

## **Strategies of Assessing and Implementing Quality Assurance in Nigerian University Libraries**

By

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### **Abstract**

University Libraries play significant role towards achieving the teaching, learning and research needs of Universities. This they can do by quality assurance of their operations and services. This study examines the strategies of assessing and implementing quality assurance in Nigerian University Libraries. The population for the study comprised the Nigerian University Librarians. Cluster random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 18 respondents from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. A questionnaire was administered to sample size, of the eighteen copies of the questionnaires administered only ten were duly completed and returned. Data collected were analyzed using frequency and percentages. The findings of the study showed that methods, criteria, strategies, and mechanisms used for the assessment of the quality of the university libraries were not uniform. The main strategy used for implementation of quality assurance was integration of the library` services quality assurance agenda into the university structures and the quality assurance mechanisms available and used in Nigerian university libraries were programme accreditation and benchmarking of library systems. The paper amongst other things recommended that the criteria, method, strategies and mechanisms assessment of library information systems, resources and services in Nigeria university libraries should be unified for easy comparability.

### **Introduction**

The recent focus on "quality" in higher education suggests that many educational institutions are beginning to take up the goal of ensuring quality service. For university libraries to support higher education, it certainly has to undergo rapid changes in both content and structure and the pace of this change is accelerating. Many libraries make efforts to introduce modern managerial models, improve the quality of existing services and develop new ones. New strategies are being applied. However, the strategies adopted for ensuring quality in the provision of library and information services in universities may differ from one university to another or from region to region.

One of the aspects of the industrial revolution and its resultant factory system was the quality and quality assurance being emulated today. Quality assurance has been recognized as an important tool for achieving the nation's goals, mission, vision and objectives in all sectors of Nigerian economy and educational system. Abubakar (2001), asserts that Nigerian educational planners have identified the, teaching and dissemination of knowledge, Research; Provision of intellectual leadership; Promoting social and economic modernization; Promoting inter-oriental and international understanding as the major objectives of the Nigerian University education. As integral parts of educational institutions, it becomes inevitable that the issue of quality assurance be taken seriously in their libraries too.

Quality assurance which is the process of control is also a concept that began with the pyramids of Egypt when a system of standards for quarrying of stone

was designed. One of the aspects of the industrial revolution and its resultant factory system was the quality and quality assurance being emulated today. According to Johannsen (1999), the International Standard Organization (ISO) for standardization published the ISO (9000) series as a set of five world wide standards that establish requirements for the management of quality. It is recognized and used in over 900 countries. Australia and some Nordic Countries have been implementing it since 1990. Other commonly used standards for quality assurance are the application of management systems such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and European Foundation for quality management 1992 (EFQM). The ISO 9000 series intends to stimulate trade by providing assurance of an organization's ability to meet specifications and perform the negotiated standards. The focus is on basic process of control of products and services.

Quality assurance has developed over a long period from more traditional quality control activities like final inspection and test to standardization. If an item or service is rejected at the final stage of a process it represents a large investment which cannot be sold to the customer and the rectification at this stage is expensive, difficult and fully visible to the customer or client. Quality assurance according to Griffin (1995) offers control at each stage of the process such that it becomes very difficult to reject. If faults exist, they are identified and corrected prior to any further value being added. It is also important to realize that quality is determined by the intended users, clients or customers, because they are the ones that would know whether the services provided have satisfied their needs and not the society in general.

### **Concept of Quality Assurance**

This concept of quality as we think of it now, first emerged out of industrial revolution. Goods and services had been done from beginning to end by a person or group of persons without much reference to “quality criteria”. In the late 1800s pioneers such as Frederick Winslow, Taylor and Henry Ford recognized the limitation of the methods being used in mass production at the time and the subsequent varying quality of output. Taylor established quality departments in organizations to oversee the quality of productions and rectifying of errors and Ford emphasized standardization to ensure that standard products or services were produced. Application of statistical control came later as a result of world war production methods as a result of the work done by Edwards (1986) for introducing quality management systems. Quality is therefore, defined differently by different people from different perspectives. Uvah (2003) observed that, quality can be seen as a degree of excellence while others see it as the level of a value in a product.

Quality assurance on the other hand is a wide ranging concept covering all matters that individually or collectively influence the quality of a product. Quality assurance refers to planned and systematic production processes that provide confidence in a product’s or services’ suitability for intended purpose. It is set of activities intended to ensure that products (goods and /or services) satisfy customer requirements. Whitely (2001) in Miller (2002) and Uvah (2003) viewed quality assurance as the degree of “fitness for purpose”. In the view of Walkin (1992), quality assurance is a term that is used to describe activities taken to prevent non-conformance and also to remove doubt about meeting customers’ requirements. It incorporates procedures for planning, establishing, monitoring, auditing and evaluating management systems. The Objectives is to provide consistent quality of service or product and remove any possibility for failure to meet customer’s expectations. Quality assurance systems preserve the quality of service provided and generally result in improvement and reduction in total quality cost. Derfert –Wolf (2005) is of the opinion that quality of libraries is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or services that bear on the ability of the library to satisfy defined or implied needs of its clientele.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The University Libraries being the bedrock of any university as observed by Aguolu (1983:8) that “the academic health and intellectual vitality and

effectiveness of any University depends upon the state of health and excellence of its library” the parameters used for the evaluation of the University Libraries in ensuring quality of academic programmes run in the respective universities are not enough to ensure the quality of the libraries themselves and to support quality University education. The assessment of the NUC accreditation panel evaluation of the university libraries shows that they mostly browse the library shelves without taking note of the quantitative and quantitative indicators of the information resources and services of the libraries meant to support the academic programmes. Furthermore there were hardly any serious assessments made on the quantity and quality of the library staff manning the collection. The accreditation exercise also tended to neglect the user/library staff ratio and the effectiveness of the services rendered in terms of users’ satisfaction. Additionally, the effectiveness and adequacy of the libraries’ equipment in relation to the aims and objectives for which they were established hardly received the attention of the accreditation panels. This neglect of relationship of library assessments to the objectives for which they are set up contradicts an important assertion by Drucker (1973:43) in his words “library resources and services cannot be evaluated in the abstracts, but only in relation to the purposes for which they were intended to serve and the actual needs existing in the provision for potential users”. It is in the highlight of these shortcomings that this paper examines assessment and implementation of quality assurance to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of Nigerian university library systems.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this study is to generally examine the strategies of assessing and implementing quality assurance to Nigerian university library system. Specifically the objectives are to:

1. Examine the methods and criteria used to assess the quality of the Nigerian university library operations, and Information system ?
2. Identify the methods/strategies employed to implement quality assurance in the Nigerian university libraries to support the universities’ functions?

### **Literature Review**

Whenever the issue of quality assurance is being talked of in a library setting, what comes to mind is the achievement of the quality of service that satisfies the information and research needs of its clientele. In a university library setting, the concern has been on the quality of service that satisfies the information and research needs of faculties, students and the

researchers to prove to its funding and accrediting bodies that it is a worthy investment. Any organization that focuses on service quality is likely to have put in place implicating elements of quality assurance system. Warren, and Nnazo (1994) described quality assurance as “a continuing active and integrative process for maintaining and improving the delivery of services”. Robinson (1994) in his view defines it as “the set of activities that an organization undertakes to ensure that standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service”.

### **Strategies for Implementing Quality Assurance In University Libraries**

A survey carried out by the British Library in 1992 showed that 17% of public libraries and 10% of academic libraries implemented ISO 9000 while the University of Central Lancashire Library started using the ISO by 2000. Many special libraries have also indicated their keen interest in its implementation as revealed by the survey. For decades there has been an increased global awareness for quality assurance otherwise known as ‘best practices’ for products and services leading to the emergence of some International Standards Organizations. One of such organizations is the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). This organization is responsible for the planning, development and adoption of standards for all sectors except telecommunication technologies. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is responsible for the control of standards of all Telecommunications Technologies.

Soraja and Sojatha (2002) in a study conducted on the application of total quality management to library and information services in Indian Open Universities, suggested the following as the strategies to be adopted for ensuring quality in library services (i) including the agenda of quality assurance of library services as part of the quality assurance of the universities’ Total Quality Management (TQM) project.; (ii) development of standards/norms for assessing quality of information services with reference to distance education; (iii) Putting in place methodologies and mechanisms for the improvement of quality information services; (iv) allocation of more funds for studying the quality of information services on project basis and; (v) training of staff members in providing quality information services. In another study, Natarajan (2000) conducted a study on the role of accreditation in promoting quality assurance in higher education. The results of his findings revealed that accreditation is the major initiative, towards quality assurance in universities.

However, he also discovered that in addition to accreditation, the adoption of total quality management (TQM) is also another strategy with which libraries in India ensure quality in services delivery. Despite the fact that there has been much in the library and information services literature on the merits or otherwise of such quality management systems, they are still very much in use. In Scandinavian Universities, the Helsinki university adopts internal evaluation of its libraries to ensure quality in its services provision. Sinkara (2006) in his study of the Scandinavian university libraries, identified internal evaluation as a strategy for ensuring quality. He also used it in determining whether the quality assurance system is functioning according to the objectives and whether it is efficient and suitable for the purpose. Comparatively, in Poland, a study of the quality assurance mechanisms of Polish University libraries, namely, Cracow University of Technology, University of technology and Agriculture in Bydgos Zez, Szczecin University, and Kielce university of technology by Winkworth (2001) reveals that the strategies adopted by Polish academic and research libraries are (i) accreditation (ii) the application of Iso 9000; TQM and users’ survey to evaluate existing or planned services to ensure quality services. Willimbe (1995) confirmed that a continuous evaluation contributes to improving services by revealing remedial actions that need to be taken based on the results of the on-going evaluation.

In Africa, the use of quality management systems like Iso (9000) TQM, lip etc for quality assurance seem to be limited or almost absent. Nyaigotti-Chacha and Ouma Ayoo (2001) in their study of quality assurance in East Africa University found out that accreditation of programmes which also includes the library is the major strategy that is used to ensure quality in library services. Hayward (2006) also conducted a study on “Quality Assurance” and “Accreditation of Higher Education in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritions, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. The findings reveal that program accreditation remains the main quality assurance strategy that the libraries adopt. Specifically, African university libraries need to have a framework for quality assurance that is beyond just the institutional accreditation. Commenting on this Pritchad (1996) stated that, the leading institutional players in developing models, criteria and standards for quality assurance of library and information systems in developed countries such as Association of Research libraries is non-existent. The tradition of using data collected routinely by government and other official bodies used as source data in some

advanced countries for evaluation of library performances is lacking in developing countries.

In Britain, Mistry and Usherwood (1996) conducted a study on the management of British Academic Libraries. The study revealed that a majority (62.5%) of the libraries use ISO (9000), TQM and Investors in people (IIP) and other quality management systems for service improvement as their strategies for ensuring quality library and information services.

**Research Methodology**

The researcher adopted the descriptive survey research method. The population of this study comprised the Nigerian university librarians. Cluster random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 18 respondents from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. For fair representation, three universities comprising Federal, State and a Private university were chosen for the study from each geo-political zone. Eighteen copies of the questionnaires were administered on the eighteen University Librarians of the universities used for the study. Of the eighteen copies of the questionnaires administered only ten representing 55.5 percent were duly completed and returned

**Assessment of the Methods and Criteria used for Quality Assurance in the Nigerian University in Table 2**

**Libraries’ Operations, Information Systems, Resources and Services**

In order to determine the methods and criteria used by the university librarians to assess the quality of their operations, the university librarians’ responses were sought and the data is provided in table 1.

Table 1 showed that the commonly used methods and criteria were survey of Users’ level of satisfaction, performance evaluation and use of suggestion boxes to seek users’ opinions with scores of 50 to 70 percent response rates. This implies that the librarians were aware of the need to assess their library operations to determine their quality and respond to the needs of their clientele. Table 4.9 clearly shows that survey of users’ level of satisfaction, performance evaluation and use of suggestion boxes were the most common methods used by University Librarians in Nigeria to assess the quality of their library operations.

**Methods and Criteria used to assess the Quality of Nigerian University Library Systems**

One of the objectives of this study was to identify the methods and criteria used by University Librarians to determine the quality of the Information Systems available in their libraries. The responses of the University Librarians were presented

Table 1: University Librarians’ Responses on the Methods and Criteria used to assess the Quality of the Nigerian University Library Operations

Methods and Criteria used to Assess the quality of University Library Operations	Used	Not Used
	Freq(%)	Freq(%)
Performance evaluation	6(60.0%)	4 (40.0%)
Survey of users’ level of satisfaction	7(70.0%)	3(30.0%)
Observation of user’s behaviour towards library operations	4(40.0%)	6(60.0%)
Use of suggestions box to check users’ comments	5(50.0%)	5(50.0%)
Time spent to complete a transaction	1(10.0%)	9(90.0%)
Accuracy of the transaction	1(10.0%)	9(90.0%)

Table 2: Responses of University Librarians on the Methods used to assess the Quality of Nigerian University Library Information Systems

Methods Used to Assess the Quality of Library Information Systems	Used	Not Used
	Freq(%)	Freq(%)
Performance evaluation	5(50.0%)	5(50.0%)
Survey of users' level of satisfaction	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)
Observation of user's behaviour towards the library systems	8(80.0%)	2(20.0%)
Contracting out the exercise to consultants	1(10.0%)	9(90.0%)
Using suggestions boxes for users' comments	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)

The responses of the University librarians on the methods used to assess the quality of the Library Information Systems in their libraries showed that observation of users' behavior towards the library systems, survey of Users' satisfaction, using suggestion boxes for users' comments and performance evaluation were favoured by 50 to 80 percent of the respondents. The only commonly expected assessment method that was not used by virtually all the University Librarians was contracting out the exercise to consultants which attracted a paltry score of 10 percent. This indicates that Nigerian University Librarians use various methods to assess the quality of their library operations. However, it was important to note that there was no uniform standard method that all the University Librarians use to assess the operations of their libraries. This finding therefore justifies the reason for the need to provide a standard uniform method for assessing the operations of University Libraries.

From the findings, we conclude that observation of Users' behavior towards the library systems, survey of users' satisfaction, using suggestion boxes for users' comments and performance evaluation were the commonly used methods for the assessment of the quality of operations of Nigerian University Libraries. Contracting out the exercise to Consultants was not common probably because of the cost involved for the service.

**Criteria used to assess the Quality of Information Systems Available in Nigerian University Libraries**

In an attempt to discover the criteria used to assess the quality of Information Systems available in Nigerian university libraries, the questionnaire was designed with several options for the librarians to indicate which ones they employed in their assessment. Their responses were presented Table 3.

Table 3: Responses of University Librarians with respect to the Criteria used to Assess the Quality of Information Systems in Nigerian University Libraries

Criteria used to Assess the Quality of Information Systems	Used	Not Used
	Freq(%)	Freq(%)
Effectiveness of the information systems	3(30.0%)	7(70.0%)
Timeliness of the system	3(30.0%)	7(70.0%)
Efficiency of the system in performing the tasks	5(50.0%)	5(50.0%)
Cost effectiveness of the systems in relation to its performance	2(20.0%)	8(80.0%)
Success of the system in achieving the aims and objectives of the library	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)
Sustainability of the systems	4(40.0%)	6(60.0%)
Durability of the systems	4(40.0%)	6(60.0%)
Functionality of the systems	7(70.0%)	3(30.0%)
Adaptability of the systems	3(30.0%)	7(70.0%)
Operationality of the systems	4(40.0%)	6(60.0%)
Ease of use of the systems	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)
Ease of maintenance of the systems	4(40.0%)	6(60.0%)
Usefulness of the systems	1(10.0%)	9(90.0%)

From Table 3, the criteria mostly used to assess the quality of the Information systems in the Nigerian university libraries were functionality of the systems, success of the system in achieving the aims and objectives of the library, ease of use of the systems and efficiency of the system in performing the tasks with scores between 50 and 70 percent. The least used criteria were cost effectiveness of the systems, effectiveness of the systems, timeliness of the systems, sustainability of the systems, adaptability of the systems, usefulness of the systems, and durability of the systems with scores of between 10 percent and 40 percent. This indicates that Nigerian University Librarians use various criteria to assess the quality of their information systems. This means that Nigerian

University Librarians have criteria with which they assess their information systems. However, it was clear that there were no uniform criteria that have been adopted by the librarians for the assessment of their information systems.

#### Methods and Strategies of Implementing Quality Assurance in Nigerian University Libraries

Generally some methods and strategies have to be put in place to ensure quality in the operations, systems, resources and services of University Libraries. Towards this end, the researcher tried to find out the methods and strategies the libraries adopted to implement quality assurance.

**Table 4: Responses of University Librarians on the Methods of Implementing Quality Assurance in Nigerian University Libraries**

Methods employed to apply quality assurance in the library Employed Not employed	Used	Not Used
	Freq(%)	Freq(%)
Survey of users' satisfaction	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)
Taking library users' statistics	9(90.0%)	1(10.0%)
Regular assessment of the library operations, systems, resources and services	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)
Analysis of users' observations and comments on the quality of the services they receive	5(50.0%)	5(50.0%)
Training of library staff in quality services provision	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)
Analysis of library use of suggestion boxes	3(30.0%)	7(70.0%)

**Table 5: Responses of University Librarians on the Strategies Employed to Implement Quality Assurance in the Nigerian University Libraries to Support the Universities' Functions**

Strategies employed by library to apply quality assurance to support the university's function Employed Not employed	Used	Not Used
	Freq(%)	Freq(%)
Setting up of senate library quality assurance committee	3(30.0%)	7(70.0%)
Setting up of quality assurance sub-committee to assist the library	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)
Integration of the library services quality assurance agenda into the university structures, system and financial planning	7(70.0%)	3(30.0%)
Increasing the library budget to provide more resources and better services	7(70.0%)	3(30.0%)
Collaboration with other libraries	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)
Engaging the services of consultants for ensuring quality library services provision	5(50.0%)	5(50.0%)

Several responses were proposed for the University Librarians to indicate which methods they adopted in implementing quality assurance in their libraries. Table 4 showed that all the University Libraries confirmed using all available methods except the use of suggestion boxes with responses scores between 50 and 90 percent. Only 30 percent of the University Librarians adopted the use of suggestion boxes as a method of implementing quality assurance in their libraries. This indicates that the Nigerian University Libraries adopted various methods to implement quality assurance of their services. The implication of this is that there was no uniform methods of quality assurance implementation in the libraries, as such, comparing the quality of the libraries will be impossible to make. From the findings, we conclude that the methods used for implementation of quality assurance in Nigerian University Libraries were taking library users' statistics, survey of users' satisfaction, regular assessment of the libraries' operations, systems, information resources and services, training of library staff in quality services provision and analysis of users' observations and comments on the quality of the services they receive. The finding of this study is therefore in line with the findings of Soraja and Sojatha (2002) on the application of total quality management to library and information services. The findings of the study identified putting in place methodologies and mechanisms for the improvement of quality information services as well as development of standards/norms for assessing quality of information services.

In an attempt to find out the strategies employed by the Nigerian University Libraries to implement quality assurance, several alternative responses were provided for the University Librarians to indicate

**Table 6: Responses of University Librarians on Quality Assurance Mechanisms Available and Used in Nigerian University Libraries**

Quality assurance mechanism used in university Libraries	Used	Not Used
	Freq(%)	Freq(%)
Programme accreditation	7(70.0%)	3(30.0%)
Application of managerial models like TQM, ISO 9000 series and LIB-QUAL standards measures	1(10.0%)	9(90.0%)
Establishment of Internal quality assurance division/section	1(10.0%)	9(90.0%)
Benchmarking of library systems, operation, resources and services	7(70.0%)	3(30.0%)
Establishment of taskforce on quality assurance	3(30.0%)	7(70.0%)
Engaging of consultants/specialists	2(20.0%)	8(80.0%)

their choices in table 5. The responses of the University Librarians to the questionnaire showed that a majority of them used one strategy or the other. Only a few used Senate Library Quality Assurance Committee, contacting specialists on quality assurance for advice and engaging the services of Consultants. This means that Nigerian University Libraries used various strategies to implement quality assurance. The implication was that even though the libraries used various strategies, the libraries cannot be graded for one to know which library or libraries are the best as there was no uniform standard means of comparing the libraries since they used different strategies to implement the quality assurance in their libraries. From the findings, we conclude that Nigerian University Libraries employed integration of the Library Services quality assurance agenda into the university structures, systems, and financial planning, increasing library budget, collaboration with other libraries, encouraging the university library's quality assurance subcommittee to assist the libraries as their strategies for implementing quality assurance. The findings of this study compare with that of Mistry and Usherwood (1996) which revealed that majority (62.5percent) of British Academic Libraries used quality management systems like TOM, LIP and ISO (9000) for services improvement as their strategies for ensuring quality library and information services.

**Assessment of Quality Assurance Mechanisms used in Nigerian University Libraries**

The study tried to identify the quality assurance mechanisms used in the Nigerian university libraries. Several options were provided for the respondents to indicate which ones they employed. Their responses were provided in table

Table 6 showed two common quality assurance mechanisms (programme accreditation and benchmarking of library systems with a score of 70 percent each) that were employed by the libraries to ensure the implementation of quality levels of library operations, information systems, resources and services. The mechanisms that were not commonly employed by the University Libraries were application of Managerial Models like TOM, ISO (9000) Series and LIBQUAL Standards measures, establishment of internal quality assurance division/section in the libraries, establishment of taskforce on quality assurance and engagement of Consultants/Specialists with response scores between 10 and 70 percent. Thus, we conclude that Nigerian university libraries commonly used programme accreditation of library systems, resources and services as quality assurance mechanisms in their libraries. Other quality assurance mechanisms were however used but at low rate. The findings of this study is therefore in line with the findings of Winkworth (2001), Ouma Ayoo (2001), Hayward (2006) and Natarajan (2000) that identified programme accreditation as the main quality assurance mechanism and strategy in University Libraries especially in Africa.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The data collected were analyzed and the followings were the major findings of the study:

1. The methods and criteria used to assess the quality of the library operations were survey of users' level of satisfaction, performance evaluation and use of suggestion boxes to seek users' opinions.
2. However, the criteria used for assessing the quality of the library systems were functionality of the systems, success of the system in achieving the aims and objectives of the library, ease of use of the systems and efficiency of the system in performing the tasks.
3. The methods used for implementation of quality assurance in Nigerian university libraries included taking library users'

statistics, surveying of users' satisfaction, regular assessment of the libraries' operators, systems information resources and services, training of library staff in quality library services, training of library staff in quality library services provision and analysis of users' observations and comments on the quality of services they received.

4. The strategies used were integration of the library` services quality assurance agenda into the university structures, systems and financial planning, increasing library budget, collaborating with other libraries and encouraging the university library's quality assurance subcommittee to assist the libraries.
5. The quality assurance mechanisms available and used in Nigerian university libraries were programme accreditation and benchmarking of library systems, resources and services.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study discovered that some level of implementation of quality assurance was being carried out in the Nigerian University libraries. However, due to lack of established uniform standards for the evaluation of the University Libraries, it was difficult to determine which library was more qualitative than the other. As such the quality of Nigerian University Libraries could not be assessed locally let alone internationally. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The standards for evaluation university libraries should be established so as to encourage the evaluation of university libraries operations.
2. The method for contracting out the assessment of the quality of university libraries' systems, research and services should be encouraged for better results and objectivity.
3. The criteria, method, strategies and mechanisms assessment of library information systems, resources and services in Nigeria university libraries should be unified for easy comparability.

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