
Christian Religious Education: A Tool for Quality Assurance

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Abstract

Every education system aspires to produce high quality products, especially in contemporary competitive world. Each education system is doing everything possible to make its product the best. The Nigerians education system tries to make its products, not only of high quality, but also internationally competitive. The craving for good quality school leavers' agitates educational administrators in Nigeria to exploits all avenues that can make Nigerian school products one of the best in world. The only guarantor that can make Nigeria attain this feat is to implant or infuse into the education system, functional quality assurance strategies, otherwise national development will be in jeopardy. It is, therefore, worrisome to have deficient quality assurance strategies that cannot process and guarantee high quality school leavers. It is this worry that prompted this paper. The paper opined that substandard work force is detrimental to national transformation, growth and development. The paper conceptualised the term quality assurance and advocated that quality assurance in education is the responsibility of all. The paper appreciated the operational and serviceable disposition of quality assurance agencies at various levels of the Nigerian education system, from the colonial era to date. The discourse finally positioned that Christian Religious Education is God ordained tool for quality assurance. This position is corroborated with five suggestions on how Christian Religious Education can be an effective tool for quality assurance in the Nigerian education system.

Keywords: *Quality Assurance, Christian Religious Education.*

Introduction

Every education system endeavour to produce school leavers that can meet the expectations and aspirations of the community, society or nation. School leavers who cannot give the nation the requisite skills are often viewed as misfits, and they could be detrimental to national development, growth, progress or advancement. It is not contentious that misfits, wherever they are employed, do not only fails to give the required output that can move the society forward, but are most likely to under develop the organization they are serving, with catastrophic effects on the entire nation. Substandard and lowly rated workforce is, therefore, detrimental to any nation because development may be hampered, where the quality of work force lack productive potentials.

To avoid the destructive effects of substandard work force on societal development, growth or progress, virtually every education system have incorporated, quality assurance mechanisms that can give society confidence with regards to its products. Quality assurance is not only vital but also significant for any organization that wants society to patronize its

products. Quality assurance is the only guarantee to show that the end product will meet a specified standard, both locally and internationally. Quality assurance gives confidence, certainty, faith, trust, and conviction that the education system is very much in tune with international best practice. The pre-eminence of quality assurance forms the bottom line of this treatise. The discourse absolutely supports the proposition that quality assurance is paramount for any education system and that everything possible must be done to put quality assurance into practice. All segments of an education system can serve as tool for quality assurance including all subjects taught under the education system.

In this paper the favoured subject is Christian Religious Education (CRE), the paper articulated how CRE has served and could serve as tool for assuring quality in any education system, with focus on Nigeria. Preceding this, quality assurance was contextually defined. The process and mechanism for quality assurance were highlighted in the Nigerian context, with particular reference to quality assurance agencies such as National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). The paper gave a brief recast of CRE in Nigeria.

Contextual Concept of Quality Assurance (QA)

Quality assurance in education is the process of building into the teaching-learning process, carefully selected techniques that can assure the nation to expect world-class products who are properly tutored with all the relevant knowledge, skills or attitudes that can qualify them to meet the aspirations and expectations of the nation, society and international community. This paper is not, however, opposed to Merriam – Webster’s definition, that quality assurance is a program for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project, service, or facility in order to ensure that standard or quality are being met. Merriam Webster’s definition have some common grounds with the former conception, for instance, teaching–learning process in the former definition, could be equated with project, or service, as captured in the Merriam Webster’s definition, in fact, the use of terms, such as “education” and “teaching-learning” is what makes the earlier definition contextual and relevant for this presentation. The salient point of the two definitions is that quality assurance should be built into the education process based on the concept of value as perceived by the nation. The values could be in terms of workforce expectations by employers of labour.

The ultimate goal of quality assurance is to produce high quality workforce that can synchronously shift the frontiers of development of the entire nation. Delivering quality in education requires a systematic and disciplined approach. Quality does not just happen; in the teaching-learning process, quality require effective teachers, good monitoring, adequate and relevant foundation, matured learners, appropriate and adequate instructional materials, conducive learning environment, and the right system.

Every good education system does not neglect quality assurance mechanism, rather it holds unto them tenaciously, fully aware that infusing deficient school leavers into the society may cause or register devastating consequences on the country and the world at large. Beside this, any education system that is committed to excellence will do everything possible to ensure that its school products are internationally competitive and it is only quality assurance that can do this perfectly. In Nigeria quality assurance is not a new concept, some agencies, such as National University Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and others have over time been saddled with the

responsibilities of quality assurance, at various levels of the education system in Nigeria.

The Background of Quality Assurance in Nigerian Education System

The concern about quality in education dates back to the 1882 education ordinance, promulgated by the Colonial Government for Anglophone West Africa. The ordinance among others established an inspectorate to serve the Colonies of Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Nigeria. In each colony, School Inspectors were trained and appointed; they represent pioneer instruments of quality assurance during the period in question. They were revered but also feared, by teachers and school heads. They may sometimes come to the school un-announced or tip-toe into the classroom trying to take the teacher un-aware to catch him red-handed. Dodd (1968) referred to this type of inspection as administrative inspection and was used in the 18th, 19th and early part of the 20th century.

Because of the significance society attached to quality assurance, the history of quality assurance in educational institutions is saturated with sequences of improved variety of quality assurance versions. For instance between the 18th and 21st century, concern for quality assurance has witnessed five different models of school inspection and supervision, each being an improvement on its predecessor. The first model is the Administrative inspection, which was used between 18th to early 20th century. Others are the scientific supervision (1910 – 1930). Democratic supervision or human relations supervision, (1930 – 1950); the Neo – scientific supervision Era (1960 – 1970) and the human resources supervision era (1970s to date). Though these models were used in various eras, the commonly examined components of the school system were relatively the same. They include school administration, personnel, pupils, programmes of studies, school plant and equipments and so on (Dodd, 1968).

The Nigeria education system is structured into three parts, these are the Tertiary, the Secondary and the Basic Education Level, arranged in descending order. Each level of education in Nigeria is expected to produce high quality products; this may explain why quality assurance is one of the preoccupations of the agencies in charge of the respective levels in the education system (NUC, NBTE, NCCE, UBEC, and others).

Before the advent of NUC, NBTE, NCCE, UBEC, and others, quality assurance in Nigerian's education system, were promoted by school inspectors, Headmasters, Principals, Vice Chancellors and their respective managements. For instance Principals were accountable for the deeds and misdeeds of student who were in the then five secondary institutions in former Gombe Division (now Gombe State). Namely, Government Secondary School, Gombe; Teachers College, Gombe; Government Craft School, Gombe; Sudan International Mission (SIM) Secondary School, Billiri; Government Secondary Schools, Kaltungo; and SIM Teachers College, Kaltungo. As a measure of quality assurance all school heads ensured that the Curriculum is fully covered and properly implemented. In this regard lateness, truancy, disturbances, failure to do class work and assignment on the sides of students were unacceptable. Teachers on the other hand were properly monitored on punctuality, actual classroom teaching, use of relevant teaching aids, proper lesson planning, good classroom management, and other requirement that can help to attain set educational goals and objectives. The attainment of educational goals and objectives translates into producing an all round developed individual who is good in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

Was quality assured through the efforts of Headmasters, Principals, Vice Chancellors, Rectors, school inspectors and other school heads?

Quality is a relative term, given a scale such as “very high”, “high”, “fair”, “low” and “very low”, peoples opinion may not only vary but may also cover the five options. Before the 1970s quality of school products may have received good ratings especially from the advocates of falling standard of education (Unegu, 2011), who believe that school products of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were of better quality than school products of later years. During the period under review opinion about quality of education seem to be based on students spoken English, students performance in final year examinations and sometimes the extent they can read or write. The number of student that have passed the common entrance examination into secondary schools was used as a measure to classify a school as good school or otherwise. Similarly, the number of students that got five credits and above in West African School Certificate (WASC), is a proof that quality assurance has worked or not, in a particular school.

Before government took-over schools in the second half of the 1960s, most mission schools seem to perform better than government owned schools in WASC and Teacher Grade II examinations. For example, in the former North Eastern State, mission Secondary Schools, such as Church of the Brethren Mission (CBM) Secondary School, Waka-Biu; Villanova Secondary School, Numan (Lutheran); Bronum Secondary School, Numan (Lutheran); Hong Secondary School (Lutheran); Billiri Secondary School (SIM); Mcbright Secondary School, Jalingo (Methodist) and so on. All of them use to record good result in the West Africa School Certificate Examination. Similarly, missionary owned Teachers’ Colleges such as Teachers’ College, Bazza (Catholic); Teachers’ College, Numan (Lutheran); Teacher’ College, Waka-Biu (CBM); Teacher’ College Kaltungo (SIM), Women Teacher’ College (Madonna), Sugu near Ganye (Catholic) performed creditably better in Teacher Grade Two examinations than government owned Teachers’ Colleges.

Any institution, whose products perform well in the final examination, can be credited for having a functional quality assurance mechanism. However, society always struggle to improve on its quality assurance strategies, so that it may move away from imperfection and get closer to perfection, it is in this vain that the Nigerian Government has created education agencies for various levels of our education system, each with a very strong quality assurance sector infused into them, some of these agencies as mentioned earlier are: National University Commission (NUC); National Board for Technical Education (NBTE); National Commission for College of Education (NCCE); Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC).

Quality Assurance in Universities

The National University Commission (NUC), oversees all the activities of Universities in Nigeria, both public and private. The NUC has so many sections that handle deferent aspects of the organization. One of such sections is Quality Assurance unit. The quality assurance section organises accreditation exercise for all programmes in all Universities, no student is allowed to graduate in a programme, unless such a programme is fully accredited. At the end of each accreditation, a programme may get denied, interim or full accreditation. Any programme that gets denied accreditation will have to stop completely, a programme with interim accreditation will have to be re-accredited after two years and a programme with full accreditation will only be re-accredited after five years. Virtually all aspects of a programme will be accredited. It is believed (and of course it is) that accreditation is a strong quality assurance instrument, especially where such exercises are carried out sincerely.

Having the right quality assurance instruments in the Universities is good; it helps universities to produce the right calibre of graduates. Universities represent only one tier of tertiary education; others are Colleges of Education and Polytechnics. Therefore even where Universities produce good quality graduates, there need be a corresponding good product from other tertiary institutions, who will fill the manpower requirement of the nation. Where the products of other tertiary institutions are not as good as that of Universities, a fusion of manpower from the two axes may affect the general output of the entire work force negatively, with concomitant affects on Nigeria's development. To avoid such a worrisome scenario both Colleges of Education and Polytechnics have equally mounted quality assurance strategies in their respective Commissions. These are the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE).

Quality Assurance in Colleges of Education

The NCCE is the agency that coordinates all the activities of Colleges of Education in Nigeria, its schedule, covers a spectra of activities, among such activities quality assurance is prioritised. The NCCE provides minimum standard for all the programmes to be implemented by Colleges of Education in Nigeria and all Colleges of Education are expected to follow, the guidelines of the minimum standard religiously. A team of accreditation panel are regularly sent out to accreditate all programmes in COEs. Sometimes the outcome of such accreditation leads to closure of some programme of even the entire college, if the affected Colleges are grossly deficient in meeting accreditation requirements.

Quality Assurance in Polytechnics, Mono-technics and Technical Colleges

The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) performs similar functions as NUC and NCCE, in the Universities and COEs respectively. The NBTE strives to ensure quality and they are not relenting and do not compromise anything that may undermine quality of National Diplomas and Higher National Diplomas.

Quality Assurance for Childhood, Basic and Secondary Education

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) handles the issue of Quality Assurance at the Basic Education level. All the questions about quality assurance are contained in a document named "National Education Quality Assurance Handbook for Basic and Secondary Education in Nigeria" (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016). According to the handbook, the Federal Government of Nigeria was not satisfied with the mode of inspection of school, which did not lead to the expected improvement in learning outcomes, in institutions below tertiary level. Therefore, the question of quality assurance became a major concern to the government. This desire to provide quality education spurred the Federal Ministry of Education to request the National Council on Education (NCE) in its 2007 meeting, to approve a shift from the old system of inspection to quality assurance, using the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) strategy. At this level, quality assurance is viewed as a process of monitoring, assessing, evaluating and reporting objectively, based on agreed quality, standards and all aspect of school life, to ensure that acceptable standards are attained, maintained and improved upon, continually. That quality assurance processes and practices are dynamic and provides the needed guidance and support to schools for consistent improvement in learning outcomes.

The handbook recommended that, there will be a National Education Quality Assurance body (NEQAB). Who will coordinate the development of a functional National Education Quality Assurance (EQA) system and framework in collaboration with states, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and other stakeholders. All areas of quality assurance will be included in the

foundation of the NEQAB, such as learning process, teaching, quality of curriculum, care, guidance and safety of learners, others are learning environments, effective leadership and management of schools. Types of evaluation to be approached should include whole school evaluation, accreditation evaluation, special evaluation; follow through evaluation and External Evaluation (EE).

From the foregoing, virtually all institutions of learning apply one form of quality assurance technique or the other, one can hardly think of any institution without a form of quality assurance. Imbedded in the structure of most educational institutions, are some pertinent sub-structures that play a significant role in quality assurance. In some instances these sub-structures are so vital that they are recognised as major determinate of quality. It may not be out of place to say that, they effectively complement the functions of quality assurance agencies to such an extent that, without them the product of educational institutions may not be classified as effective. These very important sub structures are latent but significant agents of quality assurance. These institutional substructures include Professional Association (Science Teachers Association, (STAN), Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN); National Association of Christian Religious Educators of Nigeria (NSCREN) etc. Other institutional sub-structures, whose activities support quality assurance, include teachers, learners and subjects taught in schools (Mathematics, English, Economics Government, Geography, and Christian Religious Education (CRE), among others. Each subject has its own ethics, these ethics to a larger extent supports quality assurance. However among the school subjects, CRE stands out as both a repertoire of knowledge as well as, a strong stool for quality assurance.

A Brief Recast of Christian Religious Education in Nigeria

Traditional education in pre-colonial Nigeria, taught almost all aspect of human knowledge except CRE. The CRE also referred to as Bible Knowledge (B.K.), Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK), Christian Religious Studies (CRS), is education God has purposely prepared with the aim of saving all humans, who have fallen short of his glory. The content of this education is contained in the Bible, comprising 66 books from Genesis to Revelation. There is little or no evidence to proof that CRE was taught in Nigeria before the advent of Christian Missionaries. However, when Christian Missionaries arrived the shores of Nigeria, they brought with them the best news human beings should not miss and an education that contains all human requirement for survival here on earth and life after death.

So many missionary groups were involved in propagating the gospel they, included the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Methodists, Anglicans, Lutherans, Qua – Iboe, Church of the Brethren Mission (CBM), Sudan United Mission (SUM), Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) among others. These missionary groups and many more, taught CRE in Churches, theological institutions, secular schools, during open preaching, during public lectures, seminars, conferences, workshops, induction courses etc.

When western types of education started in Nigeria, CRE formed part of the Curriculum. The CRE was taught in all missionary schools, in addition to public schools that were located in Christian dominated areas. Most people that have received training from missionary schools whether Primary, Secondary, Medical Auxiliary, Nursing, Teachers' College, Bible College, Seminary, Bible School and so on, have often been commended for being of very good quality (Ifedili & Ochuba, 2009). This may imply that the missionary training process must have been properly blended with quality assurance ingredients, whose effect must manifested in the performances of their products. These ingredients of quality assurance must have

included good management of schools, good quality teachers, adequate facilities, good teacher-student ratio, and so on.

Generally, the indices on CRE education before government takeover of missionary schools seem to be pointing in a positive direction, unfortunately there seem to be slight decline in the post takeover era. Unfortunately, Lawal (2010) reported that poor performance occurred yearly between 2000 and 2010. He further observed that more students are running away from the Christian Religious knowledge (CRK), he described this alarming rate of poor performance in CRK has pivotal for generating concern among parents, teachers, schools and government. Similarly, Gabriel, Ethelbert, and Monty (2016) reported a fall in student's academic performance in CRK over the years when compared to other subjects in the education system. They reiterated that the West African Examination Council (WAEC) result in the last three years (2012 – 2014), indicates that only 35.26%, 23.58% and 33.45% respectively passed CRK at credits level. However, they further observed that the downwards trend in students performance is not restricted to CRE, it cuts across the entire education system. Deterioration in students academic performance is a worrisome trend, steps must, therefore, be taken to address it properly, so that the situation does not drift further down the slope, otherwise development, growth and progress may be hampered. A hampered development is detrimental to any nation or society. Addressing these issues should be a collective responsibility.

Suggestions: How CRE can serve as Tools for Quality Assurance in Nigeria

All subjects taught in school have four components objectives, content, methodology and evaluation. The last component (evaluation) is an instrument for quality assurance. Evaluation is used to determine the effectiveness of objectives, content and methodology, whether formatively or summatively. This means that every school subject is a tool for quality assurance, as long evaluation constitutes part of teaching-learning process. This segment of the presentation will offer suggestions on how CRE can serve as a tool for quality assurance. However, the paper we will present only five suggestions:

1. Heed the Word of God and get Excellent Quality Products

Christian Religious Education is the best quality assurance tool the world has ever had. Going by the the book of 2 Tunothy 3:16 – 17 states

“All scripture is God – breath and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

The content of CRE is the scripture, and it is stated un-equivocally that the scripture is the word of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and trainings. No human invented quality assurance strategy can be better than what God has sanctioned. All the Biblical terms mentioned above are essential for quality assurance, no human terms can be better. Definitely quality assurance will require teaching on how quality can be assured, it require rebuking where a person is deviating from the norms of quality assurance, correcting where a person is getting it wrong on sequences of activities that leads to quality assurance and training in quality assurance skills are indispensable. Very fundamental to quality assurance is that all these attributes will equip the man of God for every good work. If CRE will equip us for every good work which other quality assurance strategy can substitute CRE?

2. The Christian Religious Educators Should Serve as Models for Quality Assurance.

Christian Religious Educators can be a tool for quality assurance by serving as models for others to emulate. Late coming to work, absence from work, truancy, poor lesson preparation,

poor lesson presentation, lack of teaching skills, and others is antidote to quality assurance. Christian Religious Educators should not harbour such attitudes; they are manifestations of how the devil influences our performances. All Christian Religious Educators are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto quality work (Ephesians: 2:10). When Christian Religious Educators are punctual to work and fully dedicated to their duties, they can serve as reference point to other staff. It is an abnormality to call a Christian Religious Educator a late-comer, lazy teachers or somebody who does not know his subject matter. Christian Religious Educators are among the group of teachers that society often cite or pass judgement on. Community may trail Christian Religious Educators who are drunkards, adulterers, fornicators, thieves, promiscuous and so on with odd comments, but such comment may not be accorded non CRE teachers.

3. NACREN to Organise Conferences, Workshops and Seminar on Quality Assurance.

The National Association of Christian Religious Educators of Nigeria (NACREN) is an association of all Christian Religious Educators in Nigeria; they have a role to play as tool for quality assurance, by organizing conferences, workshops and seminars on quality assurance that can attract audience from different levels and structures of the education system. Where conferences are to be organised themes and sub-themes should cover a range of topics that have direct bearing on quality assurance, especially in the Nigerian context. Workshops could be in stages from one geo-political zone to the other. Each workshop should afford participants ability to acquire quality assurance skills in their respective workplaces; similarly, the seminars should allow participants opportunities to present their experiences with respect to quality assurance, so that their presentation can be discussed. Finally communiqués can be issued at the end of such conference, workshops and seminars. Copies of such communiqués could be distributed to all relevant education state-holders.

4. NACREN to Engage in Book Publications

Besides conferences seminars and workshops, NACREN should publish books, Journals Newsletters, Magazines, on quality assurance. For instance NACREN can field Quality Assurance Journal of Nigeria, or in collaboration with other association, NACREN can put in place, the International Journal of Quality Assurance. So also NACREN could publish books regularly on quality assurance. There is a dearth of books on quality assurance, therefore by fielding books on quality assurance it will go a long way in improving the capacity of teachers, school administrators and non teaching staff working in educational institutions.

5. Conduct Regular Research on Quality Assurance.

NACREN could conduct researches on quality assurance. The entire process of quality assurance in Nigeria is bedevilled by some gaps. There are a lot of un-answered questions pertaining quality assurance. Discrepancy abounds between what is and what should be, in quality assurance; the instruments for ensuring quality should be subjected to continuous testing. Are quality assurance exercises properly done? Are results of quality assurance exercises properly communicated to the relevant authorities? Do the quality assurance agencies have the expertise? How regular is quality assurance exercises conducted in our schools? All these questions and many more need to be answered, and the best answers are through well coordinated researches, NACREN and Christian Religious Educators could champion this very vital projects that may save Nigerian Education from deterioration.

Conclusion

The concern of all educations systems is the efficiency of their final products. Where the final products of the system fails to meet societal expectations, it implies that the system has not

only failed the nation but may make the country static economically, socially, educationally, politically, culturally and of course in all spare of human endeavour. The effects can be catastrophic, that is why all nations try to ensure that the products of their education system are of very good quality, one way of producing very good quality school leavers is to build into the education process quality assurance strategies consistently and continuously, throughout each level of education. Such strategies may be harnessed from a wide spectrum of players in the education system, such as students, teachers, school administrators' professional bodied and so on. This paper acknowledged the significance of quality assurance in national transformation. The paper commend the positives steps taken by the Nigerian Government to establish quality assurance agencies for the various levels of our education system (UBEC, NCCE, NBTE, NUC etc), finally, the paper recommends CRE as the ultimate tool for quality assurance.

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