

## QUALITY ASSURANCE CHALLENGES TO TECHNICAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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### Abstract

*The study assesses challenges to quality assurance in the assessment of technical and vocational education run by polytechnics and mono-technics in Nigeria, with focus on entry assessment, institutional examination draft, project writing, supervision and assessment, examination scoring and practical facilities. Educational training and skills required in the learning process are found to have been much compromised of vested interests and politics from various stakeholders in the educational system. Obtaining five credit passes in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) has been much business oriented than allowing merit to count. Admissions into ND and HND programmes have also been much of revenue generation than true human capital development. Internal examination questions being administered are less concerned of technical and logical designs. Project writing is much of recycling and plagiarizing with lots of grammatical inadequacies. Correcting the research and project writing in the system is being resisted and discouraged. Scoring and grading true achievement of students in tests and examinations have been a subject of low commitment to thorough marking and financial inducement. Practical appreciation of various techniques of handling issues in various specialties is limited due to shortage of functional machines and equipment. The major recommendations intensify merit rating in the student intakes and academic staff employed in managing teaching and learning in technical and vocational education.*

**Keywords:** *Entry Assessment, Examination Question Draft, Project Writing and Assessment, Scoring, Practical Facilities.*

### Introduction

Polytechnic and mono-technic education is a sub-degree education run in National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) Programmes. It is administratively called Technical Education, being regulated by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). The ND entry requirements have from inception been four credits passes obtainable from Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE), marking completion of secondary education in Nigeria, plus Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB)'s scores. The bodies with statutory mandate to manage the SSCE have been the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Examinations Council (NECO),

National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) and recently, National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS). The entry requirements for HND have been ND plus one year or two year post ND industrial experience, as the case may be. The provisions for quality assurance in technical education have been recognized to include curriculum design and redesign, instructional supervision and inspection, accreditation and reaccreditation of programmes, physical facilities, continuous professional development, industry partnerships with polytechnics, students-lecturer assessment and valid evaluation of students' learning outcomes (Korter, 2023; Emuhowho & Joseph, 2023; Mensah, 2016).

With the prevalence and pervasiveness of examination malpractice at the SSCE level, obtaining better grades becomes easy for many candidates seeking admission into tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria and abroad (Jerome, 2023; Munkaila, 2017). The many candidates seeking admission into polytechnic education are teenagers much below the age of 18 years. In further attempt to ascertain quality content in such candidates, the JAMB strategizes to move away from Pen-Paper Test (PPT) to Computer-Based Test (CBT). Still, cases of impersonation, deliberate system failure of accredited CBT centres and parents colluding with unaccredited CBT centres, to write the objective test, are contemporary issues which the JAMB has been relentlessly fighting and safeguarding against, in its Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) electronically attempted by candidates seeking admission into universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria (JAMB Bulletin, 2021). This paper thus attempts to have focus on five areas of the challenges: entrance assessment challenges; institutional examination draft challenges; project supervision and assessment challenges; scoring challenges; practical facilities challenges.

### **Entrance Assessment Challenges**

These series of challenges to quality assessment of true performance in candidates at SSCE and JAMB levels, have one time informed the policy makers in the Nigerian government to recommend admitting institutions to re-assess the successful candidates. This reassessment is called post UTME test (Munkaila, 2017). Subsequently, it got to the public knowledge that the many admitting institutions are much interested in income generation from the post UTME than the post UTME itself (Ikoghode, 2015). So, candidates with the requirements from the SSCE and the UTME are eventually being admitted after the payment without post UMTE test. So, policy makers at the centre arguably called for the

scrap of the post UTME test (Munkaila & Adeyinka, 2017; Abdulraheem, 2013).

Again, in the recent years, the JAMB has been lowering UTME scores to 120 out 400 marks, as a benchmark for universities to admit candidates into their proposed programmes of study while candidates with 100 out of 400 marks are to be admitted to programmes of study in polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria (Eketu, 2017). The quality of learning content in many new intakes for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma has continued to raise a lot of questions on their prior knowledge and reading culture which in most cases do not align with revised topics in various courses, expected to have been taught and appreciated at their respective previous levels. Thus, low content and learning inefficiency are carried forward to HND by ND holders who manage their ways to graduate with pass classification or lower credit. These challenges have been underscored by political factors, ethnicity, nepotism and corruption (Stephen, 2016)

### **Institutional Examination Draft Challenges**

Administrative functions of various departments running these ND and HND programmes include vetting and moderation of examination questions set with model marking guides. These set questions with the marking guides are expected to satisfy certain functions which include course comprehensiveness, objectivity, item differentiation, item difficulty, item discrimination, item analysis, validity and reliability of learning outcomes, etcetera (Hussien & Al-Hussein, 2022; Azzopardi & Azzopardi, 2019; Sylvanus, 2015; Talebi et al., 2013). External assessors are less engaged in vetting these questions while many examination question drafts are submitted late and close to the examination dates. Instances of discovering low standard questions and marking schemes thus scale through likely assessor's comments and recommendations for adjustments. Such set

questions without moderation are eventually administered while the students write the examinations.

Coming to examination rooms for corrections of typing errors and omissions to students has been a common practice since the questions are not vetted and corrected before being administered. Ohiri and Oscar (2023) presented these constraints as low professional competence of teachers and lecturers when investigative skills of such examiners and those of assessors are slim-focused of quality and quantity of instructional objectives. Cases of cheating and dishonesty during and after examinations are underreported and shrouded in secrecy while greedy and unreliable staff among lecturers do not refrain from giving examination questions to students as pre-seen (Jerome, 2023).

### **Project Writing, Supervision and Assessment Challenges**

Project writing is a tool for research skills aimed at communicating findings and recommendations to problems being investigated in practical skills and innovations which are expected to reflect polytechnic education. The technical education and skills that will propel identification of practical problem with a view to findings solutions are not much prevalent in the Nigerian polytechnic system (Innocent, 2019). Research and project writing have been taken as daunting task for graduating students of ND and HND programmes to undertake. When they are assigned for project supervision, they take away several weeks and months without reporting to the supervisors. The common practice with them has been going to business centre operators where a number of projects of earlier researchers are obtained and presented at their respective departments for one to be approved. After approval, the whole work of the earlier researcher is then being copied by business centre operator for supervisees to present to their supervisors. Samuel and Kisugu (2019) find low level of

awareness of these students/supervisees in plagiarism and copyright infringement. Thus, the practice to them is not considered criminal.

These students then attach less interest and importance to research as supervisor tries to interact in understanding the statement of problem that makes the research to develop objectives and hypotheses. The academic system of the sector also does not help to improve the situation of project writing as plagiarism level is high among lecturers' writings and the attitude to encourage students in their communication and intellectual skills through project writing (by themselves) is not much supported by the many academic staff who are supervisors (Olayinka & Femi, 2022; Ude-Akpeh & Ezequile, 2022). Factors which promote students to go into plagiarism in project writing include similarity of research topic approved, much lump of information on the research topic available on the internet and lack of adequate skills of citing and referencing authors (Esieve et al., 2024). Consequences of plagiarizing research project, according to Osumah (2020), include: robbing of originality and research value by recycling stolen findings with no new findings added; preventing advancement in existing body of knowledge; bringing morale of researchers down in critical analysis of research procedure and contributing to underperformance of undergraduate students in their entire programmes of study.

### **Scoring Challenges**

Scoring the achievement of students in tests, assignments and examinations forms the basis of assessment of each course in programmes of study. Arts, social and management sciences and humanities are known with developing students to internalize and externalize elucidation of concepts and theories in their respective disciplines. Some course lecturers choose to ease themselves from strain of marking by setting multiple choice questions and 'fill in the blank' in their Continuous Assessment (CA) tests. This

CA test, as is popularly called, is expected to spread across the weeks and the topics which are delivered. But in most cases the CA is carried out one-off (Okoye, 2023). Okoloeze et al. (2015) identified one of the factors responsible for this summative assessment as large class size. They are of the opinion that the lecturer is much concerned of the results to be produced and submitted than the quality content internalized in the learners.

Low level of technical competence among lecturers being recruited promotes less concern for consequences of arbitrary award of CA scores (Aliberi, 2017) while they save their energy of marking and shield students who might score so low from the tests (Ohiri & Oscar, 2023; Stephen, 2016; Okoloeze, et al., 2015). Examination scripts are being marked with lump marks to points and explanations being assessed. At times, the internal examiner who is mostly the course lecturer does not critically read the scripts before the marks are dropped. External examiners in most cases are not engaged to sample and audit a number of scripts marked per course. Nansak (2019) in his empirical findings raises administrative recklessness (3.98 out of 5-point Likert scale) in the call for examination question drafts, moderation and vetting of the marked scripts and academic staff recruited not on merit (4.18) contribute to more teaching and assessment challenges.

The politics of academic staff recruitment and appointments then goes a long way in making a common place for lobbying to pass students who by content in their scripts deserve to fail (Dangara & Chinyere, 2021). Empirical findings by Oluwaleye (2017) revealed that undergraduates in Nigerian tertiary institutions go extra mile to buy examination scores by rewriting and replacing the original scripts submitted in the examination rooms, through paying money to some lecturers while some female students avail themselves sex-for-marks deal with corrupt male lecturers.

## **Practical Facilities Challenges**

Laboratories, studios and workshops particularly for practical in science, mass communication, office management practice and engineering have been much identified to be inadequately provided while the few infrastructures available are poorly maintained (Philomena, 2021). Ngalburgi (2024) noted practical skills acquisition among polytechnic students to be challenged by inadequacy of certain instructional tools and methods of instructional delivery. Ile and Okafor (2021) and Ukala (2019) raised concern for challenge in ICT resources, material resources and human resources for Office Technology Management in polytechnics. The ICT challenges are expressed in terms of poor e-learning utilization, computer systems availability and functionality, periodic allocation for computer instructions and costs of maintenance. The material challenges include poor power and alternative energy supply and non-availability of office equipment for practice in the studio. The human resource challenges are perceived from poor staff recruitment system, shortage of computer technologists and poor supervision (Jacob et al., 2020) of practical instructions.

Okoye and Arimonu (2016) posited that workshop assessment of vocational and technical education faces challenges such as facilities inadequacy, brain-drain to other professions and overseas while many Nigerian academic staff on foreign scholarship refuse to return at the completion of study. Hence, practical assessment merely end up to favour Nigeria certificate value system without commensurate content to justify qualifications being held. The practical which in turn is required to make polytechnic graduates job producers makes them to end up job seekers, due to its inadequacy in curriculum delivery (David & Gabriel, 2020).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined quality assurance challenges in the management of polytechnic education in Nigeria with focus on five areas of assessment – students’ entry procedure, internal test/examination question drafts, physical facilities for practical, project writing and supervision, scoring and grading students’ academic achievement. These areas are substantially identified to be inadequately functional in the Nigerian polytechnic sector. Thus, the sector apolitically needs policy review with independent implementation of reforms and suggestions for sustainable quality assurance in the technical and vocational education system in Nigeria.

From the literature findings and conclusion reached, it is pertinent to recommend the following suggestions for policy makers and collegiate managers in the technical educational system:

i. *Test-Retest System:* The admitting polytechnics and mono-technics should be sustaining test-retest system in order to ascertain candidates with real prior content of the SSCE and UTME, with a view to assuring total quality processing of ND programmes for HND programmes. This becomes necessary because SSCE results are cheaply and easily obtainable through miracle centres run in both private and government schools purposely for economic benefits and maintenance of SSCE enrolment patronage. The JAMB continues to battle impersonation and collusion for system failure of its accredited centres during UTME test. In Uzbekistani and Vietnamese higher education systems, high school graduation examinations have been recorded with unethical practices and negative wash-back effect. So, the colleges and institutions admitting have been

recommended to be conducting entrance examinations to the incoming students in their respective specialties, for quality control in student learning process and graduate skilful output at completion (Bao & Cho, 2022; Hotamova, 2023). In Portugal, Ferrao and Almeida (2018) established that entrance score of students by admitting institutions of higher learning strongly determine academic performance of students in their year one learning progression.

ii. *Remedial and Pre-ND Programmes:* Remedial and pre-ND programmes of one year duration should be reintroduced in correcting and reworking quality inadequacy in the candidates with lower achievements in the UTME and post UTME tests than mere admitting them for sole priority of institutional revenue increase. The SSCE has been much compromised that almost every candidate possess the five credit passes required for a programme of study. There are candidates with good grades in the SSCE but they may not meet 40% of the UTME scores which is naturally required as minimum level of performance. Instead of waiting for the year to turn round, such candidates can be availed with pre-ND and pre-degree programmes, for reworking, equipping and updating the SSCE content contemporarily missing in most candidates seeking admission into tertiary institutions of learning.

In a comparative study empirically conducted by Eke et al. (2023), pre-degree students were found to have better Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) among UTME and direct entry students. Pegram (2023) also found that pre-college factors such as high school grades and standardized tests (like Scholastic

- Assessment Test – SAT) have strong relationship with students’ academic performance in their year one of undergraduate studies. Conversely, Bakawu et al. (2018) earlier established empirical findings that no significant difference exists in the academic performance of students who are admitted into ND programmes by Pre-ND and those who are admitted into ND programmes through UTME. This scenario may be better understandable that prior knowledge gap between the two groups has been bridged and as such, their respective understanding and learning appreciation are at par in the year one.
- iii. *Examination Question Draft Moderation Effectiveness:* The examination officers along with their heads of departments should step up their efforts and strategies in ensuring examination question drafts are submitted earlier before the examination dates. They should also ensure that internal moderation and external moderation, as the case may be, are conducted on the question drafts while corrections noted are effected before printing and administering to students. The moderation thus assures level of validity and various items of question quality. This goes a long way in discouraging repetition of examination questions in similar word and figure structures. It also sends messages to serious students to read hard and smartly prepare for decoding logical understanding and requirements of qualitative questions. Students with quantitative questions will also be pushed to practice more questions beyond examples and illustrations given in the lecture notes.
- iv. *Post Script Marking Review:* The college system should ascertain sustainable vetting of marked scripts by engaging external reviewers and establishing item analysis on students’ academic performance and quality of their learning outcomes. This sustainable effort of sampling and auditing appropriateness and distribution of marks on student achievement steps up meticulousness and professionalism in the course lecturers as they mark the scripts and return them to examination office. The active practice of this post marking assessment of scripts reveals dedication and technical competence of the internal examiners who are the course lecturers. The lecturers inadequately found could be paired with senior colleagues who will update them from such technical competence required. Departmental seminars could be from time to time held in order to equip such academic staff identified with marking skills deficiency.
- v. *Merit Rating and Appointment in Academic Staff Recruitment:* Recruitment of academic staff should be much less of politics while merit is allowed to discover lecturer competence and passion for the job, on the bases of qualifications, prior teaching experience, industrial work experience, professional affiliations and publications of research findings. Vested interests of top level management in recruitment decision making have been settling for their candidates who usually perform low in both written test and oral interview. Many of these candidates of interest who graduate with third class degree and pass in HND easily get employed as lecturers and instructors while their counterparts with second class degree and upper credit and above hardly get appointed without god-fathers. Due

process and transparency should be intensified to recognize and appreciate candidates with better classes of degree, advanced degree, prior teaching experience and industrial experience in selection process to lecturing appointments.

- vi. *Adequate Funding of Infrastructural Items:* More funding should be directed to infrastructural adequacy and maintenance with equipment for practical in the workshops and laboratories, to meet surge of admission and enrolment in technical and vocational education. TETFUND intervention should be adequately accessed for procurement of workshop and laboratory equipment in public polytechnics and mono-technics. The infrastructural items could be received from alumni of the institutions through donations they make from time to time, as their alma maters are being assessed of material and infrastructural needs. The institutions through their various departments should imbibe culture of maintenance at utilization. Those items should be better monitored when in use and also be kept under locks and keys after use, for security and durability.

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