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REGULATORY ROLES OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION AND THE QUALITY OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The Regulatory Roles of the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the quality of Nigerian University Education was investigated in this study. The study employed a descriptive survey design research. The population consisted of public Nigerian universities. Samples were made up of 1,500 subjects, consisting of 200 students each, randomly selected from six public universities in South-West Nigeria and 50 staff members (teaching and non-teaching) from each of the six universities selected. The findings of the study established a moderate level of NUC performance of its regulatory roles, a corresponding moderate level of quality of Nigerian university education, and a significant relationship between NUC performance of its regulatory roles and the quality of Nigerian university education. Based on the findings of the study, conclusions were drawn and it was recommended that the government should encourage the National Universities Commission to put up optimal performance and an acceptable credibility to demand compliance from Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Quality, University education, National universities commission, Accreditation, Monitoring, Peace and stability.

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Contribution/ Originality

The paper's primary contribution is finding that the quality of Nigerian university education is not poor as perceived by most stakeholders in education, and that there existed a significant relationship between the performances of the regulatory agency and quality of university education. It complements the literature in the area investigated.

1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of university education in nation building the world over cannot be over emphasized, more importantly in the area of knowledge creation and dissemination. [Oladipo et al.](#)

(2010) submitted that education in general and university education in particular is fundamental to the construction of knowledge economy and society in all nations. On this premise, every nation of the world seems to be much concerned about the global acceptability and competitiveness of its university education, and to achieve this, regulatory agencies and professional bodies where applicable are often put in place. However, the Nigerian experience seems not different from the rest of the world with the creation of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1962.

Nigerian higher educational institutions in which the university system is a sector are established with the aim of providing a very sound and quality education, to enable the products of the system function effectively in any environment in which they may find themselves, and to make them productive, self-fulfilling and self-actualizing. However, these aims are to be achieved through teaching, research and the pursuit of service to the community. In pursuance of these aims for university education, the Nigerian constitution gives the Federal Government the exclusive responsibility for quality of tertiary education in Nigeria, the responsibility which the Federal government by Act 16 of 1985, bestowed on the National Universities Commission as a statutory agency to ensure quality of Nigerian university education on its behalf (Uvah, 2008). On this premise, the National Universities Commission as a statutory agency has the power to dictate and regulate the activities of the Nigerian universities. These roles the NUC plays by accrediting institutions and programmes, monitors the universities to ensure compliance with set standard, and ensures peace and stability within the system.

Tajomavwo (2009) argued that organizations succeed or fail to the extent to which it is able to satisfy the customer while UNESCO (2005) posited that the success of education should be assessed according to what was hoped for or aimed at in advance and not solely on the amount or quality of the results which may emerge in the end. It is perceived that the problem of quality assurance still pose a strong threat to Nigerian university education notwithstanding the external performance audit of Nigerian universities which is often statutorily carried out by the NUC in conjunction with some professional bodies such as Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) or Council for Registration of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN) as the case may be, who also perform independent appraisal exercise of some professional courses.

It has become a common knowledge that graduates of accredited institutions and programmes in Nigeria are today regarded as of low quality by most education stakeholders even when accreditation is still assumed to be the core component of quality assurance and a major way by which government officials and every stakeholder in education could believe that institutions' programmes provide quality. The National Universities Commission (2005) confirmed this assertion when it noted the reports on denial of Nigerian universities graduates into direct admission for post graduate degree courses in foreign Universities due to their reservation for the quality of Nigerian university education.

Consequently, there have been outcry by stakeholders in Nigerian university education; parents, students, educationists, employers of Nigerian universities' graduates and more

importantly by the international communities. It seems one of the greatest challenge before the NUC in Nigeria is its inability to ensure that a Nigerian university enters the first two hundred universities in the world ranking. On the contrary, [Ibidapo-Obe \(2012\)](#) argued that Nigerian universities are not as poor as people think.

However, there are reports of Nigerians spending so much to get quality university education in some other countries of the world, to enable them acquire internationally recognized degrees/certificates which can enhance their chances for post graduate studies and global job search. Corroborating this view, [Faborode \(2012\)](#) reported that Nigeria loses N78.5 billion annually to foreign universities, while [Babalakin \(2012\)](#) posited that university education in Nigeria is at a cross road, when he noted that no fewer than 75,000 Nigerian students are currently studying in three Ghanaian universities. [Nigeria Education Fact Sheet \(2012\)](#) also revealed that, Nigeria was the 17th largest source of international undergraduates and the 19th largest source of international graduate students in the U.S. in 2009/2010 session. The same report also revealed that Nigeria is the largest source of students from Sub-Saharan Africa to the U.S. and that, there are 6,568 Nigerian students studying in over 733 regionally accredited U.S. Colleges and Universities in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia.

Quality as a concept has been considered to be stakeholders' relative. Hence, the concept is opened to multiple perspectives. Quality in higher education according to [Maduewesi \(2002\)](#) refers to the baseline standard in education, which can be measured on a scale of preference and on this premise quality is seen as an expression of standard. Quality is also seen as the extent to which education could satisfy the purpose for which is supposed to meet. [Newton \(2007\)](#) saw quality as a process, that is, the quality of the educational process experienced by students, which can be viewed from teachers' and students' perspective, as a process and from the employers' perspective as the output of education.

However, it seems that, in spite of the NUC two-stage quality assurance processes that first develops standards for assessing quality and then monitors the universities to ensure that those standards are adhered to, not much have been achieved. Observations have pointed towards the absence, utter disregard or failure of regulatory system within the Nigerian university system to the extent that the Federal government of Nigeria ordered the ICPC to undertake a comprehensive system study and review of the Nigerian university system ([Aboderin, 2012](#)). It is against this background that the study tends to find answers to certain questions.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With the creation of the National Universities Commission (NUC) as a Federal government regulatory agency empowered to ensure quality of Nigerian university education, outputs of accredited institutions and academic programmes in Nigeria are expected to be of best quality and to be globally acceptable and competitive. However, the situation on ground in Nigeria today seems different as outputs of accredited institutions and academic programmes are regarded as of low quality by most stakeholders in education in spite of the NUC two-stage quality assurance

processes that first develop standards for assessing quality and then monitors the universities to ensure that those standards are adhered to.

Consequently, most stakeholders in Nigerian education have continued to express a decline in the quality of Nigerian university education both in the print and electronic media. The few Nigerians who have the economic power now send their children and wards outside the country in the quest for globally acceptable and competitive university education that can enhance their global job search as well as admission for postgraduate studies. This situation calls for concern, and in addressing the problems of the study, the following general questions were raised;

- i. What is the NUC level of performance of its regulatory roles?
- ii. What is the level of quality of Nigerian university education, using educational processes an indicator?

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the regulatory roles of the National Universities Commission and the quality of Nigerian university education. The study also investigated the relationship between NUC regulatory roles and the quality of Nigerian university education so that possible sources of dysfunction could be discovered and on this premise offer useful suggestions on appropriate framework that could improve the quality of Nigerian university education.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research question was raised for the study;

- i. Is there any relationship between NUC performance of its regulatory roles and the quality of Nigerian university education?

4.1. Research Hypothesis

In order to find solution to the problems of the study, the following Null hypothesis was generated and tested.

- i. There is no significant relationship between NUC performance of its regulatory roles and the quality of Nigerian university education.

5. RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a descriptive research of the survey type. The population for the study consisted of all staff members (teaching and non-teaching) and students of Nigerian public universities. The sample consisted of 50 members of staff (teaching and non-teaching) and 200 students each from 3 Federal and 3 State Universities from the public universities in the South-West, Nigeria. Multi-stage, purposive, proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 300 staff members and 1,200 students, making a total of 1,500 subjects. Data were collected using two different instruments titled 'University Staff

Questionnaire on the Regulatory Roles of the NUC and the Quality of Nigerian University Education' (USQNUE); and 'Students' Assessment of the Conversion Process of University Education' (SACPUE); The instrument (USQNUE) comprised of 36 items that elicited information on the performance of NUC regulatory roles and quality of inputs. The instrument (SACPUE) meant for the university students comprised of 40 items that sought information on the quality of the conversion process. The respondents indicated their responses in terms of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Scoring was done using the Likert rating method.

The face and content validity of the instruments were determined by specialists in Educational Management, and Test and Measurement in order to ensure that the instruments adequately measure the intended content areas of the study. The reliability of the 2 instruments (USQNUE and SACPUE) yielded 0.89 and 0.93 coefficient respectively using the split-half method. Data obtained from the instruments were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics were used to analyze research questions, while inferential Statistics (Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis) was used for testing the relationship in the hypothesis generated. The hypothesis was tested for significance at 0.05 alpha level.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1. Descriptive Analysis of Data

Question 1: What is the NUC level of performance of its regulatory roles?

In order to answer this question, respondents scores on 'Performance of NUC Regulatory Roles' was computed using Section B of the 'USQNUE' questionnaire i.e. items 1 to 21. The mean scores on NUC performance of its regulatory roles and the standard deviation were used to categorize the subjects into three groups representing levels of performance. Using the mean score of 57.02 and standard deviation of 7.29, respondents whose scores on NUC level of performance of its regulatory roles ranged between the minimum scores of 32 and the difference between the mean and standard deviation ($X-SD$) were grouped into 'Low' level performance i.e. $32.00 - (57.00 - 7.29)$ which gives (Low: 32.00- 49.71). Respondents whose scores ranged from the sum of mean and standard deviation and the maximum score of (82) were grouped as 'High' i.e. $(57.02 + 7.29) - 82$ equals $(64.29 - 82.00)$. "The moderate' level of performance constituted the respondents whose scores fell between the 'low' and 'high' level $(49.72 - 64.28)$. The study revealed that the NUC performance of its regulatory roles was at a moderate level with 73.3% of the respondents adjudging the Commission' performance as moderate. The result is presented in table 1 and graphically represented in figures 1.

Table-1. Frequency distribution of NUC performance of its regulatory roles

Level of NUC performance of its regulatory roles	Frequency	%
Low: $\text{Min}-(X-\text{SD})$ 32.00(57.00-7.29)	40	13.3
Moderate: 49.72 – 64.28	220	73.3
High: $(X + \text{SD}) - \text{Max}$ = $(57.00 + 7.29) - 82.00$ = 64.29 – 82.00	40	13.3
Total	300	100%

Question 2: What is the level of Nigerian university education based on the present state of the processes of education?

In order to answer this question, respondents scores on the processes of Nigerian university education i.e. ‘quality of educational inputs and quality of educational conversion processes were computed. The mean scores and the standard deviation were used to categorize the subjects into three groups representing levels of quality of Nigerian university education.

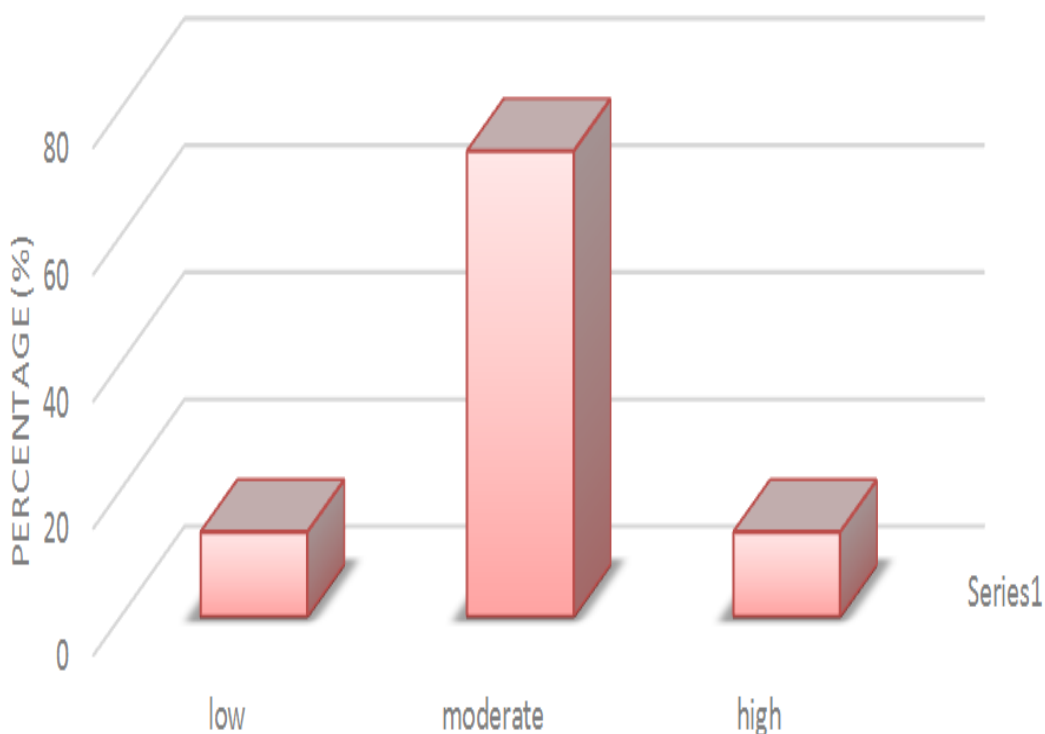


Figure-1. Bar Chart Showing Nuc Level of its Regulatory Roles

Using the mean score of 168.88 and standard deviation of 11.74, scores ranging between the minimum scores of 141.06 and the difference between the mean and standard deviation ($X-\text{SD}$) were grouped into ‘Low’ level of quality of Nigerian university education i.e. 141.06 - (168.88 -

11.74) which gave (Low: 141.06 – 157.14). Scores ranging from the sum of mean and standard deviation, and the maximum score of (203.82) were grouped as ‘High’ i.e. (168.88+ 11.74) – 203.82 equals (180.62 – 203.82). “The moderate’ level of quality of Nigerian university education constituted scores that fell between the ‘low’ and ‘high’ level (157 – 180.61). The study revealed that the level of quality of Nigerian University education was moderate with 66.7% of the respondents adjudging the level of quality of Nigerian University education as moderate. The results are presented in table 2 and graphically represented in figures 2.

Table-2. Level of quality of Nigerian university education

Level of quality of Nigerian University education	Frequency	%
Low: Min Score-(X-SD) = 141.06 – (168.88 – 11.74) = 141.06 – 157.14	48	16.0
Moderate: 157.15 – 180.61	200	66.7
High: (X+ SD) – Max Score = (168.88 + 11.74) – 203.82 = 180.62 – 203.82	52	17.3
Total	300	100%

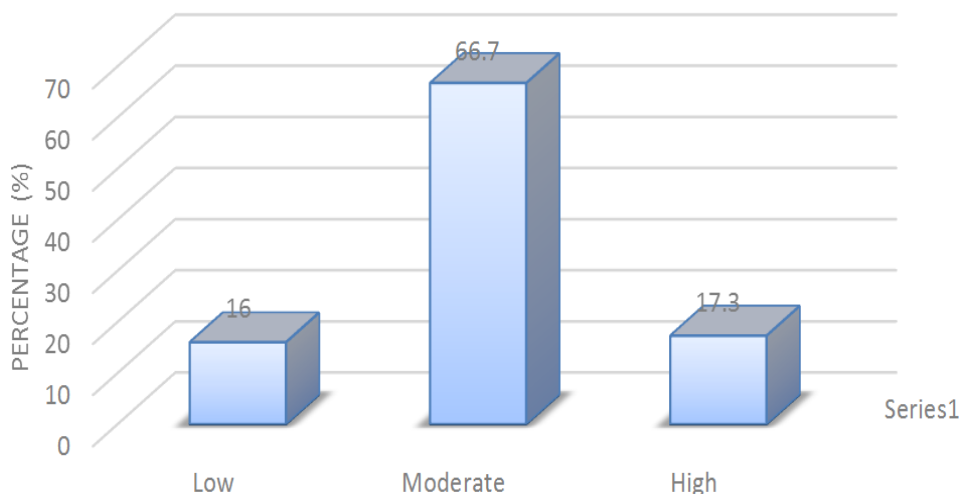


Figure-2. Bar Chart Showing Nuc Level of Quality of Nigerian University Education

6.2. Testing of Hypothesis

The only hypothesis generated for the study was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1:

Ho: There is no significant relationship between NUC performance of its regulatory roles and the quality of Nigerian university education.

In order to test the hypothesis, scores relating to NUC performance of its regulatory roles and the quality of Nigerian university education were computed. These scores were subjected to statistical analysis involving Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The results is presented in table 3.

Table-3. Pearson Correlation Analysis of NUC performance of its Regulatory Roles and Quality of Nigerian University Education.

Variable	N	r cal	r table
NUC performance of its regulatory roles	300		0.195
		0.592*	
Quality of Nigerian University Education	300		

*P<0.05 (Significant result)

Table 3 shows that r-calculated of (0.592) was greater than r-table of (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was a significant relationship between NUC performance of its regulatory roles and the quality of Nigerian university education.

7. DISCUSSION

The finding of the study revealed that the NUC performance of its regulatory roles was at a moderate level and not poor as perceived by most stakeholders in education. This finding corroborated [Ibidapo-Obe \(2012\)](#) who argued that Nigerian universities are not as poor as people think, though the established moderate level of performance of NUC regulatory roles was not good enough for the system as rightly noted by [UNESCO \(2005\)](#) when it posited that the success of education should be assessed according to what was hoped for or aimed at in advance and not solely on the amount or quality of the results which may emerge in the end. [Tajomavwo \(2009\)](#) also opined that organizations succeed or fail to the extent to which it is able to satisfy the customer as the objectives or goals are outcome or result of efforts and serve as the sign post for actions.

The moderate level of NUC performance also corroborated [Okebukola \(2006\)](#) who noted that one of the greatest challenges before the NUC in Nigeria is its inability to ensure that a Nigerian university is listed among the first two hundred universities in the world. This finding probably is the reason why some stakeholders are asking government for a total scrapping of the NUC saying it had failed as a regulatory agency to reposition the nation's universities as shown by the NEEDS assessment, ([Okwuofu and Aminu, 2013](#)).

The finding of the study established that the quality of Nigerian university education was at a moderate level. This confirmed the view of [Akinrinade \(2012\)](#) who posited that it is sad but one must admit that the quality of Nigerian tertiary institutions has nosedived in recent years, and the submissions of [Ijeoma \(1997\)](#), [Oto \(2006\)](#), [Omoregie \(2008\)](#) and [Oyewole \(2009\)](#) that university education in Nigeria which hitherto enjoyed tremendous global respectability and acceptability is fast losing its high esteem in the face of labour. The established finding also supported the report

of Osuagwu (2009) who noted the poor ranking of Nigerian universities, in which no Nigerian university was listed among the top 10 tertiary institutions in Africa, and Mafuyai (2012) who also noted the inability of any Nigerian university to make the list of the best 100 universities in the world.

8. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the current state of Nigerian university education was at a moderate level and not poor as perceived by most of the stakeholders in Nigerian university education. More importantly, the significant relationship established between NUC performance of its regulatory roles, and quality of Nigerian university education was an indication that, quality of university education as direct link or directly dependent on the performances of the regulatory agency (NUC).

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the established findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. The Nigerian government should make available all necessary apparatus that would encourage the National Universities Commission for optimal performance.
2. The National Universities Commission should recognize its position and the 'expectations /goal' attached to it and work towards improving on its credibility in achieving globally competitive university education for Nigeria, by giving optimal performance of its roles.

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