Strategies for sustainable quality assurance in education: the National Commission for Colleges of Education Experience

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STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION: THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR COLLEGES OF EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

BY

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Abstract
This paper examines quality assurance strategies adopted by National Commission for Colleges of Education in controlling quality for NCE teacher education programs. It shows that the Commission employs both internal and external modalities for enhancing quality. However, existing challenges are militating against the achievement of set objectives. The paper concludes that unless something urgent is done about the problems along the suggested remedies, sooner than later, the nation will miss the much needed quality control in the preparation of basic level teachers for the primary and junior secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION
The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) was established by an Act in 1989 as the third leg of the tripod of excellence in the supervision of tertiary education in Nigeria. As a supervisory agency in teacher education, the NCCE has the mandate of laying down of standards for all programs of teacher education, accreditation of certificates and academic awards as well as approval of guidelines for the establishment of teacher education institutions and their accreditations.

The need for NCCE arose out of the desire of government to replace the activities of the various universities in catering for academic standards and certification requirements of colleges of education. At that time, universities lay standards for NCE certificates. Though the universities carried out these assignments commendably through their institutes and faculties of education, there was no parity in standards and practices. Consequently, universities had more confidence in products of their affiliate colleges of education and reflected same in their admission policies. NCCE (2002) reported that universities admitted NCE graduates from their affiliate colleges for a two year B.Ed degree program, while providing for three-year B.Ed programs for products of the same NCE programs affiliated to other sister universities. On establishment as a commission to monitor and control quality among colleges of education, the NCCE took its mandate of “laying down of minimum standards” for NCE programs and setting out “criteria for accreditation of colleges of education” in Nigeria seriously. To date, it has prescribed and reviewed the minimum standards for the training of NCE teachers three times.

The NCCE minimum standards started in 1990 with a study and workshop on the NCE programs offered in the different parts of Nigeria (NCCE 1990). The process marked the first time in the Nigeria educational history that the NCE programs across the country were subjected to a National evaluation and revision. From that process, evolved the NCE curriculum model. The model entails a need assessment (called pre-planning
stage), planning, development and evaluative stages all worked in to a five-year process.

A unique quality of the NCCE curriculum model is that it makes curriculum building and reconstruction democratic and responsive to needs of the stakeholders in the education industry. As a process, it consists of the production of a draft minimum standards arising out of analyzed and condensed versions of submissions of stakeholders and experts, organization of workshops where the draft is deliberated on by experts and stakeholders, production of thoroughly reviewed documents, and the assemblage of professionals from assorted disciplines from colleges of education, universities and polytechnics to further critique and edit the products before its approval by the Honorable Minister of Education.

In all reviews, the commission is guided by the principle that a quality program cannot be predicted on anything but identified Nigeria's aspirations for a sound, just and utilitarian education at all levels.

This paper encapsulates the highlights of NCCE inbuilt strategies for sustainable quality assurance in NCE Teacher Education programs across the country. It also examines problems encountered by the Commission as well as modalities for improvement in the quality assurance mission of the Commission.

Background to Quality Assurance in Nigerian Colleges of Education

Quality assurance has been a re-occurring decimal in all educational systems worldwide. In traditional Nigerian societies, for example, the quality assurance measure of traditional education was whether or not a segment of the educational enterprise could assist the learner to creditably carry out assigned duties in the area of training on graduation. Consequently, quality traditional education experience was one that culminated in the learner doing what the trainer or master craftsman did after graduation.

However, with the advent of western education, quality education assurance parameters are more abstract, complex and difficult to determine. For example, in the era of Christian missionaries, educational efforts were geared towards evangelism of Nigerians. At that time, the quality of education offered in educational institutions was measured by the amount of religious information available to the students and the bench-mark for "quality assurance" was the number of graduates that were "converted" before graduation. As colonial administration increased their stake in education, the focus in quality assurance in the school system changed. School children were no longer expected to demonstrate that they were "converts" of the Christian missionaries; but rather, educational assurance indices such as 'subservience and dependence' introduced by the colonial masters became the yard-sticks. Schools from the primary to tertiary level were fashioned after the British school system with their curricula skewed towards these goals.
Similarly, the focus of quality assurance in the intermediate independent Nigeria changed on attainment of independence and self government in 1960. Graduates of the then “Independent Nigerian School System” were expected to move into the shoes of the western colonialists (Alaezi, 1989). This shift crystallize into crave for paid employment. Since the introduced education had no indigenous standards, foreign standards were introduced and jealously guided (Ukoli, 1985). Abelega (2001) reported that following the new orientation, there was crave for “white collar jobs” and schools were established to guarantee the production of such category of workers. The situation persisted until the National Universities Commission, NUC, the Nation Board for Technical Education, NTBE, and the National Commission for Colleges of Education, NCCE, were established to monitor and control quality among the universities, the polytechnics and the colleges of education respectively.

On establishment, the NCCE took the charge in her enabling Act, prescribed and reviewed three times, in its shot life span, Minimum standards for the training of NCE teachers for prospective holders of Nigeria Certificate in Education. As stated before, the focus of all Minimum Standard reviews by the Commission has been the desire to fulfill the needs and aspirations of Nigerian people for a sound, just and utilitarian education at the primary and junior school levels.

Practically, curriculum review in the NCE programmes involved a painstaking exercise of selecting and organizing learning experiences that would make the NCE graduates pivots in modern Nigerian classrooms where such graduates would catalyze adaptation, adoption and the use of modern technology as well as preserve the cherished values of the nation as an emerging democratic giant.

To further concretize the gains of the review, accreditation of NCE programmes in Colleges of Education is undertaken every five years. During the exercise, external mechanisms are evolved to check the internal efforts by individual colleges to engender quality. Panelists from Universities, Colleges of Education, and polytechnics are constituted to examine the academic and institutional programmes of the institutions. The data generated by the group are later validated by the independent judgment of the Commission’s Programme officers who are experts in their respective disciplines.

On the bases of the pre-determined criteria, colleges are awarded full or interim or denied accreditation which impacts its status in the eyes of professional bodies, NCCE, parents and the Nigeria public.

**Quality Assurance Strategies in Colleges of Education**

Several quality assurance strategies are adopted by the Commission to engender sustainable quality in colleges of education across the Nation. These strategies include:
1. **Collaborative Efforts in Laying Down and Reviewing Minimum Standards for all Colleges of Education.**

For purposes of laying down minimum standards, the commission adopts a collaborative approach whereby universities which make varying scholastic demands on the NCE programme are involved. Similarly, due recognition is also given to academic and professional expertise that exists in the colleges of Education, polytechnics and other NCE awarding institutions. Experts from these institutions and other stakeholders form the majority of the participants that serve in the panels that draws up the draft documents as well as those who participate in the NCCE minimum standards workshops that are hosted in different colleges across the country by the commission.

The evolution of NCCE minimum standards begin with a call by the Commission for colleges of education and other stakeholders to submit proposals in the areas of need or deficiencies in the existing NCE curriculum. These submissions are then collated by the academic programs department and used as working papers for NCCE minimum standards Review workshops at different levels. At first level, the outcome of the workshop produces drafts minimum standards document from subject panels. These drafts are subjected to a critique in a second stage review workshop attended by resource persons from the universities, polytechnics and Colleges of Education.

Deliberations at the workshop could result in a modification of the draft NCCE minimum standards in terms of contents and course description. At this workshop also, attention of participants could be drawn to the aspects of teacher education which need urgent evaluation. From these efforts, it is possible to evolve a curriculum that will not only guarantee parity among colleges of education but also meet the yearnings and aspirations of the wider Nigeria society. Additionally, the approach is a veritable strategy in assisting NCE graduates in transiting into B.Ed degree programs in the university without problems.

2. **Accreditation of Academic Programs in the College Of Education.**

As intended for all tertiary institutions in Nigeria, accreditation of NCE programs in the Colleges of education by the NCCE is for quality improvement and to ensure that there is parity in all NCE programs in accordance with the set standards. As a quality assurance strategy, the focus of accreditation is to:

a. guarantee that the specific NCCE minimum standard for the award of NCE is not only attained but it is enhanced and sustained by all NCE awarding institutions;

b. validate the quality of NCE graduates with respect to their areas of specialization; and
c. Certify to the employer and community that academic programs in the Colleges of education are of desirable standards and their graduates are adequate for employment and further studies.

3. **Monitoring of Academic of Programs and Infrastructure**

   This is a strategy by the Commission to ensure that the guidelines specified in the NCCE minimum standards documents are closely followed. During the monitoring exercise, the Commission determines whether and how the educational objective of the institution is achieved in line with the published NCCE guidelines. At site visit by program officers, judgment is made about the objectives of the program, admission requirement and their implementation, physical facilities, personnel, mode of teaching as well as the application of graduation requirements in the institution. Decisions about the above parameters inform the commission on the desirable academic status in between the accreditation exercise of the institution.

4. **Ranking of the NCE Awarding Institution on the Aggregate Quality of the Program**

   Another strategy introduced by the commission to bring about quality assurance in NCE Teacher Education and encourage healthy competition among the colleges is the ranking of Colleges of Education on the basis of aggregate quality of their programs. Following this strategy, a total of aggregate scores of academic programs offered by each NCE awarding institution is compiled and computed as the sum of the individual scores in each of the assessed program. The product of this computation yields mean quality index score which provides a conglomerate quality measure of the general strength of the NCE programs offered by the institution. The result of this analysis and standing of each NCE awarding institution is then publicized.

   As expected, this approach to quality assurance has introduced the spirit of competition that has encouraged the colleges to compete for enviable positions in the ranking which is not only necessary for quality improvement but it is also a balm for quality assurance to the Nigerian public. At least for now, parents, students, proprietors and other stakeholders have a ready document to consult for their quality assurance needs in NCE Teacher Programs in the country.

5. **External Moderation System**

   A major consideration in any quality assurance process in education, the world over, is the issue of parity. Parity in educational programs is essential because stakeholders in the educational enterprise wish to be assured that a given level of education under one setting is the same as that which is undertaken in another setting provided it is the same level of education.
One way the commission is able to achieve this in the colleges of education system is to institute a veritable External Examination system. Under the arrangement, experienced and professionally qualified senior academic staff are made to moderate examination of all NCE awarding institutions across the nation. Thereafter, reports on the moderated papers are sent to the commission (and the respective institutions) which guides decisions about quality and the certification of the affected schools.

6. **Guidelines for Establishment and Mounting New Programs**

Another strategy for quality assurance by the commission is lying down of guidelines for establishing new institutions and mounting new programs. Under normal situations, consideration of a new program comes after an accreditation exercise. In order to obtain approval for new program or to establish a new institution, the institution must be able to:

(a) Provide a justification for the new program in line with the National Policy on education (NPE Rev. 1995);
(b) Indicate sources and projection of students' intakes;
(c) Provide the curriculum (if the program is not in the minimum standards);
(d) Show evidence that it possess the teaching personnel for the program; and
(e) Provide the requisite facilities for the program

Until these conditions are examined and found to exist in an institution, no new program or institution is approved to run an NCE program.

7. **Train-the-Trainer Programs**

To ensure continued relevance of NCE graduates, the NCCE organizes regular train-the-trainer workshops for academic staff in the Colleges of Education. The scope and spectrum of the workshops vary. However, such workshops provide relevant in-service needs of teacher educator in their respective specialized areas as well as in Methodology, Information and Communicative Technology, ICT, use of virtual library and so on.

**Enhancing Quality Assurance in Colleges of Education: Challenges and Remedies**

**Challenges**

There are several challenges in enhancing quality assurance in colleges of Education in the country. A few of the challenges that deserve special mention in this paper are:

1. **Gap Between Learning Experiences provided in Education Programs and Practices in the School system**

In all disciplines in teacher education, there are wide gaps between what is studied in such programmes and what is practiced in the education industry.
For example, the Nigerian Colleges of Education train their products in skills, methodologies and teaching aids that are hardly available in our public school system. A further complication to the situation is the entry of the private sector and the spirit of competition in the educational arena of the country. To date, parents and other stakeholders choose schools on the bases of the unique programme that such schools offer. Consequently, private entrepreneurs are constantly reviewing the programs they offer in such schools in hopes that it could abstract more students. These changes are providing serious challenges to the colleges of education that reviews its curriculum once in five years to provide graduates who can meet the market demands. It is little wonder, therefore, that Nigerians are complaining about the relevance of NCE graduates in the school system.

2. **Undue Adherence to International Standards**

Colleges of education experts and stakeholders adhere unduly to international standards in selecting learning experiences for their prospective clientele. Right from the onset of what has metamorphosed into colleges of education system today; there has being the feeling that such education will be "no good" if it is not of the same standards as obtained in Britain and America. This is not helping the situation in our colleges of education.

Nigerians, and indeed, most countries in Africa have always looked to two countries for academic and consequently human resource development. For example, the history of education in Nigeria (FAFUNWA, 1991) indicates that universities of Ibadan and Ghana were reluctantly recognized and eventually accepted by Africans only because of their affiliation with the famous London University.

In addition to our pre-occupation for international standard in education, our concept of development is also inextricably linked to the levels of industrial countries. From all indications our educational development is a matter of accelerating the provision of learning experiences in order to reach the levels of advanced countries as soon as possible. Hence according to Ukoli (1985), we are a "nation in a hurry" striving to "catch up" with advanced nations of the world. This approach to the development of colleges of education is putting a strain on the capacities of existing colleges with the result that thin and thinner resources are deployed over great and greater "imported values". The net effect is less than accepted standards in colleges of education system.

3. **Dearth in Number of Applicants into NCE programmes**

One unhealthy trend evolving over the years in Colleges of Education (COEs) is the serious dwindling enrolment in the colleges. This situation has led to a heavy reliance on the pre-NCE programs for recruitment of entrants into NCE programs. As a step to ensure parity, the commission has provided for a
standardized pre-NCE curriculum to upgrade applicants with deficiencies who wish to secure admission into the colleges of education outside JAMB examination. However, students admitted under the pre-NCE program are not the best that can be admitted into teacher education programs. Consequently, the quality of NCE graduates produced is not as good as they should be.

4. Continuous Decline in Appropriation for Teacher Education

As it has been said time without number, "no educational system can rise above the standard of its teachers". Unfortunately not much is done by way of appropriation in our national budget to support this axiom in the Nigerian Educational system. The net effect on the colleges of education is that vital activities like monitoring, accreditation and other quality assurance strategies are suffering.

A further problem along the lines of funding that the colleges of education system depend on outside sources for funding. This can leave the colleges vulnerable to the holders of the resources and reduce their control under the NCCE.

Remedies

It is difficult to prefer universally accepted remedies to the myriad problems in quality assurance strategies in NCE Teachers Education. However, the basic needs, aspirations, goals and values of the people could be enhanced if the nation could implement the following:

1. Building Framework for Service-Learning

Service-learning is a strategy to link schools and communities as student performs community-service work that is integrated into and complements their classroom work. It promotes personal, intellectual, and social growth in students; helps them develop civic responsibility and civic pride; and gives them an opportunity for career exploration. Students learn to apply their skills and knowledge to identify and meet needs in school or in greater community.

To incorporate service-learning in schools, legislators should enact a school-to-work transition Act that will establish a structure and a direction for a school-work system. Under the Act, students should be equipped with relevant academic knowledge, marketable skills and appropriate work-place behaviors.

The Act could call for the revision of the current NCCE Minimum Standards to make its experiences tailor-made to meet the challenges in the school system. These will no doubt, help students make connection between the "real world" and the world of classrooms and textbooks. The framework must
stress that students should have the opportunity to make connection between what they learn in the classrooms and their every day lives.

2. Determination, Development and Transmission of Home-grown Values
It could be recalled that most institutions on the African continent were accepted because their standards compared favorably with standards obtained in similar institutions in developed countries. However, those standards have no relevance to the needs of the Nigeria people. Therefore, it is imperative that if Nigeria wants to provide learning experiences that are relevant to the needs of her people, she has to develop structures and learning opportunities that are skewed towards her needs and stage of her development and not the so called international standards.

3. Improvement in the Condition of Service of Teachers
Nigeria has taken a bold step in the establishment of federal teachers' corps during which graduates of NCE teacher education will not only be employed but will also obtain relevant professional training in their profession. And equally important addition to the professionalisation of teaching would be improvement in the condition of service of teachers. This improvement in the condition of service of teacher can take the form of enhanced teachers' service scale, good working environment better annual leave bonuses and recreational facilities, free tuition for teachers' children (especially teachers who have spent our 20 years in service), permanent teaching benefit for retired teachers as well as assured post service retirement Homes for teachers.

Implementation of 26% Budgetary Allocation to Education Sector
Nationwide, contributors to debate about the education industry have always asked for enhanced funding of educational activities. While the author will not want to over labor the issue, it is true that much of teething problems common in the colleges of education system has been due to the dearth of funds in the colleges of education system. As you are all aware, funds are needed in the provision of personnel, facilities and staff welfare in areas such as health services, recreational facilities, electric power and water supply, transportation, communication and so on that are indispensable to the smooth running of academic activities in our campuses.

Conclusion
The paper examined strategies for sustainable quality assurance in colleges of education (COEs). It traced the genesis of quality assurance in COEs and the assorted quality assurance strategies put in place by NCCE for needed parity at the NCE Teacher Education level. It is hoped that the ideas and insight shared in the paper will positively change the future of quality assurance strategies in the nation. If the colleges of education become more effective, more people will opt and find training in the sector. No
doubt, this will not only improve our educational system at basic education but also ensure sustainable human resource development in the rural area.

References