table 1, accreditation exercise was done in every five years while visitation exercise occurred once since the establishment of the three institutions, over three decades. All the three colleges used external examination system, monitoring and evaluation and student admission policy on continuous basis. It is, therefore, expected that the institutions would maintain quality in students' admission and production of their graduates.

Table 3 shows that government regulations on admission policy in terms of benchmark for admission of students were strictly adhered to in the colleges. The institutions had introduced post UTME screening exercise to strengthen the quality of their admission into various programmes. All these are to ensure quality of the students to be admitted. However, the use of post UTME screening exercise is a contentious issue in Nigeria as the National Assembly is contending its legality.

As shown in table 4, all the three state-government owned colleges of education in Kwara State were using moderation of examination questions, moderation of students' projects, moderation of examination results and moderation of teaching practice exercise to ensure quality of their operations. However, only the College of Education, Ilorin, out of the three colleges, used Adjunct Lecture/Sabbatical Leave System in spite of the inherent advantages of such system. This might be due to inadequate funds in the institutions.

In terms of areas of improvement, table 5 shows that there is a need for the construction of more laboratories and staff offices, improvement on staff development programme and provision of more textbooks in the library. In the College of Education, Oro, there is a need for an improvement in the Student-Teacher Ratio (STR) of the college to meet up with government's stipulated STR of 1:25. On the other hand, the STR in the College of Education, Ilorin needs to be reduced to meet up with government regulations. In the College of Education, Lafiagi, there is a need for improvement of teaching staff and infrastructure.

Areas needing improvement varied in the three institutions despite their being owned by the same proprietor, the State Government. However, common areas for improvement in all the three colleges were infrastructural facilities and staffing.

Conclusion

This paper provides an overview of quality assurance strategies in Kwara State Government-owned Colleges of Education, Nigeria. It examines strategies of ensuring quality of teacher education programme in the institutions. The paper then outlines the areas of improvement required as a result of quality assurance practices adopted and the steps taken by the colleges to improve on their programmes. Nonetheless, there is growing awareness regarding quality assurance while a wave of healthy competition among institutions is rising. The need for formal, external and internal quality assessment strategies is felt for the development of teacher education programme. Since quality assurance is a management function, it requires the ability of the Chief Executive of the institutions to ensure that the system is properly managed for the objectives of their institutions to be achieved. Funds are needed for the development and improvement of physical and human resources of the institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Colleges of education should continue to adhere to policies and procedures meant for quality and standards of teacher education programmes.
2. The colleges should engage in peer review of their programmes among themselves, in order to ensure quality.
3. Programme audit, assessment and academic review should be adopted as part of quality assurance strategies in the institutions.
4. Adjunct lecturer system where Senior Lecturers or Professors (including those on sabbatical leave) from universities would be employed on part-time basis, to oversee activities of some programmes in the colleges.
5. The State Government should make available more funds to the colleges for the provision of more infrastructural facilities and staff development programmes.

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