

Application of Quality Assurance Mechanisms for Effective Library Services in Academic Libraries in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

In bit to ensure quality standards in Nigerian universities the Federal Government promulgated decree No. 16 of 1985 empowering the National Universities Commission (NUC) to lay down Minimum Academic Standards for all the Nigerian universities and also to accredit their degree programmes. In the case of library system, the assessment of libraries by NUC accreditation panel mostly browsed the library shelves without taking note of the quantitative and qualitative indicators of the information resources and services of the libraries. The main objectives of this paper included identification of the quality assurance mechanisms applied for effective library services in Academic Libraries in Nigeria. A descriptive survey research method was used for the study. Questionnaire and observation constituted the main instruments used to collect data for this study. The researcher used descriptive method to analyze responses to the questionnaires. The correlation analysis and chi-square statistic were used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. The findings of the study showed that the methods used to assess the quality of the information resources were credibility of the author, relevance of the content, and currency of the information resources. Another significant finding was that the 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. Based on the foregoing, the key recommendation of the study was a designed proposal for uniform standards for assessing the quality of university libraries. The proposed standards aimed at unifying the methods, criteria, strategies and mechanisms of assessing the quality of the libraries.

Introduction

One of the driving forces for performance measurement of systems and services is the demand for quality services and products. 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.

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. In the areas of services, such as education for example, various accreditation bodies were established by the government in a bid to ensure quality standards. Such bodies include the National Universities Commission (NUC) empowered by decree no 16 of 1985 to set up minimum academic standards for programmes taught in Nigerian Universities and to accredit such programmes. Other accrediting bodies include the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), empowered to set standards and accredit Nigerian

Polytechnic programmes and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), for colleges of education. Some private accrediting bodies also exist for the monitoring of standards and accreditation of professional courses. Such bodies include the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), for Accountants and Accounting Programmes, the Council for Registered Engineers of Nigeria, (COREN) for Engineers and Engineering programmes, and the Nigerian Legal Council (NLC) for Lawyers and Law programmes, as well as Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) for librarians and library practices. These organizations set standards for their areas of concern and apply sanctions on defaulters so as to maintain the standards in ensuring quality services.

Other measures taken by the Federal Government of Nigeria in order to ensure quality in Education was the Education Trust Fund Intervention, the Constitution of Presidential Visitation Panels to Universities in every five years, Budget Monitoring, Programme Accreditation by the National Universities Commission, Introduction of Institutional Accreditation, Monitoring Visits to Universities, holding of University System Annual Review Meetings with Universities by the National Universities Commission, Introduction of Library Development Fund (LDF) to ensure adequate funding for Nigerian University Libraries.

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. The level of development of a nation is basically measured by the extent to which the citizens of that country are educated.

As integral parts of educational institutions, it becomes inevitable that the issue of quality assurance be taken seriously in their libraries too. This is why it has now become an issue of importance necessitating this research, which has as its focus, the implementation of quality assurance in Nigerian university libraries. 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. In recent times, customer satisfaction has become the cardinal principle governing service industries. A library being a service providing industry therefore, finds it necessary to ensure quality in its services provision so as to satisfy customers' needs.

Statement of the Problem

In the early years of University education in Nigeria, the University system had developed well and had gained international acceptability and respect for the quality of its graduates and the high standards of teaching and learning. However, it has been observed that the issue of low quality of Nigerian University graduates is becoming a serious source of concern to all stakeholders in the university education. Academic libraries have been recognized to play significant role towards improving the standard of teaching, learning and research needs of the universities. This they do mostly through acquiring relevant information resources and provision of relevant information services necessary for sustaining the learning, teaching and research activities of the universities. Consequently, the first measure taken by the federal government to regain and ensure quality in Nigerian Universities was the promulgation of decree no. 16 of 1985 empowering the National Universities Commission to lay down Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for all the universities in Nigeria and also to accredit their degrees and other academic awards. In the case of library system, the MAS provides for minimum floor space for lectures, library holdings and currency of collection as well as minimum staff – student ratios for effective teaching and learning in any given discipline.

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 researcher observed that 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 qualitative 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) 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 a research on the implementation of quality assurance to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of Nigerian university library systems, resources and services is necessary to determine the level of their responsiveness to assuring quality education.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to generally examine the implementation of quality assurance to Nigerian university library system. Specifically the objectives are to:

1. determine the extent to which the information resources and services available in Academic libraries in Nigeria are relevant to the teaching, learning, research and community services functions.
2. identify the quality assurance mechanisms available and used in the Academic libraries in Nigeria

Hypotheses

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated and would be tested to determine the implementation of quality assurance in Nigeria university libraries

H₀₃: The quality assurance mechanisms available and used in the Nigerian university libraries have no significant effect on the quality of their information resources and services.

Literature Review

Quality is 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.

Concept of Quality Assurance

Goods and services had been done from beginning to end by a person or group of persons without much reference to "quality criteria". 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

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Discussion and Analysis

The perception of the library users and university librarians was sought to determine the level of relevance of the information systems available in their libraries for teaching, learning, research and community services needs. Table 1 was a frequency distribution of the responses of librarians and library users.

Table 1: *University Librarians and Users' perception of the Relevance of the Information Systems Available in the University Libraries to Learning, Teaching, Research and Community Services Needs*

Type of the Information Systems	University librarians				Library users			
	Relevant		Not relevant		Relevant		Not relevant	
	Freq	percent	Freq	percent	Freq	percent	Freq	percent
Computer system	7	70.0	3	30.0	490	89.1	60	10.9
Inter library loan system	7	70.0	3	30.0	349	63.4	201	36.5
Automated circulation system	5	50.0	5	50.0	320	58.2	230	41.8
On-line Public Access Catalogue System (OPAC)	6	60.0	4	40.0	402	73.1	148	26.9
Serial management system	7	70.0	3	30.0	387	70.4	163	29.7
On-line information system	5	50.0	5	50.0	444	80.7	106	19.2
Indexing system	4	40.0	6	60.0	363	66.0	187	34.0
Abstracting system	4	40.0	6	60.0	341	62.0	209	38.0
Telephone system	5	50.0	5	50.0	289	52.5	261	47.5
Manual circulation system	3	30.0	7	70.0	313	56.9	237	43.1
Automated serial management system	5	50.0	5	50.0	233	42.4	317	57.6
Brown system	2	20.0	8	80.0	144	26.1	406	73.9
Newark System	2	20.0	8	80.0	146	26.6	404	73.4
Multiple slip system	1	10.0	9	90.0	222	40.4	328	59.6
Automated charging system	4	40.0	6	60.0	281	51.1	269	48.9
Electronic mailing system	4	40.0	6	60.0	262	47.7	288	52.4
Word-by – letter filing system	4	40.0	6	60.0	289	52.5	261	47.5
Letter - by – letter filing system	3	30.0	7	70.0	144	26.1	406	73.9

Table 1 provided information on the level of relevance of information systems available in Nigerian libraries for learning, teaching, research and community services needs of the university library users and the University Librarians. It was expected that a typical University Library should have at least 18 information systems that were relevant to their Learning, Teaching, Research and Community Services Needs, however the responses of library users revealed that only computer system, on-line information system, on-line public access cataloguing system, serial management system, indexing system and inter library loan system had scores between 66 and 89 percent. In other words, only six of the 18 information systems were perceived to be quite relevant to academic needs of the university. Newark System, Browne

System, and letter-by-letter filing system had relevance rating of only 26 percent. This further confirms the earlier findings on the availability of the information systems in the university libraries showing that most of the information systems were found to be ICT Compliant. The finding also indicates that the library users themselves prefer to use ICT Systems for their learning, research and community services needs. On the part of the University Librarians' perception, the findings show that Computer System, Inter library loan System and Serial Management System were found to be relevant with scores of 60 percent to 70percent. Multiple Slip System, Browne System, and Newark system with scores between 10 percent and 20 percent were found to be irrelevant.

Table 2: University Librarians and Users' perception on the level of relevance of the Information Resources Available in their University Libraries

Information resources	University librarians				Library users			
	Relevance		Not Relevance		Relevance		Not Relevance	
	Freq	percent	Freq	percent	Freq	percent	Freq	percent
Print books	8	80.0	2	20.0	450	81.9	100	18.1
Non-print books	7	70.0	3	30.0	474	86.2	76	13.8
Journals	5	50.0	5	50.0	354	64.3	196	35.7
Print Journals	9	90.0	1	10.0	435	79.1	115	20.9
Non-print journals	7	70.0	3	30.0	430	78.2	120	21.8
Audio Visual Materials such as: Pictures	2	20.0	8	80.0	301	54.7	249	47.3
Maps and Atlases	4	40.0	6	60.0	313	56.9	237	43.1
Films	6	60.0	4	40.0	330	60.0	220	40.0
CD-ROM	8	80.0	2	20.0	429	78.0	121	22.0
CD	6	60.0	4	40.0	288	52.4	262	47.6
Video Cassettes	6	60.0	4	40.0	350	63.6	200	36.4
Audio CD discs	6	60.0	4	40.0	322	58.6	228	41.4
Radio Cassettes	6	60.0	4	40.0	250	45.5	300	54.5
Video CD	6	60.0	4	40.0	280	51.0	270	49.0
Audio CD	6	60.0	4	40.0	276	50.2	274	49.8
Audio DVD	6	60.0	4	40.0	295	53.6	255	46.4
Video DVD	6	60.0	4	40.0	284	51.7	266	48.3
Microforms	6	60.0	4	40.0	204	37.0	346	63.0
Encyclopedias	7	70.0	3	30.0	181	32.9	369	67.1
Indexes	7	70.0	3	30.0	471	85.7	79	14.3
Abstracts	8	80.0	2	20.0	420	76.4	130	23.6
Dictionaries	8	80.0	2	20.0	396	72.0	154	28.0
Gazettes	8	80.0	2	20.0	495	90.0	55	10.0
Pamphlets.	8	80.0	2	20.0	342	62.2	208	37.8
Almanacs	8	80.0	2	20.0	383	69.5	167	30.5
Yearbooks	8	80.0	2	20.0	354	64.4	196	35.6
Directories	8	80.0	2	20.0	393	71.5	157	28.5
Others	8	80.0	2	20.0	401	72.9	149	28.1

This shows that the perceptions of the University Librarians collaborate with the perceptions of the University Library users. This finding agrees with the findings of Albany (1990) where it was found that Information Systems at the University met the needs of the Institutions programmes and functions. This shows that there was an improved funding for Nigerian University Libraries thereby contradicting the findings of Ifidon (1997:5) where it was reported that the book stock of the Nigerian university libraries were in a deplorable state. From Table 1 we conclude that majority of the Information Systems were relevant to the learning, teaching, research and community services functions of their universities. The graphical illustration of the combined perceptions of the users and University Librarians on the level of relevance of the Information Systems in the libraries to the teaching, learning, research and community services functions of the universities was depicted.

Perceptions of University Library users and University Librarians on the relevance of the Information resources available in the libraries to the teaching, learning, research and community services functions of the universities were presented in Table 2. From the Users' perceptions, the information resources that were considered relevant were print and non-print books, print and non-print journals, films, CD-ROM, Video Cassettes, Indexes and Abstracts, Dictionaries, Gazettes, Almanacs, Yearbooks, Pamphlets, Directories, Audio

Discs with scores of 60 percent to 90 percent. Those perceived to be irrelevant by the users were Encyclopedias and Microfilms with scores between 33 and 37 percent respectively.

From the University Librarians' perception, the findings revealed that almost all the listed/expected available information resources in the libraries were relevant with scores between 60 percent and 80 percent. Only Audio visual materials, maps and atlases had scores of 20 and 40 percent respectively. This may be that they considered them as outdated in this ICT era. The perceptions of the University Librarians agree with the perceptions of the users. This shows that the Information resources available in the university libraries were relevant to the learning, teaching and community services functions of the universities. A graphical presentation of the respondents' perceptions on the relevance of the information resources available for the teaching, learning, research and community services needs of their universities were presented in figure 4.4.

The Perception of the Library Users and the University Librarians on the Relevance of the Information Services Available in the University Libraries

In an attempt to find out the perception of the Users and University Librarians on the relevance of the available Information Services available in the Nigerian University Libraries, The opinions of the University Librarians and library users were presented in Table 3

Table 3: Users and University Librarians' Perception on the relevance of the Information Services available in Nigerian University Libraries to their Teaching, Learning, Research and Community Services functions

Type of Information Services	University librarians				Library users			
	Available		Not available		Available		Not available	
	Freq	percent	Freq	percent	Freq	percent	Freq	Percent
Lending services	8	80.0	2	20.0	434	79.0	146	21.0
Indexing services	8	80.0	2	20.0	400	72.8	150	27.2
Abstracting services	6	60.0	4	40.0	369	67.0	181	33.0
Telephone service	8	80.0	2	20.0	284	51.6	266	48.4
Photocopying services	7	70.0	3	30.0	450	81.8	100	18.2
Reprographic services	8	80.0	2	20.0	289	52.6	261	47.5
Referral services	7	70.0	3	30.0	349	63.4	201	36.6
Literature search services	9	90.0	1	10.0	419	76.2	131	23.8
Reference services	8	80.0	2	20.0	459	83.4	91	16.5
Micrographic services	6	60.0	4	40.0	241	43.8	309	56.2
Internet services	7	70.0	3	30.0	442	80.3	108	19.6
Selective dissemination of information (SDI)	6	60.0	4	40.0	327	59.5	223	
Fax services	4	40.0	6	60.0	254	46.1	296	53.9
Retrospective search services	8	80.0	2	20.0	265	48.1	285	50.9

Table 3 provide information on the perceptions of Nigerian University Library Users and the University Librarians on relevance of the Information Services available in the libraries to the teaching, learning, research and community services needs. The findings revealed that the library users perceived reference services, photocopying services, internet services, Indexing services, abstracting services and SDL with scores between 60 and 82 percent as being quite relevant. Micrographic Services, Fax Services and retrospective search services were perceived by the users as less relevant. A glance at Table 3 clearly show that majority of the available information services provided in the university library were found to be relevant.

On the part of the University Librarians' perceptions, the findings show that all the available information services had scores of relevance between 60 and 90 percent except fax services with a score of 40 percent. A plausible explanation for this was that fax is no more in vogue due to the advent of on-line mail (e-mail) services. The perception of the University Librarians was therefore in line with that of the users. This shows that the information services available in Nigerian University libraries were relevant to the teaching, learning, research and community services functions of the Universities. This finding agree with the finding of Ifidon (1990:2) which discovered that reference services in Nigerian University Libraries satisfied the needs of the users of Nigerian university libraries.

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 4. Table 4 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), 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.

Hypothesis I: The quality assurance mechanisms available and used in the Nigerian university libraries have no significant relationship with the quality of their information resources and services.

The information resources available in the University Libraries were used along with the methods and strategies used in the university library systems for the implementation of quality assurance standards in the libraries. The Spearman rho correlation procedure was used for the test because of the scoring adopted in the librarians' instrument. The result of the correlation test is summarized in Table 5.

Table 4: 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	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
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

Table 4.22: Correlation between quality assurance mechanisms and quality of information resources and services available in the libraries

Variables	Mean	Std dev	Std. Error		DF	P
Quality of information resources/services	7.822	3.7535	0.1601		548	0.000
Quality assurance mechanisms	17.306	2.1964	0.0937			

Hypothesis I is rejected because the probability of 0.000 is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance. Thus, we conclude that quality assurance mechanisms have significant relationship with information resources and services available in the libraries.

Conclusion

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

The information systems that were perceived to be relevant by the university library users and the University Librarians were computer systems, on-line information systems, and online public access cataloguing system. With respect to the library resources, the university librarians and the users opined that print and non-print books and journals, films, CD-ROM, video cassettes, indexes and abstracts, dictionaries, gazettes, almanacs, year books, pamphlets, directories, and audio discs were relevant to teaching, learning, research and community services needs of the university. As for library services, the university librarians and users perceived reference services, photocopying services, internet services, indexing services, and abstracting services to be relevant to teaching, learning, research and community services needs of the university. The quality assurance mechanisms available and used in Nigerian university libraries were programme accreditation and benchmarking of library systems, resources and services. 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. This study therefore found a great need to establish uniform standards for the evaluation of university libraries in Nigeria so as to be able to determine and compare their quality

Recommend

1. In view of the rapid changes in the information and technology age, the older systems like network system, and multi slip systems should be replaced with contemporary digital information systems for relevance. As for information resources, encyclopedias and microfilms should be replaced

with electronic dictionaries and the use of e-libraries be encouraged to access relevant materials.

2. In the case of library information services, investment in micrographic services, fax services and retrospective search services should be discouraged since most users of the libraries indicated that they were not relevant to them.
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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