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INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES AS PREDICTORS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study assessed internal and external quality assurance practices as determinants of institutional effectiveness of public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was intended to address two objectives, from which two null hypotheses were developed. Based on the descriptive survey research design, the census approach was used to study the whole population of 157 administrators (Deans and head of departments) in the two public universities in the study area. Quality Assurance Practices and Institutional Effectiveness Questionnaire (QAPIEQ) was the instrument utilized to collect data. Five experts validated the instrument while an overall Cronbach reliability rating of. 853 was obtained. Data were gathered from 132 respondents due to restrictions that prevented data collection from the targeted 157 respondents. Multiple regression analysis with R studio software version 3.6.0 was used to test the two null hypotheses at the .05 alpha level. Internal quality assurance processes have a substantial influence on university institutional effectiveness (R=.924, R2=.846, F=120.851, p.05), according to the findings. External quality assurance measures were also shown to have a significant influence (R=.792, R2=.782, F=79.100, p.05) on university institutional effectiveness. Based on these findings, it was concluded that internal and external quality assurance processes are critical components that can increase university institutional performance. It was suggested, among other things, that the Nigerian Institutions Commission (NUC) should ensure that accreditation visits are made to universities at least twice, in each academic session to verify the quality of courses and programs.*

KEYWORDS: External quality assurance, institutional effectiveness, internal quality assurance, practices, public universities, quality, quality assurance,

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of several tertiary institutions in Nigeria, notably in Cross River State, has been called into question. Many universities are underperforming in terms of teaching, research, and community service engagements, based on keen observations and experience. Many university graduates are of poor quality, lacking basic literacy and numeracy abilities. According to Odigwe, et al. (2018), "the poor performance of graduates, particularly when they are hired, is a real representation of the fact that they were not effectively taught, or their behaviours were not adequately modified" (p. 406). As a result, seeing university graduates who cannot read or write in the Nigerian labour market has become the norm (Odigwe et al., 2018; Arop et al., 2018).

Another issue affecting university institutional performance is inadequate service delivery by both academic and non-academic employees. The researcher learned through experience and data from interactions with several undergraduates that many university instructors seldom report to duties on time. Some people prefer to focus on their enterprises over teaching, research, and community

involvement. The quality of educational research at most tertiary institutions is also diminishing (Bassey & Owan, 2018), owing to academic staff's unwillingness to conduct genuine field surveys to tackle educational problems. As a result, many academics turn to data fabrication and falsification to imitate the results of research trials. This inappropriate attitude has influenced students' views about research even further since many undergraduate and postgraduate students now regard research as merely an academic formality.

Another aspect of inefficiency at many institutions is the low quality of employees as a result of dishonest recruiting processes in which researchers of academic renown are rejected positions in favour of inferior persons owing to their inability to pay their financial commitments. Many university teachers have been reported struggling to communicate simple and basic English with the right tenses to pupils. Some institutions' staff nominal rolls claim a greater proportion of inept and somewhat unqualified persons who were hired through godfatherism, lobbying, or with good academic degrees obtained by trick or crook. Because of the emphasis on paper qualifications rather than skill-based learning, many university staff and students appear to be engaging in practices that are harming the reputation, image, dignity, and pride that tertiary institutions (universities in particular) have as the hallmark of knowledge creation, problem-solving, and societal development. The high percentage of examination misconduct has also harmed colleges' effectiveness. The efficacy of any university may be measured by the efficacy of its personnel and students (Bassey, Owan, & Eze, 2019). This is because they are human resources who are the key drivers of any educational setting and have control over material resources. However, many people generally complain of bad working circumstances, uncoherent wage payment, harsh promotion criteria and partial wage payments. Some employees have also blamed their ineffectiveness on difficult criteria, such as high-indexation journal publication, inadequate motivation and excessive delays in paying wages and other duties.

The government and Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) have been making serious efforts to provide new structures in schools in response to this scenario. Trade unions like ASUU and NASU undertook a variety of striking measures to bring attention to the government's problems. Universities have also been supported by NGO's, private benefactors and other government bodies through gift, money and construction provision. The university communities themselves generate internal income from several sources (too many to mention). These measures do not seem to provide adequate proof of better results that should be exhibited in employee dedication, devotion, student performance, classroom quality, teaching and learning environment, as well as the quality of schools' premises.

This shows that the finances and resources generated both from outside and from inside are not properly allocated toward the smooth operation of the institutions. Many universities advisory, remediation and part-time programming with fees charged; however, employees are allowed to complain of the mixed rewards and "next to nothing incentives" offered as extra lubricants, in addition to their core tasks (which should be appropriately compensated for a sustained and motivated workforce). Therefore, the researcher is concerned about the bleak scenario and questions the extent to which internal measures are employed to guarantee that things are done correctly. In doing so, the researcher intends to investigate the extent to which internal and external quality assurance techniques are implemented in public varsities.

Quality Assurance (QA) procedures refer to any services or activities provided in the university system that help to maintain and enhance overall academic standards in schools. According to Bassey et al. (2019), QA attempts to build a quality culture and guarantee that all acts demanded of university personnel and students are motivated by a desire to constantly improve their practice, learning experience, and outcomes. A quality culture is practised by any university system that includes students, professors, administrative and technical personnel, as well as external stakeholders, in an ongoing cycle of quality in teaching, learning, research, and outreach (Bassey, et al, 2019). As a result of the above argument, it follows that the persistent manifestation of a quality culture will ensure quality in higher education. This guarantee of quality in colleges is what quality assurance entails.

Universities have a long history of guaranteeing quality through external monitoring, accreditation of new courses, periodic review of current programs, fast assessment of students, and a variety of other means. However, during the last several decades, the quality of teaching and learning has become a key strategic problem in tertiary education systems across the world (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Enders & Wes-terheijden, 2014). This has piqued the interest of many academics in Europe, Asia, Africa, and other regions of the world (Hayward, 2006; Weir, 2009; Mavil, 2013; Vander & George, 2014; Alabi et al., 2018; Mgaiwa, 2018; Ofosu & Fredua-Kwarteng, 2018). In the Nigerian context, several researchers have been drawn to the topic of quality assurance in higher education (Odukoya et al., 2015; Onuma & Okpalanze, 2017; Okoche, 2017; Arop et al., 2019; Bassey et al., 2019). It's no wonder that the issue of quality assurance has gained traction in both local and international literature. This might be linked to higher institutions' requirement to perform following expected norms. QA was considered in this study because it aids in the installation of a quality culture, the encouragement of best practices, the provision of accountability, the encouragement of participative and inclusive leadership, the provision of continuous improvement, and the satisfaction of personnel needs (Dube, 2011). As a result, if finances and revenues produced from external and internal sources are not properly utilized, the presence of quality assurance may aid in holding people in charge of such resources responsible.

It is clear that “universities and higher education in general require and may play key roles in the broader development of the country” (Matei & Iwinska, 2014; p.10). Contributing to the country's economic development, contributing to the state's democratic transition, renewing societal politics, contributing to the construction and assertion of national identity under new, democratic, and pluralistic conditions, and strengthening the State's position and reputation are all examples of these roles. All of these specific contributions of universities in particular, and higher education in general, according to Matei and Iwinska (2016), can only be made through institutional autonomy, adequate funding (public funding and funds from private sources such as fees paid directly by students or their families, various types of loans, contributions by corporations and other private sector organizations), and institutional autonomy. This study was performed with this background in mind to look at one of these components that may be utilized to help higher education achieve its objectives. The researcher believes that anything that can motivate universities to fulfil their mission must first be able to make the system successful because only an effective system can fulfil its objectives (Owan, 2019). As a result, if quality assurance may motivate universities to reach their goals (Matei & Iwinska, 2016), it may also increase the internal system's overall performance.

Internal quality assurance practices in Higher Education

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) has acquired widespread acceptance as a means for organizations to take primary responsibility for the quality of their services (European Standards and Guidelines ESG, 2015). Many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) throughout the world have implemented IQA processes (Martin, 2018). These mechanisms are frequently set up to meet the requirements of national External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQA) or regulatory bodies, and to generate information that satisfies institutions' internal quality monitoring and management requirements (Seal, González, Fischer, Hansen, & Ponds, 2008). Various HEIs throughout the world have implemented a variety of approaches to ensure internal quality, some of which have both official and informal characteristics (Martin, 2018).

Internal quality assurance has sparked several scholarly disputes and, as a result, has become a prominent thread of institutional change across the world. For the past 20 years, much experimentation has taken done at the university level in this field (Martin, 2018). Because of the reform's global reach, several policies, structures, and procedures have been widely embraced across national and institutional boundaries (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010). According to a research, there is a link between IQA and the many contextually determined understandings of quality (Harvey & Green, 1993), which reflect varied national, institutional, and academic traditions and cultures. IQA might have an academic, management, educational, or employment focus, according to an international research by Brennan and Shah (2000). The present prevailing techniques place a premium on student learning quality, hence IQA's primary goal would be to improve students' learning experiences (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2005). Although IQA is primarily concerned with the improvement of academic excellence, it also can develop crucial links between academia and the labour market, according to Martin (2018). This shows that institutions' internal quality assurance methods can predict university graduates' employability and success outside of the classroom. Because IQA's primary goal is to improve students' learning experiences, their performance when they graduate from school may be used as a proxy for judging the efficacy of that institution (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2005).

Internal quality assurance (IQA) methods in Ghana were investigated by Ofosu and Fredua-Kwarteng (2018) to propose improvement methods. Data was gathered through interviews and analyzed thematically, using the organizational renewal theory as a theoretical framework. Internal quality assurance practices implemented by the school include strict admission standards, teaching and learning practices, examination and assessment practices, funding medical education and training, regulator or training role, accountability and monitoring issues, and transfer of medical knowledge, skills, and dispositions acquired in training to places of work. Bassey, et al (2019) found that quality assurance procedures used by the school administration, staff, and students accounted for 14.2 per cent of the variance in students' performance rating at universities. The study also found that school administration, staff, and students' quality assurance techniques had a substantial composite effect (F=48.19, P.05) on students' performance appraisal. This study implies that quality assurance procedures utilized by the school management, staff, and students are all IQA techniques that have a substantial impact on students' performance (which can be used as a proxy for school system effectiveness).

Mgaiwa (2018) found that private universities were in charge of a major portion of QA processes such as institutional self-assessment and external examinations. Internal quality audits and tracer studies, in contrast to these results, were not properly conducted. To summarize, the non-regular conduct of these processes remains the primary problem in the majority of Tanzanian institutions examined. Okae-Adjei (2016) investigated internal quality assurance processes at three Ghanaian polytechnics. The study was founded on the interpretative theory of social constructionism, and data from 40 respondents were collected using an interview methodology. The Polytechnics have made attempts to build internal quality assurance structures and institutional-wide quality assurance policies, according to the report. However, due to several problems and bottlenecks, the schools have not been very effective in building a quality culture. These issues might potentially be due to a scarcity of empirical research that would have provided solutions to address these flaws. Unfortunately, according to Leiber et al. (2015), there is a scarcity of solid methodological robustness and complete empirical literature on the impacts and processes of quality assurance systems. Previous research, in particular, has not given enough attention to empirical evidence on internal quality assurance processes at developing-country institutions.

External quality assurance practices in higher education

External Quality Practices (EQA) are processes or services provided outside of the higher education system that governs how activities are carried out within it. Because they are carried out by regulatory organizations to improve school performance, these services are referred to as external quality assurance procedures. "EQA assurance refers to the mechanisms that are created and administered by an external organization, frequently mandated by legislation, to monitor the quality of the education given by tertiary providers," according to Utuka (2012). (p.44). EQA is defined by Machumu and Kisanga (2014) as steps performed by an external entity (perhaps a QA agency) to assess the operations of institutions and/or their programs to determine if they are fulfilling the required standards. External quality assurance procedures include accreditation, benchmarking, audit, evaluation, and review (Machumu & Kisanga, 2014). These approaches can solve the flaws in traditional quality assurance techniques that can be encountered in both administrative and real-world situations (Newton, 2013; Martin & Stella, 2007). According to a research, the goal of EQA is to promote accountability and improve institutional performance (Utuka, 2012). External quality certification is vital and vital, according to Machumu and Kisanga (2014), because national authorities are often distancing themselves from institutions and may not be able to make a fair judgment about the quality of academic activities, programs, and institutions. External quality assurance becomes necessary in comparing standards in circumstances when academic institutions are both suppliers and judges of their services.

As a result, EQA plays a critical role in giving public comment on how well institutions are meeting their objectives. Because it allows for audit, assessment, and reporting, this might help institutions become more successful. When there is a divergence from expected norms, many institutions may be guided in the right direction. Studies have found various degrees of success and experience in developing countries' attempts to use external quality assurance procedures that they have taken from affluent ones (Bordia, 2001; Gnanam, 2002; Lenn, 2004; Lim, 2001). The findings of Onuma and Okpalanze's (2017) study revealed, among other things, that providing infrastructural amenities and hiring skilled instructors are both quality assurance techniques in schools. Similarly, Weir (2009) found that greater surveillance by quasi-state quality agencies adds to a mismatch between established educational institution quality assurance methods and

those needed by quality authorities in New Zealand. Finally, quality is a nebulous concept that forces government bodies and tertiary institutions to rethink their interpretations and implementation techniques.

After reviewing the current literature on the issue, it was revealed that there is a paucity of information on external quality assurance techniques throughout the world, particularly in the Nigerian setting. Only a few authors appear to have paid attention to external quality assurance procedures in the Nigerian environment. Many of the available studies focused on quality assurance practices in general rather than internal and external quality assurance techniques. Only one research (Bassey, et al, 2019) has attempted to link quality assurance techniques to institutional success at the postsecondary level. These are the gaps in the literature that this study is expected to fill. Internal and external quality assurance indicators need to be examined to help determine the extent of institutional readiness to promote quality culture and sustainable practices. The present study will specifically examine the contributions of internal and external quality assurance practices to the institutional effectiveness of universities respectively.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study

Ho_1: There is no significant contribution of internal quality assurance practices to the institutional effectiveness of universities.

Ho_2: External quality assurance practices have no significant contribution to the institutional effectiveness of universities.

METHODS

A descriptive survey research approach was used in this study. The researcher's objective was to characterize events and phenomena related to internal and external quality assurance methods as they occur at universities, as well as the impact such procedures have on the effectiveness of these institutions. This study's population includes all of the Deans and Department Heads at two public institutions in Cross River State. The first university (University of Calabar, UNICAL) has 16 faculties and 105 departments, while the second university (University of Cross River State, UNICROSS) has eight faculties and 28 departments (See Table 1). As a result, 157 administrators (24 deans and 1333 HODs) participated in this study. In this study, a census approach was used to study the complete population of 149 respondents from the two public colleges in the area of the study.

Table 1: Population distribution of the study showing the total number of academic staff available in two universities in Cross River State

S/N	Name of institution	Type	No. of Deans	No of HODs	Total
1	University of Calabar, Calabar	Federal	16	105	121
2	University of Cross River State	State	8	28	36
	Total		24	133	157

(Academic Planning units/websites of the various Universities, 2021).

The researcher created a questionnaire named Quality Assurance Practices and Institutional Effectiveness Questionnaire (QAPIEQ) to collect data. The instrument was divided into four sections (A, B, C, and D), with Section A eliciting demographic information from respondents such as gender, rank, educational qualification, and job experience. Section B was constructed with 24 questions evaluating six internal quality assurance processes (staff capacity building, student assessment, student evaluation of instructors, supervision of staff, quality assurance committees, and disciplinary action against erring employees). Another set of 24 items measuring six external quality assurance processes was also prepared for Section C of the QAPIEQ (NUC accreditation visits, funding from external sources, provision of learning resources, external audit, public information, and availability of information systems). Each of these IQAPs and EQAPs was assessed using four items grouped on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) (SD). Section D was created with ten elements that assess institutional performance (the dependent variable). Section D's 10 items were likewise categorized on a four-point Likert scale of SA, A, D, and SD. Thus, the QAPIEQ's section B – D had 54 elements. Three psychometric specialists from the University of Calabar's Department of Educational Foundations and two Higher Education academics from the University's Department of Educational Management validated the instrument. The Cronbach reliability approach was used to determine the instrument's internal consistency, and an overall dependability value of.853 was found to be within the acceptable range.

Copies of the instrument were sent to respondents, with the opportunity to take them home and fill them out at their leisure. After a week, the researcher returned to the responders and collected all of the administered copies. Those who misplaced the instrument were given another one to fill and return promptly. With this method, it would have been able to get the attention of all respondents; unfortunately, 17 respondents were not present because they were claimed to have travelled or been gone for unspecified reasons. As a result, the targeted number of 157 respondents was decreased to a manageable amount of 140 respondents. In the end, only 132 questionnaire copies were discovered to have been appropriately filled, with the eight incorrectly filled copies eliminated.

RESULTS

Internal quality assurance practices and institutional effectiveness

Six internal quality assurance procedures were investigated for their overall and relative impact on university institutional effectiveness. These IQAPs feature stringent admission requirements, qualified staff recruitment, students' evaluation of instructors, disciplinary action against erring employees, staff monitoring, and student assessment processes. At the .05 level of significance, multiple regression analysis was used to test this null hypothesis that there is no significant contribution of internal quality assurance practices on the institutional effectiveness of universities. The result in Table 2 revealed a multiple correlation value (R) of .924, indicating that the six Internal Quality Assurance Practices (IQAPs) have a collective relationship that is strong and positive with the institutional effectiveness of public universities. The adjusted R square value of .846 indicates that 84.6% of the total variance in the institutional effectiveness of public universities is explained by the six IQAPs, with the remaining 15.4% explained by other independent variables not included in the model.

The ANOVA section of the regression analysis revealed an F-ratio of 120.851 with the value of .000 being less than the .05 level of significance at 6 and 125 degrees of freedom. This implies that there is a significant contribution of internal quality assurance practices to the institutional effectiveness of universities. A cursory look at the relative coefficient of the respective independent variables indicates that stringent admission requirements, qualified staff recruitment, disciplinary actions against erring employees and staff monitoring are the significant predictors of institutional effectiveness of universities. However, students' evaluation of instructors and students' assessment process are not significant predictors of the institutional effectiveness of public universities. Out of the four significant predictors, disciplinary action against erring staff was the strongest predictor, followed by qualified staff recruitment, stringent admission requirements and staff monitoring, in that order.

TABLE 2
Relative and cumulative contributions of six internal quality assurance practices to the institutional effectiveness of universities

R	R^2	Adj R^2		SE		
.924	.853	.846		3.587		
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	
Regression	9329.073	6	1554.845	120.851	.000	
Residual	1608.223	125	12.866			
Total	10937.295	131				
Model		B	SE	β	t	Sig.	Rank
(Constant)		-2.572	1.200		-2.142	.034	
Stringent admission requirements		.536	.135	.212	3.964	.000	3rd
Qualified staff recruitment		.570	.134	.217	4.237	.000	2nd
Students' evaluation of instructors		.298	.191	.123	1.563	.121	6th
Disciplinary actions against erring staff		.751	.133	.316	5.626	.000	1st
Supervision of staff		.364	.154	.157	2.371	.019	4th
Students' assessment practices		.188	.097	.079	1.946	.054	5th

External quality assurance practices and institutional effectiveness

Six EQAPs were investigated to establish their overall and relative impact on university institutional effectiveness. Accreditation visits by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), external financing, supply of educational materials, external audit, public information, and acceptable supply of basic infrastructures are all part of these EQAPs. At the .05 level of significance, multiple regression analysis was used to test this null hypothesis that external quality assurance practices have no significant contribution to the institutional effectiveness of universities. As presented in Table 3, the result of the analysis indicates that there is a strong positive correlation (R = .792) between the six external quality assurance practices and the institutional effectiveness of universities. The six EQAPs jointly accounted for 78.2% of the total variance in the institutional effectiveness of universities, with the remaining 21.8% of the variance accounted for by other independent variables not included in the model.

The analysis of variance revealed an F-statistic of 79.100 with the p-value of .000 being less than the .05 alpha level at 6 and 125 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was

rejected while the alternate hypothesis was retained. This implies that external quality assurance practices have a significant contribution to the institutional effectiveness of universities. Thus, the R square value of .792 obtained was not due to chance. Relatively, the result in Table 3 also showed that five of the six EQAPs are significant predictors of the institutional effectiveness of universities. These include accreditation visits by NUC, external financing, supply of educational materials, external audit, and acceptable supply of basic infrastructures. However, public information is not a significant predictor of the institutional effectiveness of universities. Out of the significant predictors, the supply of educational materials was ranked the strongest predictor. This is followed by external audit, accreditation visits by NUC, external financing, and acceptable supply of basic infrastructure in 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th positions in that order. This ranking was based on the beta, t, and p-values of each of the variables.

TABLE 3
Relative and cumulative contributions of six external quality assurance practices to the institutional effectiveness of universities

R	R^2	Adj R^2	SE			
.890	.792	.782	4.271			
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	
Regression	8657.165	6	1442.861	79.100	.000	
Residual	2280.130	125	18.241			
Total	10937.295	131				
Model		B	SE	β	t	Sig.	Rank
(Constant)		-4.594	1.808		-2.540	.012	
Accreditation visits by NUC		.564	.163	.236	3.453	.001	3rd
External financing		.412	.133	.169	3.094	.002	4th
Supply of educational materials		.931	.155	.350	6.016	.000	1st
External audit		.653	.171	.247	3.812	.000	2nd
Public information		.053	.104	.022	.513	.609	6th
Acceptable supply of basic infrastructures		.238	.105	.099	2.270	.025	5th

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Internal quality assurance practices such as stringent admission standards, recruitment of qualified staff, students' evaluation of lecturers, the discipline of erring staff, supervision of staff, and students' assessment practices, if practised collectively, will result in a significant improvement in the institutional effectiveness of public universities in Cross River State, according to this study. This observation is consistent with the findings of previous investigations (Harvey & Green, 1993; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2005; Martin, 2018). Stringent admission standards, recruitment of qualified staff, the discipline of erring staff, and staff supervision, when practised in isolation, will significantly improve institutional effectiveness in public universities, whereas students' evaluation of lecturers and students' assessment practices will not result in a significant improvement in university effectiveness. This is also in line with the findings of Onuma and Okpalanze (2017), who found that providing physical amenities and hiring skilled instructors are both quality assurance techniques in schools. This comes as no surprise because when rigorous admission procedures are followed, the quality

of students admitted into the universities will be of high quality. This will also eliminate poor-performing students from the system as such will not be allowed into the system (Ofosu & Fredua-Kwarteng, 2018). The recruitment of qualified teachers will promote effective teaching in universities. Staff who are disciplined for erring may avoid making similar mistakes in the future leading to effectiveness by staff, especially as some will learn from the mistakes of others.

The supervision of staff enables them to discharge their duties following prescribed standards (Owan, Arop, & Agunwa, 2019). It could also be used to offer guidance to underperforming staff, leading to improvement. It seems that students' evaluation of lecturers was not shown to be a significant predictor of institutional effectiveness due to students' tendencies to provide fake, misleading, and unreliable information about lecturers that may not be true. Total reliance on such information could affect the quality of decision making in universities. Students' assessment practices may have also been shown as an insignificant predictor because of the high rate of examination malpractices that usually occurs during examinations. Judging a school, therefore, based on such results, could be misleading.

The second finding of this study showed that, on a joint basis, external quality assurance practices such as NUC accreditation visits, external funding, provision of learning resources, external audit, public information, and adequate supply of infrastructural facilities have a significant effect on the institutional effectiveness of universities. This finding supports the position of Machumu and Kisanga (2014) which provided the benefits of external quality assurance practices. On an individual basis, the significant EQAPs that can increase the institutional effectiveness of universities include NUC accreditation visits, external funding, provision of learning resources, external audit, and adequate supply of infrastructural facilities. However, public information has no significant effect on the institutional effectiveness of universities.

This finding is not surprising because NUC accreditation provides a platform where external control is introduced to the internal system to check programmes that meet or do not meet the minimum standards to be in operation. During such visits, reports are taken and programmes considered to have met the minimum benchmarks are retained while those below expectations are scrapped out. This promotes effectiveness since only programmes which conform to set standards are retained.

External funding, provision of learning resources and adequate supply of infrastructural facilities are all forms of injections or inputs made from external sources such as agencies, private donations, TETFUND, the Government, philanthropist and so on. When these material resources are adequately provided, there will be sufficient classrooms, staff will be paid accordingly, students will have all the needed books, computers, and other learning resources available at their disposal. All these developments will improve the effectiveness of both staff and students, making them more effective. Such effectiveness of both staff and students is what makes the system effective, thus aligning with the model of (Bassey, Owan, and Eze (2019), that school system effectiveness is a function of staff and students' effectiveness.

An external audit may have also proven a significant factor because it assists in delivering accountability of the system (Utuka, 2012). During such a process, institutional accountants, bursars, or those engaging in monetary transactions are made to provide a financial statement

about their income and expenditures within a specified period. Public information was not significant in this study maybe because it is internal feedback provided to external agencies. Thus, the external agencies only wait for institutions to provide a clear statement of stewardship for a while. In this case, any information related to the public from the school is accepted whether true or false.

CONCLUSION

Internal and external quality assurance techniques are highly important factors that might increase university institutional performance, according to the findings of this study. These quality assurance measures, if implemented across the university system as a whole, would improve the internal efficiency and effectiveness of Cross River State's public institutions. Rigorous admissions requirements, competent staff recruiting, disciplinary action against erring employees, and staff monitoring are all important internal quality assurance procedures. NUC accreditation visits, external finance, provision of learning resources, external audit, and proper supply of infrastructural facilities are all examples of key external quality assurance procedures. However, students' evaluations of lecturers, students' assessment processes, and public information may not be crucial, but when integrated with the crucial QA methods, they can be highly essential quality assurance activities.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

i. Any university should have a minimum admission criterion of six credit level passes earned in no more than two sittings, including Mathematics and English. The 200 (average) JAMB cut-off mark is recommended as the minimum score that qualifies a student to sit for an aptitude test at any university for any discipline. These criteria will establish a more stringent admission criterion than the one in place now.

ii. Only employees who are appropriately qualified for the relevant positions should be provided such possibilities. To put it another way, hiring should not be based on a personal touch, family ties, marital connections, godfatherism, ethnicity, or religion.

iii. Students should only be employed to assess lecturers once all of the other internal quality assurance measures described in this research have been implemented completely.

iv. Underperforming employees who have a history of truancy, ineffectiveness, or poor service delivery should be immediately penalized using a variety of approaches, including verbal caution, written inquiries, salary and other dues reductions, suspension, and dismissal. This will act as a deterrence to other failing employees, as well as increase the general efficiency of university employees.

v. Every member of the personnel on duty should be closely monitored, using both traditional classroom visits and computer-assisted equipment like Webcams and CCTV.

vi. The Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) should guarantee that accreditation visits to universities are made at least twice throughout each academic session to assess the quality of courses and programs.

vii. The three levels of government, donor agencies, and private benefactors should finance universities to offer the essential learning materials, infrastructural facilities, and to guarantee that academic and non-academic programs function smoothly.

viii. viii. Every university should be audited by the NUC at the end of each session as a method of promoting accountability and transparency in the institutions.

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