Impact of external quality assurance on academic libraries

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Forty nine librarians from the University of Ibadan (UI), University of Lagos (UNILAG) and Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) were surveyed by employing a structured questionnaire seeking respondents' opinion on quality assurance. The respondents indicated that they fully participated in accreditation exercises of the National Universities Commission (NUC) which is the main body responsible for ensuring quality in Nigerian universities. The importance of accreditation is to improve quality and to maintain standards and guidelines. As regards the impact of accreditation, all the librarians rated improved provision of library services and resources to be the highest impact. Most of the criteria for assuring quality received very high scores with leadership having a score of 100% in the three institutions. It is concluded that the highest impact of accreditation on libraries is the improved provision of library services and resources. The library is the hub of activities during accreditation because each accreditation team is obliged to visit the library to ascertain the quality of library holdings and services in relation to every programme being accredited.

Introduction

The evolution of information and communication technology (ICT) has exerted considerable influence on the provision of education worldwide. The libraries which are integral units of educational institutions have integrated digital services such as e-mail, voice mail, discussion group, bulletin board, chat sessions, online reference, and web pages to improve their service delivery to patrons.

The essence of institutional participation in accreditation exercise is to ensure that standards are maintained in the course of training students in higher institutions for improved manpower development. The academic library, as the hub of accreditation process, plays a significant role in guarantying the quality of graduates through the provision of innovative information resources for enhanced learning, teaching and research in all academic programmes.

Higher institutions are clamouring for quality assurance systems in which the academic library is a key player. One of the major objectives of higher education is to instil lifelong and independent learning in students. Librarians, as partners in the training of students as well as custodians of information, are working towards meeting the parameters that assure quality. These include: providing excellence, being exceptional, providing value for money, conforming to expectations, getting things right the first time, meeting customers' needs, having zero defects, providing added value and exhibiting fitness of purpose[1].

Review of literature

Quality assurance is defined as a process of establishing stakeholders' confidence that provides inputs, processes and outcomes and fulfils expectations or measures up to the minimum requirements[2]. Quality assurance is a planned, deliberate action or activities instigated and carried out with the intent and purpose of maintaining and improving the quality of learning for participants[3]. Any university that takes quality assurance seriously

emerges as a self-critical community of students, teachers, support staff and senior managers each contributing to and striving for continued improvement[4]. On the other hand, observation has been made that quality assurance tends to be associated with industry and implies an emphasis on procedures and documentation[5]. The procedure for quality assurance requires monitoring and evaluation by internal quality assurance inspectors for purposes of external accreditation[3].

Traditionally, the quality of a library is perceived to focus essentially on the size of its collection, building, library users, facilities and equipment, services, and the extent to which libraries achieve their mission and goals. In the provision of services, however, there appears to be a clear opportunity to excel. In order to achieve excellence, quality service delivery requires quality resources which include quality personnel and cost-effective supporting processes. In recent times, emphasis is on service quality, satisfaction and desired outcomes which should be linked to planning processes. As investment on new information resources and services are rising, libraries need to justify the investment on them to improve the efficiency and positive influences of the new resources and services[6]. The provision and use of library materials and services affect the quality of students' educational experiences[7].

Quality assurance is a way of measuring, improving and maintaining the quality of any human activity that has value[8]. Librarianship across the world is recognized as a human activity that has value and contributes to the growth and development in every aspect of human endeavour. Implementing quality assurance measures, therefore, facilitates service delivery in academic libraries and information centres. It has been observed that the perceived quality assurance in academic libraries requires some good understanding of higher education issues and needs and the academic library's unique nature and functions in the larger context[9]. It involves taking a look at how the academic library contributes to the institutional overall goals and objectives.

There are local and international agencies [for example, Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and American Library Association (ALA)] responsible for regulating and setting minimum standards for academic libraries. There are potential benefits as well as challenges and obstacles in adopting a version of total quality management (quality assurance) in library settings[5]. The University of Wollongong, for example, in a bid to evaluate its stated mission and goals, applied for and received the Associated Australian Business Excellence Award (ABEA). The experience of University of Wollongong has shown that even though the Total Quality Management (TQM) is more popularly used in business-oriented systems, this concept can be applied in the library environment to achieve quality outcomes. In a bid to embark on the onward journey of quality assurance, certain processes and operations in the library must be examined through a process of planning, implementation, and review of goals in order to achieve the set objectives. The emphasis of World Conference on Higher Education in 2009 was on expanding access, equity, relevance and quality of higher education[10]. This development led to the establishment of internal and external accreditation and quality assurance mechanism, alongside the promotion of networking among them[11]. Also, addressing the challenges of globalization and commercialization of higher education has led to the setting up of quality assurance agencies across institutions of higher learning world-wide to evaluate higher education inputs, processes, and outcomes[9]. Consequently, academic libraries, being key partners in the provision of quality education, should follow the current trends and manage the change process.

The impact of external quality assurance on university libraries in Kenya was investigated and it was observed that globalization and commercialization had affected higher educational systems with emphasis being placed on quality graduates and evaluators who are looking for new data and indicators that demonstrate that graduates have mastered specific objectives[11]. The effects of privatization and commercialization of higher education in Nigeria have become more prevalent as more individuals and organizations have ventured into the provision of higher education.

It has, therefore, become necessary to entrench quality assurance and quality control in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Quality performance of a library should be judged by the contributions of the library to the achievements of the overall goals and objectives of the parent institution.

Some of the key elements involved in quality entrenchment are quality leadership, customer

centeredness, personal commitment, and improvement on infrastructure[8]. In this regard, academic library is responsible for building the academic foundation by demonstrating the ability to satisfy stated and implied needs of the users. Among other responsibilities, the librarian's role includes liaising with faculty members in curriculum development and planning which must be in tune with current trends and discoveries from research outcomes. These reviews confirm that the process of quality assurance is a continuing, active and integrative process for maintaining and improving quality rather than simply being a system of evaluating and checking for errors.

Empirical studies on quality assurance in academic libraries in Nigeria are scanty. Since there is an upsurge in the establishment of higher institutions in Nigeria, such studies are necessary for quality assurance assessment in these institutions.

Objectives of the Study

- To evaluate institutional participation in external quality assurance.

- To assess the impact of external quality assurance agency on academic libraries.

- To evaluate criteria for quality assurance in academic libraries.

Methodology

The population of the study comprised all academic librarians in three Federal universities in the South-West geographical zone of Nigeria. Sixteen librarians from the University of Ibadan, 15 from the University of Lagos and 18 from Obafemi Awolowo University participated in the study.

A 23-item structured questionnaire was devised for data collection. The questionnaire had two sections.

Section A comprised of respondents' demographic data while Section B solicited for respondents' opinion regarding institutional participation in accreditation exercise, accreditation agency, impact of accreditation on libraries, and their rating of criteria for evaluating quality assurance performance in their libraries.

The questionnaire was administered to the respondents in each of the institutions studied and the completed questionnaire was collected for data analysis. Data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages.

Analysis

Gender and qualifications

Table 1 shows that 11 (68.8%) out of 16 and 10 (66.7%) out of 15 of the librarians in the University of Ibadan (UI) and University of Lagos (UNILAG), respectively, were male. Thus, the ratio of male to female librarians in the two institutions was 2:1. In Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), 10 (55.6%) out of 18 librarians were male. This indicated that OAU was more gender friendly in the recruitment of librarians than UI and UNILAG. With regard to qualifications, 3 (18.8%) out of 16, 4 (26.7%) out of 15, and 3 (16.7%) out of 18 librarians in UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively, had Ph.D. in Library Science while 13 (81.3%) out of 16, 10 (66.7%) out of 15, and 12 (66.7%) out of 18 librarians in UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively, had Master's degree in Library Science (Table 1). This showed that the librarians in these institutions were highly qualified professionals with a total of 45 (91.8%) out of 49 having at least a Master's degree in Library Science.

Participation, accreditation agency and importance of accreditation

All the librarians indicated a 100% participation in accreditation activities in their various institutions

Table 1—Gender and qualifications of librarians in the three Nigerian universities

Universities	Gender				Qualifications							
	Male		Female		Ph.D.		Masters		Bachelor		Diploma	
	*f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Ibadan	11	68.8	5	31.3	3	18.8	13	81.3	-	-	-	-
Lagos	10	66.7	5	33.3	4	26.7	10	66.7	1	06.7	-	-
Obafemi Awolowo	10	55.6	8	44.4	3	16.7	12	66.7	-	-	3	16.7

*f = Frequency counts.

(Table 2). Results revealed that the National Universities Commission (NUC) was the main body responsible for ensuring quality in these universities. While librarians from UI and UNILAG gave a score of 100% to NUC, OAU librarians had a score of 88.9% for NUC (Table 2). According to the librarians from UI and UNILAG, the importance of accreditation was to ensure quality and to maintain standards and guidelines. These items received a total score of 93.8% and 93.3% from UI and UNILAG, respectively (Table 2). While ensuring public accountability was scored 06.3% and 06.7% by UI and UNILAG, respectively. On the other hand, OAU librarians had a score of 44.4% for ensuring quality, 55.6% for ensuring public accountability and zero score for ensuring standards and guidelines (Table 2). These results indicated that the aim of accreditation was to ensure quality, standards and guidelines. The lower score on ensuring quality by OAU could be explained on the bases of leadership of the library and the management team driving the quality assurance system in that institution. If the leadership showed commitment to quality assurance, the respondents would consider it important. The transformational leadership style would be successful in quality management, since the leadership knows the importance of high performance expectations and intellectual stimulation which support the implementation of quality management in a library[12].

Impact of accreditation

Out of the seven possible impacts of accreditation presented to the librarians, improved provision of library services and resources was adjudged to be the highest impact with the sum of frequencies for Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) of 16 (100%), 15 (100%) and 17 (94.4%) out of 18 for the UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively (Table 3). Library staff being involved in accreditation was the next with the sum of frequencies for SA and A of 13 (81.3%) out of 16, 15 (100%), and 17 (94.4%) out of 18 for the UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively. The third highest impact was assisting the library in achieving self-determined goals with the sum of frequencies for SA and A of 12 (75.0%) out of 16, 15 (100%) and 17 (94.4%) out of 18 for the UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively (Table 3). According to the librarians, the least impact was that accreditation consumes time. This item had the sum of frequencies for SA and A of 10 (62.5%) out of 16, 10 (66.7%) out of 15, and 2 (11.1%) out of 18 for the UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively (Table 3). In any institution, the impact of accreditation is felt mostly in the library making it the hub of academic activities during the period. This is because each accreditation team is obliged to visit the library to ascertain the quality of library holdings and services in relation to the programme being accredited. One of the important pillars determining the quality of higher-education service delivery is the quality management system in the library[13].

Criteria for assessing quality assurance performance

Table 4 shows that of all the nine criteria listed for assessing quality assurance performance, leadership was the most important with the sum of frequencies for very important (VI) and important (I) of

Table 2—Percentage rating of institutional participation, accreditation agencies and importance of accreditation in academic libraries.

		Universities		
		Ibadan	Lagos	Obafemi Awolowo
Participation	Yes	100	100	100
	No	-	-	-
Accreditation Agency:	National University commission (NUC)	100	100	88.9
	Library Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN)	-	-	5.6
	NUC and LRCN	-	-	-
	Others	-	-	5.6
Importance of Accreditation:	Ensure quality	56.3	40.0	44.4
	Ensure public accountability	6.3	6.7	55.6
	Ensure standards and guidelines	37.5	53.3	-
	Others	-	-	-
		n=16	n=15	n=18

Table 3—Frequencies of agreement with statements on impacts of accreditation on academic libraries

Statements	Response categories	Universities					
		Ibadan		Lagos		Obafemi Awolowo	
		*f	%	f	%	f	%
Accreditation has led to the improvement and provision of library services and resources	**SA	7	43.8	9	60.0	14	77.8
	A	9	56.2	6	40.0	3	16.7
	D	-	-	-	-	1	05.5
	SD	-	-	-	-	-	-
	NC	-	-	-	-	-	-
Accreditation has led to staff development and improved skills	SA	5	31.3	9	60.0	11	61.1
	A	8	50.0	2	13.3	5	27.8
	D	3	18.8	2	13.3	2	11.1
	SD	-	-	-	-	-	-
	NC	-	-	2	13.3	-	-
Accreditation has led to conducive work environment for staff and students	SA	6	37.5	8	53.3	3	16.7
	A	8	50.0	7	46.7	9	50.0
	D	2	12.5	-	-	4	22.2
	SD	-	-	-	-	2	11.1
	NC	-	-	-	-	-	-
Accreditation consumes time	SA	4	25.0	6	40.0	1	05.5
	A	6	37.5	4	26.7	1	05.5
	D	5	31.3	4	26.7	9	50.0
	SD	1	06.3	1	06.7	4	22.2
	NC	-	-	-	-	3	16.7
Library staff are involved in preparing for accreditation	SA	3	18.8	8	53.3	9	50.0
	A	10	62.5	7	46.7	8	44.4
	D	2	12.5	-	-	-	-
	SD	-	-	-	-	-	-
	NC	1	06.3	-	-	1	05.5
Library staff are well trained on how to prepare for accreditation	SA	1	06.3	8	53.3	6	33.3
	A	6	37.5	4	26.7	5	27.8
	D	3	18.8	3	20.0	6	33.3
	SD	2	12.5	-	-	-	-
	NC	4	25.5	-	-	1	05.5
Accreditation assists Library towards achieving self-determined goals	SA	6	37.5	8	53.3	14	77.8
	A	6	37.5	7	46.7	3	16.7
	D	3	18.8	-	-	1	05.5
	SD	1	06.3	-	-	-	-
	NC	-	-	-	-	-	-

*f= Frequency counts.   **SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree, NC= Not Certain.

16 (100%), 15 (100%) and 18 (100%) for UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively. This indicates that leadership plays a very important role in quality assurance performance. Three other criteria, funding and budget with the sum of frequencies for VI and I of 15 (93.8%), 15 (100%) and 18 (100%), collections and services with the sum of frequencies for VI and I of 16 (100%), 15 (100%) and 16 (88.9%), and building and facilities with the sum of frequencies for VI and I of 15 (93.8%), 15 (100%) and 17 (94.4%) for UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively, ranked next to leadership. Customer perspective criterion, with the

Table 4—Frequencies of the importance of quality assurance performance criteria

Performance criteria	Response categories	Universities					
		Ibadan		Lagos		Obafemi Awolowo	
		*f	%	f	%	f	%
Leadership	**VI	11	68.8	11	73.3	14	77.8
	I	5	31.2	4	26.7	4	22.2
	SI	-	-	-	-	-	-
	LI	-	-	-	-	-	-
	NI	-	-	-	-	-	-
Planning and Strategy	VI	7	43.8	7	46.7	8	44.4
	I	8	50.0	8	53.3	7	38.9
	SI	1	06.2	-	-	1	05.6
	LI	-	-	-	-	2	11.1
	NI	-	-	-	-	-	-
Management of resources and partnerships	VI	6	37.5	7	26.7	8	44.4
	I	8	50.0	8	66.7	6	33.3
	SI	2	12.5	-	06.7	1	05.6
	LI	-	-	-	-	2	11.1
	NI	-	-	-	-	1	05.6
Management of internal processes	VI	3	18.8	4	20.0	4	22.2
	I	11	68.8	10	80.0	6	33.3
	SI	2	12.5	1	-	6	33.3
	LI	-	-	-	-	2	11.1
	NI	-	-	-	-	-	-
Customer perspective	VI	3	18.8	3	20.0	6	33.3
	I	8	50.0	12	80.0	6	33.3
	SI	5	31.2	-	-	2	11.1
	LI	-	-	-	-	2	11.1
	NI	-	-	-	-	2	11.1
Building and facilities	VI	8	50.0	8	53.3	12	66.7
	I	7	43.8	7	46.7	5	27.8
	SI	1	06.2	-	-	1	05.5
	LI	-	-	-	-	-	-
	NI	-	-	-	-	-	-
Funding and budget	VI	6	37.5	12	80.0	14	77.8
	I	9	56.3	3	20.0	4	22.2
	SI	1	06.2	-	-	-	-
	LI	-	-	-	-	-	-
	NI	-	-	-	-	-	-
Staffing	VI	8	50.0	13	86.7	8	44.4
	I	7	43.8	2	13.3	5	27.8
	SI	1	06.2	-	-	3	16.7
	LI	-	-	-	-	2	11.1
	NI	-	-	-	-	-	-
Collections and services	VI	10	62.5	13	86.7	9	50.0
	I	6	37.5	2	13.3	7	38.9
	SI	-	-	-	-	2	11.1
	LI	-	-	-	-	-	-
	NI	-	-	-	-	-	-

*f= Frequency counts.   **VI= Very important, I= Important, SI= Somewhat important, LI= Less important, NI= Not important.

sum of frequencies for VI and I of 11 (68.8%), 15 (100%) and 12 (66.7%) from UI, UNILAG and OAU, respectively (Table 4), was adjudged by most librarians to have the least influence on quality assurance performance. All the nine criteria were scored highly by librarians from UNILAG with maximum frequencies for VI and I of 15 (100%) in seven out of the nine criteria. In addition to leadership style, funding and budget are key components for the entrenchment of quality assurance in academic libraries as well as in other organizations as quality requires adequate funding and implementation of budget. There is significant relationship between accreditation and resource input into Nigerian universities, quality of output and quality of process, and no significant relationship between accreditation and quality of academic content[14]. Resource input and quality of output have to do with adequate funding. In essence, when adequate funding is achieved, quality output is expected.

Conclusion

The library is the foundation for learning, teaching and research activities which is reflected in the quality of graduates produced. It is the hub of academic activities during accreditation. This is because each accreditation team is obliged to visit the library to ascertain the quality of library holdings and services in relation to the programme being accredited. An academic library that upholds the culture of quality assurance would boost departments and faculties in getting their programmes accredited. It is, therefore, recommended that quality assurance should be enshrined in the provision of information services. Standards and guidelines should be developed to assess the activities of academic libraries in order to ensure excellent service delivery.

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