

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINER IN THE REALIZATION OF ACADEMIC STANDARD IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In all degree level examinations in higher education in Nigeria, external examiner occupies an important centre-stage in the system of quality control, and assurance of academic standard; and can advise in area of curriculum development of Nigerian institutions. As independent and impartial advisers, the external examiner provides institutions with informed comments on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards. This means that the key focus of the external examiner remains to ensure that standard are kept the same across universities, polytechnics or colleges of education and to provide an assurance of fair play given that internal examiners might be prejudiced for or against a candidate or institution. Thus, the role of the external examiner varies with the level of examination, including to verify that academic standards are appropriate for the award or part thereof; to ensure that the academic standard of institutions in Nigeria awards are comparable to similar awards in same level of institutions in Nigeria; to provide an objective view to the nature and standards of the assessment of students. It is through external examiners that institutions examinations in form of written papers, oral examination, practical, etc are monitored and assessed for fairness and academic standard. For these reasons, this paper attempts to examine the roles of external examiners in the realization of academic standard and highlights the lapses of some external examiners. While the recommendation of this paper in one hand suggest that effort should be made to provide in full to the students all external examiners' reports with the exception of any confidential report which may be made to the Vice-chancellor or Rector or Provost. On the other hand, it reveals that all tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria should recognize the importance of the role of external examiner when looking at staff promotion procedures.

Introduction

The realization and achievement of academic standards and quality education in all levels of educational institutions in Nigeria are issues of great important to every Nigerians. Education issues are fundamental in every society. Generally, the two most important components in educational institutions are the teachers and the pupils. The external examiner is needed to assist teachers and pupils in ensuring quality teaching and learning process; specifically to ensure fairness, quality and academic standard in the higher institutions of learning.

The external examiner can be described as a person from another institution or organization normally an academic or other professional or a recognized specialist in the field appointed by a university or Polytechnic or College of Education, and charged with the responsibility of monitoring and assessing examinations so as to maintain fairness and ensure academic standard. They provide an objective view to the nature and standards of the assessment of students. They are also appointed to act as independent and impartial advisors providing informed comment on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards and to standards of comparable institutions elsewhere (Cambridge University, 2004) . Going by this definition, it is apparent to recognize that external examiners plays a critical role in all degree level examination in higher education in most higher institutions of learning in the world, including Nigeria. No doubt it is regarded as the oldest systems of quality control within higher education.

The external examiner occupies an important position in the system of quality control, academic standard and educational development of most institutions. Though, the role of external examiner varies with the level of examination, the purpose of the system control remains: to ensure

that standards are the same across the Colleges of Education; and to provide an assurance of fair play given that internal examiner might be prejudiced for or against a candidate (Wikipedia, 2010).

It is against background that this paper attempts to examine the role of the external examiner in the realization of academic standard in Nigeria.

Who is an External Examiner?

An external examiner is a person who monitors the assessment procedure of an institution for fairness and basis (Onwuagba, 2013). He also recognizes that an external examiner is a senior academic at another institution, appointed for a period of three years and charged with the responsibility to monitor examination and assessment process of the institution; to ensure fairness and academic standard. He/she is a recognized expert in his/her field of study. At times, they may be called external assessor.

Providing conceptual clarifications of external examiner will be considered in this paper in three conceptual viewpoints: the core definition, explanatory review and analytical review based on Wikipedia, (2010). The core definition holds that an external examiner is a person from another institution or organization who monitors the assessment process of an institution for fairness and academic standards. On the other hand, the explanatory context provides that external examiners are normally academics but may also, in some settings, be employers or other professionals not employed in higher education institutions. Whereas providing analytical review and in response to the question “what is an external examiner?” Dublin Institute of Technology (2004) stated as follows:

Every course has to have an external examiner who is appointed for a three year period. The external examiner is normally a senior academic from another institution whose role is to monitor the examinations for fairness and academic standard. The external examiner reads and approves the examination papers, may read some or all of the examination scripts, attends examination board meetings and reports formally on his/her findings.

While Cambridge University (2004) as cited in Wikipedia, (2010) in External examiner, on the other hand explained that external examiner are responsible for the standards and quality of the education they provide and the degrees they offer. The Nigeria’s system of higher education evidently is similar to the United Kingdom practice introduced in the 19th century which holds that all institutions use External Examiners to assist them in monitoring the standards and quality of all degrees except those granted on an honorary basis. Apart from the United Kingdom, the systems of higher education in other countries like Australia, New Zealand and India have been greatly influenced by external examiner.

Standard Academic and Quality education

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2000) defined standard as level of quality, especially one that people think is acceptable. Quality on the other hand is defined as the standard of something when it is compared to other things like it; how good or bad something is: to be of good/poor/top quality. Following the definitions above, academic standard, therefore, implies the level of standard provided to ensure that product or education outcomes will satisfy given requirement for quality. What does quality mean in the context of education?

Many definitions of quality in education exist, testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept (UNICEF, 2000). The terms efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality have often been used synonymously (Adams, 1993) as in UNICEF. That is why Ezeaku (1984) holds that the standard of education depends on quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance as the bases of functionality. Quality is, therefore, at the heart of education. From the above view points, quality assurance is the practice of maintaining the way goods are produced or services are

provided to make sure they are kept at a high standard. Technically, Robinson (1994) holds that quality assurance is the set of activities that an organization undertakes to ensure a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality; that is, the standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service.

In line with above, National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) provides that to enhance quality assurance, facilities that would ensure easy access to education shall be provided to include:

- Inclusive education
- Regular census and monitoring of people
- Provision of educational equipment and materials
- Training and re-training of personnel and
- Architectural design of school building to make them barrier free.

Regrettably, evidence abound that academic standard and quality of education in all levels of higher institutions of learning have been on decline in the recent time in Nigeria. Some attributed it to lack of qualified teachers and professionalism while others blame government for lack of funding and political will. No matter how you perceived it education in Nigeria is in crises. With this scenario in mind, what roles and relevance does the external examiner plays in ensuring academic standard and quality of education in Nigeria.

Role of External Examiner in Assessing Student Work

In order to effectively comprehend the role external examiner plays in higher institutions of learning this authors recognized the roles as specified in University of Bristol (2005) as follows:

1. The external examiner has the right to see all degree examination scripts and any other work that contributes to the degree result.
2. The external examiner should act as a moderator of the decisions of internal examiners. Student work will be marked in the first instance by internal examiners and some or all of the work should be made available to the external examiner for moderation. The external examiner should normally be asked to review the following:
 - Fail marks
 - First class marks and/or Masters distinctions
 - Third class marks
 - A sample of work from lower and upper second class divisions
 - Borderline marks and whether boundaries between classifications are set appropriately

It is good practice to involve the external examiner in decisions that will result in the student being required to leave the University. The external examiner should negotiate with the department on the amount of student work they will receive.

3. The external examiner may also act as an adjudicator where there are disagreements between the internal examiners, although internal examiners should try to agree marks where possible and only send irreconcilable conflicts to the external examiner.
4. Exceptionally the external examiner may act as the second marker, where there is insufficient internal expertise for full internal moderation and where this has been agreed with the external examiner.
5. External examiners should be asked to correct and subsequently approve all examination papers contributing to the final degree result. It is also good practice to consult the external examiner on other forms of assessment contributing to final degree results while in draft form, e.g. coursework essay title or project outlines.
6. Where a viva voce examination is to be held for a proportion, but only a proportion, of the candidates, the principles for the selection of candidates should be agreed with the external

examiner. Such an examination should normally be conducted by an external examiner who may be assisted by one or more internal examiners.

7. The external examiner may comment and advise on matters of course curriculum, balance and structure, in so far as these are revealed by the assessment process.
8. Examination papers, scripts and any other relevant assessment material contributing to the degree classification or overall result, should normally be kept until at least one year after the relevant students have graduated from University. This may not always be possible in respect of coursework returned to students.
9. If an internal or external examiner considers that a candidate has engaged in an improper assessment practice, such as plagiarism or another form of cheating, the examiner should, as soon as possible, report the circumstances to the Chairman of the appropriate Board of Examiners, who should consult the College Disciplinary Committee.

External Examiners in Nigerian Colleges of Education:

External examiner for undergraduate examination: The primary responsibilities of external examiner here are to approve, draft examination questions before the papers are set. It is also their responsibility to mark the work, or review the marks, of at least a sample of candidates. Fundamentally, it is expected of them to make a report both to the department and also to the University or Polytechnic or College of Education authorities as the case may be. For instance, National Commission for Colleges of Education 6A of External Moderation's Report Form provided as follow:

Name of the Institution:

Course Title and Code:

Credit Unit:

Year and Semester:

- (1) Standard and quality of the questions and coverage.
- (2) Availability and quality of marking scheme.
- (3) Comments on the marking of answer scripts.
- (4) Comments on answer scripts (organization, numbering etc).
- (5) Students' performance old scores and moderated scores with grades.
- (6) General comments/observations
- (7) Recommendations/suggestions

Name of Moderator:

Rank:

Address:

Signature:

Date:

From the NCCE sample for Colleges of Education in Nigeria, it is, therefore, of immense important that the external examiners be allowed to comment on all aspects of the degree programme, including its staffing and teaching, not just on the examination process or assessment process of an institution.

External Examiners for Postgraduate Examination: This is another kind of external examiner in the institutions of higher learning in most countries of the world. In Nigeria for instance, there are normally internal examiners during the post graduate project or thesis defense/assessment but the external examiner usually takes the lead in questioning the candidate (PhD exams and M Sc) in the final thesis or project assessment. Normally the criteria used when examining the thesis is given below:

Examiners are asked to make general comments on whether the thesis:

Literature	Demonstrates both a thorough knowledge of literature relevant to its subject and general field, and of the candidate's ability to exercise critical and analytical judgement of that literature
Topic	Deals with a topic of sufficient range and complexity to meet the requirements of the degree
Investigation of topic	Comprises a sufficiently coherent investigation of the chosen topic
Methodologies	Displays a mastery of appropriate methodology and/or theoretical material
Conduct & presentation	Meets internationally recognized standards for the conduct and presentation of research in its field
Original contribution	Makes an original contribution to knowledge in its field and contains material suitable for publication in appropriate academic journals
Publication	Whether any parts of the thesis, in the opinion of the examiner, are worthy of being the basis of a publication.

Source: [Waikato](#), (2011)

It is commonly believed that the external examiner is an imperative that would make a positive contribution to improving academic standard as well provide an objective view to the nature and standards of the assessment of students. This is the reason why Cambridge University saw them as independent and impartial advisors providing informed comment on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards and to standards of comparable institutions elsewhere. It is, therefore, important to recognize that invitation to serve as an external examiner is usually seen as something of an honour. The work of external examiners no doubt is demanding, however could also been seen as inconveniencing too (University of Bristol, 2005 and Dublin Institution of Technology, 2004). This is so because it is done usually during the busiest time of the academic year. In Nigerian higher institutions, an honorarium is paid to external examiners, but considerably a small amount.

The Role of External Examiner in the Realization of Academic Standard in Nigeria

The role of external examiner varies with the level of examination; the purpose of the system remains the same: to ensure that standards are kept the same across Colleges of Education in Nigeria; specifically in realization of quality education as well as academic standard. In attempt to

realize academic standard and quality education, external examiners have been able to perform the following duties in Nigeria according to Onwuagba (2013) are as follows:

- To moderate and certify draft examination question papers in order to ensure the maintenance of a good academic standard.
- To moderate the marking of papers in the academic discipline of which is an Examiner,
- To take part in oral and other examinations as required by the Chief Examiner.
- To certify the grade list in any subject examined by him and where possible the relevant overall pass list.
- To attend the meeting or meetings of the Board of examiner and
- To report to the Vice-Chancellor/Rector/Provost on the following matters:
 - The standard of the examinations.
 - The standard of marking by the Internal Examiners.
 - The standard of project and course work examined.
 - The pass list and any classification and
 - Other matters considered appropriate.

He noted that in the event of any disagreement between the internal examiners, the external examiner should act as an adjudicator.

Other key roles are:

- To verify that academic standards are appropriate for the award or part thereof which the external examiner has been appointed to examine.
- To ensure that the academic standard of institutions in Nigeria awards are comparable to similar awards in same level of institutions in Nigeria.
- They can provide an objective view to the nature and standards of the assessment of students.
- To help institutions to monitor the academic standards of their awards, except those granted on an honorary basis.
- As independent and impartial advisers, external examiner provides institutions with informed comment on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards.
- They help institutions to assure and maintain academic standards across higher education awards.
- They help institutions to ensure that their assessment processes are sound, fairly operated and in line with the institution's policies and regulations.
- In a case of thesis, external examiner is required to write an independent report on the thesis and make a recommendation of assessment (Cambridge University, (2004), University of Bristol (2005), University of UK and Guide, in Collaboration with the QAA, (2010).

Lapses of some External Examiners:

The following are notable lapses of some external examiners:

- Failure to submit report in time to the appropriate authorities/appointed institution.
- Another notable undesirable behavior of external examiner is inadequate coverage or incomplete or brief report. A case that can require that the faculty head should request for a full or detailed report as appropriate.
- At times the external examiner provides false information with respect to academic assessment or standards. Implying that external examiner's comments in its opinion are potentially false, misleading, defamatory, unfairly damaging to the institution (Cambridge University, 2004).

Relevance of External Examiners to the Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

External Examiner would have the following stimulating implications which are related to quality assessment for academics standard and quality of education in Nigeria as follows:

- The use of external examiner is just one of the many ways to monitor whether fairness and academic standard are in line with the institution's guidelines, regulation process. Their key functions are to contribute to the assurance of the standards of awards and to ensure that students are treated fairly in the assessment process (Wikipedia, (2010) and University of UK and Guide, in Collaboration with the QAA, (2010)).
- The external examiner reports have significant status within the institution and usually considered very useful by an institution in internal quality assurance. Their reports are considerably useful in assessing institutions standard, student performance, comparability with other programmes at the same level elsewhere and other comments as appropriate (Cambridge University, 2004). This follows that their reports are vital and integral part of the quality assurance procedures.
- Another relevant is that poor attitude to work, low academic coverage and performance and poor academic assessment are prevented by the use of external examiners in the moderation of students' work and it's marking by internal examiners.

The Implications of Appointing External Examiners to Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

External examiners appointing to tertiary institution are vital to the realization of academic standards in Nigeria. However, the pitiable scenario at the present in the Nigerian higher institutions of learning cast serious doubt on the possibility and achievability of the role of external examiner in the realization of the much needed fairness and academic standard. This is so because evident abound that quality of education and academic standard in various higher institutions have been on decline in recent times in Nigeria. Some attributed it to lack of qualified teachers and professionalism while others blame government for lack of funding and political will (Moja, 2000 and Bamiro, 2012). External examiners, of course, are not exonerated. No matter how you perceived it, standard and quality of education in Nigeria has deteriorated (Moja, 2000 and Bamiro, 2012).

Conclusion:

External examiners have immense implications for realizing academic standard in Nigerian higher institutions. It is way of verifying that standards are appropriate for the course(s) concerned; to assist institutions in comparing curriculum coverage, adopting minimum academic standard depending on institutional level and as well to stimulate the teachers to improve and compile with the laid down standard and procedures in line with the institution's regulations.

- as practicable.

There should be a national set of criteria established for the appointment of external examiners; these should be adopted by each institution (Universities UK and GuideHE, in Collaboration with the QAA, 2010).

Recommendations

Based on the above highlights, the following recommendations are suggested:

- There should be collaborative centres that must ensure that all comments and recommendations contained in the report by external examiners are considered by the course team and committee structure as soon
- Government should ensure that Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education attach significant importance to the external examiner's report.

- Effort should be made to provide in full to the students all external examiners' reports with the exception of any confidential report which may be made to the Vice-chancellor or Rector or Provost.
- All tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria should recognize the importance of the external examiner role when looking at staff promotion procedures.
- Government should also provide wider commitment to ensure that quality arrangements are continually reviewed and developed in various institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

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