THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT MODEL (UEQIMODEL): A 21ST CENTURY DESIGN FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

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Abstract

From every dimension of measurement, education is seen as a pivot on which other facets of national development rotate. It is considerably important to refer to the quality of university education as a paramount indicator for growth and development of nations, including the developing countries. University managers apply diverse strategies to improve the quality of University Education, however, the current state of university education in most developing countries is becoming a source of worry, as major stakeholders globally expect improvement of outcomes in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). This study therefore aims to introduce a standardized guiding principle in the form of an Educational Model that would aid in the reformation of the existing system. The model, named the University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel) is a modern-era scientifically designed innovation in the field of educational management. It basically identifies the loopholes associated with the existing university management practices as applicable to developing countries and tries to bridge the gap by incorporating necessary tools needed to augment the status quo. The principles of the model are sub-categorized into five steps, which include management practice, activities, expectations, evaluation, and outcome. The paper concludes that UEQIModel should be implemented holistically by universities in developing countries for the restoration of a fast-declining dignity and overall improvement of university education quality.

***Keywords*:** Model, UEQIModel, University Education, Quality of Education.

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Introduction

According to Alemu, (2018, pp.210-218), a university is an institution for higher learning that brings learners to a high-level of intellectual development to promote research and innovation. A university can be viewed from two either theoretical or practical perspectives. The theoretical concept believes that university is designed for pure pursuit of knowledge, in this regard, (Goetze, 2019, pp.61-68 cited Hamlyn, (1996, p. 205-218), postulating that the university is primarily concerned with producing new knowledge in specialized areas as well as training of future researchers. The practical concept suggests that the university is conceived basically in terms of its economic importance, by empowering students to become productive members of society, producing cutting-edge technologies, nurturing creative and entrepreneurial projects, and making scientific advancements that are beneficial to both government and industry (Goetze, 2019 , pp.61-68).

It is imperative to understand the peculiar roles that university education plays in sustaining national growth and development globally. In this modern time, institutions of higher learning play an important role in shaping the culture of our society (Teague, 2015, p.1). A country without good education spanning among the citizenry cannot significantly compete among nations as it is critical to socio-economic strengths and well-being (Teague, 2015, p.1).

However, it is sad to note that the quality of university education, especially in developing countries, has continued to decline. The type and quality of education in any country is an important factor to their national development, but the declining state in the quality and standard of education in Nigeria is becoming quite alarming (Olawale, 2017). In the same line of view, Eziokwu and Amah, (2019, p.1) observed that the Nigerian university system is consistently faced with many critical challenges, as it has been observed that the standard of education as well as the much-cherished morals are

gradually declining. The reasons for such decline are not far-fetched, as corruption, poor funding, inadequate teaching and learning facilities, brain drain in the educational sector, poor implementation of educational policies, poor management practices, poor management of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), high level of indiscipline in the education sector, lack of accountability and transparency in the system etc. The issue of quality in university education in third countries suffer from several challenges, including poor funding, inadequate classrooms, and teaching aids, a "paucity of quality teachers, and a not-conducive learning environment" (Odia & Omofonmwan, 2007). However, it is right to emphasize that corruption is instrumental to the declining quality of university education in developing countries. According to Ignatius and Umotong, 2022, p.9-14), the hallmark for education problems in Nigeria is anchored on corruption and bad governance as Nigerian society is generally enveloped by insecurity and near absence of freedom and democracy (Ignatius & Umotong, 2022, p.9-14). On the other hand, UNDP, (2004, p.2), believes that lack of institutional capacity and inability to manage society through a system of social, judicial, political, and economic checks and balances are the main attributes of corruption.

As the quality of university education in developing countries continues to decline, there is an urgent need for concerned authorities to delve into actions on how best to improve the narrative. For a developing country like Nigeria to attain the required height in economic and political development, education should be one of the core services delivered by the government. According to the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, (2012), "Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to be more just, peaceful, and tolerant in societies".

Having stated the problems associated with the declining standard of quality of university education in developing countries, it is imperative that this study recommend a strategy that would augment the present state of the educational system . Therefore, the University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel) has been identified by this study to play a mediatory role between university education and declining quality of university education being obtained by students in developing countries. The model highlights key prerequisites to achieving the best maximum output needed to restore dignity as well as improving the quality of university education in developing countries. The UEQIModel covers the application of a broad range of scientific principles with the concept of checkmating the management practices and implementation of guidelines by educational managers and university administrators.

Objective

The objective of the study is to introduce the University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel) as a modern-era approach to restoring the dignity and quality of University Education in Developing countries.

Research question

How does the University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel) improve the quality of university Education in developing countries?

Theoretical Background

As part of the University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel) development process, it was necessary to preview the Multi Models of Quality Education (MMQE) designed by Cheng and Tam, (1997, p.22-31). The Process Model (PM) as part of the MMQE was adopted by this study because of its operational indicators on leadership, communication, planning, social interactions, and other essentials that makes learning experiences worthwhile (Cheng & Tam, 1997, p.26). The Process Model of Quality Education opines that rational internal processes and worthy learning experiences determine the quality of output (Tam and Cheng, 1996, p.20). According to Kwek, Lau & Yan, (2010, p.155), the Process Model of Education Quality is relevant to the management of education due to its clear association between process and educational outcomes. It further emphasizes that with a hitch-free internal institutional process, teaching and learning would be effectively done to enable students to understand the learning processes better (Cheng and Tam, 1997).

Definitions of Model

An abstraction that provides a conceptual framework for system analysis is known as a model. A model provides a logical and systematic approach to a problem by fixing the limitation and scope of an activity (Farzana & Khalid, 2010). According to the American Heritage Science Dictionary, (2011) a model is a systematic description of an object or phenomenon that shares important characteristics with the object or phenomenon. Models are like scientific concepts, capable of making generalized ideas more comprehensible to learners (Huddle, White & Rogers, 2000, pp.104-110).

Models are useful learning tools that can facilitate explanations, generate discussion, make predictions, provide visual representations of abstract concepts and generate mental models (Chittleborough et al., 2005, pp.195-212). The models that are used in the educational science area are known as Educational models and are specifically designed as guides in determining how schools operate, the curriculum being focused on, and the pedagogy in general (Ackerman, 2022). Models are effective representations of natural processes and our only tool for assuming vast spatial scales or making future predictions. Examples of models include conceptual models, statistical and mathematical models, teaching and demonstration models, and models for teaching using visualization.

Importance of Quality in Education

Quality education is crucial for promoting tolerance and peaceful societies, it helps people to escape the chain of poverty. As well as impacting people with the skills to critically reflect on reality and make wise decisions about life. Quality Education entails identifying the required changes the university intends to make on students (Rashid, (2019, p.1). According to Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon needed to change the world". The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, SDG4 (Quality Education) strives to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. Achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires education. Achieving gender equality, reducing inequality, and enabling people to have healthier, more sustainable lives are all made possible by quality education. Quality Education is also necessary for promoting tolerance and peaceful co-existence among people as well as helping people to escape the 'chain of poverty and upward socio-economic movement'.

In the developing countries, especially in the sub-Saharan areas, quality education is needed to improve people's consciousness about things happening within and around them, by doing so they are aware of their social and political responsibilities. Quality education helps people to realize the need to participate in political activities like voting or vying for political positions. People gain the capacity to reflect critically on reality, and the ability to make wise decisions are often an offshoot of high-quality education.

Furthermore, Rashid, (2019, p.1), opines that quality education provides the outcome needed for individuals, communities, and societies to progress. By this, it means that universities should be allowed to collaborate freely with their host-communities to access services across sectors designed to support the educational development of the students (Rashid, (2019, p.1). By doing so, University Education Quality provides the basis for equity in society which helps to reduce class distinction that seems to control the social fabrics of our society. It is worthy to note that quality education is supported by three key pillars which include (a) Ensuring access to quality teachers. (b) Provision of quality learning tools and professional development. (c) Establishment of safe and supportive quality learning environments (Rashid, 2019,p.1).

In summary, the importance of University Education Quality should not be over-emphasized as it is a human right and a public good. It provides the opportunity for each student to participate, learn and adopt a healthy lifestyle (Rashid, 2019,p.1). The high rate at which students from developing

countries migrate to western countries in search of quality education is enough evidence to show that there is a problem.

Causes of Poor-quality University Education in Developing countries

Despite the important role that education plays in the modern-day world, the quality of education in most developing countries remains regrettably low. However, it should be noted that failing to quickly improve the quality of education in developing countries would be one of the greatest moral disasters of our lifetime. In order to break the jinx, it is important to highlight some of the causes of poor-quality university education. They include- corruption, unsuitable management styles/practices, poor educational policy implementation, weak leadership structure, lack of discipline/disciplinary measures, inadequate learning environment, ethnic and religious considerations in appointments, examination malpractices etc.

Considering all the odds (*as highlighted in the above paragraph)* associated with obtaining quality education in developing countries, most students from Sub-Saharan Africa massively migrate to Europe and other Western countries for studies simply to obtain quality education.

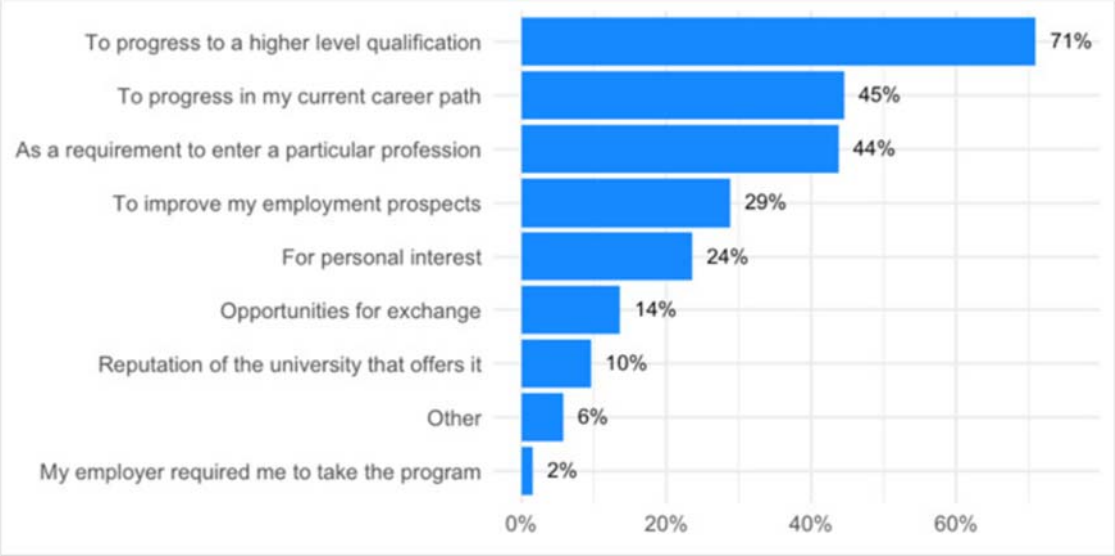


Figure 1: Showing the study motivations of African and Middle Eastern undergraduate prospects.
Source: Adapted from 2018 QS Applicant Survey

Figure 1 indicates the motivation behind students' interest in studying abroad. 71% indicate interest to progress to higher level qualification, while 45% want to progress in their current career path. These, of course, are offshoots of the poor quality of university education associated with home universities.

Methodology

The framework of the research design is descriptive, as information was systematically obtained to describe a created educational model known as the University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel), which is a modern-era scientifically designed innovation in the field of Educational Management.

Process of UEQIModel Creation.

1. The creation of UEQIModel went through various stages of development before a final model was validated. The theoretical background adopted the Process Model (Cheng & Tam, 1997, p.26) due to its operational indicators on leadership, communication, planning, social

interactions, as well as consideration of rational internal process and learning experiences to determine the quality of output (Tam and Cheng, 1996, p.20).

2. Think aloud approach, which involves articulation of thinking was applied (Tompkins, Campbell & Green, 2012).
3. Expert consultation and expert interviews: Five experts drawn from different fields of specialization were consulted for advice and feedback on the subject matter.
4. Expert's feedback: On the basis of the presented works, constructive feedback was received.
5. Experts Validation: Validation represents the action to verify that any process, procedure, activity, material, system, or equipment can achieve the desired results. (Rachna et al., 2012, pp.60-64). After creating the model, experts were consulted, before the validation.



Figure 2: Showing the stages of model creation. *Source: Figure illustrated by the author*

Introducing the University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel)

The University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel) which is the core-content of this study is intended to provide the best management guidelines for university management in developing countries. This could be made possible by restructuring the modalities for planning, organizing, implementation and evaluation of university management practices towards the achievement of the best possible quality of university education. Poor University Education Quality (UEQ) found in developing countries is associated with poor management practices in the university system. Therefore, university managers and other stakeholders saddled with the responsibility of university management should apply the principles of UEQIModel in accordance to set-out rules and regulations governing their respective universities.

The UEQIModel principles (distributed under five steps**)**



Figure 1: Showing the five steps of UEQIModel. *Source: Author's illustration).*

Step 1: (Management Practices)

The first step highlights the importance of adopting the best management practice that could help improve the management potential of universities. This is because the type of management practice applied by the university management system determines her management strength. The UEQIModel, based on literature, opined that democratic management style which entails that other members of the group should take a more participative role in the decision-making process, is the best management practice recommended for universities in developing countries. Democratic management style denotes that staff and other members of the university management body are given the opportunity to contribute their free ideas towards the day-to-day running of universities. Teachers who also use this management approach instill the values of collaboration, communication, and teamwork among students.

Step 2: (Activities)

This step includes the overall activities which take place within the university environment that helps to shape the university**.** This stage has three concepts, namely-

Accountability refers to accepting responsibility for one's actions. It is the state of being accountable to educational stakeholders for educational resources used. This, however, implies that accountability is a measure of the extent to which all available resources in a productive system are used for greater efficiency and productivity (Usman, 2016, p.266). According to NOUN, (2008), accountability in Education is usually linked to the management of the scarce resources of education to ensure efficient utilization of resources (human and material) for the accomplishment of goals of education. When staff are accountable for their actions, cases of corruption, embezzlement or misappropriation of public funds, abuse of office etc are reduced.

Social Justice*:* As part of guidelines outlined by UEQIModel to achieve quality education, certain principles of social justice should be met. According to Alvarez, (2019, p.1), social justice is about fair distribution of resources, treating all students and staff equitably so that they feel safe and secure (physically and psychologically). This would help create rooms for fairness and equal representation. Social justice could also refer to a fair and equitable division of resources, opportunities, and privileges in society (Mollenkamp, 2022, p.1). In a university setting, the process by which employees are hired, promoted and deployed within the university departments should be clearly stated and adhered to. Academic staff members (ASUU) should be diplomatically tolerated, their demands should be given due attention within a considerable time frame. A set of ethical principles for a just society must be met, these *include*- access, equity, diversity, human rights, and participation (Mollenkamp, 2022, p.2).

Learning Environment: Includes spaces where students feel free, safe, and supported in their pursuit of knowledge as inspired by their immediate surroundings, in all cases, conducive. Research into what makes schools effective finds that learning requires an orderly and co-operative environment, both in and outside the classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, pp.491-525). There should be an acceptable level of relationship between the university and its host community as both influence one another. Students and schools perform better when classrooms are well-disciplined and relations between students and teachers are amiable and supportive (OECD,2010, p.88). Learning environment encompasses three categories, namely, the physical, psychological, and emotional environments. The UEQIModel admits that the learning environment should be conducive as well as enticing to enable the user the confidence to operate maximumly.

Step 3 (Expectations)

This step deals with the expectations of the universities resulting from the application of the recommended management practice**.** The three identified concepts are:

Teaching and learning: These are processes that enable thought and behavior change, and can be done formally or informally, inside or outside the classroom**.** Teaching and learning is a process whereby the teacher identifies the learning objectives, develops teaching materials, designs the teaching method and puts the teaching and learning approach into action. The UEQIModel sees teaching and learning as a key function in university activities. Students should be provided with the best qualified teachers, teaching, and learning resources, functional libraries, up-to-date ICT hubs, and other opportunities capable of promoting learning. The Pat Basset 5C's (Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration, and Character) of 21st century learning, (POWHATAN school blog, 2019, p.1) was structured into the UEQIModel.

Discipline in the university: An organized enforcement of standards to reduce disruptions and maximize learning. Universities use discipline strategies to control staff and student behavior and promote self-discipline. All forms of discipline, whether preventive, supportive, or corrective, aim to create a welcoming environment at school for all students. Students' involvement in anti-social activities are frowned upon by the UEQIModel.

ASUU Management: Some activities of the Academic staff union of universities, (an umbrella body of all teaching members of universities in Nigeria) is capable of affecting the students' academic performance. The overall quality of university education in Nigeria is on the verge of collapse partly due to incessant labour actions engaged by ASUU. The UEQIModel believes that if an appropriate management style (democratic) is applied, then the excesses of ASUU/government face-off could be cut-off or drastically reduced.

Step 4 (Evaluation)

This step assesses the success or failure of the entire process. Evaluation is the process of judging something's quality, importance, or value, or a report that includes this information. According to Manichander, (2016, p.15), the purpose of evaluation is to give shape to educational objectives so as to make teaching methods simple and effective for a successful completion of the teaching-learning process. A successful evaluation provides valid and credible results, providing direction and action for development. The evaluation of UEQIModel should be done through assessment of students' academic performance to determine if there is improvement or not.

Step 5 (Outcome)

This step highlights the result of the whole process. A successful implementation of the highlighted principles of UEQIModel should amount to improved students' academic performance. According

to Tadese, et al. (2022, p. 2), academic performance/ achievement is the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has attained their short or long-term educational goals and is measured either by continuous assessment or cumulative grade point average (CGPA). This would lead to an improved quality of University Education as it provides all learners with capacities required to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, and contribute to peaceful co-existence within society. This study submits that university education quality could be improved by implementing the UEQIModel.

UEQIModel Validation

Model creation is regarded as an efficient research strategy because it helps researchers and scientists to relate to reality more accurately and it also helps to explain, predict, test complex systems (Farzana & Khalid, 2010, p.4). The development of a model in research is an abstract means of decoding a complex situation (Farzana & Khalid, 2010,p.10). It is important that models should be validated and verified to represent that which it ought to represent. On that principle, this study applied the validation approach to authenticate the created University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel).

An expert interview was conducted, four international experts gave constructive feedback on the model development process, in addition to strict adherence to standard scientific principles and procedures, a final version of the model was created.



Figure 2: Showing the UEQIModel validation process. (*Source: Author's illustration)*

UEQIModel Implementation

The UEQI Model is meant for the university managers and administrators, policy makers, curriculum developers, the government, Federal and State Ministries of Education, the University Commission, researchers, Academic Staff Union of Universities, students, and other relevant stakeholders to implement the model. The model should be seen as a focal point to assemble all relevant stakeholders on board for a joint action to improve and restore the quality of university education in developing countries. Every aspect of the model should be implemented without compromise.

Results and Discussion

The implication of the declining quality of education at all levels has a far-reaching negative impact on a nation's moral, civic, cultural, and economic sustainability (Orji and Job, 2013, p.312). The University Education Quality Improvement Model (UEQIModel) has a positive impact on the improvement of university education quality in Nigeria. However, this should be possible if the principles of the model are appropriately implemented. Stakeholders including experts, researchers, policy makers, governments, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), curriculum developers, university managers and administrators, NGO's, students, parents, community leaders and host communities should realize the importance of individual and group efforts towards achieving

the goal of improved university education quality. The interest of providing a quality education should be in the general interest rather than individual interest.

The importance of quality university education should be over emphasized, considering its impact on national development. According to Thom-otuya1 & Inko-tariah, (2016,p. 106), quality education is a veritable tool for scientific discoveries, national development, and transformation of a greater society to a greater height. In the same development, Afolabi and Loto (2012, p.330) affirms this idea when he suggests that a developed or educated polity is the one that has enough manpower, and each person occupies his or her rightful position to enhance the growth of the society.

Conclusion

The UEQIModel is a management structure for organizing, planning, implementation and evaluation of university policies to achieve the best possible quality of university education in developing countries. This study concludes that complete adherence and implementation of the principles as enshrined in the UEQIModel should significantly improve the quality of University Education in developing countries. The management style applied by the universities could have a correlation with the students' learning outcomes. This shows that the ways and manners in which those entrusted with management positions discharge their responsibilities can directly or indirectly influence students' learning outcomes, owing to the fact that students' academic performance is an assessment platform for determining the effectiveness of university policies. The relationship between education management practices and quality of university education is a process that propels students' achievement. Efficient management practices will lead to an improved academic performance by the students thereby transcending to a quality university education (QUE).

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