

# **INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

By

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## **Abstract**

The importance of quality instruction in schools cannot be underestimated. However, the instructional quality in Nigerian tertiary schools seems persistently low, and worrisome based on the students unemployability in labour market. This has continued to be a subject of concern to individuals, the public, government, and other stakeholders. This paper accessed instructional quality in Nigerian tertiary education and its implications for national development. Thus, the interest point of this paper lies in the fact that Nigerian tertiary education appears to have failed to provide its recipients with the required quality, to take their place in society as self-supporting individuals for national development. The paper shows that teachers as a central factor have to make a lot of decisions at a classroom level: about goals, the allocation of time to (groups of or individual) students, use of material, their own instruction, and behaviour management during the instructional process. The paper recommends that, critical stakeholders, through their various supervising ministries and agencies, should advise and ensure that qualified teachers are recruited into the teaching positions in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

## **Introduction**

Learning is a complex activity that puts students' motivation and physical condition to the test. It has been a long-held assumption that curriculum and teaching have an impact on learning. However, it is becoming more apparent that instructional quality in our schools can influence student achievement. This attests to the fact why education in Nigeria needs improvement at all levels, essentially in all its aspects of teaching and learning. Nigeria tends to be bold in thought but timid in action with regard to its educational policies. Nigeria spent time talking about

theories, while the schools remain in their comfortable ruts and the relevance of education is left in doubt. In addition, Maina<sup>1</sup> stated that unlike Britain and America, the Nigerian government with its educational planners and administrators relied more on lofty educational policies, political inanities, spurious data and unrealistic budget proposals. For this reason the Nigeria began to experience constant degradation in the direction of sub-human and underdevelopment. Global exploitation, misrule, ignorance, poverty and diseases seemed to have become a recurring decimal in the order of the day.

Nigeria like other countries in the world recognises instructional quality as the major instrument for quality of tertiary education, effective national development, inclusive growth, progress, technological breakthrough, advancement in human attainment and world peace. Instructional quality in Nigerian tertiary education can only be positively and fully attained if there is quality delivery. For example, for Nigeria's tertiary education to become globally competitive issue of quality instruction should be of paramount important. Tertiary education in its ideal frame of mind is committed to the realization of positive changes in the society. Education and educational institutions mobilize, radicalize, revolutionalise and sensitize a people for those behaviours that are conducive for progress and harmonious living. Instructional quality in tertiary education develops in people positive qualities that enable them to acknowledge their limitations while at the same time belt up or crave to transcend their limitations. People who have acquired the right education are great assets to their societies in all ramifications. They make development easier for their state but very problematic to be enslaved or marginalized.

Thus, the interest point of this paper lies in the fact that Nigerian tertiary education appears to have failed to provide its recipients with the required quality, to take their place in society as self-supporting individuals as a results of lack of Instructional quality including curriculum, quality of content, qualification and experience of teachers, availability of instructional aids, and motivation for users (both teachers and students), well-managed educational systems, and functional assessment techniques.

### **Conceptual context of instructional quality**

Quality is an elusive concept. This is because it is a general term that is applicable to any trait or characteristic, whether individual or generic. Hornby<sup>2</sup> perceives it as the standard of something when compared to other similar items; the degree of excellence of a product or service; or the distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something. In the opinion of Newel and Dale<sup>3</sup>, it is the level of achievement in five basic areas: people, equipment, methods, materials, and the environment. Peter<sup>4</sup> avers in broad terms that quality in the context of this paper, can be defined as having the characteristics of being well thought out; prepared with care, and implemented with responsibility; having a firm direction but flexible enough to cope with contextual variation; and being positively responsive to comment and criticism.

In the word of Ndiomu<sup>5</sup>, and Majasan<sup>6</sup>, quality instruction is that instruction which is relevant to the needs of the society. That is, quality instruction is value-loaded with the argument that

quality instruction should produce disciplined behaviour, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. Hence Akinpelu<sup>7</sup> argues that education without quality instruction can be even more dangerous than no education, stressing further that without quality instruction, education has no value. Adebanjo<sup>8</sup> remarked that if a teacher is incompetent, a good output cannot be expected. Thus, a competent teacher is regarded as one who has undergone relevant training in a chosen field of study and is certificated. Furthermore, Eurydice<sup>9</sup> wrote that instructional quality in tertiary education includes 'the framework in which tertiary institution pursues its goals, objectives and policies in a coherent co-ordinate manner'. In other words, instructional quality tertiary education pertains to employable graduands across institution.

The issue of quality is the most widely used and spoken concepts in formal education system in Nigeria that is why Emmanuel; Ikenna & Bala<sup>10</sup> sees the concept of quality as ambiguous and elusive, thereby making the understanding of its meaning difficult to arrive at. This is essentially true in education as compared to industry where clearly definable products with quantifiable qualities exist. Accordingly, Emmanuel et al<sup>11</sup> contends that the "product" of education is intangible and the customer very difficult to identify. That is to say, virtually everybody recognizes it when it is seen but scarcely, anyone can specify its components or features with any degree of precision or confidence. Quality instruction is to have essential knowledge by inculcating positive values and mastering of useful skills that will increasingly make life meaningful to an individual and his society. It is a process that will produce the kind of citizens needed by a country at any given time. The operation of unqualified and under-qualified educators in the school's system impacts negatively on the quality of instruction. The activities of qualified and competent teachers cannot be under-estimated in achieving the stated goals and quality instruction in the school.

### **Theory of Educational Effectiveness**

This paper is build on the theory of educational effectiveness propounded by Creemers<sup>12</sup> who opined that effective instruction starts with teachers in the classrooms and this refers to two important implications. Firstly, teachers as a central factor have to make a lot of decisions at a classroom level: about goals, the allocation of time to (groups of or individual) students, use of material, their own instruction, and behaviour management during the instructional process. Secondly, to guide the planning of the instructional process by teachers and the development of effective arrangements, central guiding ideas are of crucial importance. These can be found, next to the goals of education, in theories and research about learning and teaching, and in theories and research about the quality and effectiveness of instruction.

The theory presents a holistic view on education as it considers the outcomes of education, the input, the process, and the context in which education takes place. In this paper, the outcome of education is the proportion of students transiting from tertiary institutions having graduated such institutions through final examinations approved by the school senates. The outcome can also be the value added by tertiary education to the initial attributes of students to become more useful

individuals in the society. The theory consists of variables such as the background of the teacher, the method of teaching, and time-on task which is the semesters students spend on school learning which can be expanded by school test.

Importantly, the theory consists of components such as teachers' characteristics which to Creemers<sup>13</sup> make a difference between effective and non-effective instruction. At the classroom level, the characteristics of effective instruction are related to time-on-task and opportunity to learn. The quality of teachers and materials, grouping and behaviour is in one way or another related to the time available for learning. Thus, Creemers' idea on teachers' characteristics as being integral to instructional quality serves as the theoretical backdrop for this paper.

### **Current State of the Nigerian Tertiary Education System**

Tertiary education is a critical element of human development, and it is essential to the growth and development of any country. A country's ability to experience changes, surmount challenges, and keep up with the latest global developments across all sectors is derived mainly from its educated populace. However, for tertiary education to contribute meaningfully to the making of balanced and analytical citizens capable of leading governments as well as driving economies and industries, its instructional quality has to be excellent and tertiary education in Nigeria is far from this. In most countries of the world, enough premiums are given to tertiary education in a bid to prepare students for global relevance and competitiveness. In Nigeria, although the tertiary education system has come a long way, there is still much to be done in terms of achieving the level of excellence required to produce trained individuals capable of driving national growth and development. This paper aims to examine the current state of tertiary education systems in Nigeria, highlight core lessons from global standard practices, and recommend ways in which the quality of tertiary education in the country can be further improved.

Instructional quality in tertiary education in Nigeria is disgracefully low. Nigerian graduates owing to this, are no match for their counterparts in other parts of the world. The sorry state of tertiary education in Nigeria is also responsible for the increase in its none-literate or school dropout population. The yearly dropout rate from across all universities in Nigeria is over 18%. All this costs the country dearly; first, it inspires a tremendous brain drain. Nigeria currently ranks 10th on the International Student Leading Place of Origin. Of the 71,753 Nigerian students studying abroad, 14,438 are studying in the U.S., which represents a 12% increase in enrollment numbers from the previous academic year (12,860). This educational mobility, as well as the lack of employability, takes a destructive toll on the country's economy.

In Nigeria, Doris Dokua Sasu<sup>14</sup>, states that there are 170 universities in Nigeria. As of 2023, 79 were private, federal universities amounted to 43, while state universities were 48, 132 polytechnics, 26 monotechnics, and 89 colleges of education. This brings the total number of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to about 417. This number of higher education institutions is not enough to cater for the population. Figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show that from

According to a JAMB<sup>15</sup> policy document obtained, the over 400,000 unallocated admission spaces represent 43.78 per cent of the total admission quota in last year's Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). Data extracted from the document show that tertiary institutions only admitted 551,553 candidates out of the 956,809 admission quota available to them from the 2021 UTME. According to the JAMB, two-thirds of about two million applicants who sought access in 2019-2022 were unsuccessful. Public tertiary institutions are finding it increasingly hard to cope with the admission pressure that seems to become more compelling each year. And while there is significant private sector participation in the Nigerian tertiary educational system, private schools are available to only a minority of the population as these private institutions are not quite affordable. Thus, average Nigerians are left to jostle for the limited number of slots available in the public universities. In comparison, the United States has over 3 000 tertiary institutions, France has over 3 500, and India has over 4 000.

Another problem facing the tertiary education system is the lack of proper funding. Statistically, Nigeria ranks amongst the lowest countries in terms of the budget allocated towards tertiary education. the then Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari approved the 2023 financial disbursement to publicly tertiary institutions, Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (CoE), in Nigeria in line with Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund)<sup>16</sup> approved guidelines the sum of N320,345,040, 835. (Three hundred and twenty billion, three hundred & forty-five million. Forty thousand, eight hundred & thirty-five Naira only). Based on this, each university will receive, for the Year 2023 intervention cycle, the total sum of N1,154,732,133.00.

The fund comprises N954,732,123.00 as annual direct disbursement and N200 million as zonal intervention. Similarly, each Polytechnic shall get N699,344,867.00 comprising of N569,344,807.00 as annual direct disbursement and N130million as zonal intervention, while each College of education receives N800,862,602 comprising of N670,862,602.00 as annual direct disbursement and N130million as zonal intervention as the funds represent the highest disbursement to each beneficiary institution, since the inception of the Fund. **Between 2015 to date (8 years), the total sum of N1,702trillion has been disbursed as Education tax collection to public universities, polytechnics and colleges of education compared to a total sum of N1.249trillion disbursed from the inception of the Fund in 1993 up to 2014 (21 years).** This resulted in an increase in education tax from 2.0% to 2.5% in the year 2021. In 2022, the then President approved the sum of 189billion Naira for the public Higher Institutions which represented 80percent<sup>17</sup>.

The struggle between the government and the tertiary institution staff nationwide over funding has become a national reality. The system is built such that the public universities rely majorly on the government to fund the operation of the university and pay staff salaries. However, the poor state of national finances has left the government unable to fulfill its financial obligations towards tertiary institutions appropriately. Strikes and protests are an annual occurrence, and

these mass actions often lead to a disruption in the school calendar. This lack of funding, in turn, leads to a lack of infrastructure. Laboratories in public universities are typically under equipped, lecture theatres in states of despair, hostels are uncondusive and sometimes, a threat to the health of students, libraries are neither updated nor upgraded, there is no proper utilisation of ICT and the internet, etc. Furthermore<sup>18</sup>, there is no concrete framework for the training and retraining of tertiary institution staff. A lack of instructional quality exposure to modern methods of teaching and training will ensure that the tertiary education process remains stuck in antiquity. This is bad for development because globally, countries make sure that their education systems evolve with the times. Such an evolution can only be done by members of staff who recognise the need to develop and appreciate it. In Nigeria, to a great extent, such a mentality is lacking among tertiary institutions staff. It is important to note that anyone who does not evolve via training and re-training to stay relevant in their field stands the risk of becoming obsolete and irrelevant in our fast-paced, ever-changing world.

The Federal Government of Nigeria<sup>19</sup> in its educational policy, among other things, acknowledged the place of instructional quality as a prerequisite for acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences, as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of his society. The Nigerian educational goals are only good on paper and theory but not in practice.

Buttressing the above, Lyons<sup>20</sup> opined that learning is a complex activity that puts learners' motivation and physical condition to the test. It has been a long-held assumption that curriculum and teaching have an impact on learning. However, it is becoming more apparent that the physical condition of our schools can influence learners. Cash<sup>21</sup> stated that facility condition in tertiary institution such as laboratories, accommodations, condition of classroom furniture, had a significant effect on student achievement and their socio-economic status.

Analytically, instructional quality in tertiary institutions seeks to refine learners, teachers, administrators; policy makers by developing in them the potentials to live a meaningful, or productive and responsible life in society and transforming their environment for the benefit of humanity. Instructional quality in tertiary institutions, therefore, is a leading adage for reforming outmoded economic and political institutions. Accordingly, Maduabum<sup>22</sup> maintained that instructional quality in Nigerian tertiary education as it is today in Nigeria, is running short of the meaning, and consequently is a disappointment to social expectations and the esteem in which it is held. Tertiary education is meant to help its recipient develop his abilities, skills, initiatives and other forms of behaviour that are of positive value for the individual and his society. It was at this wake of thought that Maina<sup>23</sup> argued that any nation that seeks relevance in the global economy, cannot afford to neglect instructional quality education. It is human resources not income or material resources that constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production. Human beings are the active agents who

co-ordinate and mobilize capital, exploit natural resources, build social economy and political organizations, to carry forward the national development.

The need for instructional quality in Nigerian tertiary education for national development cannot be overstated. The stage of development attained by a country is analogous to its state of instructional quality in tertiary education. National development is appraised in terms of mental and physical indices. It is the instructional quality that bequeaths the psychological attitudes and physical skills which enable the citizenry to bring about national development. A poorly developed and/or maintained educational system cannot bring about the needed transformation. Oshita<sup>19</sup> added that the development and maintenance of any educational system is a policy issue. It is philosophy of education that provides us with deep and wide-ranged approach to understanding educational issues and problems in relation to instructional quality. The interplay of education and philosophy can, and do, have positive influence on development. While education exposes us to array of information regarding the posture development should take, it is philosophy that teaches us to maintain open and critical mind in the midst of diverse ideas.

In Nigeria, the capacity of the country's educational system through quality instruction to bring about the desired development has been hampered by problems and issues of instructional quality. One of the key issues identified by scholars is quality financing. Quality funding is a critical aspect for educational development to occur. It is quality funds that are used to develop the human and physical infrastructure of the educational system. The criticality of quality financing can be abstracted from the recommendation of UNESCO<sup>24</sup> that 26% of annual budget of developing countries should be devoted to educational development.

It therefore follows that any country which is unable to develop the skills or the creative knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in its national economy like Japan and China may not develop anything else. In other words, the apparent failure of Nigerian education can be traced to lack of instructional quality in tertiary education.

### **Practical Analysis of Teachers' Characteristics and Instructional Quality**

The significance of instructional quality in tertiary education has positive effect on student learning that is similar across same course. However, student learning varies systematically across institutions and this can be seen from teacher's characteristics such as qualification, professionalism, and experience. This is because teachers appear to have an influence on students' learning beyond their impact on the curriculum of the subjects completed in the classrooms. It is well-documented that student learning may vary substantially across classrooms in tertiary institutions depending on the experience of the teachers.

There are diverse opinions from the parents, teachers, employers of labour and the government about the quality of instruction in Nigerian tertiary institutions. This perhaps shares affinity with the increasing rate of tertiary institutions graduates who are unemployable. Clearly, quality instruction in Nigerian tertiary institutions is a crucial tool for national development. For Eric, Rich and Shali<sup>25</sup>, an academic instruction is qualitative if the learners take less time to assimilate, the learners spend a major portion of instructional time actively engaged in learning,

the teacher achieves a high level of success, content coverage is achieved, the teacher proceeds through the curriculum as specified by the regulatory agencies, and individual learners gain mastery of specific skills. Following this trajectory, one can assume that a Nigerian tertiary education is not qualitative enough. For this study, quality instruction is that instruction which is relevant and adapted to the needs of the society (Ndiomu<sup>26</sup>. Majasan<sup>27</sup> maintains that quality instruction is value-loaded with the argument that quality instruction should produce disciplined behaviour, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. Hence Akinpelu<sup>28</sup> argues that education without quality instruction can be even more dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education instruction has no value. In Adebajo<sup>29</sup>, it was remarked that if a teacher is incompetent, a good output cannot be expected. Thus, a competent teacher is regarded as one who has undergone relevant training in a chosen field of study and is certificated. In agreement with this view, the South African Ministry of Education (SAME)<sup>30</sup> posits that the operation of unqualified and under-qualified educators in the school's system impacts negatively on the quality of teaching. The activities of qualified and competent teachers cannot be under-estimated in achieving the stated goals and quality instruction in the school.

In Adeyemi<sup>31</sup> on the influence of teachers' factors on students' academic performance, he content that students taught by experienced teachers outperform those taught by inexperienced ones. Jekayinfa<sup>32</sup>, in another similar study, notes that the quality, relevance, adequacy, and competence of teachers are in doubt and this result in a lack of confidence in the Nigerian educational system. In addition, Obanya<sup>33</sup> affirms that good teachers must be quantitatively adequate, properly educated, professionally prepared and well-motivated. It has thus been established that it is necessary to provide students with an effective instruction at tertiary institutions as a means of providing a solid foundation for national development.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, for effectiveness of instructional quality in tertiary education, the fundamental factor is to be able to deliver quality instructions, which emanates from the teacher's experience and professionalism as over the years, the issue of instructional quality has been a major concern in Nigerian tertiary institutions, which is evident from unemployable graduates. Importantly, this paper maintained that for quality instruction and improved academic performance, it is necessary to rely on the services of qualitative teachers.

## **Recommendations**

Teachers should be encouraged to attend educational conferences, seminars, and in-service programmes where issues relating to quality instruction are discussed as this will expose the teachers to practical capacity programmes on instructional development and can also form part of the promotion requirements for teachers.

Critical stakeholders, through their various supervising ministries and agencies, should advise and ensure that qualified teachers are recruited into the teaching positions in Nigerian tertiary institutions.



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