Quality of Education in Africa: Definitions, Indicators and Practices

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Overview
‘Quality of education is now an issue of global concern. Without quality education, development will not occur. Only the educated people can command the skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and for a better quality of life’

Barber Conable
Former President of the World Bank (1988)
Kwapong (1988) observed that the main challenge of education in Africa is to develop the human resources that will ensure accelerated development and modernization without compromising Africa’s cultural identify. He stressed, in order for education to realize its key role in development, the attainment of greater internal efficiency of the educational system and a greater external efficiency through an increase in the relevance of schooling to the job market should be a priority.
In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All [EFA] identified quality as a pre-requisite for achieving the fundamental goal of **equity**. It was recognized that expanding **access** alone would be insufficient for education to contribute to the development of the individual and the society. Emphasis was accordingly placed on assuring an increase in **children’s cognitive development** by improving the quality of their education.

The quest to achieve Education for All is fundamentally about assuring that children, youth and adults gain the knowledge and skills they need to better their lives and to play a role in building more peaceful and equitable societies. This is why focusing on quality is an imperative for achieving EFA (UNESCO, 2004)
UNESCO further stressed that the six goals adopted at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, implicitly or explicitly integrate a quality dimension. Goal 6, in particular, commits countries, with the support of their EFA partners, to improve all aspects of the quality of education ... Two principal objectives are at stake here: the first is to ensure the **cognitive development of learners**. The second emphasizes the role of education in **nurturing the creative and emotional growth of learners** and in **helping them to acquire values and attitudes for responsible citizenship**.

Quality must pass the test of equity: an education system characterized by discriminating against any particular group is not fulfilling its mission.
The profound and valid statements underscore the significance of the theme of this paper - *quality of education*. 
Some of the core questions addressed in this paper are: what is quality education? Is the definition of quality education universal or there are peculiarities about quality education in Africa? What are the reliable and valid indicators of quality education? What current practices best illustrate the state of the quality of education in Africa in comparison with best practices in the world? How realistic is the goal of achieving EFA within the specified time frame [2015], considering the serious limitations in developing African nations? Is it really feasible to achieve quality and ‘quantity’ education all at once? This paper attempts to find valid answers to these key questions.
Definitions
Although there is no single definition of quality, two principles characterize most attempts to define the objectives of education. The first, which identifies learners’ cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems, sees the success with which systems achieve this as one indicator of their quality. The second emphasizes the role of education in promoting commonly shared values along with creative and emotional development (UNESCO, 2005).
Gordon and Partington (1993) conceptualized education quality as the degree of success with which an institution provides educational environment which enable students to effectively achieve worthwhile learning goals and appropriate academic standard.

According to Cole (1996), quality is the degree of excellence. It is synonymous with standard, efficiency, excellence, relevance and worthiness.
The various approaches regarding quality have their roots in different traditions of educational thoughts. Humanistic approaches, behaviourist theory, sociological critiques of education and challenges to the legacies of colonialism have each enriched the quality debate.

To reconcile a range of approaches, the EFA Global monitoring Team Report adopts a framework that takes into account five major factors affecting quality: learners, whose diversity must be recognized; the national economic and social context; material and human resources; the teaching and learning process and the outcomes and benefits of education. By focusing on these dimensions and how they interact, it is possible to draw up a comprehensive map for understanding, monitoring and improving quality.
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Major Factors Determining Education Quality

- Learners [whose diversity must be recognized]
- National economic and social context
- Material and human resources
- Teaching & learning process
- Outcomes & Benefits of education

Learners [whose diversity must be recognized]

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The Dakar framework for Action declared that access to quality education was the right of every child. It affirmed that quality was at the heart of education – a fundamental determinant of enrolment, retention and achievement. Its expanded definition of quality sets out the desirable characteristics of learners [healthy, motivated students], processes [competent teachers using active pedagogies], content [relevant curricula], and systems [good governance and equitable resource allocation] (UNESCO, 2005) [Illustrated]
UNESCO saw education throughout life as based upon four pillars: **Learning to know** – learners build their own knowledge daily, combining indigenous and ‘external’ elements; **Learning to do** – focuses on the practical application of what is learned or knowledge acquired; **Learning to live together** – addresses the critical skills for a life free from discrimination, where all have equal opportunity to develop themselves, their families and their communities; and **Learning to be** – emphasizes the skills needed for individuals to develop their full potential. According to Delors et al (1996), this conceptualization of education provided an integrated and comprehensive view of learning and, therefore, of what constitutes education quality.
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Learning To Be

Pillars of Education

Learning To Do

Learning To Live Together

Learning To Know

Source: Delors - UNESCO [1996]

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UNICEF strongly emphasizes what might be called desirable dimensions of quality, as identified in the Dakar Framework. Its paper ‘Defining Quality in Education’ recognizes five dimensions of quality: learner, environments, content, processes and outcomes, founded on the ‘rights of the whole child, and all children, to survival, protection, development and participation’ (UNICEF in UNESCO, 2005).
Dimensions of Quality

- Learner
- Outcomes
- Environments
- Processes
- Content

UNICEF in UNESCO, 2005
According to Obanya (2002), the most distinguishing characteristic of quality in Education is that it is a multi-dimensional concept. Quality pervades every action that goes into making the process of educating possible, every element of the activities undertaken in the process of educating, and the wide array of beneficial results of educational activities on both individual learners and the wider society. The subject of education quality can therefore be addressed at three levels: input, process and output.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Total Involvement and acceptance of program</td>
<td>- Acquisition of socially desirable skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Responsive to individual and societal needs.</td>
<td>- Teachers and Management fully devoted to continuous self improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Teaching Force</td>
<td>Adequately prepared and well motivated</td>
<td>- The ultimate goal: A committed society, a critical mass of productive/creative citizens and an education system that goes on improving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Aesthetic, relevant and enough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Relevant, adequate and enough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Funds</td>
<td>Available at the right time in right amount, and well applied</td>
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**Source:** Obanya (2002)
The Obanya conception of Quality of Education is quite ingenious. It concisely addressed the subject, and interestingly, within an African perspective. Though the details of the actual process are not clearly delineated in this table/model [such as practically effective pedagogies, use of diagnostic and development-oriented testing techniques etc], they are well explained in several portions of his classic titled: ‘Revitalizing Education in Africa’. It appears two vital elements are missing in the input dimension though: the student force and the industrial force.

The quality of pupils/students prepared by the society [parents, hospital, church, school etc] lays the foundation and largely determine the effect of the education process and the quality of final output.

A strong collaboration between the school system and the industrial system, particularly in science and technology practical works will go a along way in catalyzing truly indigenous productivity and development.
The UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team [IITT] on Education posits that a quality education focuses on learning. There is a shift of emphasis from ‘educating’ to ‘learning.’ The primary concern is learning and, therefore, the relationship between the learner and the educator is critical. But the inputs, processes, results and outcomes that surround and foster, or hamper learning are key as well. All of these can be seen as affecting learning at two levels – at the level of the learner in her or his learning environment [adult or child, formal or informal] and the level of the system that creates and supports the learning experience. Each of these two levels can be divided into five dimensions. / The five dimensions for the level of Learner are: Considers the Content of formal and non-formal learning, acknowledges what the learner brings, seeks out learners, provides a conducive learning environment, and enhances learning processes. The five dimensions for the level of the learning system are: Implements relevant and appropriate policies, restructures resources for learning, measures learning outcomes, promotes the establishment of legislation supportive to learning, structures management and administration to support learning [Illustrated].
What affects learning affects the quality of education

Factors affecting Learning:

- Content of formal and non-formal learning
- Level of Learner
- What the learner brings
- Seeks out learners
- Conducive learning environment
- Learning Processes

Source: UNAIDS-IITA [2006]

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What affects learning affects the quality of education

Factors affecting Learning:
Level of the Learning System

- Structures management and Administration to support learning
- Implements relevant and appropriate policies
- Restructures resources for learning
- Promotes the establishment of legislation supportive to learning
- Measures learning outcomes

Source: UNAIDS-IITA [2006]

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Source: UNAIDS-IITA [2006]
‘Level of Society’ was added by Odukoya (2010). Obanya (2002) also addressed this Societal Dimension.
The society moulds the learning system and the learner; the learning system moulds the learner.

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Indicators
Several indicators provide information on dimensions of quality. Public expenditure on education represents a higher proportion of GDP of rich countries, where the EFA goals are already achieved, than in poorer ones, where the coverage of under-resourced systems needs to be expanded and improved. Pupil/teacher ratio remain higher than is desirable in many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa [regional median is 44:1] and South and West Asia [40:1]. In many low income countries, teachers do not meet even the minimum standards for entry into teaching and many have not fully mastered the curriculum. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is severely undermining the provision of good education and contributing significantly to teacher absenteeism (UNESCO, 2004)
Yoloye in Ajayi (2009), posited that there are six indicators for assessment of quality in higher education system. These include the quality of teachers, the quality of facilities, the quality of instructions, the quality of evaluation procedure, the quality of morality, and the quality of administration and management [Illustrated].
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Quality of teachers
- Quality of administration & management
- Quality of morality
- Quality of Evaluation procedure
- Quality of facilities
- Quality of instructions

Source: Yoloye in Ajayi [2009]
These points are valid. However, a vital quality indicator appears to be left out, ‘quality of students’. In my view, this is the mother of all education qualities. It is possible to have quality infrastructure, teachers and related inputs and processes and yet produce students who are aversive morally, incapable of peaceful mutual relations, and hardly able to contribute meaningfully to community and national development. Such educational investment would be a waste. Education that does not translate to production of quality students who are capable of solving their personal, societal and environment problems whilst evolving economically viable goods and services is hardly a quality education.
Akpa, Udoh and Fagbamiye (2005) identified some of the factors militating against the quality of higher education to include: inadequate fund, shortage of physical facilities, shortage of qualified teachers, unstable educational policies, lack of uniform curriculum and poor supervision cum monitoring. These factors are indirectly quality indicators.
Practices
Sub-Saharan Africa [SSA] with about 740 million people and some 200 public universities and a fast increasing number of private higher education institutions and the lowest gross enrollment ratio in the world [about 5%] is now paying greater attention to issues of quality at the tertiary level. Findings from Materu [2007] study showed that structured national-level quality assurance processes in African higher education are a very recent phenomenon and that most countries face major capacity constraints. Only about a third of them have established structured national quality assurance mechanisms. Activities differ in their scope and rigor, ranging from simple licensing of institutions by the Minister responsible for higher education, to comprehensive system-wide program accreditation and ranking of institutions. Within institutions of higher learning, self assessment and academic audits are gradually being adopted to supplement traditional quality assurance methods [e.g. use of external examiners]. However, knowledge about and experience with internal audit is limited.
The main challenges to quality assurance systems in Africa are cost and human capacity requirements. Operating a national quality assurance agency typically entails an annual budget of at least US$450,000 and requires appropriately trained and experienced staff. As African countries look forward to tertiary education to make significant contribution to economic growth, improvements in the quality of programs and institutions will be crucial [Ansu, in Materu, 2007]
In an empirical study of quality assurance practices in tertiary institutions in Africa, Materu (2007) found that, to date, out of the 52 countries in the continent, only 16 [31%] have quality assurance agencies. These are Cameroon, Cote D’Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. 36 countries [69%] have no national agency in place.
The emergence of private tertiary institutions and the need to regulate their activities appears to have been the main trigger for the establishment of formal QA agencies in most countries. The common quality assurance practices observed are: institutional audits, institutional accreditation and program accreditation. The common approach, also used in developed countries is: institutional [or program] self-assessment, followed by peer review and transmission of findings to the institution.
The key factors contributing to the decline in quality of higher education in Africa are: 1) decline in per unit costs amidst increasing enrolments. 2) insufficient number of academic staff in higher education institutions as a result of brain drain, retirements and HIV/ADS. 3) low internal and external efficiency and 4) Poor governance.

Other challenges facing the quality of education in Africa include: severely limited resources, the threats posed by wars, internal conflicts, political uncertainties, the prevalence of fledgling democracies, natural disasters, HIV/AIDS, refugees, the debt burden, rapid population growth, globalization and the acute shortage of skills in the education sector (Obanya, 2002).
The most common QA standards used in the case study countries are: mission, vision, academic programs, library resources, physical and technological resources, number and qualification of staff, number of students and their entry qualifications and financial resources [relative to number of students]. Surprisingly, the Matero study found no evidence of output standards such as volume and quality of research and graduates. Little is known about the impact of QA on the quality of graduates, employer attitudes towards graduates, and research outputs of tertiary institutions. There is need for follow-up works in these areas.
Matero further observed that Francophone countries lag behind the rest of Africa in developing structured management of quality assurance at the national level and also within institutions of higher learning. Only Mauritius and Cameroon have national QA agencies. Madagascar is about to set up one. CAMES which has been responsible for quality assurance in the entire Francophone region presently appears over-stretched. Also, because participation in CAMES is voluntary, it lacks power to enforce quality control.
Virtually all current QAs are government dependent for funding and appointment of their governing bodies and top management. Some [e.g. South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt enjoy significant autonomy in their operations]. The Higher Education Quality Committee in South Africa directly defends its budget in parliament. In Cameroon, the agency is funded as a department of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Minister has the final say in Accreditation decisions. This heterogeneity in activity and rigor of quality assessment raises doubts as to the ability of some tertiary education systems to respond to global challenges such as the **Bologna Process**, which is intended to harmonize tertiary systems in the European Union area, leading to a common framework for recognition of programs, credentials and competencies. African academics, particularly those in Anglophone countries, do not fully understand the Bologna process and its influences on global higher education. A study on the specific implications of the Bologna reforms for Africa higher education is therefore necessary.
Progress towards agreement on global standards for licensing of graduates is occurring in certain professional fields, for example, the Washington Accord standards for engineering. This movement is likely to increase in the years ahead. Graduate competence that can be assessed in terms of global standards is important for companies considering foreign direct investment, and for graduates seeking mobility in a global labour market. So, there is need to develop along this area.
Assuring the quality of distance learning and new modes of delivery remain a challenge. Development of quality standards and verification of compliance for distance education require new skills which are currently lacking in most countries. Presently, distance learning and its facsimiles are on the ascendancy lane in many developing countries. Capacity building in this regard is urgent.
American International School of Lagos [AISL]
The American International School of Lagos, Nigeria, has established curriculum standards and learning outcomes in all areas. The curriculum is based on the US National Standards. In order to maintain high achievement, a curriculum coordinator is in charge of monitoring and revising the curriculum periodically. The revision, based on current research, follows a five-year cycle. Teachers, administrators, and parents are involved in the decision making process. Open forums are conducted to inform parents and gain feedback regarding curriculum. To prepare students to achieve at their highest levels, the curriculum is designed to promote integration with technology and other subject areas. Library, community resources, and Internet access, as well as hands on and cooperative activities are planned to encourage positive attitude toward learning. The goal of the American International School, Lagos is to ensure a rigorous, updated curriculum that meets the needs of an international body.
The student Learning Outcomes/Curriculum for Math, Literacy, Social Studies, and Science are on the school web site. Examination of these documents along with the published calendar provides parents, students and interested parties with a thorough description of a student’s year of study.

Formal conferences are held bi-annually while parents and teachers schedule informal meetings as necessary. Report cards are sent home three times a year in the elementary grades Pre-K to 5. Grades 6 to 10 will follow a semester grading period and will have two grading periods in the school year.
The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills [ITBS] and its cognitive tests are administered to all students in first through ninth grade. Test results provide grade level equivalents, national, international, private school, and high socioeconomic school percentile ranking. Parents are provided with a summary of their child’s achievement, and the Child Study Team reviews individual and grade level scores. Students and/or areas of concerns are identified, and plans are formulated to address deficits.

An integral part of the AISL program is the school library containing over 25,000 volumes in addition to computerized technology for use in research. It serves as a valuable resource and is staffed by professionals.
Closing Remarks/
Food for Thought
Can quality education be achieved within a quantity education system?

In this presentation, the author tried to be intellectually disciplined in kow-towing the lines of thought of acclaimed International Bodies and their respective Agencies like World Bank, United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF and that of my Mentors and Education Gurus. Great care was taken not to ‘rock the boat’. However, exposure to the principles of creativity, innovation and development wouldn’t just that this presentation be concluded without sharing some inspirations.
So far, the focus has been on *quality education*. But it is necessary to posit that there is also *quantity education*. From all indications, Education for All [EFA] is fundamentally ‘quantity education’, though some want to prove otherwise. The question is, is the practice of EFA [as it is presently stipulated] realistic, especially in poor African nations that are barely managing to survive in the face of scarce resources. The drive or quest for quality education within a system of quantity education and scarce resources can be likened to a famished/emaciated man who attempts to climb a mountain by drawing on its lean fat reserves. Two things are apt to happen: he is not likely to achieve his mission and while trying to, he may drop dead. This is the pathetic state of many poor African nations presently. EFA or Quantity Education, vis-à-vis its attendant compulsory Basic Education for All is rendering impotent the available meagre resources in poor African nations. If continued, it is apt to dissipate the meagre resources and leave the respective countries poorer, as the trend is presently.
Wisdom demands that African education agencies should devote their meagre resources to effect true quality education that would evolve morally sound technocrats who could galvanize national development within a short time. This achievement is apt to significantly increase national GDP/Income within a shorter period of time that could then be used to achieve EFA [Quantity Education], if so desired.

However, this is not desirable either. Rather, it is better that such accrued resources be used to further Quality education. It is this practice that is more likely to emancipate Africa from poverty and its attendant problems [including mass illiteracy] rather than spreading our thin resources in trying to achieve EFA by year 2015.
Until the United Nations and its Agencies who are advocating Education for All are ready to fully assist Africa in funding Quality and not Quantity EFA without lending [which puts Africa in greater cul-de-sac], they should allow Africa to take the course of nature, in going at its own pace. Failure to heed this request will simply keep Africa retrogressing instead of developing.
References


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