Administrative strategies for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined administrative strategies for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. Three (3) research questions and three (3) hypotheses were answered and tested in the study respectively. The study adopted descriptive survey design, with a population of three thousand and fifty lecturers, and two thousand four hundred and fifty nonacademic staff drawn from three public universities in Rivers State. The sample of the study comprised of 600 lecturers and 500 administrative staff drawn using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The respondents of study responded to a validated 26-item instrument titled "Effective Administrative Strategies for Quality Assurance in Public Universities Questionnaire (EASQAPUQ)". Mean and standard deviation statistics was used to answer five research questions, while z-test statistics was used to test five null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study showed that that there is positive and significant relationship between the mean scores of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of planning strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State (Z_{cal}=1.45; Z_{crit}=1.96), amongst others. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that Based on the findings that effective administrative strategies enhanced quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The study recommended that university management should organize a routine administrative training that will impact planning strategies and skills to the academic and non-academic staffs in all the public universities in Rivers State.

Keywords: Administrative strategies, quality assurance, staff planning strategy, staff directing strategy, staff coordinating strategy

Introduction

Education constitutes the major engine for sustainable human development as well as the fulcrum around which every activity revolves. Nigeria like so many other developing countries of the world has invested so much in education because it is believed that education is for national growth and development. The purpose of establishing the school as an institution is to ensure that effective learning and teaching takes place. Learning plays a pivotal role in the all-round development of an individual and the school is purposefully organized to facilitate effective teaching and learning process by eliminating aversive stimuli in the environment and increasing satisfying

stimuli, but where this is lacking it becomes a big challenge to the school itself and the society at large Philip (2009). There is the common phrase we now hear around the circles of university students and some persons in the society, and that is: "las las school na scam". This phrase captures the ugly condition of university education lately; and explains the unserious attitude and behavior of students towards it especially, in public schools. The students argue that the schools just extort money from them without making any significant good on their offer. For instance, some schools course content or lecturers give outdated information extort more money through sales of text books and some even take bribe to grade students good. Also, in some universities learning facilities are either non-functional or inadequate, learning environment is not conducive, teaching staff are too few and over labored, there is poor or no retention of outstanding students, good students are unemployed etc. Yet, the number of undergraduate and PG admissions and graduation keep soaring without improvement to the quality of the education system. This is crystal clear and has become the story of our university education lately, plagued with several issues of quality assurance.

Quality is often referred to as a relative concept because it is relative to the user of the term and the circumstances in which it is invoked. Higher education comprises a variety of stakeholders, which include students, parents, employers, teaching and non-teaching staff, government, accreditors, validators, auditors, assessors (including professional bodies), and policy makers. Each may have a different focus and perspective on quality. It implies that quality means different things to the different stakeholders. For instance Hall (2006) explained that while a government may be interested in graduating as many students as possible with internationally recognized credentials at a reduced cost, employers may be looking for employment skills and knowledge for the job market. Concerning academic staff, Hall noted that they will be interested in "good academic training based on good knowledge transfer and a good learning environment and a good relationship between teaching and research". In many situations, the various definitions described above can be used to complement each other in developing and using quality management processes. Hall (2006) was of the view that, of all the definitions given earlier, the notion of "fitness for purpose" is perhaps the most encompassing; virtually all other definitions, or category of definitions, can be interpreted within the broader framework of "fitness for purpose". He concluded that such an interpretation, however, always requires clarification of the context and intentions of the process or product under scrutiny; this may lead to a more specific definition for a particular purpose. This perhaps reinforces the conclusion reached by Van Damme (2002) that: twenty years of expertise and operational experience in quality assurance in higher education have not lead to a growing consensus on how the concept of quality should be defined, on the contrary. There is much more diversity in the definition of the concept than ever before, while we need to converge on what we actually mean by academic quality. In spite of the difficulty in finding a universally accepted definition for quality, we may in the last resort point out that quality is a philosophical concept and as Jude (2006) argues "there is no single definition of quality that is right to the exclusion of all others". To sum up, the number of diverse definitions of quality is an indication that quality has been a contested concept particularly in the field of higher education,

For the purposes of this research, the notion of "fitness for purpose" will be used as a general description for "quality"; that is, an educational system that achieves its goals can be said to be "fit for purpose". Within the context of quality assurance, an "educational system" refers to any provision or activity that has, as its focus, the objective of ensuring, maintaining or enhancing the quality of the education received

by students. If a particular system is evaluated for its effectiveness, then a more specific notion of quality, such as "quality as meeting customer needs" or "quality as transformation" may be incorporated to provide clarification to the notion of "fitness for purpose".

For us to understand that the word 'quality' has multi-dimensional factors, we may look at those essential elements of quality in education i.e. those elements that make inputs into quality of education and the process through which they can or do influence on the quality, Umo (2004). Quality outcomes in education can be derived through effective supervision of inputs and processes. Philip and Jude (2006) classified quality into five categories, namely quality as exceptional, quality as perfection or consistency, quality as fitness of purpose, quality as value of purpose, quality as value for money and quality as transformation, Letuka, Strydon and Mahrasoa (2007) observed that the notion of Harvey and Green on quality was sufficiently inclusive and adaptable and could be used by different institutions working under different circumstances. When applied to education, Mackow and Witkowsk, (2005) opined that quality assurance exists to ensure that quality assurance mechanisms achieve their purpose. One of such mechanisms is supervision. The primary responsibility of supervisors is to see that high standards are maintained and that schools are run in accordance with laid down regulations. By implications the supervisors are seen to be fulfilling a controlling, coordinating and communicating roles as guardian of educational standard. Supervision therefore is an important component of quality control strategy in education that would ensure the maintenance of high standards in the public tertiary institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Tertiary education is worthwhile only on the basis of producing quality output (students) equipped for servicing the needs, challenges and aspirations of the society towards national development. The galloping challenge of delivering quality education in Nigeria seems to have been necessitated by ineffective supervision and quality control of what goes on in tertiary system of education. The role of the supervisor in ensuring conducive teaching/learning environment can therefore not be trivialized. Moreover, the dismal performances of student's in examinations have given cause for concern because the academic performances of tertiary education students has been visited with a lot of public mixed complaints and reactions. In another vein, the Nigeria society believes that the quality of tertiary education is yet to attain a reasonable high level which indicates that our system of professional teaching and education is at the verge of collapsing.

The quality of training offered in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, has bedeviled the performance of their products (students) in the society. These fallen standards are traceable to ineffectiveness of the teachers and students as they reluctantly and carelessly perform their normal daily official assignment. This includes: teachers' and students' lateness to work and classroom, absence of teachers' and students' from work and classroom, teaching without proper organization of lesson note, instructional aides, poor personal preparation, refusal of students to do and submit assignment. The result of this now is that, teachers cannot cover the course content and the subject matter is not addressed. Again, the student will not learn what they are supposed to be taught. These lapses and ineffectiveness in our tertiary institutions can be abridged if supervision and quality control is given due attention and implemented. The study therefore seeks to investigate effective administrative strategies for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate effective administrative strategies for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Ascertain the extent university staff planning strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.
2. Examine the extent university staff directing strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.
3. Examine the extent university staff coordinating strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study.

1. To what extent does university staff planning strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does university staff directing strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does university staff coordinating strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_{o1}: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of planning strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of directing strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

H_{03}: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of coordinating strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Methodology

The research design that was used for this study was a descriptive survey.

The population of this study was made up of three public universities (i.e. one federal and two state) in Rivers State which are University of Port Harcourt (UPH) with 1670 lecturers, Rivers State University (RSU) comprising 780 lecturers and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education with 600 lecturers.

The Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling technique was used. The sample size for this study was 1100 representing 20% of the entire population of academic and non-teaching staff of the public universities. The sample size comprised of 600 lecturers and 500 administrative staff drawn using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique.

The instrument used was a self-structured instrument titled "Effective Administrative Strategies for Quality Assurance in Public Universities Questionnaire (EASQAPUQ)".

The researcher personally administered the questionnaires with the help of two trained research assistants. The research assistants who helped to administer the questionnaires were briefed on how the participants should fill them in order to avoid mistakes. 1100 copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents and only 1084 of the instruments were retrieved which represented 98.5% retrieval rate.

Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer five (5) research questions while five (5) null hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance. 2.50 served as the criterion mean for judgment.

Result and Discussions

4.1   Results of Research Questions

Research Question One: To what extent does university staff planning strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 4.1*: Mean ratings and standard deviation (SD) on the extent university staff planning strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.**

S/N	ITEMS	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1.	Carrying out staff audit by field of study and qualification	3.10	0.45	High Extent
2.	Checking number of staffs against workload and courses to be taught	3.21	0.51	High Extent
3.	Find out areas of staffs shortage on a regular basis	3.15	0.47	High Extent
4.	Carrying out skills deficiency test on staffs to determine areas they need upgrading	3.21	0.51	High Extent
5.	Making request for staffs in specific areas to fill the areas of staffs shortage in the university caused by transfer, retirement, death, inadequacy and withdrawal	2.90	0.80	High Extent
	Grand Mean	3.80	0.59	High Extent

Table 4.1 shows the mean ratings and standard deviation (SD) on the extent university staff planning strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. All Items 1-5 have high mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. Item 1 have a mean and standard deviation of 3.10 and 0.45 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent that there should be intermittent staff audit by field of study and qualification. Item 2 have a mean score and standard deviation of 3.21 and 0.51 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent that there should be systemic appraisal of number of staffs against workload and courses to be taught. Item 3 has a mean and standard deviation of 3.15 and 0.47 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent that management should find out areas of staffs shortage on a regular basis. Item 4 have a mean and standard deviation of 3.21 and 0.51 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent that carrying out skills deficiency test on staffs to determine areas they need upgrading. Item 4 have a mean score and standard deviation of 2.91 and 0.83 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent that making request for staffs in specific areas to fill the areas of staffs shortage in the university caused by transfer, retirement, death, inadequacy and withdrawal. The grand mean and standard deviation of 3.80 and 0.59 show that respondents agree to a high extent that university staff planning strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: To what extent does university staff directing strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 4.2*: Mean ratings and standard deviation (SD) on extent university staff directing strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.*

S/N	ITEMS	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
6.	Ensuring that directive is given to act in the absence of the instructional leader	3.10	0.45	High Extent
7.	Delegating responsibilities to deputy to act without reservation	3.21	0.51	High Extent
8.	Giving directive to deputy to chairman staff meetings	3.15	0.47	High Extent
9.	Taking decision in unison with staff	3.21	0.51	High Extent
10.	Considering alternative before making decision	2.90	0.80	High Extent
	Grand Mean	3.80	0.59	High Extent

Table 4.2 shows the mean ratings and standard deviation (SD) on extent university staff directing strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. All Items 5-10 have high mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. Item 6 have a mean and standard deviation of 3.10 and 0.45 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent that Ensuring that directive is given to act in the absence of the instructional leader. Item 7 have a mean score and standard deviation of 3.21 and 0.51 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent that Delegating responsibilities to deputy to act without reservation. Item 8 has a mean and standard deviation of 3.15 and 0.47 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent that Giving directive to deputy to chairman staff meetings. Item 9 have a mean and standard deviation of 3.21 and 0.51 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent to Taking decision in unison with staff. Item 10 has a mean score and standard deviation of 2.90 and 0.80 respectively. This implies that the respondents agree to a high extent to Considering alternative before making decision. The grand mean and standard deviation of 3.80 and 0.59 show that respondents agree to a high extent that university staff directing strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Question Three: To what extent does university staff coordinating strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 4.3: Mean ratings and standard deviation (SD) on the extent university staff coordinating strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

S/N	ITEMS	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
11	Initiating conflict resolution mechanism in schools	3.48	0.65	High Extent
12	Ensuring that there is synergy among staff	3.15	0.51	High Extent

13	Establishing synergy between the school and the community	2.80	0.47	High Extent
14	Ensuring team work among staffs		2.75	0.45	High Extent
15	Integration of efforts of various department of the organization to achieve a common goal	2.60	0.46	High Extent
	Grand Mean ($\bar{X}$)	**3.01**	**0.49**	**High Extent**

Table 4.3 shows the mean ratings and standard deviation (SD) on the extent university staff coordinating strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. All Items 11-15 have high mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. Item 11 has a mean and standard deviation of 3.48 and 0.65 respectively. This implies that the respondents to a very high extent agree to Initiating conflict resolution mechanism in schools. Item 12 has a mean score and standard deviation of 3.15 and 0.51 respectively. This implies that the respondents to a high extent agree to Ensuring that there is synergy among staff. Item 13 has a mean and standard deviation of 2.80 and 0.47 respectively. This implies that the respondents to a high extent agree to Establishing synergy between the school and the community. Item 14 has a mean and standard deviation of 2.75 and 0.75 respectively. This implies that the respondents to a high extent agree to Ensuring team work among staffs. Item 15 has a mean score and standard deviation of 2.60 and 0.46 respectively. This implies that the respondents to a high extent agree to Integration of efforts of various department of the organization to achieve a common goal. The grand mean and standard deviation of 3.01 and 0.49 shows that the respondents to a very high extent agree that university staff coordinating strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of planning strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4.6: Z-test Summary of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of planning strategy for quality assurance in public universities

Source of Variation	N	$\bar{x}$	Variance	S D	Df	Z-cal	z-crit	Sig.	Decision
Academic	590	2.69	0.823	1.18	1082	1.45	1.96	0.000	Accept
Non-Academic	494	2.84	0.431	1.14					

Results in table 4.6 show the summary of z-test statistics of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of planning strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The result shows that the z-calculated (Z_{cal}=1.45) is lass than the z-critical (Z_{crit}=1.96) with a degree of freedom of 1082, therefore the hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is positive and significant relationship between the mean scores of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of planning strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of directing strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4.8: Z-test Summary of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of directing strategy for quality assurance in public universities

Source of Variation	N	$\bar{x}$	Variance	S D	Df	Z-cal	z-crit	Sig.	Decision
Academic	590	2.54	0.823	0.82	1082	5.70	1.96	0.000	Reject
Non-Academic	494	2.98	0.431	0.92					

Results in table 4.7 show the summary of z-test statistics of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of directing strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The result shows that the z-calculated (Z_{cal}=5.70) is greater than the z-critical (Z_{crit}=1.96) with a degree of freedom of 1082, therefore the hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is positive and significant relationship between the mean scores of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of directing strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of coordinating strategy for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4.8: Z-test Summary of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of coordinating strategy for quality assurance in public universities

Source of Variation	N	$\bar{x}$	Variance	S D	Df	Z-cal	z-crit	Sig.	Decision
Academic	590	2.78	0.823	0.93	1082	5.93	1.96	0.000	Reject
Non-Academic	494	3.25	0.431	0.70					

Results in table 4.8 show the summary of z-test statistics of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of coordinating strategy for quality assurance in public universities. The result shows that the z-calculated (Z_{cal}=5.93) is greater than the z-critical (Z_{crit}=1.96) with a degree of freedom of 1082, therefore the hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is positive and significant relationship between the mean scores of academic and non-academic university staffs on the influence of coordinating strategy for quality assurance in public universities.

Discussion of findings
The discussion of findings is organized in the following headings:

Planning Strategy and Quality Assurance

Result shows the extent university staff planning strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The result indicated that both respondents agreed to a high and moderate extent to Carrying out staff audit by field of study and

qualification, Checking number of staffs against workload and courses to be taught, Find out areas of staffs shortage on a regular basis, Carrying out skills deficiency test on staffs to determine areas they need upgrading, and Making request for staffs in specific areas to fill the areas of staffs shortage in the university caused by transfer, retirement, death, inadequacy and withdrawal, enhanced quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The findings of the study support the views of Uralem et al (2016) that success and failure in any organization is not a circumstantial occurrence rather a human misplacement of planning and implementation strategies. Also, Arenkintola (2017) support this present finding that planning strategies among most public and private organization is namely in theoretical expression that lack strict foundational approach and application reality.

Directing Strategy and Quality Assurance

Result shows the extent university staff directing strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The result indicated that both respondents agreed to a high to Ensuring that directive is given to act in the absence of the instructional leader, Delegating responsibilities to deputy to act without reservation, Giving directive to deputy to chairman staff meetings, Taking decision in unison with staff, and Considering alternative before making decision enhanced quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The findings of the study support the views of Ula, et al (2017) that confirmed to the reality of input and output result oriented experience among the various primary schools. Anyatuiegu (2015) also support this present finding that differences abound in the nature of decision administrative strategy adopted by head teachers, hence strong relationship exists between the type of decision making strategy and the quality of effort and commitment inserted the teachers in their classroom instructional delivery exercise.

Coordinating Strategy enhance Quality Assurance

Result shows the extent university staff coordinating strategy enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The result indicated that both respondents agreed to a high and moderate extent to Initiating conflict resolution mechanism in schools, Ensuring that there is synergy among staff, Establishing synergy between the school and the community, Ensuring team work among staffs, and Integration of efforts of various department of the organization to achieve a common goal enhanced quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State. The findings of the study support the views of Adeolu, et al (2014) that the relationship between principals strategies and teachers instructional performance was low in coordinating. The relationship between this study and the present one anchors on their interest on the role of head of administration coordinating strategy towards the performance of teachers especially in the area of instructional delivery exercise.

Conclusion

Based on the findings that effective administrative strategies enhanced quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State, it will however be difficult to achieve high quality assurance in public universities. This is so because, achieving of quality assurance in public universities, no doubt is a function of quality university administration through stafss ability to perform the daily productive instructional delivery. Achieving this goal may not be a mere wishful exercise, rather a functionality of public universities administrators' administrative strategies.

The identified staff's administrative strategies which include, staff planning strategy, staff directing strategy, staff coordinating strategy, staff organizing strategy, and staff supervising strategy, no doubt constitute the lubricant of the quality assurance in public universities. The practical application of these strategies is necessary. Its necessity may not be unconnected to the fact that, without such administrative inputs, university staffs daily formal instructional activities will be short leaved with absenteeism to school, lateness to school, inability to write lecture note, inadequate classroom instructional delivery, inability to complete scheme of work amongst others.

Recommendations
On account of the findings, it was recommended that:
1. Since planning is an undisputable requisite to the attainment of organizational goals, the students mental, physical and emotional development may be hampered without adequate planning strategy of academic and non-academic staffs. Therefore, this study recommends that university management should organize a routine administrative training that will impact planning strategies and skills to the academic and non-academic staffs in all the public universities in Rivers State.
2. In the same vein, since the academic and non-academic staffs are daily confronted with administrative scenario of the school that will require directive strategy, the university management should as a matter of necessity encourage the development of strategic skills among the academic and non-academic staffs as this will enhance quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.
3. The daily activities of universities are the active function of different personnel and resources, hence the imperativeness of mobilizing for the attainment of public universities education goal. Thus, it is apt to recommend that academic and non-academic staffs should be abreast with coordinating strategy as it will enhance their optimal performance for quality assurance in public universities in Rivers State.

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