

Challenges of Globalization and Quality Assurance in Nigerian University Education

Iniobong Ekong Nkang¹

¹ Faculty of Education, Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), Ikot Akpaden, Mkpato Enin Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Correspondence: Iniobong Ekong Nkang, Faculty of Education, Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), Ikot Akpaden, Mkpato Enin Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Tel: 234-802-353-8761. E-mail: sinemobong@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The study was undertaken to examine the state of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian universities with a view to proffering measures that would enhance the quality of education obtained in the institutions. The population consisted of professors from federal universities in the south-south region of Nigeria, numbering 624. The stratified sampling technique was used in selecting a sample of 225 professors from the universities for the study. Two null hypotheses were formulated based on the variables of the study. These were tested at 0.05 alpha level, using t-test analysis. Data collection was done with the use of a structured questionnaire tagged "Quality Assurance in Nigerian University Education" (QANUE). The calculated t-values were less than the critical t, leading to the retention of the two null hypotheses. It was therefore concluded that the quality of Nigerian University Education is low and cannot measure up globally due to the poor state of quality assurance mechanisms in the universities. Based on this, measures for improving the quality of Nigerian university education were recommended to include adequate funding, updated libraries, well equipped laboratories and workshops, provision of instructional materials and school infrastructure, lecturer motivation and proper supervision.

Keywords: globalization, quality assurance, funding, labour market, national universities commission, Bench Mark Academic Standard (BMAS), total quality management

1. Introduction

Concern for quality in Nigeria University Education is most desirable for obvious reasons. University Education is the nation's hope for national development and there is the growing importance of trans-border education provided by globalization and massive education. Globally, quality in education, especially university education has become a topical issue. Globalization has led to a high level of competition for jobs and positions in international labour market. Products of universities in the world compete interestingly for available positions. Studies have indicated that geo-political and national boundaries are no barriers at international labour market. Only the best, the very best, compete for available job vacancies (Dabalén, A., & Oni, B., 2000). This underscores the need for quality assurance at the institutional level. Unfortunately, university education in Nigeria which hitherto enjoyed tremendous global respectability and acceptability is fast losing its high esteem in the face of labour market and members of both national and international communities because the current certified Nigerian graduates lack acceptable level of competence in their areas of specialization. (Uvah, I. I., 2005) observed that many departments in Nigerian universities are producing not so qualified graduates which have a negative chain effect in the economic, social and political development of the country. (Osagie, R. O., 2005) noted the regret of the Honourable Minister of Education that foreign Universities are reluctant to recognize Nigerian Universities Degrees and many parents are sending their children to foreign universities for quality education. The study investigates the state of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian universities with a view to recommending measures that would enhance the quality of university education in the country.

2. Quality Assurance and University Education in Nigeria

Ramen-Yusuf (2005) defines quality simply as "fitness for purpose". Quality refers to the degree of excellence in a product.

It is the combination of all attributes and peculiar features that make a product (good or service) fit for a purpose. Quality assurance is the process of maintaining standards in products or services. Quality in Nigerian University Education is a multidimensional concept which should embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment (UNESCO, 2000). (Okebukola, P., 2004) sees quality assurance in Nigerian Universities as a process of continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning activities which will be achieved via pathways of employing mechanisms, internal and external to the universities. It is ensuring that the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) are attained, maintained and enhanced. The certificates, the diplomas and the degrees awarded by Nigerian universities should assure employers, Nigerian and International Communities that graduates of their academic disciplines have attained an acceptance level of competence in their areas of specialization and so are fit for employment and further studies.

(Norah Omoregie, 2008)

The issue of comparability and international competitiveness of qualifications is seen in the quality of education which includes the learning environment (process) and students' outcomes. The graduates should be able to go out to the society and prove their worth by their level of performance in the competitive labour market. Problems that undermine quality assurance in Nigerian Universities are enormous. The scenario in the Nigerian university system indicates that there is crisis in Nigerian Universities, when viewed against different reports from scholars, (Babalola, J. B., 2001; Adedipe, R. O., 2005). The impact of the crisis as reported by (Ajayi, K., 2004) indicated that employers complained about considerable fall in standard over past decades and that a university degree is no longer a guarantee of communication skills and technical competence, and as a result, our graduates are viewed as half-baked.

The decay manifests variously as staff and students indiscipline, poor remuneration and poor working conditions, dilapidated facilities and obsolete equipment, bad administration, inadequate funding, enrolment explosion, cultism, academic dishonesty, strike actions, crises of succession of vice-chancellors, sexual harassment, drug abuse, poor research culture and general apathy to work and learning.

(Birnbaum, T., 2004) discussed the diversity in quality of higher education, and offered three dimensional typologies in discussing quality, namely, the meritocratic, which is the institution's conformity to professional and scholarly norms with the academic profession as the reference point. Secondly, the socialistic, which is the degree to which the institutions satisfy the needs of important collective constituents, and thirdly, the individualistic, which is the contribution the institution makes to the personal growth of students. Thus, quality in education is a mute dimensional concept interpreted by different stakeholders, such as government, teachers, administrators, students and employers. This assessment is done according to their set of criteria.

(Obanya, P., 2002) identified the essential elements of quality in education which make inputs into the university education and the process through which they can influence the quality.

Inputs	Process
Society	Participatory process of programme development, full societal acceptance and ownership of programme.
Policy	Democratic/formulation and articulation of policy, adaptability to local conditions
Management frame work	Decentralization/devolution of power and initiatives to the grassroots levels, empowerment, autonomy for operations down the line.
Teaching force	Qualitatively adequate, adequately educated and professionally prepared.
Curriculum	Responsive to individual and societal needs and aspirations, comprehensive coverage, adaptable to changing needs, time and conditions.
Infrastructure	Quantitatively, aesthetically, specially adequate, learners and teachers friendly, adequate classrooms, workrooms, recreational facilities, toilet and first aid facilities.
Materials	Judicious mix of print/audio text, video, electronic teaching/learning facilities closely related to the goals of the curriculum, user friendly and qualitatively adequate.

Source: Obanya, P. (2002)

According to (Popoola, S. O., 2006), a serious threat to achieving quality in students' academic performance is population explosion of students across all levels of education. This according to the researcher, calls for new strategies in the assessment of students' academic performance. Nwana, in Ugodulunwa and Mustapha, A. Y. (2005), concluded in a study that the overall assessment of credibility of Nigerian Universities is only far less than adequate. Other threats to achieving quality in students' academic performance include incessant strike actions by teachers, inadequate infrastructures, inadequate funding, dearth of measurement experts, poorly constructed tests, domestic responsibilities of female students, gender stereotype in curriculum, cultural differences in some ethnic group, religious beliefs of the people, among others.

From the point of view of (Ciwar, A. M., 2005), quality assurance in education has to do with setting standards for the various processes and activities that lead to the production of graduates by the universities. These processes and activities include: requirements for admission, programme duration, course content, quality of teachers, standard of instructional infrastructure and facilities, the university environment from a holistic perspective, quality of examination items, supervision, moderation of results and grading system.

According to (Yawari, S. L., 2002) quality assurance is different from quality control by being either a before or a during-the-event process. According to him, quality is designed into the process from the beginning to ensure that the product is produced to a predetermined specification. Quality assurance is one of the key concepts of total quality management. This means a system of running the affairs of an organisation or institution such that all aspects of the organisation and appropriate resources are provided and utilized towards actualizing the goals of the organization. In education, quality assurance is seen as an error-preventive before-the-event process located in the purview of instructional and school supervision (Okorie, N. C., & Uche, U. A., 2004).

In order to realize a credible quality assurance framework for Nigerian University education, it must be built on a preventive management theory that works on its own towards the realization of productivity and excellence in the system. This theory must be based on the major performance indicators on the Minimum Academic Standards for undergraduate programmes in Nigerian Universities. These performance indicators represent the laid down standard for the institutions of higher learning to comply with.

The near absence of total quality management work culture is a major factor militating against quality assurance in Nigerian University education. The value for collaboration, teamwork, crave for quality and continuous improvement are all ingredients of the TQM culture which are lacking in the system. There is insufficient manpower, and the required resources and environment that will prepare the ground for the workability of the framework are yet to be provided in most universities. Another hindrance is unnecessary bureaucracy. Personal interest as against the public interest constitutes yet another problem. Other obstacles impeding quality assurance in Nigerian University education are budget constraint, corruption, sincerity of implementation and quality assurance system development.

For quality to be realized in Nigerian University education there is need for effective supervision of the academic and non-academic staff of Universities. Supervision involves the use of expert knowledge and experience to oversee, evaluate and coordinate the process of improving teaching and learning activities in schools. The key factors in institutions of higher learning include the students, without whom the institution will not be established, the teachers without whom the curriculum will not be delivered, and the non-tutorial staff, both the junior and senior, without whom the academic activities cannot function (Egbo, A. C., 2007). Supervision creates the awareness of sound education philosophies in teachers. Without effective supervision the goal of establishing an institution like the university cannot be achieved. According to Igwe in Egbo, A. C. (2007), supervision is the process of ensuring that the policies, principles, rules, regulations and methods prescribed for the purposes of implementing and achieving the objectives of education are carried out.

Umoh, M. O. (2002) identified funding as a major setback on the quality of University education in Nigeria. Inadequate funding of public universities in Nigeria is a prime cause of other problems that have undermined quality in university education. The issue of poor funding has its manifestations in problems such as academic staff shortage, dearth of library books and journals, decline of reading culture among students, dilapidated buildings, obsolete equipment, the desire to obtain degree by unorthodox means etc. The Nigerian university system lacks the financial resources to maintain educational quality because Nigeria's allocation shares for education diverge sharply from regional and international norms (Umoh, M. O., 2002). Nigeria's funding efforts of education is poor and its budgetary priority for the education sector is even low, much lower than the UNESCO's 26% recommendation. Funding should be qualitatively adequate, targeted to those things that will actually make a difference. The funds should be made readily available in the schools and other decentralized levels of educational administration and should, above all, be prudently managed. Quality outcomes in education

can come about only through effective supervision of inputs and processes.

All the people involved in university education should work hard and be under close supervision by the bodies responsible and co-operate with them for a better result. The government should provide enough personnel, materials and finance to carry out the supervisory roles for effective result and enhancement of quality assurance in Nigerian university education.

Internal quality assurance mechanism should be adopted in Nigerian universities. This implies the quality of students admitted into the university in the first instance, the Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) for universities and a Bench Mark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) for the disciplines to make them comparable in content with every programme carried out in the Nigerian university system. Okebukola, P. (2006) addressed most of the gaps identified by employers of labour about the quality of graduates from Nigerian Universities as a disparity between the Minimum Academic Standard for universities and Bench-Mark Academic Standard required of the students as a minimum standard obtainable in the best universities the world over. Okebukola, P. went further to say that it does not mean that all aspects of the curriculum should be covered by the lecturers to equip their students with the required knowledge, skill and competencies to face global competitiveness, rather, curriculum should be designed to be relevant to local needs, meet community needs and expectations, develop indigenous culture, social norms and ethos while reflecting current knowledge and best practices with the goals and strategic objectives of a university in its global concern.

Another factor of quality assurance in Nigerian University Education is the external quality assurance mechanism, which is the National University Commission trusted with the responsibility of accreditation. Quality assurance in Nigerian Universities can be guaranteed through the quality of university lecturers employed in a university. This intellectual resource pool that Nigeria is not able to generate and keep impedes her universities' capacity to produce quality graduates that can compete in the global market of knowledge. There should be discipline into the ethics of teaching and learning in institutions. Sorting and other forms of examination malpractice must be seriously addressed for credibility of university education in Nigeria. The government at all levels should give priority attention to education. The nation's ranking of education in the 7-point agenda should be reviewed upward from 5th to No. 1 position as education is the bedrock of all development efforts. The provision of adequate number of learning facilities also guarantees quality assurance. This means that the facilities should be provided to meet the population of the students. Proper networking and internet connectivity will give learners ample opportunity to work, interact through e-learning and feel the most like a traditional classroom.

Quality assurance is maintained in a university when it enjoys stable academic calendar devoid of students' unrest, strike actions and other disruptive activities. In the light of the present course credit system run in Nigerian universities, a stable academic calendar becomes relevant. Operating this system requires that the curriculum be organized in such a way that subject areas are broken down into unit courses which are examinable and for which students earn credit (s) if passed. Coombs, P. H. (2008) asserted that the quality of an educational system should be judged by both its ability to enable the students perform well in standard examination and its relevance to the needs of the individual students, the immediate community and the society at large.

Necessity of quality assurance in Nigeria university education is most desirable for various reasons. University education is the nations hope for national development. A nation cannot develop beyond the level of the intellectual capabilities of her teachers. A university system that is plagued with insurmountable problems cannot produce the manpower required for the development of the nation. The factors that account for the poor quality of university education in Nigeria are both internal and external to the universities. The internal factors border around performance and management competency while the external factors include lack of employee motivation and weak accountability for educational performance. A holistic approach is therefore required to address the issues of quality assurance, quality control and quality enhancement in the university sub-sector.

3. Purpose of the Study

The study was undertaken to investigate the state of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian universities with a view to recommending measures that would enhance the quality of university education in the country. Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1) Determine the difference in the mean responses of male and female professors regarding the state of quality assurance mechanisms in universities in the south-south region of Nigeria.
- 2) Determine the difference in the mean responses of male and female professors on measures to improve the

quality of university education in the south-south region of Nigeria.

4. Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study.

- 1) There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female professors regarding the state of quality assurance mechanisms in universities in the south-south region of Nigeria.
- 2) There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female professors on measures to improve the quality of university education in the south-south region of Nigeria.

5. Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study. This was because the researcher had to gather information regarding the variables under study in order to test the hypotheses. The population consisted of professors from federal universities in the south-south region of Nigeria, numbering 624. The stratified sampling technique was used in selecting a sample of 225 professors from the universities for the study. Professors were used for the population and sample for the study considering their relative importance in Nigerian University Education. They are needed in good number if quality must be maintained in Nigerian University education. They are the root of university education. Considering the uniqueness of males and females in their assessment of issues, it was necessary the assessment of quality in Nigerian university education be based on gender perspective. This ensured proper assessment of the true situation. Two null hypotheses were formulated based on the variables of the study. These were tested at 0.05 alpha level, using t-test analysis. Data collection was done with the use of a structured questionnaire tagged "Quality Assurance in Nigerian University Education" (QANUE). The instrument was duly validated and pilot-tested with a reliability coefficient of 0.73.

6. Data Analyses and Results

6.1 Research Questions

Research Question 1

What are the major causes of poor quality of University education in the south-south region of Nigeria?

Table 1 indicates agreement between the male and female professors in their ranking of the major causes of poor quality of university education in the south-south. Poor remuneration for lecturers is ranked first by both sexes, followed by poor funding, lack of interest by students, etc. Lack of commitment by lecturers is ranked last by the two groups of respondents with weighted means of 2.2 and 2.1.

Table 1. Weighted means and ranking of causes of poor quality of University education in the south-south region of Nigeria

S/N	Causes of Poor Quality of University Education	Males		Females	
		Means	Ranking	Means	Ranking
1.	Poor funding.	3.7	2 nd	3.6	2 nd
2.	Dearth of academic staff.	2.5	12 th	2.6	12 th
3.	Inadequate infrastructure.	3.5	4 th	3.4	4 th
4.	Poor library facilities.	3.2	6 th	3.2	7 th
5.	Poor laboratories.	3.1	7 th	3.1	8 th
6.	Inadequate Instructional facilities.	2.9	8 th	2.9	9 th
7.	Poor remuneration for lecturers.	3.8	1 st	3.7	1 st
8.	Insufficient lecture halls for students.	2.4	13 th	2.4	14 th
9.	Poor supervision.	2.6	11 th	2.7	11 th
10.	Incessant strike actions.	2.7	10 th	2.5	13 th
11.	Insecurity on campus.	3.4	5 th	3.3	6 th
12.	Examination malpractice.	2.8	9 th	2.8	10 th
13.	Lack of interest by students.	3.6	3 rd	3.5	3 rd
14.	Lack of commitment by lecturers.	2.2	15 th	1.1	15 th
15.	Poor admission policy.	2.3	14 th	3.4	4 th

Cut off point = 2.5

Research Question 2

What are the possible measures to improve the quality of University education in the south-south region of Nigeria?

The professors in table 2 generally agree in their ranking of the possible measures of improving the quality of University education in Nigeria. Increased budgetary allocation is ranked first by both male and female professors, followed by institutional autonomy, institutional quality assurance unit, effective supervision and monitoring and lastly abolition of central admission policy.

Table 2. Weighted means and ranking of measures to improve the quality of University education in Nigeria

S/N	Measures to Enhance Quality of University Education	Males		Females	
		Means	Ranking	Means	Ranking
1.	Increased budgetary allocation.	3.9	1 st	3.8	1 st
2.	Institutional autonomy.	3.7	2 nd	3.7	2 nd
3.	Effective supervision/monitoring.	3.3	4 th	3.2	4 th
4.	Abolition of central admission policy.	2.8	5 th	2.6	5 th
5.	Institutional quality assurance unit.	3.6	3 rd	3.5	3 rd

Cut off point = 2.5

6.2 Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female professors regarding the state of quality assurance mechanisms in Universities in the south-south region of Nigeria.

Table 3 indicates no significant difference in the mean responses of the professors in 13 out of the 15 identified quality assurance indices in the universities, with t-values less than the critical t-values of 1.96. The null hypothesis was therefore retained. However, the responses of the professors were different regarding items 14 and 15 with calculated t-values greater than the critical t.

Table 3. Weighted means and t-test of the responses of male and female professors regarding the state of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian Universities

S/N	Quality Assurance Indices <i>Universities in the south-south suffer from:</i>	Means		t-value	Remarks
		Male	Female		
1.	Poor funding.	3.7	3.6	0.97	NS
2.	Dearth of academic staff.	2.5	2.6	1.52	NS
3.	Inadequate infrastructure.	3.5	3.4	1.01	NS
4.	Poor library facilities.	3.2	3.2	1.04	NS
5.	Poor laboratories.	3.1	3.1	1.06	NS
6.	Inadequate Instructional facilities.	2.9	2.9	1.11	NS
7.	Poor remuneration for lecturers.	3.8	3.7	0.94	NS
8.	Insufficient lecture halls for students.	2.4	2.4	1.66	NS
9.	Poor supervision.	2.6	2.7	1.47	NS
10.	Incessant strike actions.	2.7	2.5	1.32	NS
11.	Insecurity on campus.	3.4	3.3	1.03	NS
12.	Examination malpractice.	2.8	2.8	1.19	NS
13.	Lack of interest by students.	3.6	3.5	1.01	NS
14.	Lack of commitment by lecturers.	2.2	1.1	2.99	S
15.	Poor admission policy.	2.3	3.4	2.97	S

$N_1 = 127$; $N_2 = 98$; $df = 223$; $t\text{-cri} = 1.96$; Average $t\text{-cal} = 1.42$; S = Significant; NS = Not Significant

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female professors on measures to improve the quality of University education in the south-south region of Nigeria.

Table 4 shows no significant difference in the mean responses of the male and female professors regarding measures of improving the quality of university education in Nigeria. The t-values in all the identified items were less than the critical t-values leading to the retention of the null hypothesis.

Table 4. Weighted mean and t-test of the responses of male and female professors regarding measures to improve the quality of University education in Nigeria

S/N	Measures to Enhance Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities	Means		t-value	Remarks
		Male	Female		
	<i>Quality assurance in Nigerian University education can be enhanced through:</i>				
1.	Increase budgetary allocation.	3.9	3.8	0.99	NS
2.	Institutional autonomy.	3.7	3.7	1.01	NS
3.	Effective supervision/monitoring.	3.3	3.2	1.11	NS
4.	Abolition of central admission policy.	2.8	2.6	1.21	NS
5.	Institutional quality assurance unit.	3.6	3.5	1.06	NS

$N_1 = 127$; $N_2 = 98$; $df = 223$; $t_{-cri} = 1.96$; Average $t_{-cal} = 1.08$;

S = Significant; NS = Not Significant

7. Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data on the state of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian universities revealed no significant differences in the mean responses of the male and female professors. Thirteen of the fifteen quality assurance items had their t-values less than the critical t-value. The average t-value of 1.42 was equally less than the critical t-value leading to the retention of the null hypothesis. This is in line with the result of the research question. The implication is that both the male and female professors agree to the poor state of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian Universities.

This finding is supported by many studies. Ifedili (2005) observed that many departments in Nigerian universities are producing not so qualified graduates which have a negative chain effect on the economic, social and political development of the country. As reported by Osagie, R. O. (2005), the Honourable Minister of Education regretted the poor state of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian Universities when the Minister noted that foreign universities are reluctant to recognise Nigerian Universities Degrees and that many parents are sending their children to foreign universities for quality education. This confirms the poor state of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian Universities.

The analysis of data to test hypothesis two indicated an agreement in the mean responses of the professors regarding the measures to improve the quality of university education in Nigeria. The t-values of all the identified measures and the average t-value of 1.08 were less than the critical t-value. This led to the retention of the null hypothesis. The result of the research question is in line with this finding. The finding is backed up by many studies. Okebukola, P. (2004) sees quality assurance in Nigerian Universities as a process of continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning activities which will be achieved via pathways of employing mechanisms, internal and external to the universities. Ciwar, A. M. (2005) identified admission policy, supervision, quality of teachers, standard of instructional and infrastructural facilities, programme duration, course content, quality of examination items and the university environment as some of those quality assurance indices that have to be improved for a better quality of university education in Nigeria. Umoh, M. O. (2002) equally identified funding as an aspect that must be looked into if the quality of university education must be improved in the country. The quality of university education in Nigeria would be greatly improved if all stakeholders were concerned about the problems of the educational system.

8. Conclusion

On the basis of the data analysis, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The quality of Nigerian University Education is low and cannot measure up globally due to the poor state of quality assurance mechanisms in the universities.
- Increased budgetary allocation, institutional autonomy, effective supervision/ monitoring, instructional quality assurance unit and abolition of central admission policy are possible measures that would enhance the quality of University education in Nigeria.

9. Recommendations

Quality assurance is the immediate and long-term solution to the problem of poor quality in university education in Nigeria. The adoption and implementation of internal and external Quality Assurance Mechanisms will facilitate the actualization of the goals of university education in Nigeria. On the basis of this, the following measures are recommended to enhance the actualization of quality assurance in Nigerian university education.

- 1) As the major stakeholder in the education sector, the government should appreciate the strategic position of universities in national development and increase its budgetary allocation to the sector.
- 2) The NUC should be repositioned and empowered adequately to enable it carry out its quality control function.
- 3) All stakeholders in the education sector (the government, parents, students, teachers, non-governmental organizations, the private sector) should be sensitized and gingered to perform their roles effectively. The business of providing qualitative university education for Nigerians should be a collective responsibility of all stakeholders in the education sector. If the stakeholders are able to identify their roles, admit them and be alive to their responsibilities, qualitative university education for the Nigerian child would be guaranteed.
- 4) Universities should be mandated to set up Quality Assurance Units to supervise and monitor academic activities on campuses. Quality Assurance Committees (QAC) should be set up to ensure that members of the institutions are familiar with the quality assurance requirements as well as implementing them in the activities they carry out.
- 5) Politicization of the system, especially in terms of appointments, should be discouraged. Appointments should be on merit to facilitate internal efficiency in the system.
- 6) Universities that flaunt regulations on quality assurance should be duly penalized.

10. Contribution to Existing Knowledge

This study is hoped to make significant contribution to existing knowledge in the area of quality assurance in Nigerian Universities. The findings of the study have revealed the extent of quality assurance mechanisms in Nigerian University education. This debunks existing pre-conceptions about the quality of Nigerian University education, especially universities in the south-south zone. Besides, the study has also added for the stock of literature in globalization, quality assurance and university education.

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