

Education sector reforms: The Role of Quality Assurance, Standards and Professional Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Quality assurance, standards and professional development play interconnected roles in driving education sector reforms in Nigeria. Quality assurance ensures that educational processes and outcomes meet predetermined standards fostering accountability and excellence. Establishing and upholding standard and benchmark sets clear expectations for curriculum, teaching methods and student performance. Concurrently, investing in professional development equip educators with updated skills and knowledge as well as enhancing teaching effectiveness. However, this paper x-rays some ways through which these elements contribute to a comprehensive and sustained improvement in the quality of education, positively impacting the overall educational landscape in Nigeria. The paper recommends among others; government and all other stakeholders in education sector must ensure the quality control implementation even in the reform processes and curriculum developers should ensure that, correct standards are set that will meet the global needs in education sector.

Keywords: Education sector, Reforms, Quality Assurance, Standards, Professional Development

Introduction

Educational reform is the key to participation in the global economy of the 21st century, based on technological revolution in communication and transfer of information as well as major changes in production, distribution and the economic value of knowledge. Education as Achuonye and Ajoku (2003) in Achuonye (2007) put it functions as an agent for the maintenance of social status quo in the society through the transmission of modern ideas, modern strategies of doing things. In an effort to better meet the diverse needs of learners and ultimately of the society, there have been numerous curricular reforms and the introduction of a range of new approaches and strategies in the class room environment. Every child, youth and adult should be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning and personal needs. Achuonye (2007).

Obanya (2004) said such needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, numeracy, oral expression and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development to improve the quality of their lives and to make informed decisions. He expressed that the basic learning needs of youths and adults are divers and should be met through a variety of educational reform programs. This reform could be well anchor through the following variables: Quality assurance, standard and as well as professional development.

Education Sector Reforms and Quality Assurance

Quality as a concept is multi-dimensional; hence it has been defined differently by stakeholders. Quality according to Okoro (2015) encapsulates the concept of meeting commonly agreed precepts or standards which may be defined by law, an institution, a coordinating body or a professional society. It is the degree with which a product, service, or phenomenon conforms to an established standard, and which makes it to be relatively superior to others (Oyewumi and Fatoki, 2015).

According to UNESCO (2012), quality education is characterized by (i) Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in by their families and communities (ii) Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities; (iii) Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life etc (iv) Processes through which trained teachers use child centered teaching approaches in classrooms, schools and skillful

assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities; (v) Outcomes that encompass knowledge and attitudes linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

Quality of educational programme could be measured in terms of quality of input, quality of process, quality of context and quality of output (Adegbesan, 2011). Therefore, ensuring quality in education requires the right quantity and quality in everything that goes into the teaching-learning process or system as input and process (Okoye and Ashibogwu, 2018). This kind of productive synergy can ensure a clear focus on school development, providing data on aspects such as school climate and the well-being of all members of the school community, effective teaching, learning and the impact of innovations (Adeniran and Ekeruche, 2019).

FME (2014) emphasizes that education quality assurance in Nigeria is a paradigm shift from the former practice of school supervision and inspection to a monitoring and evaluating process that provides a new operative mode of evaluation. This is carried out according to set standards that bring about improvement in teaching and learning. The strategic aim of quality assurance is therefore to prescribe standards and ensure that inputs, processes and outputs of the system meet these standards.

Quality assurance according to Harvey (1999) is a process of ensuring effective resource input control, refining the process and raising the standards of output in order to meet the set goals and satisfy public accountability. It is based on three main principles of control, accountability and improvement. Obadara and Alaka, (2013) posited that accountability usually requires meeting the preferences of stakeholders and control means that the institution does not merely control the expenditure of resources but also shows how high quality is achievable with the existing resources. Improvement enables the institution to get necessary input, refine the process and raise the standards of output in order to meet the goals set (Harvey, 1999). The role of quality assurance in education reform cannot be overemphasized including standards as well as professional development.

In schools quality assurance activity focuses on whether learners are achieving as much as they can and whether everything the school provided has the best possible impact on learning (Olayanju, 2016). The system provides the evidence needed to establish confidence among all concerned that quality-related activities are being performed effectively (FME, 2014). In view of the fact that a systematic and consistent quality assurance system helps to establish an institution's good reputation and credibility, Adegbesan, (2011) averred that educational administrators are always faced with the responsibility of

determining the priorities of management and other functions including adopting the management style that will ensure the seamless achievement of qualitative educational outcome.

The need for quality assurance in Nigerian schools cannot be overemphasized in order to ensure quality of teaching and learning. In this regard, Adegbesan (2011) enumerated the relevance of quality assurance to the education system in Nigeria to include; serving as indispensable component of quality control strategy in education; ensuring and maintaining high standard of education at all levels; assisting in monitoring and supervision of education; determining the quality of the teacher input; determining the number of classrooms needed based on the average class size to ensure quality control of education; determining the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control and regulating the prudent and judicious utilization of the available financial resources towards achieving the desired result. Quality assurance ensures that educational institutions maintain high standards of teaching, learning, and outcomes. It involves monitoring, evaluating, and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of educational programmes and services. Quality assurance mechanisms help identify areas for improvement and ensure that students receive a high-quality education.

Education Sector Reforms and Standards

Educational standards are set by a variety of stakeholders, including government agencies, educational organizations, and subject matter experts. These standards provide a framework for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. There are many stakeholders involved in setting educational standards, each with their own unique role. These stakeholders include teachers, administrators, parents, students, experts in the field, and policymakers.

Teachers play a critical role in setting educational standards as they are the ones who implement them in the classroom. They provide valuable feedback on what works and what doesn't, helping to refine and improve the standards over time. Administrators are responsible for ensuring that the standards are being met and providing the necessary resources to support teachers in their implementation. Parents have a vested interest in educational standards as they want their children to receive a high-quality education. Students also have a role to play as they are the ones who are directly impacted by the standards. Experts in the field provide valuable insights and knowledge to help shape the standards and ensure they are relevant and effective. Policymakers are responsible for creating policies and laws that support the development and implementation of educational standards.

Educational standards are an important part of the education system, as they provide a framework for what students should know and be able to do at different stages of their education. There are four types of educational standards: content standards, performance standards, curriculum standards, and proficiency standards.

Content standards outline the knowledge and skills that students should have in specific subject areas, such as math or science. Performance standards describe the level of achievement that students should reach in these subject areas, while curriculum standards provide guidance on how to teach these subjects effectively. Proficiency standards, on the other hand, measure how well students are able to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world situations.

Curriculum standards are guidelines that outline the knowledge and skills students should acquire in a particular subject area at each grade level. These standards provide a clear roadmap for teachers to follow when planning their lessons and help ensure that all students receive a high-quality education. For example, in mathematics, curriculum standards might include topics such as algebra, geometry, and statistics, while in English language arts, they might include reading comprehension, writing skills, and grammar.

By setting clear expectations for what students should know and be able to do, curriculum standards help ensure that all students have access to a rigorous and relevant education. They also provide a framework for measuring student progress and identifying areas where additional support may be needed. In addition, curriculum standards can help promote consistency and equity across schools and districts, ensuring that all students have access to the same opportunities regardless of their background or location. To meet the global needs in education sector reforms, setting and implementing the correct standards plays a very significance role. Educational standards provide benchmarks for curriculum development, instructional practices, and student achievement. Standards outline the knowledge and skills students should acquire at each grade level or educational standards, educators can ensure consistency and equity in education delivery, regardless of location or socioeconomic status.

Education Sector Reforms and Professional Development

Professional development on the other hand is defined as “the process of improving staff skills and competencies needed to produce outstanding educational results for students” (Hassel, 1999). As Thomas Guskey (2000) states, “One constant finding in the research literature is that notable

improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development.”

Professional development is key to meeting today’s educational demands.

High-quality professional development strategies are essential to schools. The days of teacher staff development sessions consisting of “sit-and-get” workshops and expert-delivered awareness campaigns are long gone. We are now moving toward more effective and more engaging professional development models. Research and experience help us recognize that high-quality ongoing professional development that deepens teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical skills; provides opportunities for practice, research, and reflection; and includes efforts that are job embedded, sustained, and collaborative will assist in the goal to remain up-to-date (Sparks, 2002). Seminal research by Joyce and Showers (1988) concludes that levels of teacher learning and strategy use are greatly increased when coaching, study teams, and peer support are provided. Olofinniyi (2023) posited that Seminar and workshop are form of academic instruction where people of common interest come together for meetings on regular basis to discuss findings on particular topics. Everyone is expected to participate meaningfully on a part of capacity building. It enables staff to be more effective, efficient and productive on their job. Orientations and other forms of in-service trainings are normally organized for newly employed teachers, but it should be noted that both the newly employed and old staff are expected to constantly participate in seminar programmes so that they can be updated and be kept abreast of latest development on their jobs (Ajadi, 2019). All of these irrespective of the kind of professional development adopted by the stakeholders in educational sector needed reform per time to keep the people in charge of implementation of educational policies updated in order to meet the global changes.

This supports the continuous growth and improvement of educators. Professional development programs provide teachers and administrators with opportunities to enhance their knowledge, skills, and instructional practices. By investing in professional development, educators stay updated on best practices, new technologies and research-based strategies, ultimately and student outcomes.

Conclusion

Conclusively, all the variables of quality assurance, standards and professional development significantly contributed to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of education sector reform efforts, ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality education that prepares them for success in ever-changing world.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- Government and all other stakeholders in education sector must ensure the quality control implementation at all levels of education even in the reform processes.
- Curriculum developers and other stakeholders should ensure that, correct standards are set that will meet the global needs in education sector.
- Government and educational administrators should ensure the training of teachers and other stakeholders are of ultimate priority and as well be included in the education sector reforms.

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