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Challenges of managing quality assurance activities as panacea for the transformation of practicing facility management during pandemic occurrences

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Abstract

The reawakened demand for more vibrant and quality facilities services is needed to meet the growing needs of stakeholders require transform knowledge in facility management practice. This study examined the challenges of quality assurance and its panacea for transforming the practice of facility management in universities. This study utilized descriptive survey to elicited data from 42 Lecturers of Faculty of Environmental Sciences through questionnaires and interview as the main sources of data collection representing 76.3% response rate. A simple random sampling technique was adopted and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics: percentages and relative importance index (RII). The study revealed that 79% of the respondents agrees quality assurance have the principles of controlling, accountability and improvement serving as panacea of transforming facility management. The study establishes that the strategies and benefits of quality assurance could undoubtedly play critical role in the transformation of university facilities management by ensuring professionalism to enhance academic performance with highly maintained facilities able to sustain the standard in institutional infrastructures. Furthermore, the findings indicated that RII >0.60 rank inadequate funding, inadequate provided facilities management, shortage of facility managers, increase demand for facilities and technological knowhow as the factors militating against managing of quality assurance in facility management of Universities. Therefore, management should institutionalize the procedures and policies of quality assurance among stakeholders for effective monitoring, evaluation, sustenance and improvement of institution's facilities. To enhance conducive teaching/learning environment, management should optimize the quality of output with increased funding to provide adequate infrastructures in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Facility Management, Transformation, Panacea, Managing Challenges

1. Introductions

The ultimate goal of every tertiary institution is to render quality educational services to the public for continuous confidence in facility management. Nkpote and Woekororo (2018) ^[14]; Ajayi and Adegbesan (2007) ^[2] observed that quality is the total make-up of a facility process or service on its performance, from customer's or client's perception of that performance. It indicates that make-up of a complete facility or service incorporates an emphasis on the internal procedures and outputs with a decline in waste and the improvement of productivity. In this regard, quality is said to be achieved when the expectations of stakeholders are met by the institutions as facilities are meant to support the core objectives of universities.

Quality facilities can be characterized by three interconnected parts (Okoro and Agugum, 2017) ^[15];

- Efficiency in the facilities meeting of its goals,
- Facilities are significant to human and environmental settings and needs,
- Search for new ideas, the quest for excellence and encouragement of creativity in facilities management.

Quality facilities in Universities therefore, should reflect the needs of stakeholders at large. Quality of facilities in tertiary institutions is important in the life of a nation's economy (Nkpote and Frank, 2019a) ^[11]. This is why government is the major provider of educational facilities because it is capital intensive and can only be funded by government since it is so essential for the manpower requirement of a nation for the development of it economy (Giami and Nwokamma, 2019) ^[6]. The possibility of achieving this is dependent on the quality facilities provided in the university. There is no doubt that the quality of facilities provided in

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the educational system at all levels has not impact much to the well-being of the individual, society and government and so, its importance cannot be over-emphasized (Giami and Nwokamma, 2019) ^[6].

According to Mosha (1986), quality assurance in universities can be measured by the extent to which the facilities received attention from the management to enables the end-users think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant facility management problems in any given environment. In the same vein, Olaleye and Oyewole (2016) ^[16] noted that the quality assurance in universities is often a reflection of the facilities performance that guarantee the attraction and retention of facilities end-users which is also dependent on the quality assurance activities conducted by the various universities. In affirmation therefore, quality assurance activities can be described in terms of the quality of facilities input, process and output. The facilities represent the input, the evaluation, monitoring and supervision of facilities (process). All these put together determine the quality standards in their contribution to facilities management growth and development (output) in tertiary institutions.

Recent development in the Nigerian university system seems to indicate that all is not well as was expected with the quality assurance in the facilities management of Nigerian universities system. The scenario appears worrisome when viewed against the background that Nigeria once served as the hub of university education in the West-African sub-region. This development revolves round a lot of factors ranging from the collapse of essential infrastructure to explosion in student enrolment without a corresponding increase in funding.

Therefore, this study focuses on the challenges with quality assurance as a panacea for the transformation of facility management in Nigerian Universities using Rivers State University, Port Harcourt as a Case Study. This is with a view to reawakened the demand for a more vibrant and quality assurance fulfilling lack of quality and management's inability to strictly implement quality assurance policies in the facility management of the institutions to the letters. Specifically, this study pursues three (3) objectives which include: examining principles of QA in FM; ascertaining QA as a panacea in transforming FM: and the challenges of QA activities is not transforming FM practices in Nigerian Universities.

2. Literature review

2.1 Quality Assurance Activities.

In this present knowledge-driven economy, monitoring and supervision of quality assurance policies and procedures is critical in facility management to the actualization of the objectives of university education (Giami and Nwokamma, 2019) ^[6]. Stander (2016) ^[17] defined activities of quality assurance in facilities management as the various management approaches in which quality assurance is conducted to ensure quality standards in facilities by means of accounting, control, compliance and improvement (or enhancement). In this context therefore, activities of quality assurance can be seen as a strategic measure employed to enforce the internal and external quality assurance policies and procedures of a tertiary institution for effective accountability towards the actualization of institution's set goals and objectives.

According to Luckett (2006) quality assurance is defined as; "A systematic internal and external management procedures and mechanisms by which institution of higher education assures its stakeholders of the quality of its systems, processes, products and outcomes and of its ability to manage the maintenance and enhancement of quality. This term usually subsumes the meanings of quality assessment, quality management and quality enhancement".

Luckett (2006), however, there are internal and external quality assurance that are important aspects to facility management. Safeguarding and building capacity to ensure quality mechanism is put in place to achieve institution's objectives, this is done with internal quality assurance, while regulating and monitoring governance and management issues through policies and regulation document by the National University Commission (NUC) to be external quality assurance. Quality Assurance is the means by which tertiary institutions can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its facilities provision are being maintained and enhanced, while Quality control refers to the verification procedures (both formal and informal) used by tertiary institutions in order to monitor quality and standards to a satisfactory standard and as intended to offer.

2.2 Quality Assurance as a Panacea for the Transformation of Facility Management

Quality assurance is a proactive measure used in ensuring quality facilities in any organization or institution. The standard of university education cannot be guaranteed without strict implementation of quality assurance policies and procedures for the institution is not being carried out effectively (Giami and Nwokamma, 2019) ^[6]. The essence of linking quality assurance to University education is to facilitate facility management transformation to enhance stakeholder's productivity (Okoro and Agugum, 2017) ^[15]. No wonder, Garba (2014) ^[5] observed that quality assurance in tertiary institutions is aimed at preventing quality problems and assures that provided facilities of the educational system conform to standard. quality assurance based on three main principles: control, accountability and improvement (Harvey as cited in Adu-Oppong, 2014) ^[11]. Quality assurance involves a host of activities designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the university education system. It ensures accountability in respect of the investment of public funds on education (Okoro and Agugum, 2017) ^[15].

2.3 Challenges of Managing Quality Assurance Activities in Facility Management

The challenges militating against management of quality assurance activities with facility management in university system is multi—dimensional in nature (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2004). Babalola (2001) ^[3] stressed that Nigerian universities are currently in crisis with less money to spend on teaching, research and community services. Libraries are ill equipped, laboratories lack essential apparatus, classrooms are dilapidated and office accommodations are a mirage. Many Nigerian universities even lacks the right quantity and of proper quality of facility managers in their institution (Giami and Nwokamma, 2019) ^[6]. The experience of Nigerian universities not meeting their expectations especially in terms of quality facility management is attributed to lack of adequate funding that

has clearly impaired the functioning of facilities that had resulted to helplessness, frustration and recriminations among stakeholders in their attempt to change the status quo (Nkpite and Frank, 2019b; Kayode, 2002) ^[12, 7]. The challenges are seen as factors hindering effective implementation of quality assurance for transforming facility management in Nigerian university education. Significant financial investment is needed in providing and maintaining infrastructure; such as facilities, staff salaries, residential housing and overhead (Giami and Nwokamma, 2019) ^[6].

The demand for admission into Nigerian universities has reached an unprecedented high level so much that twice the current number of universities in the country, will be required to fill this need. Unfortunately, facilities on ground are grossly inadequate to accommodate the number of students seeking to be admitted (Fabiya and Oladipo, 2008) ^[4]. This development contributed negatively the quality and standard of university facilities in Nigeria. Many universities lack adequate standard facilities (Nkpite and Wokekoro, 2017) ^[13]. The inadequacy of these facilities demonstrates stakeholders in their quest for excellence. In affirmation, the NUC (2006) report that the state of physical facilities in many of the Nigerian universities are in poor shape, the available physical facilities are severely overstretched and ill maintained and worse still, the lack of maintenance culture is worrisome and pathetic. The quality and quantity of facility managers available in the institution determined the internal effectiveness of its quality assurance policies and procedures in terms of proper monitoring, evaluation and supervision facilities (Nkpite and Frank, 2019a) ^[11]. The need to employ more quality facility/property managers to change the narrative is very necessary to remedy the situation for optimal result: that's necessitate this study.

3. Research Methodology

This study utilized a cross-sectional descriptive survey approach. The study area is Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Rivers State University, and Port Harcourt. The choice of Faculty of Environmental Sciences with six (6) Departments: Architecture, Estate Management, Surveying and Geometrics, Urban and Regional Planning, Quantity Surveying and Environmental Management were based on the fact that the Lecturers are experts in the built environment, knowledgeable of quality assurance and facility management in Rivers State University. Data were collected through the application of questionnaire designed, interview and observation to extract information of the Lecturers about the various aspects of managing quality assurance activities as panaceas for transforming facilities management practice on campus. Hence, the study population consisted of 55 Lecturers Faculty of Environmental Sciences within the Rivers State University Campus forty two (42) questionnaires were retrieved from the Lecturers representing 76.3% response rate, with necessary questions raised relating to the indicators of quality assurance and facilities management to respondents. The study utilizes a 5-point Likert scale in presenting questions to the respondents to identify challenges of quality assurance activities performed to transform facility management practiced, that ranges from 1 (Strongly agreed) to 5 (Strongly disagreed). A sample of 42 respondents using Yaro Yamane formula drawn out of a population of 55

lecturers in six (6) Departments with 7 respondents from each department in the Faculty. Therefore a simple random sampling of 42 lecturers was selected across each Departmental Lecturers for this study. In order to avoid bias, the distributions of questionnaires were done accordingly to each Department. Descriptive statistical tool of frequency tables and percentage chart and relative importance index (RII) distributions were used in analyzing data.

4. Results and Discussion.

Data collected for the study are presented and analyzed in this section.

4.1 Principles of Quality Assurance.

Table 1 shows the quality assurance principles which would transform facility management. The study revealed that 79% of respondents accepted quality assurance as having the principles of controlling, accountability and improvement which serves as a panacea of transforming facility management. Its implication deduced that quality assurance in tertiary education is aimed at preventing quality problems and assures that facilities services of the quality assurance system conform to standard.

Table 1: Principles of Quality Assurance in Facility Management (N = 42)

| Principles | Agree | | Disagree | | Total | |
|----------------|-------|------|----------|------|-------|-------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Accountability | 30 | 71.4 | 12 | 28.6 | 42 | 100.0 |
| Control | 31 | 73.8 | 11 | 26.2 | 42 | 100.0 |
| Improvement | 33 | 78.5 | 9 | 21.5 | 42 | 100.0 |
| Average | 31 | 73.2 | 11 | 26.8 | 42 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2020

Major findings from an in-depth interview with the respondents on the principles by their explanations include:

- **Accountability** which is usually requires meeting the preferences of stakeholders.
- **Control** means that the institution does not merely control the financial expenditure, but also shows how high quality is achievable with the existing funding.
- **Improvement** enables the institution to get necessary input, refine the process and raise the standards of output in order to meet the goals set on their facility management.

Quality assurance involves a lot of activities designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the tertiary educational system. It ensures accountability in respect of the investment of public funds on educational facilities. The input segment includes stakeholders and facilities services. While, the process emphasized on interactions with facilities, internal efficiency, evaluation procedure of facility management practices. The output itself is the quality of facilities performance giving satisfaction to the stakeholders as well as the system of maintaining external efficiency.

4.2 Panaceas of Quality Assurance Activities Transforming Facility Management

This section deals with the strategies and benefits of quality assurance activities as panacea for transforming facility management. Key information's derived from the

respondents through interview were presented in this section.

4.2.1 Strategies of Quality Assurance Activities Transforming Facility Management.

Some strategies or solutions whereby quality assurance activities can transform facility management are listed here as responses. They are:

- Helps to determine the quality of facilities services input.
- Assist in the monitoring and supervision of facility management activities especially for conducive teaching and learning environment.
- Helps to determine the financial resources requirement, likewise the facilities needed for smooth operations be maintained from time to time.
- Assist in determining the adequacy of the facilities for environmental comfort of the stakeholders.
- Ensure that available financial resources could be wisely and carefully used to maintain facilities.

4.2.2 Benefits of Quality Assurance Activities Transforming Facility Management

The benefits of quality assurance to the transformation of university’s facility management are unimaginable as they also include among other things;

- a) The upholding of the reliability of FM programmes and the worthiness of the certification issued on the facilities quality standards.
- b) Providing confidence to facility managers themselves.
- c) Quality assurance makes universities to be competitive with the standards of provided facilities both nationally and internationally.
- d) Every university is mandated to provide facilities required for teaching, learning and research; mainly, the providing high-level manpower that is well organized, rational and intellectually developed to change the world.
- e) Quality assurance measures and strategies determine the proper aligning of a given university facility on a right path and their availability to drive the development on output and finally become better if not best for the stakeholders.
- f) Quality assurance keeps stakeholders away from substandard quality facilities to the delivery of friendly academic environments.

The above benefits of quality assurance could undoubtedly play critical role in the transformation of university facilities in this contemporary age. Also it ensures professionalism

among facility managers to improve quality of teaching/learning, as to enhance academic performance as a result of highly maintained facilities and being able to sustain the standard in institutional infrastructures.

4.3 Challenges of Managing Quality Assurance Activities

Table 2 shows the challenges of managing quality assurance activities in facility management in Nigerian Universities; using relative importance index (RII) to rank militating factors against quality assurance in the facility management of Nigerian Universities. Table revealed that the average relative importance index (RII) rank inadequate funding, inadequate provided facilities management, shortage of facility managers, increase demand for facilities and technological knowhow with RII of 0.633 as the factors militating against quality assurance in the facility management.

Significant investment in providing and maintaining a basic level of infrastructure such as facilities requires funding which have been supported largely by government. But with the economic down-turn, these universities have been grossly under-funded and this has invariably led to the quality of its facilities being adversely affected in some of these institutions which are characterized by poor infrastructures and overcrowded facilities usage. Many of the facilities on the ground are being overstretched due to excess of students’ enrolment. This development will surely affect the quality of facilities provided and maintained in the university. The states of available physical facilities are severely in poor shape, overstretched and ill maintained. Hence, with this development quality facility management services seems not to be guaranteed in such universities. The consequential effect of quality assurance on the facility management of universities by the university administrators is caused by poor management; the vital function has been largely reduced to the maintenance of the status quo. Unfortunately, this development significantly negates the concept of a university, particularly when it seems certain that as long as management continues to play this non-challant role, the quality assurance activities in facility management will continue to be jeopardized in the universities. The low level of quality assurance activities in the facility management of Nigerian universities is a severe shortage of facility managers. Many universities in Nigerian are bottom heavy in terms of facility manager’s mix with others professionals having no ideas about quality assurance.

Table 2: Challenges of Managing Quality Assurance Activities in Facility Management

| Challenges | Weight (N = 42) | | | | | Sum | Mean | RII | Rank |
|---|-----------------|----|----|---|---|-----|------|-------|-----------------|
| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | | | |
| Inadequate funding | 12 | 10 | 9 | 7 | 3 | 144 | 3.42 | 0.686 | 1 st |
| Inadequate provided facilities management | 11 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 142 | 3.38 | 0.676 | 2 nd |
| Shortage of Facility Managers | 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 4 | 136 | 3.24 | 0.648 | 3 rd |
| Increase demand for facilities | 10 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 133 | 3.16 | 0.633 | 4 th |
| Technological know how | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 6 | 132 | 3.14 | 0.628 | 5 th |
| Average Ranking | 10 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 133 | 3.16 | 0.633 | Agree |

Legend: RII= Relative Importance Index

Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2020.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The management of quality assurance activities serves as a panacea for the transformation of facility management practice in the University education in contemporary Nigeria. The transformation facility management practice is tied to the effective implementation of institution's internal and external quality assurance policies and procedures. Only this, can guarantee the rising standard and quality facilities in Nigeria universities that would be acknowledged internationally. Recent development in the Nigerian university system seems to indicate that all is not well with its facility management as was expected with the quality assurance activities in Nigerian universities system. The scenario appears worrisome when viewed against the background that Nigeria once served as the hub of university education in the West-African sub-region. This development revolves round a lot of factors ranging from the collapse of essential infrastructure to explosion in student enrolment without a corresponding increase in funding. Therefore, universities management, must at all times be involved in managing quality assurance programs in the daily decisions and administrative aspects of facility management in the institution. The quality assurance principles, approaches and benefits would help promote and sustain continuous monitoring, supervision, assessment, evaluation, and accountability in facility management with the system of quality standards ensured. Therefore, management should institutionalize the policies of quality assurance among stakeholders for effective monitoring, evaluation, sustenance and improvement of institution's facilities for quality or optimal output with increased funding and provision of adequate infrastructure and facilities to enhance conducive teaching/learning environment, effective teaching of Nigerian universities.

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