



Strategic Business Process for Quality Management in Nigeria University: A Critical Realist Perspective

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Abstract

This paper aimed to evaluate and discuss quality criteria that influence decisions on how to implement quality management. The starting point was to map out the strategic business process of how quality management in Nigeria University evolved for smooth operation from a critical realist perspective. The paper focused on harmonising elements of quality management as identified in past literature. The research survey adopted the uses of critical realist qualitative approach, data were collected from 6 universities (3 public and 3 private) among over 190 licenced universities in Nigeria. The decision to select the 6 was purposive to propound a strategic business process for managing quality in Nigeria's university system. 29 principal officers were selected based on availability for interview. The paper focused solely on the element identified as important tools to enhance quality provision in the university both in the study and as identified by past researchers. The paper was qualitative in nature and gather internal stakeholders' views on developing the business model process for quality management. The finding reveals that if one aspect of the quality management element identified in this model is a shortcoming it will gradually affect all other elements of the model leading to low market share. The paper also established that government policies, environmental factors and quality criteria are components of quality management. The study suggested that none of the compound elements nor sub-elements can operate independently rather they are composite of each other.

Keywords: Business model, quality, management, Nigeria, university

1. Introduction

In today's context, it is simple to apply any business word to any sector with the connotation to implement change in the business technique, an approach adopted in several sectors of the economy. However, the university sector is not exempted from this inclination as several agencies had generated and borrowed models from manufacturing, construction, engineering and many others into the sector. Bearing in mind this antecedent, this paper aims to develop a model of quality management implementation which will expedite improvement in university education in the Nigerian context.

What will critical realism mean to this study? It is a conception created upon indispensable realities regarding the character of Nigerian universities through a metaphysical plan of human information and also how realities are made (Adetunji, 2014) ^[1]. Likewise, Edward (2006) ^[18] thinks that critical realism is an approach of science that seeks another position to two dominant approaches in analysis (positivism and interpretivism). The philosophy suggests that humans are capable of finding out about the real world, exclusive of intrusion from subjective factors or human thinking that cause an event (Gerrits & Verweij, 2013) ^[27]. In contrast, words, to study Nigerian universities as they extremely are, one should mirror and learn critically about what was studied and how it

completely was caused by the boundaries of human perception or knowledge at intervals. In the work of Smith and Elger (2014) ^[43] they shared that critical realists share some footing with the interpretative approach to interviewing, by identifying meanings construction among human beings, and the consequence of communication, both as a subject of study and as a vital medium of theorising and investigation. Nevertheless, critical realists do not believe that this may be an unpretentious issue to undertake and do, as the approach creates a different position that involves human knowledge of the event.

This paradigm is grounded on the conception that our presumptions have to be separated from what the scientist observes therefore spot objective facts supported empirical interpretations. In a debate by Fleetwood and Ackroyd (2004) ^[24] they claimed that the target of positivistic research is to develop generalizable laws centred on analytical relationships between dependent and independent variables. The researchers throughout this field use quantitative sampling techniques to generalize samples to a wider population and eliminate potential sources of bias. Bryman (2008) ^[12] supports that they additionally create use of analysis instruments connected with the positivist paradigm like structured interviews, questionnaires, systematic reviews,

randomized controlled trials, and statistical analysis data. The conclusion of such work is to generate a law to be followed, yet the impact of such law on human value.

In a similar view, qualitative approaches are associated with interaction with non-numerical narratives and interpretive paradigm connected. The interpretive paradigm is disquieted by the techniques that the world is usually built and assumed (Easton, 2010). The research method is connected with interpretivism which is typically associated with the interaction between the participants and the researcher in the study, seen as an integral part of the research procedure with small-scale however intense studies (Gerrits & Verweij, 2013) [27]. Researchers in the field generally choose their participants by adopting theoretical or purposive sampling approaches on the premise of how helpful or beneficial they are expected to be for the pursuit of the investigation and not essentially whether or not they're representative of the ultimate sample (Flick, 2009) [25]. Likewise, Hartas (2010) [30] articulated that the interpretive paradigm is said to be strategically connected with focus groups, semi-structured interviews, case studies and textual analysis. Researchers throughout this field use analytical tools like regression or multivariate analysis, with the aim being to drawn a conclusion supported by the respondent's response

2. Literature Review

Quality discussions are often traced to Cheng (2009) [13], who identifies three classes of services: pure services within which the client should be present or is the most critical facet of the service, quasi-manufacturing services where there also no real face-to-face contact with the client and mixed services in which there's both face-to-face likewise back-office contact with the client. Cheng categorizes education as a pure service, considering the degree of interaction involved between the education provider and students, especially because learning does not occur without some participation by the student. In such contexts, client satisfaction is most frequently determined by the standard of non-public contacts. Therefore, much research on the service quality aspects of HE deals with technical aspects, for example, the effectiveness of course delivery mechanisms, the standard of courses, teaching and learning (Akaranta, 2014) [6]. The educational process is often divided into two distinct areas: the administrative and academic support areas (library, enrolment, etc.) and also the teaching and learning function (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007) [44].

A key determinant of the quality of the educational process is whether or not it's appropriate for the entrants to the programme to realize the intended learning outcomes (Yorke, 1999) [50]. On one hand, there is then the supposition that an excellent educational process would be followed by excellent outcomes; on the other hand, this need not essentially be the case. The argument on stronger intake resulting in excellent outcomes versus educational process which provides opportunities for a weaker intake to realize a minimum of threshold outcomes needs to be thought about. Is the quality of the educational process better in the first case because the outcomes are better? How much importance must be added and can the achievement of threshold learning outcomes by weaker students be determined as indicative of good quality? Bridger (2007) summarized that United Kingdom schools have been dealing with the notion of 'value-added' for many years and presently there are many procedures in use. Fischer Family Trust data, for example, predict what scores students should get at diverse ages based on their prior achievement,

their schools and their home postcode. However, there is nothing comparable for HEPs.

Great teaching is not always followed by smooth learning and clever student performance is not essentially an indicator of good teaching; but, there's ample proof that learning happens as a consequence of satisfactory teaching (Yorke, 1999) [50]. Researchers illustrated the necessity for appreciating and recognizing good quality teaching in an environment wherever there's inadequate stress placed on the teaching function (Lomas, 2004) [38]. However, as Cuthbert (1996) [14] points out, the link between student learning and teaching is neither straightforward nor direct, and so the approach to learning adopted by the scholar encompasses a significant influence on the teaching and learning method and outcomes. Alternative factors that possess to be thought-about embrace personal interaction between students and staff within the range of pastoral support and sensitivity to student desires (Hill, 1995) [34]. The complexity increases as service quality are heterogeneous and so the standard of interaction might also dissent the same within the same institution.

While high education was historically more involved in the transmission of knowledge, the explosion of information in today's knowledge economy needs tutors to develop a novel ability set that involves seeking, analysing and evaluating information (Stefani, 2005) [45]. Likewise, Harvey (2005) [31] explains that to improve students' capability for critical thinking, tutors should be able to supply clear steerage concerning what's needed and provide feedback to enhance the pliability for important reflection throughout the courses they teach. Critical learning collaborative, and transformative values and encourages diversity are crucial in developing critical skills (Hill *et al.* 2003) [35].

In this respect, whereas the quality of student intake may not essentially be a big focus of quality management as mentioned earlier, the quality of input provided by students throughout their learning expertise isn't any doubt important to the quality of the strategy and outcomes. Student learning depends to a massive extent on the student's approach to learning, thereby rendering any straightforward assumptions concerning the link between teaching and learning will be non-meaningful (Cuthbert, 1996-a) [14]. Students are going to be thought about as co-producers of their learning (Stefani, 2005) [45] and, therefore, unless they participate to the fullest doable extent, the academic outcomes or objectives may not be met satisfactorily. The transformative side of HE whereby students' analytical and demanding skills square measure developed are visiting be accomplished solely by the joint participation of students and tutorial workers in achieving the programme objectives (Harvey, 2005) [31].

The critical factors internal to the student that influence the transformative technique of HE are maturity, motivation and talent or capability (Eriksen, 1995) [22]. However, undergraduate students, in particular, may not be ready for a learning atmosphere that involves autonomous participation and will give some thought to themselves as just inputs or raw material in the educational method to be reworked while not fitting place the effort needed for that transformation to need place effectively. the problem for the lecturer is in convincing the scholar of the need to position within the required effort needed so on learn effectively and utterly from their expertise (Hewitt & Clayton, 1999). Mattick and Knight's (2007) [39] postulated that students find the strategy of autonomous learning and participation intimidating, as they are unsure concerning the appropriate quantity of individual study, what to cover and also the way its success might be evaluated.

It follows that managing student participation, motivations, expectations, values and aspirations that they are enthusiastically concerned with and effectively contributing to the learning methods are very important aspects of quality management. The service sector equivalent of this can be often referred to as 'customer organisational socialization' whereby customers unit supported by the service skills and knowledge needed to act effectively with the organisation's employees so on realize the planned outcomes (Telford & Masson, 2005, p.108) ^[47]. Most consumers will have a set of expectations once they enter a service encounter however whereas their expectations will be well-defined if they are knowledgeable about the service, expectations could even be unclear in unfamiliar service contexts (Hill, 1995) ^[34]. Other factors which can influence student expectations to embrace word-of-mouth communications are students' desires and their past expertise in education.

Concerning expectations in higher education, Undergraduate students in particular do not have any comparative frame of reference except for that of their schooling system and thus phantasmagorical expectations could negatively influence their perceptions of quality (Hill, 1995) ^[34]. Therefore, undergraduate students could expect close relationships with tutors, while postgraduate students could base their expectations on their previous undergraduate experiences. There is conjointly the likelihood that student expectations and desires could amend over the quantity of it slow that the scholar is within the establishment. There is also the possibility that student needs and expectations may change over the period that the student is in the institution. There is also some evidence that student expectations and perceptions of quality are inclined by their cultural orientation (Adetunji, 2014) ^[1] but there is room for more exploration. Similarly, Rolfe (2002) studied UK university lecturers, he found that students tend to adopt passive learning expectations and approaches to all information provided to them as a result of their secondary school time, experiences and societal constraints. Relatively, mature age or part-time students tend to interpret education just as any other commercial activity and will, consequently, have the same expectations from HEPs, such as low costs, convenience, high quality and service (Enu, 2018) ^[21].

Similar studies on the learning behaviours of students (of nursing), in the Arabian Gulf region conducted by Bridger (2007), posit among one of the very few studies in the field that students tend to be passive learners who exhibit poor learning tendencies including learning by rote, inability to integrate concepts, inability to use prior learning and ideas within a subject area, not taking any initiative to resolve issues before asking for help. Equally, Goodliffe (2004) writes on Omani students that, the majority of students enter higher education with a background of teacher-centred instruction and rote learning. Therefore, attempts by HEPs to move to student-centred teaching and assessment methods may not be appreciated because these students may expect tutor-centred approaches from their schooling experience to continue into higher education.

Student learning is influenced by three discourse factors particularly, course organisation structure and resources, teaching and learning activities and assessment (Struyvern *et al.*, 2002). But, how students use the context depends on four student-centred factors: students' motivation and desires, students' self-management, students' understanding and students' want for support. Telford and Masson (2005) ^[47] highlighted that student expectations and values are thereby

positive perceptions of quality associated with their ability to contribute and participate. The extent of student satisfaction can also be noticed through role clarity and positive perceptions of the organisational climate in which the service takes place. This then brings us to the issue of how HEPs can manage student expectations and perceptions over time, which is the ultimate requirement of managing service quality as per the literature.

Student expectations over the lengthy process of HE will impact their behaviours and motivations, and ignoring such needs and expectations may not only negatively impact students' experience of quality but may also weaken them from contributing positively to the learning process. Handling such expectations may require managing insignificances that may not have a major bearing on the outcome of HE. Hill (1995) ^[34] denote using existing students on open days and school visits to profile the expectations of prospective undergraduates and make them as realistic as possible. Students should also be stimulated to reflect on their past learning experiences so that they can build on positive attitudes and unlearn negative ones (Hill *et al.*, 1996) ^[36]. Yet, it must be renowned that the literature on this very important aspect of managing educational quality is limited.

In addition, Educationalists advocate a deep approach to learning that is fostered by acceptable teaching and assessment methods that promote active engagement with tasks and supply opportunities for independent studying. Once again, the flexibility of the lecturer to demonstrate his/her personal enthusiasm and commitment to the subject and thereby stimulate students' commitment and interest is important in shaping deep approaches to learning (Nwadiani, 2014) ^[40]. Good teaching integrates three aspects of competence: practice, disciplinary knowledge and generic skills through structured, specific goals, curriculum balance between understanding and content, and a spread of assessment methods (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007) ^[44].

To achieve this, the academic role should include lecturing, empathising, facilitating, coaching and designing customised learning experiences which stimulate learning and student centred. Unfortunately, students trying to avoid the more complex demands of autonomous or critical learning can be as a result in intense pressure to achieve qualifications for a competitive job market; hence, they are tempted to focus on the surface or learning for assessments rather than deep learning (Emeasoba & Ezeani, 2017) ^[20].

Additional factors that add to the complexity of the educational process include the differing perspectives of staff; collaboration among the programme team and the need for synergistic on teaching rather than research. Recently, there has been increased emphasis by the MoHE on research activities with the establishment of the National Research Council and all HEPs are now required to demonstrate evidence of scholarly activity and research.

Adetunji (2016) ^[2] re-emphasis on the corresponding implications in terms of student demographics and resources; he shared that teaching function can also be attributed as part of the problems associated with the massification of HE. The focus on effectiveness and efficiency together with the decline of economic resources and student numbers force academics to be innovative in recruitment strategies, teaching, and learning; often without the core skills required to do so. Stefani (2005) ^[45] claimed that there is a danger that a superficial understanding of popular definitions of the scholarship of teaching will pass for a real understanding of what is involved at different levels of teaching and

assessment. She applauds taking a further practical step where all staff engaged in supporting student learning reflect on and interrogate the terms of reference for the scholarship of teaching by applying the principles to their classroom teaching. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2007) [44] maintain that universities should move from the rituals of teaching to committing to learning, and this requires a fundamental paradigm shift in the notion of teaching as a routine and subsidiary task to a key performance indicator. This as Farrugia (1996) recommends entails the continuous professional development of teaching staff leading to the gaining of key professional traits that help staff to adopt and adapt to changes such that their prestige and material rewards depend more on the quality of teaching and guidance they provide rather than solely on research.

The professional development of staff in terms of appropriate student motivation, innovative teaching methods, curriculum development, and the development of core skills is critical if academic staff are to successfully fulfil their role in an increasingly demanding workplace. The overall quality of the process in such an inter-personal and inter-active environment as HE will depend, as Lomas (2004) [38] puts it, on the level of commitment throughout the organisation to its continuous improvement and quality culture. Transformative leadership which stimulates staff to question and alter basic assumptions and behaviours while encouraging innovation and change can help develop an organisational culture that can sustain the quest for constant improvements (Fullan, 2001). Furthermore, the management's commitment to quality must be visible, permanent and present at all levels and must translate into clear values that are disseminated throughout the institution (Giami, *et al.*, 2020) [28]. Hence, leadership and management are very vital aspects of providing the right direction and initiative for establishing and sustaining the required commitment within the institution.

Akaranta (2014) [6] argue for an output-oriented approach where the focus is on developing students' knowledge, capabilities and skills to the expectations of the industry. Notwithstanding the argument for focusing on functional or process quality, there has been a shift within the focus of quality management in HE from process to outcome, the fundamental anxiety being that quality should be demonstrable. The most important evidence of quality in HE is considered to be performance, especially student achievement of learning outcomes that are represented by a broad range of performance indicators including access, student learning, degree completion, productivity and efficiency, as well as economic returns from HE (Fiberesima, 2015) [23]. Lomas (2004) [38] expressed that HE, particularly in the United Kingdom has been involved in an outcome-based approach to quality whereby success is evaluated and measured in terms of the extent to which the predefined learning outcomes have been achieved. The benchmark of quality for the Higher Education Funding Council of England is the output of the system in terms of what graduates can do at the end of the programme (Bridger, 2007). In the United States as well, Welsh and Dey (2002) acclimated that there has been a fundamental shift in the focus of accreditation agencies and quality assurance towards student learning outcomes. Fiberesima (2015) [23], however, notes that current accreditation procedures have a long way to go in assuring standards compliance in student learning outcomes, as attention has always been focused on process standards and resources.

The emphasis on outcomes or output essentially arises from the necessity of having an objective measure for assessing the quality of provision (i.e. the inputs and the process). Williams (2002) [49] opposes that quality is also meticulously aligned with increased levels of managerialism resulting from demands for more accountability and efficiency, as outcomes can be more easily measured against established standards or targets. If student perception of the process of education is not the best reliable indicator of quality, then arguably the outcome of that education would be a more appropriate and objective measure of the process. In this admiration, the role of learning assessment is to measure the value added by the instructional process towards developing the specific learning competencies that are identified by the institution (Amin & Amin, 2003).

Considering the complex multidimensional nature of HE, Hewitt and Clayton (1999) question the notion that the output of HE is a more appropriate measure of quality than the process. However, there are doubts about whether the complex nature of learning can be easily reduced to a set of learning outcomes and competencies for some, attempts to do so simply an unwelcome shift towards utilitarianism (Barnett, 1994). Hewitt and Clayton find that academic staff consider the integrity and quality of the learning environment (process) which requires students to be active partners in the overall experience rather than the outcome to be the most critical factor. While in the industrial sector, the quality of output is measured by the extent to which it conforms to some predetermined standard: the closer the output is to the predetermined standard, the higher the operationally defined quality (Eriksen, 1995) [22]. In HE, the structure of the desired portfolio of attributes, skills, outcomes and qualities is arguable and the question of which outcomes are more important than others must be considered. Furthermore, some outputs or outcomes are more easily measured than others (Lomas, 2004) [38]. The number of distinctions or first-class degrees would be the easiest to measure but a high proportion of 'firsts' need not essentially designate a high level of quality and there can be justified variation according to the subject (Yorke, 1999) [50]. The outcome and influence of HE should (if it is effective) remain long after the formal programme of study has been completed and hence, it is uncertain whether HE can be abridged to a simple, measurable end product.

Graduates' success in gaining employment or access to higher qualifications/research is an important measure of the quality of educational provision. HE can process knowledge effectively as well as apply knowledge and skills in different contexts; it has a key role to play in developing skills for lifelong learning so that graduates can be more effective in their workplace (Yorke, 1999) [50]. The most critical function of HE is considered to be the development of skills that enable learners to find out and learn for themselves rather than imparting subject knowledge (Bourner, 1998) [11]. For this to happen, the focus of curriculum, teaching and learning must be on helping students to learn for themselves and supporting them to respond to problem-solving skills and assessments. In turn, it should be more about testing the ability of the student to find out what they learnt and not a brain drain examination. No doubt preparing graduates for entry into the world of work requires much more than the passive reproduction of subject knowledge (Eagle & Brennan, 2007) [15].

In a labour market which is noticeable by rapid change, uncertainties, and competitiveness where companies are delayering and downsizing to remain competitive and relevant

(Jameson & Holden, 2000), graduates' readiness to acclimatise to the world of work may be their key distinctive factor. Harvey (2005) ^[31] pointed out five extensive areas of graduate characteristics or features which are of importance to employers including intellectual ability, knowledge, interpersonal skills, the ability to work in modern organisations and communication. While subject precise knowledge is one aspect, a key difficulty is identifying criteria relating to transferable skills that are particularly relevant for employment and preparing students for employment is not as straightforward as one may consider (Yorke, 1999) ^[50]. Employer satisfaction surveys through various fields give high ratings to transferable skills while academic subject knowledge is rated low. Examples of high ratings for transferable skills are team interaction, problem-solving, communication etc., which are very highly prized as these are skills learnt in one field which can be transferred into other domains (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2004) ^[44]. Such qualities or attributes are generic in nature rather than specific, a circumstance which underscores the changing nature of organisations. However, Morley and Aynsley (2007) asserted that employers' perception of what constituted quality in HE varied across sectors with technical and scientific employers placing greater emphasis on graduates' subject knowledge. Employers observe that technical and organisational changes have resulted in accrued expectations from recruits, creating qualities like creative thinking, willingness to learn, team skills and cluster leadership talents and ability more important. A survey on global business capabilities acknowledged the talents or skills of flexibility, cultural sensitivity and integrity as the most preferred list of managerial attributes from a list of 40 capabilities (Thomas, 2007). Adetunji, Adetunji and Oyelude (2016) ^[2] stressed that recruiters of business school graduates search for candidates who possess multifaceted interactive skills and higher-level evaluative capabilities including the ability to frame complex problems and link things together. Employers of business graduates, alumni and even students are also increasingly demanding societal skills and behavioural as well as critical skills (Hawawini, 2005) ^[33]. Behavioural skills include leadership and entrepreneurial qualities, the ability to work with others, to demonstrate a multicultural awareness and the ability to communicate effectively. Societal values include the ability to make ethical decisions which take into account corporate social responsibility. Nevertheless, developing social values and behavioural skills in students may not be possible for HEPs as students may already have developed certain social and behavioural values by the time they are of college-going age.

Asiyai (2014) ^[8] accentuate the impact of the transition that graduates have to be compelled to build from tertiary education to the workplace in the present competitive economic climate. Asiyai advanced that this transition most often produces stress, depression, feelings of anxiety and of low self-worth, which are not widely valued by employers and HEPs nor are they anticipated by students themselves. To better prepare graduates to adapt to the workplace HEPs and academics would need to put in greater effort to enhance student awareness of the importance of core personal, behavioural development and transferable skills.

Research on student learning designates that assessment is fundamental to student learning and that it drives the curriculum (Stefani, 2005) ^[45]. Assessment of student learning is measured to be the most noteworthy factor affecting transformation (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007) ^[44]. However,

it is often established that tutors inspire a superficial approach to learning by assessing those features which require memorisation of facts rather than focusing on how students use, interpret and evaluate information (Struyven *et al.* 2002) ^[46]. Stefani (2005) ^[45] cautioned that assessment is frequently measured as a separate unit from teaching and learning and is usually considered after the course content has been decided on. Stefani acclaims an integrated view of the scholarship of teaching, learning and assessment where it is recognised that all three are directly related and complementary.

Struyven *et al.*, (2002) ^[46] shared that feedback on assessments which provides students with constructive ideas and closure for improvement is also an essential part of an effective assessment technique. Assessment strategies which are observed to be inappropriate by students also render the learning experience less satisfactory (Struyven *et al.*, 2002) ^[46]. In Struyven *et al.*, study on assessments concerning industry needs, Struyven, Dochy and Janssens (2002) ^[46] find that although students understand the relevance of non-traditional innovative methods of assessment (e.g. role-plays) they are not comfortable with such methods and prefer prescriptive methods of learning and assessment. Gibbs and Simpson (2005) observe that quality assurance agencies and HEPs focus on assessments in terms of what they quantify rather than in terms of how they support meaningful learning. They contend that standards are improved when assessments improve student learning rather than simply measuring limited learning. Gibbs and Simpson also articulated that the quality of student learning has been revealed to be higher in assignment-based courses compared to exam-based courses.

In another view Struyven *et al.* (2002) ^[46] shared that multiple-choice questions or formats that accentuate detailed actual answers encourage a surface approach, while open, essay-type questions motivate and encourage a deep approach to learning. Struyven *et al.* mentioned that students with low test anxiety rates favour essay-type exams and demonstrated good learning skills, while students with low test anxiety favour the multiple-choice format with evidence of poor learning skills. Most essentially, they highlight that students form opinions and seek information about what is expected by the teacher and then tailor study strategies that fit the task. Mattick and Knight (2007) ^[39] explain that students' focus on assessment anxiety is associated with poor performance that can drive incompatible high-quality learning without reconsidering their learning approaches. Therefore, if the assessment strategy is not comprehensive or well-designed it may become comparatively easier for students to provide the teacher with whatever they expect without really going through a transformative process or enhancing their capabilities.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

From the debate avoidance, it is quite evident that there is a need to develop a business process strategy of how quality management in Nigeria University evolved for smooth operation. The debate from the literature established that efforts had been made to close the knowledge gap but little attention had been paid to harmonising elements of quality management as identified in past literature (these elements are: input, process and output). Observed that several studies on quality in higher education have been concentrated on creating or measuring solutions to the problems faced by universities on the surface, thus broadening the gaps in the literature concerning understanding the causes behind objects they measure. This paper set out to fill this gap by using a

critical realist approach: an approach that makes available opportunities for re-introduction through a theoretical explanation of the social world.

In Nigeria today, government policies interfere with quality issues, whereas the demand for education is centred on quality graduates, to help realise the policies and purpose for founding university education in the country. This is another reason why this paper focuses its attention on quality

management theories through the establishment of how government policies interplay within the structure for a better understanding of how quality management is implemented rather than discussing policies as a theory. Hence, the link between quality and government policies is unclear, as they are both classified as mechanisms that will require the effort of an agency to function and create an event.

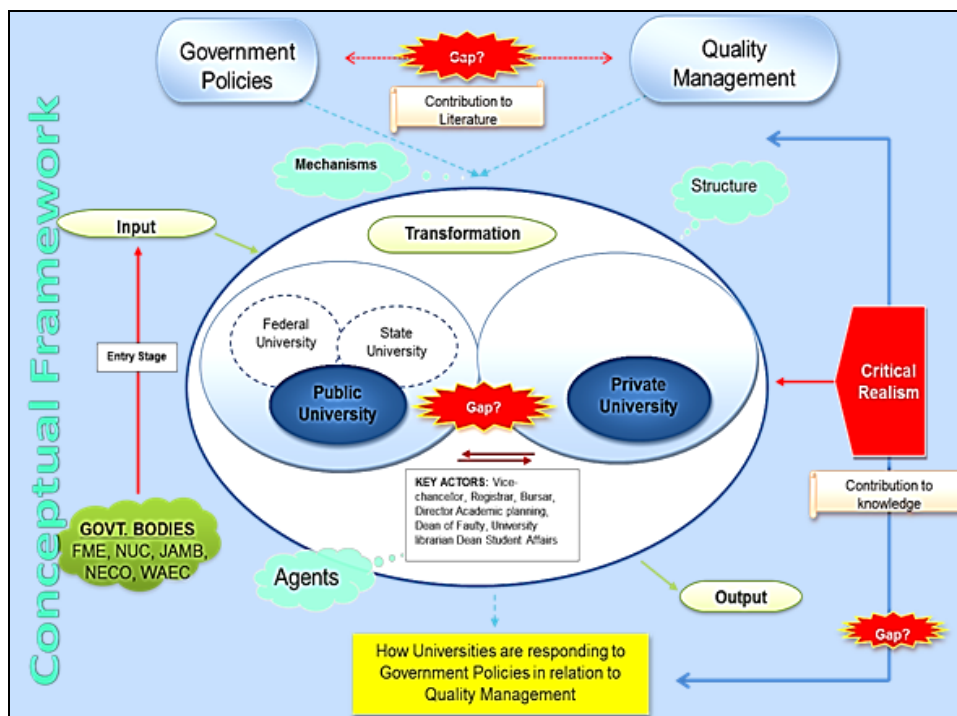


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework (Adopted from Adetunji 2014)^[1]

3. Methodology

Data were acquired from 6 institutions in Nigeria (three public and three private) using a critical realism qualitative technique within the critical realism paradigm. There are over 190 licensed universities in Nigeria at the time of the investigation. The choice of the six was made with the intent of establishing a strategic business approach for controlling quality in the Nigerian University system. Based on availability for interviews, 29 key officials were chosen. External agencies were sorted through organizations or groupings of entities that have a direct effect on the structure but an indirect influence on the process of the structure in critical realism translation, whereas internal agencies have a direct influence on the process of the structure making their involvement in the discussion more relevant.

Internal agents whose actions are within the structure were given special attention since this research is interested in what happens within the structure. Although they execute comparable responsibilities, these internal agents are sometimes referred to as "principal officers," "key players," or "university management." These main officials (such as Vice-chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Bursary, University Librarian, Deans and Directors among others) were chosen as agents to assist in the investigation of how quality management is implemented in Nigerian universities.

With these considerations in mind, the study's goal and goals are defined as indicated in the following section. Each interview section lasted for 45 minutes. The outcome of one interview section informs the design of another section as the author did not have a pre-mind set about the activities of the institutions under investigation. The interviewer was keen on establishing a model and the majority of their questions were centred on what models are in operation in each of the universities under enquires. This paper only summarised the outcome of the study into a piece of meaningful information for scholarly debate and closure of gaps in knowledge on government policy and quality management.

4. Model of What was at Work in Nigeria Universities

Having discussed the outcome of interviews with twenty-nine principal officers who play key roles in the affairs of their universities, either private or government-owned, the researcher observed that there are misplaced priorities in the manner in which the sector operates. This was evident in the responses given by the twenty-nine respondents from the six universities studied. However, after the whole exercise, the researcher was able to put together the factors that the twenty-nine participants suggested were at work using thematic analysis to cluster their responses in their various institutions (private and public).

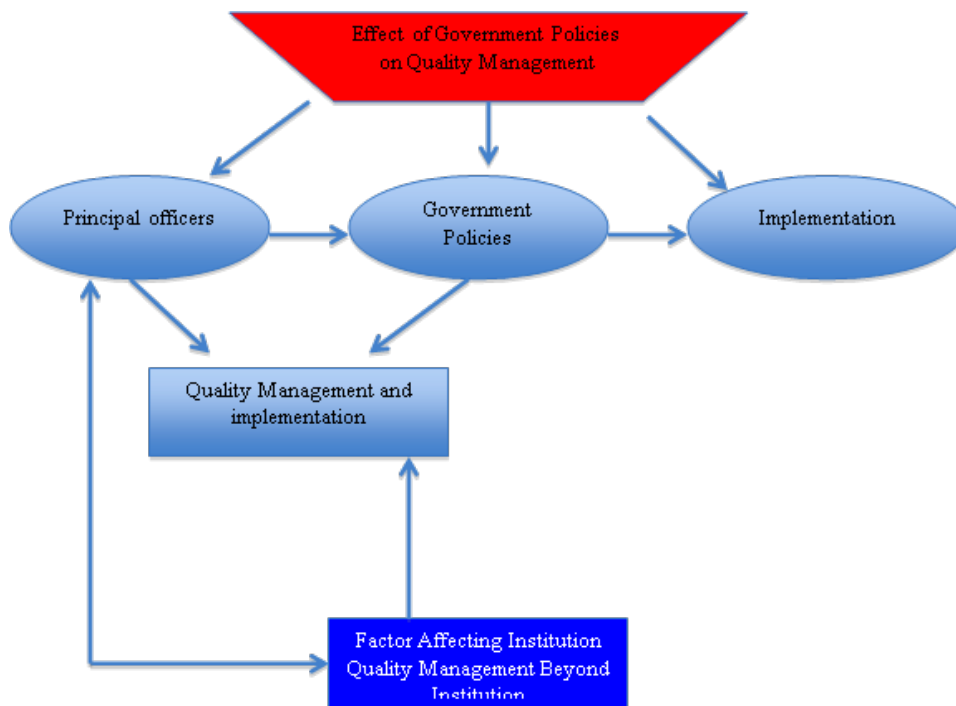


Fig 2: Diagram of what was at work in Nigeria Universities

The illustration above and responses from respondents expressed those government policies, among other mechanisms, have a very strong consequence on how principal officers discharge their duties and how government policies themselves are being formulated or designed, which in turn indoctrinate how principal officers will implement the policies. In the model above, the respondent emphasised that implementation stands alone because the findings recommended that implementing any part of government policies is a matter of desire and not of obligation. Even as respondents unanimously explain that managing quality is a demand for change, on one hand, respondents shared that change is a concern for academic staff especially the old professors and on the other hand, they acclimated that young academic staff are also worried and concerned about how they can embrace change without hurting the old professors. In another strong view, respondents agreed that government policies in Nigerian universities are centred toward only certain aspects of the universities, such as input (admission of students), while other input factors such as recruitment of staff and facilities are being ignored. No wonder a few respondents could not discuss in detail what they understood by the quality of education they produced. Likewise, some of the respondents postulated that their understanding of quality and government policies is confusing as the government is supposed to put in place a structure that will automatically improve quality. Some respondents share that understanding of the concepts (input, process and output) is still affected by many factors beyond the control of their institutions, such as past knowledge acquired, the student's family background, community, for instance, secondary school attended, and many more (Adetunji, 2016) [2]. If these factors have effects on quality management implementation, then they will affect those who are expected to implement the mechanisms.

4.1. Quality Management Model

Nineteen of the respondents in the study revealed that principal officers in public universities had migrated to private universities for sabbatical leave, promotion or increased salaries, taking with them the culture, norms and

beliefs of public universities. This assertion justifies reasons why the activities of private universities are very parallel to those of public universities: therefore, causal mechanisms affecting the actual mechanism in the public universities affect private universities as well. This makes the activities of the private and public universities to be similar and this means that it is very difficult to compare the two types of universities in this paper, but that does not mean that such an approach cannot be taken in a future study.

However, seven of the respondents from private universities established that the major market share of principal officers in Nigeria remains in the public universities-either state or federal-owned. As a result, respondents established that universities key principal officers share similar roles, duties, attitudes, beliefs, skills, abilities and other characteristics that are essential to the implementation of quality management in the Nigerian university context, and that this also impedes their abilities. Thus, the major goal of the study is to identify a potential model of quality management implementation for university education that can accommodate the key triggers that affect the improvement of quality in Nigerian universities.

This model was mostly developed through varied participants' experiences, situations and circumstances that reflect individual respondents' social and personal human values of how the events occur. However, over the years, the degree of importance that they attached to each component of the model and the extent to which they had selectively applied these components to their work differed one from the other, giving this model a rich insight into how to manage the events. This is a key element that is never considered by either interpretivism or constructivists, or in the agenda of any traditional approach. Researchers who use the inductive or deductive methodology are also always on a quest to develop models based on their surface understanding of the phenomenon they study.

Based on these divergences observed from the literature, a profile of the principal officers appropriate to the Nigerian universities was identified. Similarly, university education as an organization was examined with the view to uncover

quality management implementation and the complexity of such implementation was discussed. The practical findings of this study are illustrated in the model below, although environmental factors, government policies and quality

criteria are seen as key contributing elements to all components of the model:

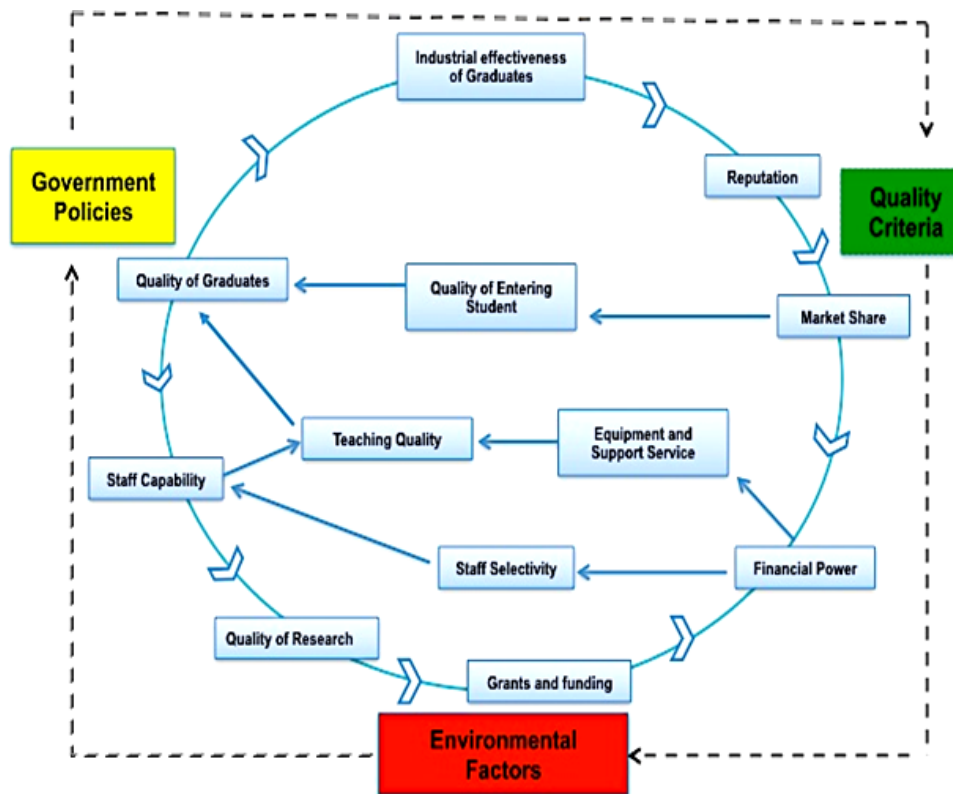


Fig 3: Model of how quality management should be viewed in the Nigerian university context.

One major link between the framework of the study and the model developed is the importance of the human social and personal values of participants, which generates the entities and mechanisms that were used to develop this model. The focus of the model is centred on the transformation event of the university, which was the focus of the conceptual framework: to uncover the cause of problems faced within the Nigerian university context. Critical realism is the central discussion that drives all the components in the conceptual framework together, giving room for the agency to function properly within the structure with the guidance of mechanisms and entities. However, as the findings reveal, according to twenty-three of the participants, there are no guidelines to implement either government policy or quality management within the structure: this has resulted in the malfunction of the structure, causing different events to occur. This approach is not considered necessary by positivists, as they rely on figures that can be represented as graphs, charts and tables to explain what happens with the event. Likewise, constructionists also focus their attention on discussing the events' components rather than focusing on how the components they discuss have been affected by the environment to remove the trigger that causes the event to happen rightly or wrongly.

In this study, it was observed that quality can be affected at any point in the sequence, as quality will only be present if all other components/entities supporting each other function properly. Therefore, the model was developed to pull together all components that participants suggested should be present for quality management to occur in Nigerian universities. It enables the researcher to explain that when constructive feedback loops are present in the system, changing a variable

in one direction (either a decrease or an increase) will lead to an increasing change in the same direction. For example, if a university produces a better quality of graduates than it has earlier produced, that is the loop keyed at the "quality of graduates" stage. Two things will happen: it will result in higher job performance for graduates in the industry, and it will improve the university's reputation. An increase in the university's reputation will increase the number of applicants willing to obtain a degree from the university. This will also increase the university's market share. It will allow the university to raise its standard above the minimum requirement set by the NUC. Likewise, it will attract more qualified students and staff, which will in turn increase its financial power and lead to higher-quality graduates.

Another strong connection in the model is how the financial power of the university can influence both the quality of graduates and the teaching. The complete focus shifted to financial power, although additional financial power will increase the market share, as well as the capability to attract grants and funding, which depend on the research effectiveness. It was observed that the quality (and quantity) of equipment and support services and the level of staff ability will produce teaching quality, which is required to produce quality graduates. Nevertheless, it was also perceived that throughout the fieldwork, less attention was paid to student support services. Questions were raised about the accountability of research funds, but the model suggests that if the policy implementation procedure is put in place, it can serve as a control mechanism. The loop is closed when deliberating the point that quality staff are expected to be more able to carry out meaningful and effective research. The entire element can have a conflicting influence once one

feature starts to go wrong. For example, low-quality graduates can lead to a poor university reputation, which can result in a worse condition for the quality of intakes and graduates.

Another robust connection in the model is how the financial power of the university can influence both the teaching and the quality of graduates. It was perceived that the quality (and quantity) of support services and equipment and the level of staff ability will produce teaching quality, which is required to produce quality graduates. Conversely, it was also perceived that throughout the interview section, less attention was paid to student support services from the discussion of the respondents. The entire focus shifted to financial power, although additional financial power will increase the market share, as well as the capability to attract grants and funding, which is determined by the research effectiveness. Questions were raised about the accountability of research funds, nonetheless, the model suggests that if the policy implementation procedure is put in place, it can serve as a control mechanism. The hoop is closed when pondering the point that quality staff are anticipated to be more able to carry out meaningful and effective research. The entire element can have a conflicting influence once one feature starts to go wrong. For example, low-quality graduates can lead to a poor university reputation, which can result in a worse condition for the quality of intakes and graduates.

Though the humanistic nature of education makes it more complex, the model suggests some relationships with a manufacturing system. This is because the system functions similarly, but with a major difference in the form of the input, as in producing an inanimate object that cannot be involved in its production, compared to students who are involved in the education process. The fact that the products of the system (such as students themselves) have a direct effect on the process and there is dynamic communication between students and teachers makes a big difference, while the problems of defining students as customers mount (Adetunji, 2016a) [4]. There are also a variety of stakeholders with different interests—for example, employers, parents, university management, external agencies, government, (such as NUC, JAMB, NECO, WAEC,) the community and students themselves—adding to the complexity of the events, which makes it difficult to define quality, but this should not overshadow the need for an operational definition of quality.

An important point which can be experimental in the model is the existence of a strong construction between quality and market issues. University quality can be attained through appeal to more capable students and most particularly through the engagement of higher quality staff, as well as fascinating more industrial grants, which are all market-related. This advocates the possibility of the adoption of commercially grounded approaches, such as improving quality in a public sector institution such as a university. Nevertheless, it is worth stating that the views, beliefs and perceptions of principal officers in Nigeria were taken into account in designing this model. Respondent believes that policies will only achieve a better enhancement if there is a policy implementation guide to make them more implementable and practicable. It was also discussed that when Nigerian universities start following a workable model like this, they can start producing graduates who will be relevant to society and fulfil government policies.

5. Conclusion

This paper has answered unambiguous research questions according to the research objective, which was to evaluate and

harmonise elements of quality management as identified in past literature using quality criteria that influence principal officers' decisions on how to implement quality management. The paper exposes issues within Nigerian universities concerning theoretical perspectives and develops a model to improve university education from the Nigerian perspective. The analysis of the principal officer's perception targets to clarify why mechanisms that are predestined to function in definite ways are not doing so. Here, it was pragmatically established that Nigerian universities operate a committee system for their day-to-day business activities via the principal officers, therefore making them relevant in the operation of the university.

It was perceived from twenty-six of the respondent's responses that government policies on university education cover every action of Nigerian university education, but following the investigation, participants articulated that they do not have a printed or written document on any common guidelines or government policies on how to implement these policies. While a few respondents speculated that they know what government policies are even though they do not have a written copy, respondents also shared that government policies are communicated verbally across the universities through word of mouth and when it filters down some key aspects of the policies got messed up. Respondents established that it is very difficult to implement what you do not know, especially given the level of autonomy in a university. The respondent points clearly that autonomous institutions are a dangerous effect on the university as it is often misinterpreted in favour and not objectively. The discussion also highlighted generating a definition of quality management in Nigerian universities. Under this section, respondents open that it is challenging to define quality in a certain way, as the university system is encompassed of multi-layered activities for which an actual meaning will undermine the integrity of the university as a whole. Moderately, when ascertaining a specific definition of quality, principal officers talked about benchmarks or quality criteria. This research work also placed more emphasis on the importance of management obligation both to improve quality management and to achieve organisational objectives.

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