

ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The problem of the study is how to ensure accountability in order for the universities to survive. The ever increasing needs of the universities and the dwindling resources available to them have necessitated that university management and other stakeholders to seek innovative ways of ensuring the survival of the universities. This can be achieved through proper accountability of the education goals, programmes and productivity measurement. This paper begins with a brief overview of the state of Higher education in Nigeria, university management, concept of accountability and processes of accountability. The issues raised include those on goals, accountability and parameters for academic excellence in the system.* The paper concludes by making some possible suggestions towards improving accountability in Nigerian universities.

KEYWORDS: Accountability, Administration and Higher Education

Introduction

Investment in the development of education is vital to the survival and progress of any modern nation. It is like an industry that utilizes money and other valuable resources to produce its own products. Nigeria inherited from the colonial power a semi—colonial poorly developed economy in which there was a low local industrial development.

As has happened since independence, while the majority of the people in Nigeria languished in poverty and were denied the most basic amenities, some of the nation's leaders took the world by storm, flaunting their wealth. Momoh (1988) further emphasized that indiscipline permeates almost all facets of our lives. As a consequence of this, everything ignoble is glorified by the citizen of this country. Rogues, criminals, full time and part time prostitutes, homosexuals, bootlickers and hypocrites we made heroes. Some of the projects embarked upon when the economy was buoyant were later found to be unviable, while others were beyond the capacity of government agencies to execute or supervise. Nigeria was earning revenue of \$26billion from oil in the 1970s and later slumped to only\$6billion in the mid 1980s. Instead of diversifying the economy to make it self-reliant, the successive administrations of the nation pursued policies that made the economy vulnerable to external influence. Debts service payments in 1984 rose. Foreign creditors became cautious and consequently refused to grant Nigeria further credits. The effect was an acute shortage of foreign exchange, retrenchment of workers, unemployment, and shortage of goods, which culminated in inflation, irrational and discriminatory financial allocation processes and arbitrariness in locating universities and other educational institutions (Sofoluwe 1991).

The magnitude of the problem led the Federal Government of Nigeria in the 1981—85 Fourth Development Plan to commit about \$2.5billion to University Education. Out of this, about \$246million was committed to students funding and the whole sum of \$568miliion was set aside for the development of other federally supported institutions of higher education.

In 2004, the proliferation of the Nigerian Universities, with overall student's population and the government's inability to incorporate a sophisticated resource allocation gave rise to fiscal backlogs. The discrepancies in funding the universities owing to the inability to follow the recommendations of various reports (Asquith & Elliot (1943); Ashby (1960): prompted the creation of Ogundeko Committee in 1977. The Report revealed that the NUC had made several representations to the government but have not yielded results.

The question of establishing new universities came up again only after the military had handed over power to the civilian administration in 1979. The action of the previous administration was seen not only as a policy of just geographical distribution but also as political in having a federal university in each state of the federation. Accordingly, seven Universities of Technology were established in early 1980s. By 1985, it had become obvious that if Nigeria were to avoid economic decolonization and a careful allocation of financial resources, only stringent and comprehensive economic measures would save the country.

The Federal Government (1985) promulgated a decree on Minimum Academic Standards in all Nigerian universities while power of accreditation of Universities programmes were added to the functions of the NUC. In the 1986 Budget, Babangida prescribed a two- year Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that was launched in 1986. With the introduction, of SAP, the government initiated a massive review of all aspects of the public service. Since then, it has put into effect, a process of rationalization aimed at streamlining and coordinating the nation's university system.

In the two decades, 1979-1999, political instability contributed to a situation in which educational policy initiatives were sporadic and often not sustained. In the period of military rule from 1989 to 1999, universities were frequently on strike or and some of them were closed and this also contributed to a lack of educational leadership.

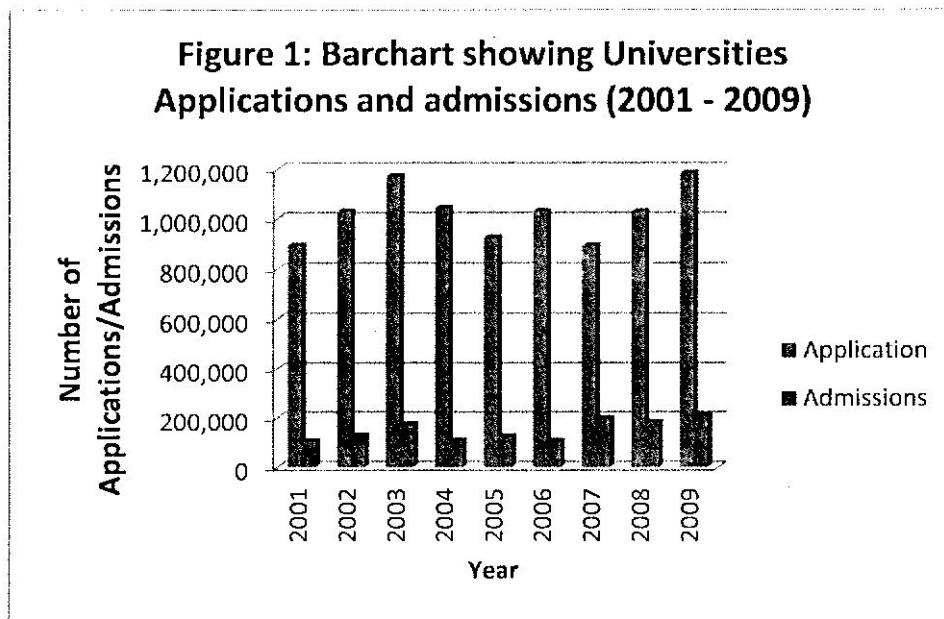
Nigeria's university system today is made up of 40 Federal Universities, 38 State Universities, 51 Private Universities. (NUC 2013) The tendency to see tertiary education as a source of individual prestige and wealth is very strong. This social reality is reflected in the demand of polytechnics and colleges of education to be degree-awarding status. It also accounts for the relatively low popularity of degrees in Education, compared with other fields in the Universities.

The excessively high demand for university places, and the quadrupling of university enrolment in the last 15 years, makes it important to consider how far the universities are meeting national needs and fostering a spirit of public service. Table I reveals statistics of applications and admissions to universities by faculties for 2004 academic session.

Applications and Admissions into Federal Universities in Nigeria (2001 – 2009)

Academic year	Universities	Admissions	%
	Application		
2001	893,259	106,304	11.90
2002	1,028,988	129,525	12.60
2003	1,172,313	175,358	14.90
2004	1,043,361	108,148	10.40
2005	926,133	125,673	13.10
2006	1,030,670	107,161	10.40
2007	893,259	149,033	16.70
2008	1,028,988	183,420	17.80
2009	1,185,574	211,991	17.90

❖ **Source: NUC 2013**



Source: NUC2013

For instance, the Universities Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) application/admission statistics for the last five academic years, 2005-2009 (see Table 1), shows that. In 2005, 125,673 of the 962,133 that applied were admitted. This accounted for 13.10% of the applicants. This means that 86.90% of the applicants were un catered for. In 2006, out of 1,030,670 that applied for university education, only 107,161 were admitted. This accounted for 10.40%, leaving 89.60% of the applicants un catered for. In 2007, 149,033 (16.70%) were admitted out of 893,259 applicants. In 2008, 183,420 out of 1,028,988 were admitted into the universities. This accounted for only 17.80% leaving out 82.20% of the applicants. In 2009, 211,991 (17.90%) out of 1185,574 were admitted that means 82.10% of the applicants were left out. The number of applicants that could not secure admission into the universities kept on increasing, thereby constituting a problem to the society. A declining trend in enrollment growth in the face of rising demand for university educations mirrors the growing difficulty in getting admissions probably due to falling academic standards at the secondary and primary school levels. It may also reflect inability of federal university to cope with growing admission pressures due to overstrained and decaying facilities as well as dearth of academic staff. Corroborating this fact, Saint *et al.* (2003) commented as follows: However, efforts to expand enrollment and improve educational quality are severally constrained by the growing shortages of qualified academic staff.

The procedure adopted for the exercise was institution based and with strict compliance with guidelines on 45% Merit, 35% Catchments, 20% educationally Less Developed States. In addition, the intake must be at the ratio 60:40 Science/Arts respectively. The rapid rise in university student population, not matched by funding, together with the loss of senior staff dissatisfied with the pay and conditions of service has brought a fall in standards. There is a soaring demand for proper accountability, effective management of the country's available resources and alternative sources of funding university education and a realistic budgetary allocation. Hence, there is need to focus on accountability in the management of university education.

Concept of Accountability

Accountability is a system of operation for delivering the desired educational output that specifies the desirable and measurable outcome to be achieved, the assignment of responsibilities to members of the organization to achieve these objectives and the assessment of achievement to ascertain relationship between input and output. The concept of accountability requires setting goals, assigning responsibilities and verifying how well resources are utilized.

The purpose of accountability in education is to respond to the implicit social contract between society and the public school system. Management is accountable for providing the students and the administrators the opportunities to learn as much as possible within available funding, resources and structures.

Government Accounting Board (GAB) defined accountability as a relationship between those who control or manage an entity and those who possess formal power over them. It requires the accountable party to provide an explanation or satisfactory reason for his/her activities and the results of efforts to achieve the specified tasks or objective. Accountability in university education requires valuation of various inputs, including scientific study and planning, adequate research and development, carefully monitored experimentation for collecting and analyzing data and information pertaining to all development. It requires utilization of relevant talent and contribution of a wide range of competent personnel including teachers and other appropriate technologies.

University education accountability is a direct response to the public demand for improved educational outcomes. Policymakers generally acknowledge that schools are in crises. Declining academic performance, increasing dropout rates, inadequate preparation for the workplace, low quality of educational output are some of the symptoms. The basic purposes of the concept of accountability are

focusing on objectives of organization, fixing responsibility, optimizing relationship between resources - human, physical and or fiscal results, ensuring prudent resource allocation, improved resource utilization patterns and better information on the performance qualities of personnel and teachers as they relate organizational objectives and ensure that teachers are held responsible for students' results or students' learning outcomes.

The basic requirements for planning accountability include development and refinement of meaningful goals for education, the translation of such goals and objectives into measurable terms; the development of criteria that are needed to determine the amount of progress made towards the achievement of goals and the development and implementation of procedures appropriate for evaluation and for reporting on the progress that is or is not made.

There are five alternative means of accountability in education viz:

- (1) **Goal Accountability** - the focus on evaluation is on the appropriateness of the goals and objectives in relation to national policies on education.
- (2) **Programme Accountability** - the locus is on the relevance of the set goals.
- (3) **Outcome Accountability** - the focus is on the outcome of the project that is measuring of educational input in relation to educational output.
- (4) **Performance Accountability** - the focus is on the efficiency and effectiveness.
- (5) **Probity and legality Accountability** - the focus is on the compliance with laws and regulations and in spending fund according to the approved budget

Accountability in Education

There are many divergent opinions about the goal and functions of universities over time. Geurgiou (1973) claimed that the universities in the past were institutions for the inculcation of a set of values of an essentially religious and Christian character, fostering scholarship and preparation of graduates for services to church and state. The UNESCO (1963) conference on the development of higher education in the social, cultural and economic development of Africa recommended the following goals of universities as: to maintain adherence and loyalty to world academic standards; to ensure the unification of Africa; to encourage elucidation and appreciation of African culture and heritage and to dispel misconceptions of Africa through research and teaching of African studies; to develop completely the human resources for meeting manpower needs; to train the whole man for nation building and to evolve over the years a truly African pattern of higher learning,

dedicated to Africa, and its people. The early history of university education in Nigeria, therefore, conferred the goals of manpower development, the development of cultural citizens who would function as leaders on the universities.

In Nigeria, the earliest attempt to define the purpose of university education was the National Curriculum Conference held in 1969 under the auspices of the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC). The NPE (2004) spells out the goals of Nigerian universities as the acquisition, development and inculcation of the appropriate value orientation for the survival of the individual and society; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environments; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community and the acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments.

The policy goes further to state that higher educational institutions are to pursue these goals through: teaching, research, the dissemination of existing and new information, the pursuit of service to the community and being a storehouse of knowledge. The educational managers now use the concept to describe (a) the nature, sources and amounts of revenue inputs, (b) the appropriation of revenues to various programmes and (c) the actual expenditures in these programmes. These data are then related to educational outputs or educational benefits so that the citizens can understand the financial implications of educational decisions and the programmes implications of financial decisions. Thus, the educational managers are accountable to the public and the public has information on which to exercise its decision-making power in areas of financial policy.

Issues on University Accountability

Quality Assurance Mechanisms

The term quality assurance refers to mechanisms and processes used to lead to the maintenance and improvement of quality assurance. It also has come to mean a guarantee or certification that particular standards are being met. Thus, quality assurance is largely about the systematic management procedures and processes adopted to ensure achievement of a given quality or continued improvement in quality. To inculcate the spirit of high standards and quality into the university education and programme, a system of quality assurance mechanisms came into existence through the National Universities Commission. These are: accreditation, ranking and programme verification.

Accreditation

This is a major quality assurance process done through the National Universities Commission. This is a system of evaluation of academic programmes in line with the laid

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down minimum academic standards. The focus of accreditation is comprehensive examining the mission, resources and procedures of a higher education or programme. NUC (1999) stated the objectives of the accreditation as:

- To ensure that at least the provision of the minimum Academic Standards documents are attained, maintained and enhanced.
- To assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programmes have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization.
- Certify to the international community that the programmes offered in Nigerian Universities are of high standards and their graduates are adequate for employment and for further studies.

There are four procedures for the accreditation of programme in Nigerian Universities. These are Application and selection of Universities for accreditation, Self-study of an institution, Initial evaluation of self-study report and on-site visit by an evaluation team (External Assessment), Accreditation action and public release of accreditation information. The cycle of accreditation at Universities is about five years. Accreditation results are either full, interim or denied accreditation. The report of accreditation of academic programme, in a typical department in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria showed 74.7%. The analysis for the programme revealed:

Academic content	20(87.0%)
Staffing	27(84.4%)
Physical Facilities	12(60.0%)
Funding	3(60.0%)
Library	6(50%)
Employer's Rating	3(100%)

The results of the accreditation are used by the Government for supporting Universities financially as providing subsidies, scholarships or research funds.

Ranking of Universities

The world-wide expansion of access to higher education has come with an increasing national and global demand for consumer information on academic quality. This has led to the development of university rankings in many countries of the world (Dill and Soo, 2004). In higher education, college and university rankings are listings of educational institutions in an order determined by any combination of factors. Rankings can be based on subjectively perceived "quality," on some combination of empirical statistics, or on surveys of educators, scholars, students, prospective students, or others.

There are several reasons behind the ranking of universities. One of such is the need to provide information to the public to guide their choice of institution of study. Guided by ranking reports, students and their families can make informed choices in the selection of a university and/or an academic programme. Ranking reports are also beneficial to firms seeking collaborative academic research partners. Therefore ranking is an important information source that could guide the decision-making process.

Ranking also ensures a healthy competition amongst institutions of higher learning; thus guaranteeing quality improvements rather than just meeting the requirements of minimum standards. Top flyers in the league table keep improving on their operations to maintain their top positions while those who perform below expectation put in efforts to displace those at the top. In addition, recent research suggests that well designed organizational report cards or ranking can sometimes serve as effective instruments for public accountability (Gormley and Weimer, 1999). In some countries, particular rankings are used in the allocation of funding which each university receives from the government

NUC ranks the Nigerian Universities based on the quality of their programmes. This is to encourage the leading institution in the ranking to maintain and enhance their lead and those at the lower rank to work hard and remedy their deficiencies and improve the quality of their programmes to meet the required standards.

Top 10 universities 2013 Web ranking in Nigeria

University of Ibadan	Ibadan
Obafemi Awolowo University	Ile-Ife
University of Lagos	Lagos
Ahmadu Bello University	Zaria
University of Ilorin	Ilorin
University of Benin	Benin City
University of Jos	Jos
University of Maiduguri	Maiduguri
University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	Abeokuta
University of Port Harcourt	Port Harcourt

Source: NUC 2013 Programme Verification

This includes, verifying the readiness of University which intends to establish a fresh programme. This is done by verifying the institutions claim and its resources

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readiness through physical inspection usually conducted by a team of NUC staff and invited experts in the discipline concerned.

In Nigeria, Ogunsanwo (1980) researched into a case study on the perceptions of the goals of the University of Ibadan by some members of the academic and administrative staff as well as students. The instrument was based on the pattern developed by Gross and Grambsch (1968). The result showed that staff had a fairly high congruent perception of the goals ($r_s=0.428$, $P<.05$) while students showed diversities and very low degree of congruence ($r_s = .007$) in their perceptions. Based on the findings the researcher suggested the need for the university to redefine its goals and familiarize its members with the goals of the institution. Like all case studies, the results of this study are necessarily limited in their applicability and generalizability to other Nigerian Universities. Consequently, the present study attempts to overcome this shortcoming.

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS)

The Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) emphasizes student achievement and other academic indicators as the basis for accountability ratings of schools. The indices include student academic and achievement in formation, programme, demographic, financial and staff data for each campus. Campus performance objectives for the current school year are included in the report. The performance indicators as revealed by Texas Education Agency (TEA) show the parameters as:

- State - administered assessment performance, by grade, by subject and by all grades tested;
- State Developed Alternative Assessment:
- Progress of Prior Year.
- Student success Initiative:
- Reading Proficiency Tests in English:
- Attendance rate for the full year:
- Dropout rate (by year):
- Completion and dropout rates:
- Percent of high school students completing an advanced course:
- Percentage of graduates completing the recommended high school programme or distinguished achievement programme;
- Advanced placement and examination results;
- TAAS/FASP equivalency rate:
- College Readiness (Success Initiative) and
- Examination - participation and results.

Conclusion

The paper examined accountability in the management of university education in Nigeria. The overview of the state of Nigerian university education was examined. The study of the university as an organization came up with different concepts or models as community, bureaucratic, collegial, service station, pluralistic and complex. This was to domesticate the complexity of the organization.

The management of university was vested in the Visitor, Officers of the University (Chancellor, Pro Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Registrar, Librarian & Bursar), Council Senate Congregation and Convocation. The eight spheres of university management for the actual attainment include financial, student, academic programme, committee system, personnel, welfare, reward system and physical facilities.

For democracy to thrive, the goals of Nigerian universities as contained in the National Policy on Education should be redefined, restated, Prioritized and recirculated among the various constituencies of the university. The Vice Chancellor must have the necessary administrative and organizational capacity to enable the university attain the goal. Moreover, the resources from both the internal and external environment must be successfully harnessed, prudently used and rationally distributed.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned conclusion, the authors wish to proffer the following suggestions with some grave implications for existing practice and future improvements.

The National Policy on Education should be reviewed in order to promote skills needed in the 21st century. There is an urgent need to articulate a curriculum that will develop transferable skills of problem solving and critical thinking. The policy should be redefined, restated, prioritized and re-circulated among the various constituencies of the university.

The Federal Government should provide regulations and guidelines (by legislation, if necessary) for local community participation in the management of community participation in the management of higher institutions. Through governing bodies, councils or University Management Committees should be empowered to monitor each institution's management of funds, personnel and academic programmes.

To reduce the attrition rate of teachers, there is a call for increasing efforts to improve their conditions of service, working environment and profile in the media. The mass media should be used constructively to recognize the achievements of teachers. A Bill aimed at increasing accountability in education should be presented to the National Assembly. The act recognizes the right to

adequate education and gives students access to the courts to vindicate that right, while the parent of a student is empowered to conduct litigation on behalf of the student.

The Civil Society (Educational Authorities) should be more active both in demanding quality education and in helping to produce it. This could be achieved through, continuous dialogue between governments, NGO's and other stakeholders; for useful, community-based initiatives. Goal setting strategies should be tried in Nigerian Universities. Among the more popular and tested goal setting procedures which also enhance consensus and better understanding of organizational goals are the Delphi Technique, PERT (Programme Evaluation and Review Technique) and Management by Objectives (MBO).

Nigeria must as a matter of urgency, employ Due Process mechanism, not only in the award of contracts, but also in all social, economic, political and educational affairs. The Due process mechanism should be all embracing and all encompassing. The National Political Reform of 2005 conference should establish formulae for the application of Due process in all the core areas of the National polity. If well and honestly applied, it will surely lead to the restructuring, reorientation and reawakening, rejuvenation, resurrection and re—birth of Nigeria.

The Benchmark reports from the National Universities Commission should be made known to all education stakeholders. These reports if made available are to present a variety of revenue and expenditure indicators on a per student basis. The indicators are then analyzed to facilitate discussions of state educational funding trends and to create more for comparison.

There is an urgent need for a restructuring and re-engineering of our University. There is need to look at the duplicated departments and courses and stream line anti rationalize them. The population of students must be reprogrammed to match the existing designed capacities of the basic Facilities required to promote excellent learning in Nigerian Universities. Once the population of the students matches the designed capacities, contact among staff/students will improve students teaching/learning process. The much— desired improvement will return to the system.

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