

Necessity of Establishing Quality Assurance Unit as Panacea to Facility Management Improvement during Pandemic in Rivers State University

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Abstract: Facilities management is fundamentally a service industry in which tertiary institutions provided services to the people. Tertiary institutions have taken quality assurance as a multi-tasking approach to develop its infrastructure and processes for this nature of educational needs so that facilities management can meet the changing needs of tertiary institutions. Therefore, this study investigated the purposes for establishing quality assurance unit to necessitate improved facilities management during pandemic in Rivers State University Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The study adopted cross-sectional case study research design, and secondary data, was consolidated upon from books, journals and document, while the primary data was obtained from one-one interview questions from 42 stakeholders of Quality assurance unite and Lecturers of the Faculty of Environmental Sciences representing 78% responses rate. The collected data was qualitatively analyzed with thematic content analysis. The study shows that the purposes of establishing quality assurance unit in tertiary institution serves as regulatory mechanism on accountability and improvement in facilities management establishing confidence in stakeholder's inputs, processes and output of educational system are fulfilled with expected standards. The study also established that a task oriented approach adopted to deliver changes in facilities management coordinating the processes of buildings, and teaching and learning environment to transfer fundamental knowledge on facility management to substantial expectations. Furthermore, the study discovered that the issues involving quality assurance concerning FM with tasks performed include building, cleaning, safety, security, health services, and equipment maintenance services, complaints/feedback mechanism, hazard management, power generation, I.C.T and surveillance services and FM training/sensitization. Therefore, deliberate effort should be demonstrated visibly to commitments of collective responsibilities of all stakeholders improving facility management with the established quality assurance unit to overcome the pandemic in Nigerian Universities.

Keywords: Facilities Management, Quality, Assurance, Improvement, Tertiary Institutions, Establishment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The essential feature of facilities management is the standards and regulations set out that ensures quality of facilities in tertiary institution. Quality assurance unit exists to ensure that facilities support organizational requirement (Becker, 1990). Quality assurance is a change management approach in people-centric requirement and businesses effectiveness, while facilities management is intrinsically aligned with the organization business needs being combined together, the occurrences of COVID19 pandemic will be overcome. Therefore, facilities management is predominantly about meeting the changing needs of the organization through promoting sustained quality control measures in tertiary institutions. According to Shafie, Yusoff and Pawi (2012), the core objectives of any University is to provide in-depth knowledge, seek academic development, educate students, and coordinate national developmental demands. To be able to deliver these

key roles effectively, Quality assurance unit in institutions need to have been substantially established, according to Lateef, Khmidi and Idrus (2010), only standard, quality and functional support infrastructure (facilities) can create a conducive environment to support, stimulate and encourage teaching, learning and research activities. However, having facilities is not enough, maximizing the use of the facilities through efficient quality assurance approach is much more vital. This is because values of facilities represent 80% of fixed assets owned by well-established organizations that involve people, process, and technology are intricately linked to each other (Nkpote and Frank, 2019). They must therefore be managed efficiently through monitoring and evaluation towards achieving organizational goal.

Quality assurance is a regulatory mechanism focusing on accountability and improvement, thus, establishing confidence in stakeholders that the inputs, processes and output of educational system fulfill the expectations or measure up to minimum standards. Quality Assurance is therefore different from Quality Control (Mishra, 2006). This definition postulate to incorporate the 'people-side' of business and couples it to the workplace, according to Atkin and Brooks (2004), 'the process, tools and techniques to manage the people-side of business change to achieve a required outcome and to realize that change effectively within the social infrastructure of the workplace'. Facilities management in organization is venturing towards project management style of operation. Actions of quality assurance are translated into projects, enabling them to be subject to an established discipline with proven methodology, techniques, tools and metrics. The benefit is the control that can be exercised over delivery in quality, time and cost objectives.

In the context of the tertiary institution, quality assurance entails a variety of procedures intended to protect academic standards and promote/improve learning conditions. To this end, various commissions have been established to assure quality education. In Nigeria, the Quality Assurance Unit is charged with the responsibility of ensuring quality in products and services. In the university system, quality assurance is the guaranty of confidence and certainty that standards and quality of a programme run by the university are being maintained and enhanced (Akpan, 2014). As the dynamics of the workplace change, so too will facilities management have to change to enable organizations implement strategies that assume change as a normal feature of business life (Atkins and Brooks, 2004).

Quality Assurance Unit has adopted a task orientated approach to delivering change within an established organization. Processes are re-engineered through a broad set of coordinated activities to establish continual process improvements in business governance, risk management, quality standards and performance, and business metrics. Quality assurance should be viewed in the context of a country's public policies to provide educational opportunities for citizens within the framework of school mapping and facility management. The state has a regulatory role to assure that all education providers meet certain quality and equity standards. Quality is not determined solely by institutional type as a public or private institution, but on whether or not an institution adheres to externally established standards promulgated by the academic community (Johnstone, 2001).

Facilities management in tertiary institution is complex and cost intensive. This is because it involves provision of buildings, classrooms, hostels, staff quarters, workshops, laboratories, Information Communication Technology (ICT) centers, libraries, health centers and sporting facilities. It also includes provision of stimulating learning environment with adequate safety considerations. Facilities improvement and maintenance in schools according to the Department of Education (2010), are essential aspects of school plant management which requires constant attention and careful planning by administrators. The educational administrators need to undertake the maintenance and minor repair of the school facilities using available resources. This is necessary because educational facilities need to evolve and incorporate technical innovations in virtually all aspect of school facilities. In addition to basic checklist procedures, educational administrators need to put in place prudent planning and proactive measures that will allow flexible usage of school facilities. Quality Assurance in the universities has become a universal issue. This study is necessitated by the rising

concerns on the part of governments around the world to provide quality education devoid the pandemic to their students.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Therefore, this study aims to examine the extent to which quality assurance unit necessitate the improvement of facilities management within the university settings during pandemic; using the foremost Rivers State University Port Harcourt, as a case study. This is with a view to provide the facility manager and school management with useful user-inclusive input for effective quality assurance policy as well as facilities management. Specifically, this study pursues three objectives which include: assess the purposes and issues involved with quality assurance towards FM; ascertain quality assurance unit tasks to be achieved in FM improvement and investigate the concerns of quality assurance unit with facilities management services within the campus.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study is of significance to educational stakeholders; the government, staff, parents and guardians, students and others by assisting towards the establishment of culture of quality during COVID19 within the institutions of higher learning. Due to globalization, there is increasing importance of higher education to competitiveness and economic development. Changes brought about by the transition to a knowledge based economy have resulted to increase in demand for higher skill levels in most occupations. The study will be of benefit to the management, lecturers and students in the sense that it will assist tremendously in improving the quality of the Higher Institutions facilities during COVID19 by detecting any barrier or hindrances in the area of facilities management that might be working against efficiency in our Higher Institutions of learning. Finally, the study will serve as reference point for other researcher who might be interested in studying quality assurance related phenomena.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to the newly established quality assurance unit of Rivers State University in Port Harcourt, Rivers State which its facilities needed improvement. It should have been ideal that the study covers all the tertiary institutions in Rivers State or Nigeria at large, but opted to restrict the scope to Rivers State University particularly the newly established Quality Assurance Unit and Faculty of Environment Sciences with experts in the built environment and facility management. In this context, quality assurance entails a variety of procedures intended to protect academic standards and promote or improve learning conditions, because the quality of human existence is the function of their ability in quality control to improve facility management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Quality Assurance in Tertiary Institution

Quality Assurance is the means by which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced. While Quality control refers to the verification procedures (both formal and informal) used by institutions in order to monitor quality and standards to a satisfactory standard and as intended (Dada, Oladapo and Olayiwola, 2018). Within the context of higher education, according to Oladosu (2011), quality is multidimensional which captures a wide range of functions and activities in a university setting. It permeates every aspect of the University System including: teaching, learning, academic programmes, research, scholarship, academic and non-academic staff, students, physical structures, facilities, equipment, community services and academic milieu (Dada, Oladapo and Olayiwola, 2018). Internal self-evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international expertise, are vital for enhancing quality. Mishra (2006) identified five different approaches to defining quality:

1. In terms of exceptional (exceeding high standards and passing a required standard);
2. In terms of consistency (exhibited through zero defects and getting right the first time making quality a culture)

3. As fitness for purpose (meaning the product or service meets the stated purpose, customer specifications and satisfaction)
4. As value for money (through efficiency and effectiveness); and
5. as transformative (in term of qualitative change).

2.2 Establishment of Quality Assurance Directorate in Rivers State University

According to Nkpite and Ohochuku (2020), Rivers State University in Port Harcourt as one of the premier generation tertiary institutions in Nigeria established the Quality Assurance Directorate under the Office of the Vice Chancellor in September, 2018. The Directorate is headed by a pioneer Director, Professor (Mrs.) Iyenemi Ibiimina Kakulu. It is the responsibility of the Directorate to develop a sustainable quality culture in the university through the formulation of robust policies for planning, monitoring, evaluation and control of the Internal Quality Assurance mechanisms. The Director therefore reports directly to the Vice Chancellor. And the Vice Chancellor appoints the University's Quality Assurance Director. The Directorate is not a unit that is responsible for quality but one which assists Faculties and other Units in their own self-assessment, coordinate activities within the University and act as a link with outside bodies in ensuring quality.

2.2.1 Main Mandate of Quality Assurance Directorate in Rivers State University

The Directorate is responsible for monitoring quality performance, through assessment and evaluation of the university's activities on regular basis, in order to receive feedbacks for amelioration and thus promote productivity and development (Nkpite and Ohochuku, 2020).

2.2.2 Purposes of the Quality Assurance Directorate in Rivers State University

- a. Develop, apply and periodically review the quality benchmarks/parameters for various academic and administrative activities of the institution;
- b. Facilitate the creation of a learner -centered environment conducive to quality education and academic staff professional growth;
- c. Provide feedback mechanisms for students, parents, and other stakeholders on quality- related issues;
- d. Disseminate information on various quality parameters of education;
- e. Organize inter and intra institutional workshops, seminars on quality related themes;
- f. Document the various programme/activities leading to quality improvement;
- g. Act as the nodal unit of the Institution for coordinating quality- related activities, including adoption and dissemination of best practices;
- h. Work closely with other academic departments and the institution's Management Information System (MIS) for the purpose of maintaining /enhancing the institutional quality;
- i. Promote and help sustain the culture of quality in the institution;
- j. Lead the Internal Self-assessment process and prepare and submit the Report to the Management of the National University Commission (NUC) annually; and
- k. Coordinate logistics during external accreditation/ assessment.
- l. The achievement of accepted criteria of minimum standard of quality.
- m. Establish confidence in stakeholders that the inputs, processes and outputs of educational system fulfill the expectations or measure up to minimum standards.
- n. Put in place a range of procedures designed to safeguard academic standards and which will promote learning opportunities of acceptable quality.

2.2.3 Quality Assurance Areas of Tasks Coverage for Facilities Management Improvement

The above tasks will be achieved through the following areas of coverage in facilities management:

1. Facilities; Buildings (lecture theaters, classrooms), Laboratories, Library, Workshop, Medical facilities, Sporting facilities, Toilet facilities
2. Teaching and Learning Environment; Terrain, Structure, Security, etc.

2.2.4 Issues Involved in Quality Assurance

1. Student Admissions (Quota (including Quota by Professional Bodies, Admission Requirement, Carrying capacity of Programme, etc.)
2. Staff Recruitment (Qualification, Process, Orientation)
3. Staff Promotion (Procedure, Residency, Timeliness)
4. Curriculum Development (Regulations)
5. Teaching
6. Research
7. Community Service Delivery.
8. Graduation/Certification
9. Academic Programme such as Remedial, JUPEB, Diploma.
10. Security.

2.3 Educational Facilities

The main purpose of facilities management in tertiary institution is to aid, stimulate and facilitate instructional process. Facilities are the physical infrastructures that contribute directly or remotely to the teaching and learning process in the educational system (Nkpite and Ohochuku, 2020). Lackney and Picus (2013) explained that an effective facility management is the responsive needs to changing programs of educational delivery, and at a minimum should provide a physical environment that is comfortable, safe, secure, accessible, well illuminated, well ventilated, and aesthetically pleasing. The school facility consists of not only the physical structure and the variety of building systems, such as mechanical, plumbing, electrical and power, telecommunications, security, and fire suppression systems. According to Nkpite and Ohochuku (2020), the facility also includes furnishings, materials and supplies, equipment and information technology, as well as various aspects of the building grounds, namely, athletic fields, playgrounds, areas for outdoor learning, and vehicular access and parking. Lackney and Picus (2013) further noted that facility is much more than a passive container of the educational process: it is, rather, an integral component of the conditions of learning. The layout and design of a facility contributes to the *place experience* of students, educators, and community members. Depending on quality assurance, its design and management; the facility should be that it can contribute to a sense of ownership, safety and security, personalization and control, privacy as well as sociality, and spaciousness or crowdedness which need to monitor, evaluate and control (Nkpite and Ohochuku, 2020). When planning, designing, or managing the facility, these facets placed experience when possible, taken into consideration quality control. Blessing et al (2015) observed that higher institutions are faced with immediate pressure to preserve existing facilities within the campuses and enhance the capacity of their higher education system to address growing demands of an increasing influx of students and academic activities. There is no doubt that dilapidated and unhealthy buildings in a decaying environment depresses the quality of life and contributes in some measure to antisocial behaviors. NUC (2006) reported that facilities in most Nigerian universities are in deplorable state. Therefore, every piece of information that can help the universities' administrators and facilities managers in particular to give the best service to their customers in the face of dwindling resources is necessary at this time.

It is obvious from the foregoing that there has been a significant amount of literature relating to FM practice in tertiary institution but a few of such have not been carried out on quality assurance in developing economies such as Nigeria. More importantly, public universities in Nigeria are recently facing decreasing financial allocation from government; the major financier, due to dwindling economic situation. Consequently, this is affecting the facilities management which require quality assurance unit in tertiary institutions.

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted on the quality assurance unit and faculty of Environment Sciences of the Rivers State University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. This study was a cross-sectional case study research with key stakeholders from Quality Assurance Unit and Faculty of Environmental Sciences. The study population

consists of high ranking officials and lecturers responsible for quality control and facility management of school infrastructures in the University.

In order to reach the above mentioned objectives, the study will include a research intended to consolidate on secondary data. The secondary data will include available data and official documents of successful quality control intervention and good practices with an emphasis on results achieved on facilities management improvement and other relevant secondary literature. In addition, this assessment will be based on existing information from reports, such as the most recent National Universities Commission's (NUC) guideline on the establishment of Quality Assurance Units in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Primary data relating to facilities management and quality control were obtained by means of semi-structured one-on-one interview questions and observation on a systematic sample of 42 stakeholders, from a sampling frame of 65 stakeholders; 55 lecturers (Faculty of Environmental Science) and 5 highly ranked officials (Quality Assurance Unit). They were persons who are well experienced in the built environment professions. So their opinions about quality control and facilities management could be counted reliable. The data collected were qualitatively analyzed using descriptive statistical tools and thematic content analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Purposes and Issues Involved in Quality Assurance for Facilities Management in Tertiary Institutions

The purposes and issues involved in the establishment of quality assurance units at tertiary institutions in Nigeria was based on monitoring quality performance through assessment and evaluation of activities in the universities, in order to receive feedbacks for amelioration of facilities as to promote productive development. The received feedbacks for ameliorating facilities management as to promote productive development as outlined in NUC guidelines for establishing quality assurance units are stated in objectives; a, b, c, d, f, g, h, i, k, l, m, n as reviewed in the literature.

The purposes and issues involved in establishment of quality assurance unit at tertiary institutions have been revealed in the study. The study reveals that quality assurance as a regulatory mechanism is based on accountability and improvement in facilities management, thus, establishing confidence in stakeholders that inputs, processes and output of educational system fulfill the expectations or measure up to minimum standards. Performance monitoring in quality assurance had provided stakeholders with an assurance of quality services delivered based on objectivity, representative sampling and reliability that is shared with stakeholders on a routine basis. This is important because it provided realistic comparison of facility management performance with minimum standards, expectations and perceptions. Quality assurance can be seen therefore as a powerful tool in itself facilitating change that helps facility management in tertiary institutions maintain focus on strategic business objectives, whilst identifying and bringing about the operational transformations that will help to deliver them. As also, facility management have to change enabling tertiary institutions implement strategies as feedbacks from quality assurance unit that assume change as a normal feature of business life.

4.2 Quality Assurance Tasks Achieved through Facility Management Coverage

Quality assurance unit has adopted a task oriented approach to delivering change within as established institution. Its process are re-engineered through a broad set of coordinated activities to established continual process of facilities management improvements in business governance, risk management, quality standards and performance, and business metrics. As also, facilities management unit exists to ensure that the facilities support organizational quality creating fitness requirement. Therefore, the core business objectives of any university are to provide in-depth knowledge, seek academic development, educate students and coordinate national development demands. The study reveals as stated in the National Universities Commission's (NUC) guidelines. The above tasks will be achieved through areas of provided facilities as in facilities management coverage. The areas of facilities management coverage as it relates to quality assurance includes:

- (a) Building; lecture theaters, classrooms, laboratories, library, workshop, medical facilities, sporting facilities, toilets facilities.
- (b) Teaching and learning environment: Terrain, structures, security, etc.

To be able to deliver these key of quality assurance effectively, tertiary institutions need to have substantial infrastructure (facilities). However, having facilities is not enough, but maximizing the use of the facilities through efficient quality assurance approach is much more vital. This is because facilities management is a people-industry and unfortunately, it's also an industry with rather high turnover rate. Again the need to quickly transfer fundamental knowledge on facility management to enable quality assurance unit perform according to substantial expectations. Furthermore, people, process and technology are intricately linked to each other which must be managed efficiently towards achieving tertiary institutional goals. This above particularly applies that only standard, quality and functional support facilities can create a conducive and adequate environment to support, stimulate and encourage teaching, learning and research activities.

4.3 Issues Involved in Quality Assurance that Concerns Facilities Management

From the NUC guidelines establishing quality assurance units in tertiary institutions as shown in the study, the unit is expected to develop and update assessment instruments and indicators for the issues of facilities (buildings, and teaching and learning environment) particularly for the following services: -

- Security services
- Cleaning services
- Building services and equipment maintenance services
- Complaint/feedback mechanism
- I.T.C services
- Surveillance services
- Traffic management and fine services
- Power generation services
- Facility management training/sensitization
- Space management
- Fumigation

This result suggests that establishing confidence in stakeholder's inputs, processes and outputs of educational system fulfill their expectations or measure of minimum standards with facility management performance monitoring was not by exception. This implies that the reporting style of quality assurance unit with facility management empowered to perform operational processes reducing existing procedures out non-productive activities and processes, and by ensuring that FM was given prominence in operational process. The intention of quality assurance was the cut operational procedures or to validate FM as essential to the educational business. Also, the task to promoting and help sustain the culture of quality in the tertiary institutions through ought assurance unit be to create new documentation that would serve as a technical reference for the institution. This took place in two business re-structuring stages; facilities management as reorganized responsibilities and breakdown that existed between the established quality assurance unit in the tertiary institutions. Quality assurance unit has given greater emphasis and new direction to the business support functions; quality control has been replaced by facility management performance and work improvement. This has created space for accelerating the development of evaluation instruments to take the roles of management; (making quality assurance a way of life) and staff (promoting quality culture) within the tertiary institutions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study investigated the establishment of quality assurance unit as solution to facility management improvement in Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The study revealed that the purposes of establishing quality assurance unit was based on monitory quality of performance through assessment and

evaluation of activities, in order to receive feedbacks for ameliorating facilities management as to promote productive development in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The quality assurance as a regulatory mechanism focused on accountability and improvement in facilities management establishing confidence in stakeholders that inputs, processes and output of educational system fulfill the expected measured standards delivered on objectivity, representative sampling and reliability of information shared among stakeholders on a routine basis.

The study also reveals that quality assurance as an established unit in tertiary institution has adopted a task oriented approach with its processes re-engineered through coordinated activities to established continual process of facility management improvement. The delivery of change within established tertiary institutions is an improvement business governance, risk management, quality standards, and performance including business metrics. The study established that facilities management exists to ensure the facilities support organizational quality control creating fitness requirement in the areas of; Buildings (lecture theaters, classrooms, laboratories, library, workshop, medical, sporting and toilet facilities) and teaching and learning environment (terrain, structure, security, health, safety, etc.) as the tasks to be achieved through quality assurance in the facilities management.

Furthermore, the study shows that the issues involved in quality assurance as it regards to facilities management is with the task to perform FM services:

- Security, safety and health services
- Cleaning, and building and equipment maintenance services
- Complaint/feedbacks mechanism
- I.T.C services and surveillance services
- Traffic management and fine services
- Power generation services
- Facility management training/sensitization.
- Space management
- Fumigation.

This will help and promote sustained culture of quality assurance in tertiary with documents on various programme/activities leading to quality improvement of facilities. The study concludes that establishing quality assurance unit as a panacea to facility management improvement cannot be over-emphasized, since the reporting style of quality assurance unit on facility management empowered to perform operational processes of facilities reducing existing procedures on non-productive activities, and by ensuring that FM was given prominence in the operational processes, to validate FM as essential to the educational business. The study therefore recommends this; promotion and sustenance of the culture of quality assurance in all aspects of the institution's facilities management operations. Therefore, deliberate effort should be demonstrating visibly to commitments of collective responsibility involving all stakeholders in the university towards improvement facilities management with the establishment of quality assurance unit.

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