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Abstract: *In the market space, quality (Q) is a characteristic of excellence for mass expansion of goods and services. It connotes the normative status of products and services in terms of valuable standard. This is marked by outstanding degree of commitment in the production process. Thus, products and services are branded with assurance of quality to end users. Correlatively, questions of what the 'Q' word means and how Quality Assurance (QA) makes a difference in the business of intellectual production has implication for the attendant expansion in theatre arts education. Therefore, an assessment of the expanding status of theatre arts education is imperative toward determining standard of input and output in teaching. The paper used survey method to assess the impact of increasing student enrollment vis-a-vis quality assurance among tertiary institutions in the Benue Valley area. After a generic analysis of quality trends in higher education system, the paper keyed into issues concerning the ratio of student enrollment to teaching staff; assessment of teaching staff workload; and assessment of the relativity between available teaching resources and teaching quality. Inferring from the survey findings, the paper conclusively suggests a QA framework for theatre arts education enhancement.*

Keywords: Assurance, massification, quality assurance, theatre arts

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1. Introduction

Increasing access to basic education has brought about the era of expansion in tertiary education with its attendant culture of mass student enrolment in the twenty-first century Nigeria. The mounting challenge of expansion in higher education system calls for concern among scholars and educational agencies to address the problems of declining quality of teaching, inadequate human resources, library decadence, eroding standard in research, dilapidated infrastructures, and lack of up dated technological facilities. Above all, there are problems of mass increase in student enrollment and the capital intensive process of education in tertiary institutions. The expansionist tendency of student enrollment into tertiary institutions has depressing effect on lecture space, studio space as well as the quality of teaching and learning. This has arduous consequence on facilities which are bound for a speedy collapse under strained maintenance

culture. Baseline survey of theatre arts departments in tertiary institutions within the Benue Valley area indicates challenges in view of scarce infrastructural facilities. The baseline showed that the method of teaching and the assumptions underpinning the method is yet to be upgraded in line with current standards in tertiary arts education. Thus, the problem of inferior quality of graduates will continue to be a hydra headed virus in the university system. Perhaps, this is why Iyeh laments in view of Theatre Arts graduates that:

Think back, how many of our graduates continue in theatre practice? How many theatre arts graduates are in the mainstream entertainment industry? How many do we have as actors and actresses in Nollywood and other emergent entertainment platforms? How many are producers? The percentage is very small. When you see them or hear about them, they have gone back to read law or are into politics or business. Is it because they no longer love theatre? No! It is because there is a fundamental problem of inadequacy in the training process that rendered them inadequate to cope with the demands and sophistication of the emergent platform. (172)

Supporting this position in terms of the social and economic implication of life after school for graduates of theatre arts, Rantimi argues that:

The theatre curriculum must be designed to incorporate elements of dynamism as...dealing with social and economic realities as evident on society. The curriculum must be tailored towards empowering the graduates of the discipline to achieve economic independence . (131)

Envisaging imminent fall in standard, a poll of baseline opinions perceived a decline in quality education if the expanding number of student enrollment does not equate a relative increase in fund and teaching facilities. It is also observed that cost of education is on the increase and lecture spaces are becoming enlarged with increasing population of students. This is common with departments of theatre arts in tertiary institutions. They are continually faced with the difficulty of accommodating large student population while striving toward quality teaching and research in theatre arts studies. Thus, the challenge at present is how to establish a curriculum of theatre arts education that strikes equilibrium between the dual necessity for assuring quality and mass accessibility to knowledge in theatre arts discipline. This background informs the need to explore massification and quality assurance in theatre arts education among tertiary institutions in the Benue Valley area. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relative factors that determine expansion and quality assurance in theatre arts education. The following research questions are hypothetical formulations for guiding the investigation:

- (i) What is the ratio of theatre arts teaching staff to students?
- (ii) How do theatre arts teaching staff assess their workload?
- (iii) What is the level of relative significance between available facilities for teaching and assuring quality in theatre arts education?

In view of the aforementioned research questions, the study has its focus on two tertiary institutions in the Benue Valley area. These include Kogi State University and Benue State University respectively. The descriptive survey design is adopted in the study. The population size for the study includes the two departments of theatre arts in the selected state owned universities in Kogi and Benue states. The stratified sampling technique was used to select the two universities. The selection was on the basis of geographical locations and type of tertiary

institution. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to select twenty - five (25) students and five (5) teaching staff members from each of the state universities sampled for the study. Also two (2) instructors from each of the tertiary institutions were sampled. On the whole, a population size of 64 respondents participated in the research. The information gathering for the study involved the use of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Semi-Structured Interview (SSI). The use of the instrument reflected the hypothetical questions of the research. To ensure authenticity and validity of the instrument, teaching staff members in the selected tertiary institutions were consulted for suggestions on the survey.

2. Quality, Quality Assurance and Massification: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Quality or the (Q) word is defined as “degree or standard of excellence, especially a high standard (*TheFreeDictionary.com*). In the market space, quality is a common characteristic that determines efficiency and standard in input and output of products and services. In this compartment, products and services are branded to assure end users or consumers of quality in output. Generally, quality assurance (QA) in its normative designation is the process of sustaining standard for products and services. Particularly, quality assurance in the business of intellectual production, especially as it relates to higher education has been defined by United Nation Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) as “the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained” (www.unesco.org). In programming response to its Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC), UNESCO is in partnership with regulatory bodies of tertiary institutions in promoting capacity building “at the regional and national level for quality assurance and accreditation mechanism” (www.unesco.org). This global QA capacity building initiative by UNESCO is informed by emerging trends in higher education at the dawn of 21st Century. In his document titled, *Higher Education relevance in the 21st Century*, Gibbons stressed at length on emerging changes in higher education when he states that:

...A new paradigm of the function of higher education in society has gradually emerged. Gone, it seems, is the high-mindedness of a von Humboldt or a Newman, with its pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. In their places has been put a view of higher education in which universities are meant to serve society, primarily by supporting the economy and promoting the quality of life of its citizens. While it is true that universities still retain their role as the "conscience of society," the critical function of universities has been displaced in favour of a more pragmatic role in terms of the provision of qualified manpower and the production of knowledge. These changes are not notional. Rather, they are intended to have direct practical impact on the behaviour and functioning of higher education institutions. The new paradigm is bringing in its train a new culture of accountability as is evidenced by the spread of managerialism and an ethos of value for money throughout higher education systems internationally. (1)

An influential factor for these changes and their attendant ‘accountability’ implication for quality assurance is mass higher education, which is also tagged massification. According to Beerkens-Soo and Voossenstyen in their report titled *Higher Education issues and Trend from an International perspective*:

In most Western countries, including the Netherlands, student numbers started to increase rapidly ... As a result, higher education systems faced a challenge of how to accommodate the growth in student numbers in an existing higher education system .(3).\

This emergent massification challenge calls for quality in education that is relevant and appropriate for meeting the peculiar needs of programmes in tertiary institutions. It also calls for quality control through a mechanism of educational logistic arrangement for maintaining a standard of excellence in teaching, research and practice. Particularly, it has implication for the means by which theatre arts education ensures quality in serving its purpose in the business of Ivory Tower production. By logical extension, it is located within the purview of the method by which theatre arts education in Nigeria ensures quality teaching services in order to remain germane to the requirements of the entertainment industry. Of course, this deals with sequences of *modus operandi* involving the entire range of activities undertaken in meeting the creteria for quality assurance. Ehindero in Oladipo et al outlined four criteria for quality assurance in education which are stipulated below:

- **Learners:** their entry behaviours, characteristics, and attributes including some demographic factors that can inhibit or facilitate their learning;
- **The teachers:** their entry qualifications, values, pedagogic skills, and professional preparedness.
- **The teaching/learning process:** including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment
- **Flow of operational fund;** its adequacy and regularity. (112)

The interaction of these determinant factors and other related factors is vital for enhancing quality assurance of theatre arts programme(s) in Nigerian tertiary institutions, albeit the emergent massification challenges. At this point, the next section of the paper will highlight the Benue River Valley area and theatre arts education in the domain.

3. Benue River Valley and Theatre Arts: An Overview

Taking its source from the Cameroon Mountains, the Benue River covers 650-mile-long distance flowing through the central geographical area of Nigeria. It joins the great Niger River at Lokoja where they form a confluence. The geography, history, politics, economy and culture of the Benue River Valley are domiciled in the three topographic areas of the domain: the Upper Benue, Middle Benue and Lower Benue. These areas are where Kogi, Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, Adamawa, and other states within the domain are located. The Upper Benue Valley area is characteristically distinct from other areas with its hilly and rugged topography. This area is home to diverse ethnic groups such as Cham-Mwana, Longuda, Jen, Ga'ana, 'Bana and others. The Middle Benue has been identified as "the largest and most ethnically and geographically complex of the Benue sub region in the Middle Benue"(www.fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/benue). Further statement has it that, "most contemporary ethnic identities in the area crystallized only during the colonial period, because the British needed them for administrative purposes, and local people embraced them out of a sense of belonging" (www.fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/benue). Ethnic groups such as Jukun, Mumuye, Chamba,

Wurkun/Bikwin, Goemai, montol, and Kuntan/Kulere are found in the Middle Benue area. The Lower Benue which is situated at the confluence area of the Niger and Benue rivers has over the centuries “been a home to a changing constellation of people” (www.fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/benue). The Idoma, Tiv, Igala, Igede, Bassa Ebira, Afo and other ethnic groups are located in the Lower Benue area. Geo-politically, the Benue river Valley area is known as North – Central Nigeria region.

In the sub-Saharan region of Africa, the Benue River Valley area is endowed with some of the greatest splendiferous, abstract, dramatic and inventively expressive art forms such as visual arts, sculpture, residual architectural aesthetics, pottery, mask/masquerades, puppetry, body tattoo/facial mark, song, music and dance. The existing dynamic cultures and interrelationships amongst the numerous and diverse ethnic groups in the sphere of influence dates back to the period of Nok culture, an ancient civilization which was “located in the forest of central Nigeria that flourished between 500 BC and AD 300. It was known for its developed art style” (*Nok, Microsoft Encarta Dictionaries*).

The Benue River Valley is a vibrant area that is rich with human and material resources. The area has always remained a significant source of natural and human resources for mainstream national development process. This is evident in the quantum of elites/professionals and agricultural products emanating from these area over the decades in Nigerian socio-political and economic history. One of the key factors that have been propelling the wheel of progress in the Benue Valley region is education of its populace. Saint, Hartnett and Strasser corroborated this position on a general ground when they posits that:

Economic and global developments are increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge. Education in general, and higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations (World Bank 1999) (<http://www.wes.org/ewenr/04sept/feature.htm>).

Specifically, education within the arts and humanities in general, and theatre arts education in particular have been progressive against the backdrop of the collectively rich cultural heritage of the Benue River valley people. In this milieu, the history of theatre arts education in Benue State and Kogi State have their origins in the curricular programmes of College of Education, Katsina-Ala, in the early 1980s. Thereafter, it was introduced into the curricular programmes of Benue State University, Makurdi, College of Education, Ankpa and Kogi State University, Anyigba. Since inception, theatre arts education has evolved progressively to be confronted now by emerging challenges of expansion in 21st Century tertiary institution, which is due mainly, to mass intake of fresh students as against available limited human and material resources. As earlier mentioned, this informs the concern of this paper in the context of investigating quality vis-à-vis assurance in theatre arts teaching and learning processes.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis of FGD and SSI Findings in Sampled Universities

Table 1: Ratio of Lecturer to Student per Department in Sampled Tertiary Institutions

Institution	No. of lecturer	No. of Student	Lecturer to Student
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			Ratio
Kogi State University	14	432	1: 30
Benue State University	19	581	1:30

Table 1 above shows that the number of lecturers in the Department of Theatre Arts, KSU-Anyigba is 14. It also shows that the number of lecturers in the Department of Theatre Arts, BSU-Makurdi is 19. It shows the total number of theatre arts students in KSU, which is 432 while that of BSU is 581. The table shows that the two departments have an equal ratio of lecturer to student (1:30) in approximation with slight difference in student population size.

5. Lecturers/Instructor and Student Responses on Workload Assessment

Focus group discussion and semi-structured interview was conducted amongst lecturers, instructors and students in the sampled state universities in order to elicit information on class population and workload. The objectives are to determine the level (low, moderate, high or very high) of:

- i. The number of student per contact lecture
- ii. The number of contact hour per week
- iii. Frequency of take home assignment
- iv. Borrowed facilities

During the FGD and SSI sessions, all the lecturers/instructors (14:8.96%) of the total sampled research population observed that the number of students per contact lecture is very high. A cross section of 45 (29.25%) respondents from the sampled universities, which includes lecturers/instructors and students stated that the number of contact hour per week is estimated at low and moderate levels. The remaining cross section of 19 discussants/respondents (12.16%) is not sure of where to place their estimation of the number of contact hour per week in the light of the levels: low, moderate, high and very high. More than half of the population of the sampled teaching staff stated that the frequency of take home assignment is estimated between low and moderate levels. The sampled 14 teaching staff respondents (4.48%) from Kogi State University and Benue State University unanimously stated that at present, the use of hired facilities may not be at low level as a result of effort by their institutional management in providing new facilities in place to accommodate staff and students on campus. However, they stated that the increasing number of students during enrolment is putting pressure on available human and material teaching resources. Inferring from the foregoing data presentation and analyses, there is relational imbalance between quality of theatre arts teaching and infrastructure.

6. Discussion

The implementation of the educational policy on access to education for children of school age has expansionist implication for tertiary education in Nigeria. In this survey, the issue of massification in theatre arts education has been investigated and ascertained in the Benue Valley area. Hence, the survey finding shows that lecturer: student ratio in the sampled universities is relatively at high level, (30-1). This finding falls short of the National Universities Commission's regulation of one lecturer to 25 students (1: 25). Finding on the number of contact hours of lecturers as observed by sampled theatre arts lecturers indicates that majority of them are of the opinion that they lack adequate contact hour for teaching and learning. For this reason, the

outcome of inadequacy of contact for lecturers is imminently low in standard. In this case, perceivable effects of over enrolment or overshooting carrying capacity by tertiary institutions could result to ineffective teaching, increasing challenges of lecture hall control, problems of assessing student (continuous assessment), problems of conducting examinations and marking of written examination scripts.

Therefore, for appropriate learning and training to be carried out in theatre arts studies, adequate infrastructure must be available and accessible. Unfortunately, as at the time of this survey, available facilities in the sampled tertiary institutions are inadequate for an enabling teaching and learning condition. The lecture halls were the theoretical aspects of theatre arts studies are taught are more often that not overcrowded. Consequently, a large number of the students hang around outside the lecture halls. Poor ventilation facilities in overcrowded lecture halls in the sampled institutions make teaching and learning uncomfortable for both students and lecturers. Furthermore, obsolete theatre studio equipments are still in use for teaching and learning. Hence, it is paramount to demand explanation as to the level of quality assurance in teaching and learning under such impoverished training condition with obsolete equipments. Just as Aluade, Idogho and Imonike observes,

Inadequate and obsolete infrastructure and equipment as well as poor library facilities remain the major challenge in Nigerian university. Thus, about 15-30% of the infrastructure, equipment and books are non-functional, obsolete or dilapidated (Federal Ministry of Education, 2009). Furthermore, the classrooms, laboratories and the general environment of most universities in Nigeria are still far from a state that will promote optimal learning, teaching and research (Okebukola, 2008) (*The African Symposium: An online journal of the African Educational Research Network*,6).

This observation shows that the situation is not particular to theatre arts discipline, but cuts across the entire corpus of tertiary education system in Nigeria. In his conclusive response on the same issue in the university system, Durosaro stresses at length that:

Obviously...These gaps, no doubt, have implication on the use-efficiency of our university resources. Most universities complain of inadequacy of space and material resources. Staff members in the faculties face the problem of attrition owing to poor facilities and conditions of service. Yet, student enrolment continues to grow, leading to inadequate facilities in the universities. The persisting economic downturn seems to have compounded the problems particularly with the serious depreciation of the *rain* and the lower absorptive capacity of the economy for university graduate. The facilities in the universities can no longer be maintained as they should. The high cost of universities and other tertiary institutions in relation to basic education, together with the fear of increasing problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria calls for a rethinking of the goals of our university system. (18)

The implication of this conclusive position on trends and issues of university resource allocation and utilization for this study is significantly crucial towards assuring quality in theatre arts teaching and learning. More so, the quality of theatre arts graduates from any tertiary institution is ultimately determined by the standard of teaching and available infrastructures for

learning.

7. Conclusion and Suggestions

This research has attempted a descriptive survey and found out that lecturer: student ratio is generally high in the Theatre Arts Departments of state universities in the Benue Valley area. Low contact hours with students were reported by sampled lecturers and instructors. An imbalanced relationship between quality of theatre arts teaching and the adequacy of infrastructure in the sampled universities was established in the study. For these reasons, the following suggestions are made:

- university managements within the Benue Valley and elsewhere should partner and access key ongoing educational reforms, in order to provide adequate human and material resources in the area of staff and student welfare, provision of state of the art theatre studio, lighting facilities, costume/make up bank, adequate rehearsal venue and musical equipments.
- Mechanism for partnership in sharing of facilities between theatre arts departments of Nigerian universities should be established. This is important for the purpose of cost effectiveness in teaching and learning.
- It is also suggested that government(s) expenditure on universal basic education should also be extended to tertiary education in Nigeria. This will bring about equilibrium in educational expenditure and development.
- Government(s) should re-establish the needed stability between the massification of theatre arts education and the quest for assuring quality in what we teach and research.

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