CALIBRATION AND PERSPICACITY, A CONSEQUENTIAL TOOL FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A MIRROR OF QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY LIBRARY COMPLEX

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Abstract

Quality Assurance (QA) in Academic Libraries is long overdue. The paper discusses the essence of calibration and perspicacity as a tool for QA with particular reference to Ahmadu Bello University Library Complex (ABULC) Zaria. It draws out the Quality Assurance/Control Tools which serve as measures in giving a clear, deep, quick and accurate judgment of QA activities and how these tools can help in enhancing QA activities in ABULC and Nigerian University Libraries as a whole. It also highlighted the achievements and challenges of the various issues associated with the Unit. Among the recommendations proffers are: Management should give utmost attention to suggestions and observations made; Minimize bias/sentiments in the implementation of suggestions; Delegation of authority by the management to a senior officer who will be in charge of Centers, Faculties and Departmental Libraries; QA Unit team be motivated to encourage them carry out assigned duty and All issues be given equal treatment.

Introduction

Quality Assurance (QA) refers to the planned and systematic activities implemented in a quality system so that quality requirements for a product or service will be fulfilled. In other words, QA can be defined as a continuous process of evaluating, assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving the quality of products or services (FEIAP, 2010). In the same vein, Kisailowska (2002) noted that QA principles are a certain form of naming and ordering the actions that are necessary for assuring the quality, for instance, of teaching that later is internally measured and evaluated at a given university and also externally during an accreditation process. (i.e. National Universities Commission in Nigeria). QA in Academic Library is seen as a way of measuring, improving and maintaining the quality of any human activity that has a value and the resulted output, be it information resources, services, and facilities.

Quality as a concept has received a lot of attention from scholars across the globe. Harvey and Green (1993) and Njoku (2006) after extensive reviews of the literature, conceptualize quality as exceptional degree of excellence, fitness of purpose, perfection or consistency, value for money. The World Conference on Education conceives quality in Higher Education as: a multidimensional concept which should embrace all its function and activities; teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services to the community.

Quality by definition assumes that there is a standard which anything less becomes sub-standard going by this premise, quality can then be defined as doing the right thing right. Interesting enough “quality” or “Right thing” is as uniquely defined by each individual. On the other hand, quality itself has been viewed by Winder, Jude and Robinson (1995) as fundamentally relational when construed as the ongoing process of building and sustaining relationships by assessing,

anticipating, and fulfilling stated and implied needs in an Academic Library system. Even those quality definitions which are not expressly relational have an implicational character.

Quality Assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgment (not ranking) through an agreed and consistent process and established criteria (IIEP, 2006). It is in view of this, Martin and Stella (2007) visualize QA as generic term used as shorthand for all forms of external quality monitoring, evaluation or review and may be defined as a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provides (input, processes and output) and fulfils expectations or measures up to the minimum requirements, Libraries inclusive.

Furthermore, it's noteworthy that QA principles regulate both the external and internal activities of an educational institution especially library. For instance in universities library, external QA refers to the actions of an external body which assesses the university information resources, operations or that of its programmes and library in order to determine whether it meets the standard that have been set, while internal QA refers to the university's or programme's policies and mechanisms for ensuring that it fulfills its own purpose as well as the standard that apply to higher education or general or to the profession or discipline in particular (IIEP, 2006). In this vein calibration and perspicacity comes into play by the external body which is the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) and the internal body, in Ahmadu Bello University Library Complex, which is the QA Unit.

Review of Literature

QA is a concept as much as a process. QA as a concept is geared towards the attainment of excellence in service delivery, whereas *process* of determining whether a product or service meets specified requirements. More so, Excellence is that relative quantum and quality of service or processes that inspires some measures of confidence and satisfaction in the consumers or users

of the end product or service. According to Uvah (2005) the notion of quality assumes the existence of a benchmark, standard, or scalar parameter for product or service (Calibration). But Odejide (2007) conceived QA in two levels which are QA as a fitness of purpose and as a fitness for purpose, he went on to say that fitness for a purpose is a mechanism for calibrating the extent to which facilities in an institution are capable of supporting the attainment of the ideal espoused in the mission and vision statement of the mother intuition. A good example is the periodic accreditation exercise of institutions by NUC in Nigeria. The intention is to ensure that all the components organs and facilities in Nigerian degree awarding institutions are capable of leading to the attainment of goals and objectives of these institutions. This goes in line with the position of Materu (2007) who defined QA as a plan and systematic review of process of an institution or program to determine whether or not it's acceptable in compliance with the set standard. On the other hand fitness of purpose which is an evaluating process for calibrating the quality of services or products within an institution. It's an in house mechanism for evaluating the quality of the services or products being produced. It's a kind of idea to ensure production of services to meet up standard. For instance ABU Library Complex establishes Quality Assurance Unit that ensures continual excellent service provision by all components of the Library Complex. In ABULC therefore, fitness of purpose is a QA process for measuring the extent to which the library is capable of supporting its mother institution to achieve its mission and vision statements in regard to information service delivery by calibration and perspicacity. It is eminent at this point to state that QA fitness for and of purpose is an essential process, calibration and perspicacity is the consequential tool used by ABULC QA Unit for ensuring that Library Complex performs its expected functions to support teaching, learning and research effectively.

Ahmadu Bello University Library Complex

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was established in 1962. Ahmadu Bello University Library Complex (ABULC) comprises the Kashim Ibrahim Library (the main Library), eleven other Satellite Libraries and about 100 Faculty and Departmental Libraries located in different campuses of the University. The Library Complex has a total holding of over 1.7 million volumes of books and 120,000 periodical titles. The University Library Complex has always been at the centre of research and scholarship playing a major role in acquiring, processing and lending library materials and responding to patron's inquiries. Today, online database and internet searches are a common feature among staff and students of the University. The Library Management in the past few years has been striving to upgrade the Information Technology (IT) skills of the staff to enable them cope with the challenges of information age. Recently, thanks mostly to donations by the MacArthur Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation, rapid progress has been made not only in updating the collection, but also in automating the resources and services of the Library Complex. With staff strength of about 103 Professionals and 258 Para-professionals, 33 Senior and 152 Junior Nonprofessional staff in the entire ABULC. (ABULC 2018)

To this regard in October 2012, QA Unit was established to ensure quality in the services and operations of ABULC. The need for the establishment of this Unit was necessitated by the Management of ABULC to provide quality systems and services for the entire University Community. The Unit is responsible for among others the following:

- Monitoring and Evaluating of Library Operations, Systems and Services;
- Identifying gaps between the Standard and the Services being provided;

- Proffer suggestion on the Provision, Promotion and Implementation of quality library services;
- Development of Strategies/Mechanism to ensure quality in Library Services and Operations.

Quality Assurance/Control Tools

Basically there are seven quality assurance tools, which can assist an organization or institution for problem solving and process improvements. These tools were proposed by Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa in 1968, in a book titled "Gemba no QC Shuho" that was concerned with managing quality through techniques and practices for Japanese firms. The book was intended to be applied for "self-study, training of employees by foremen of QC or in QC reading groups in Japan. It was in this book that the seven basic quality control tools were first mentioned. It is a valuable resource when applying the seven basic tools (Omachonu and Ross, 2004). These seven basic quality control tools, which were proposed by Dr. Ishikawa, are:

1) Check sheets;

2) Graphs (Trend Analysis);

3) Histograms;

4) Pareto charts;

5) Cause and effect diagrams;

6) Scatter diagrams;

7) Control charts.

For all these tools to work effectively and produce a good result, calibration and perspicacity is required.

Calibration and Perspicacity

Calibration simply means to determine, check, or rectify. Determination whether or not the characteristics of an assembly, component, or material are within specifications. According to the International Organization for Standardization publication entitled International Vocabulary of Basic and General Terms in Metrology (published in 1993 and known as VIM), calibration is the set of operations that establish, under specified conditions, the relationship between values indicated by a measuring instrument, a measuring system or values represented by a material measure, and the corresponding known values of a measure.

According to the definition given in the International Vocabulary of Metrology JCGM (2012) calibration establishes a relation between the quantity value provided by a measurement standard and the corresponding indication provided by a measuring instrument or system. Calibration also requires determination of the uncertainties associated with the measurements performed. A calibration can be executed either on a measuring instrument (or system) or on a measurement standard (on services).

Perspicacity on the other hand, means through sightedness. A clarity of vision or intellect which provides a deep understanding and insight (Lyles, 2010), in order words, the ability to understand things quickly and make accurate judgments. Calibration and perspicacity is the process of identifying the areas that are short of standard and by in sight judgments offering a possible suggestion that will immediately assist in bridging the gap and maintaining the standard. Calibration and perspicacity is an essential tool for effective QA in library.

Quality Assurance and the Nigerian University Libraries

The need for QA in the operation of any system is given priority; Monash University (2005) observed that the library, in assuring quality should be committed to best practices in service

provision and resources management, while still assuring financial and administrative accountability. Libraries are service providers which are uniquely related to the nature of their parent organizations. Academic Library functions in a unique environment such that any assessment of its performance, quality must be a measure of the library's total contribution towards achieving the overall goal and objectives of the parents' institution. This quality management entails activities and measures that contribute to the management of the quality of the product, service and other outputs from the institution. To ensure these, calibration and perspicacity is a major tool. Assuring quality in libraries mean that there must be a striking balance between what should be or what ought to be and what is on ground in the libraries. It is important that a standard be used as a yardstick for development and that minimum standard prescribed for libraries should be closely followed.

Academic Library QA means efforts directed towards assuring quality through calibration. QA does not focus on finding faults or glossing over real problems to claim all is well, rather it is a mechanism for checkmating that standards are being adhered to effectively by offering solutions to problems identified. Academic Library QA perceived indices for the purpose of qualitative and quantitative measures and assessments would normally include amongst others, covering a set of acceptable standards to serve as guides in evaluating the quality of service. The general factors to be considered in evaluation are library buildings, human resources, collections, equipment and facilities, funding, information communication technology etc.

According to Igborgbor (2012), QA in academic institution connotes all the measures taken to ensure that the educational system is better able to meet the needs of each society. In the view of Kontio (2012), QA means all the procedures, processes and systems that support and develop the education and other activities of the higher education. He further states that QA and auditing are

one way to support education to improve its quality of delivery. Similarly, Oladipo, Adeosun and Oni (2009) see QA as the relevance and appropriateness of the education program to the needs of the community for which it is provided. They further assert that it is the arrangement made or the mechanism put in place to maintain the degree of excellence of an educational product or services. QA involves series of operational techniques and activities which include all action taken for standards to be met. In summary, QA in an academic environment is the entire process of ensuring maximum effectiveness and efficiency of educational programs and services in relation to their context, mission and stated objectives of the institution.

QA agencies in academic environment across the globe are expected to provide an integrated QA service for higher education system. Their main mission is to safeguard the public interest in adequate standards of higher education qualification and to inform, promote and encourage continuous improvement in the management, by stakeholders of the quality of higher education. QA agencies achieve this through setting and maintaining of standards based on calibration and perspicacity.

A good QA consists of the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced. QA in ABULC is applied to: information resources and services offered by the Library Complex and the learning content, the staff technology, learning methods and services, the organizational and managerial structure of the Library Complex.

QA uses six (6) specific quality attributes that apply to the aforementioned QA elements in ABULC:

i. Availability (e.g. If the staff are there when they are needed and whether they deliver the defined services to the agreed service level)

ii. Usability (e.g. Whether staff & customers are able to carry out specific tasks effectively, efficiently and with satisfaction)

iii. Learning Effectiveness (e.g. Appropriateness of the learning material in the library to learning styles, state-of-the art content, clarity of objectives, etc)

iv. Performance (e.g. Library's ability to perform tasks within certain constraints in time and resources)

v. Security (e.g. Ability of the library to respond to a threat, protection of intellectual property right and personal details)

vi. Potential for change (e.g. Library's ability to retain or increase its values)

Enhancing Quality Assurance in ABULC

The implementation and sustenance of QA in Academic Libraries is the surest way to leapfrog the standard of education in our institution of higher learning, specifically ABU and Nigerian Universities as a whole. It is the best and fastest way to imbibe best practices in ABULC. Enhancing QA measurement is a recurrent process of continues assessment of ABULC with appropriate frequency in order to keep up with constant changes, new demands, trends and developments. Tertiary Education is increasingly becoming very dynamic in its management and knowledge delivery.

Thus QA is called to check the following quality criteria in ABULC: curricular learning effectiveness (availability, appropriateness to learning styles, state-of-the art content, clarity of objectives, etc) academic staff teaching, research and development achievements, flexibility of organisation allowing information transfer, interdisciplinary studying within the framework of various programmes or institutions; usability of infrastructure and availability of adequate equipment, protection (security) of personal data, accountability with regard to the use of human

and material resources, positive feedback from the users and responsiveness to their suggestions, proposals, and critique; positive feedback and support from stakeholders; promising strategic planning with respect to the capacity for change. For this to work effectively there must be a provision for compatibility with rules and regulations of the Library Complex and clear statement of who is responsible for conflict management and resolution.

Achievements of ABULC Quality Assurance Unit

Since the inception of the Unit, a lot has been achieved in harmonizing the standard of services and operations of ABULC with the cooperation of the various University Librarians till date. To mention few are:

1. The backbone in Establishing QA of ABU Zaria.
2. Worked hand-in-hand with the University Librarian to update Schedule of duty for every staff.
3. Involved in conflict resolution among Staff and Students.
4. Initiated the staff data update for ABULC Staff.
5. Assisted in the organization of many Departmental, Faculty, Institute and Centers Libraries.
6. Discovery of many None Functional Libraries or Libraries without Librarian and ensured that they were functioning properly.
7. Worked hand in hand with past and present University Librarian in bringing about Paradigm change in ABULC (both in infrastructure and in attitude of Staff /Students)
8. Assisted the University Librarian in the successful repositioning of ABULC.
9. Initiated the update of Librarian on Duty Roster with Phone Numbers.

ABULC Quality Assurance Unit Challenges

The following are some of the challenges encountered by ABULC Unit:

1. Delay or non implementation of suggestions and recommendation offered: most of the times when suggestion and recommendations were offered to the management it take long period before executing or it may not be treated thus discouraging the team from putting more effort.

2. Bias/sentiments when issues of sensitive nature are handled: The issue of "who you know" has always played itself in most working environments where some workers are favored.

3. Administrative bottleneck: This a common challenge faced by workers, where bureaucracy is the order of the day. Issues that need urgent attention have to go through long protocol there by delaying actions.

4 Poor Motivation and Job Satisfaction: The frustration experienced by QA staff make them loose interest. The support and commendation is not usually given to them.

5. Management Interest: Some suggestions offered may not go down well with management because it did not favor management interest. A good example is Mr. John Barnett, a former Boeing quality manager, said bosses had refused his repeated efforts to deal with production issues. "As a quality manager at Boeing, you're the last line of defense before a defect makes it out to the flying public," Mr. Barnett said. "And I haven't seen a plane out of Charleston yet that I'd put my name on saying it's safe and airworthy."

Recommendations and way forward

These are some of the proffered Recommendation under listed as follows:

1. All Recommendations and Observations made by Quality assurance team should be attended to by the management in good time.

2. Minimizing or removing the bias/sentiments in the implementation of suggestions and recommendations.

3. The work of QA needs attention most of the time, thus there is the need for delegation of authority by the management to a senior officer who will be in charge of the Departmental, Faculty and Centers Libraries in order to reduce administrative bottleneck.

4. Quality Assurance should be given the necessary motivation to encourage them carry out their assigned duties effectively by way of acknowledgment.

5. All issues observed should be given equal hearing and treatment.

Conclusion

Establishment and sustenance of QA in Libraries is the best way to improve the standard of service delivery in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions. This has undoubtedly underscore the fact that establishing a strong and independent QA is a sine qua non in the effort to develop a competitive library services and the right way to imbibe best practices in library system. There is no doubt that majority of libraries in the country are not operating at optimal level due to a number of challenges one of which is the low level of priority accorded to QA. Libraries regardless of their affiliations should embrace the culture of periodic self evaluation.

Finally, sustainable library development is an expensive venture which calls for a proper quality control therefore library management should value QA activities and encourage them to perform efficiently and effectively.

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