

THE NEED FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ADULT EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

This paper examines the complexity of adult education and the dearth of quality assurance practices in adult education programs in direct comparison with the practice in formal education. It presents lack of policy as a contributory factor and advocates more awareness of adult education as a bona fide field while reiterating the necessity to pay more attention to quality assurance in adult education. The paper argues that more attention is presently paid to quality assurance in the formal education sector and most efforts to improve the education system in Nigeria has been more concerned with the formal educational system especially below the tertiary level. The discourse further proposes a model quality assurance prototype for adult education to be followed for best practices. Quality assurance is an equally necessary process in the practice of adult education, even if it has hitherto been neglected, it is essential to establishing and instilling a stronger sense of awareness of quality and ensuring continual improvement in the practice.

Key words: Quality Assurance, Adult Education, Method

Introduction

The turn of the century witnessed the birth of new ideas derived from changing social philosophies and the new views have in turn impacted on the purpose and method of delivery of adult education generally. This has especially influenced the transition from the teacher-centred approach that is giving way to more learner-centred approach, making the teacher more of a mentor and resource person. Thus in the present dynamic environment, adult education's success is measured by different techniques of quality assurance as quality assurance in adult education is more complex than in the formal education sector.

One of the outcomes of the 1990 Jontiem, Thailand World Conference on Education for All (EFA) was the call for all countries to pay more attention to quality in their

educational delivery system. After the outmoded decree 16 of 1985, the Federal Inspectorate Service (FIS) of Nigeria had embarked on a series of quality-boosting strategies through various planned activities, including several eye-opening trips to China, South Africa and Thailand to study those countries' *modus operandi* and evolve a best practice from this and ultimately develop a quality assurance model for the education sector below the tertiary level. Before 1973 and the FIS, the Nigerian educational system did not seem to have paid much attention to quality assurance in education as a whole.

Educational quality assurance is a holistic process with the basic purpose of establishing and instilling a strong awareness of quality. According to Ramon-Yusuf (2005), Quality assurance is the process of maintaining standards in products or services through inspection or testing of samples. In education it is seen as embracing all its functions and activities (teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment). This is according to the Article 11 on Qualitative Evaluation as adopted by the World Conference on Higher Education on the 9th of October, 1998 from the World Declaration and Framework for priority action for change and development in higher education.

Unfortunately, most efforts to ensure, not only a prescribed standard but also to ensure that input, process and output in education meet these standards are largely directed at the formal education system. Adult education deals mostly with out of school experiences, who does or how then is quality ensured in the field? To begin with, adult education covers a wide area and includes, according to Okenimkpe cited in Bakare (2010) Literacy, Vocational, Fundamental, Leisure and Continuing Education. If one is to consider that these adult education types are carried out in different ways – through Correspondence, Distance Education, Vocational, Formal, Evening Classes, On-the-Job and in the community, one can then begin to see the ramifications involved in ensuring quality in all these areas.

It was further suggested that a new body called the Nigerian Education Quality assurance Service (NEQAS) be instituted. This body, though still residing within the Federal Ministry of Education, should be given enough independence to take

decisions and give crucial appraisal on issues that relate to how schools are performing nationally as well as be self-accounting. Other suggestions for what is expected from the body include:

- suggested uniform instrument, schedules and guidelines for quality assurance nationwide
- addressing the challenges confronting the present day inspection system by promoting shared responsibility thus reducing the burden on each stakeholder
- strong legal framework to back it all through the National, Zonal, State, State Zonal, LGEAs as well as Schools
- in order to have improved effectiveness and efficiency, the developed quality assurance model is to rely more on participatory evaluation through the involvement of stakeholders at all levels, and
- to make use of accredited professionals

Also suggested is the establishment of a National Quality Assurance Management Information Systems (NQAMIS) which is to:

- a) generate vital statistical information
- b) be a repository of important and relevant information for researchers, government and other stakeholders
- c) be linked with the National Education Management Information System (NEMIS)
- d) be made available to all stakeholders.

The expected stakeholders are - State Commissioners of Education, Chairmen of SUBEB, LGEA Secretaries, Principals/School Heads, Community and Opinion Leaders, Teachers, Learners, NGO/FBOs are all to play a role in school evaluation.

Furthermore, the prescribed Service is to have close interaction with all Examination Bodies in order to monitor the performance of students on State, Gender and Subject issues through a clear access to statistical information on entries and performance. It was also recommended that the body should keep abreast with best practices around the world with a view to adopting or adapting them for local use. There should also be a research unit to collate, digest and analyze information from the reports of the evaluators and other stakeholders. The proposed organization is expected to commence by engaging in a carefully planned, high level sensitization campaign from the National, State and Local Government levels.

The vision is to engender a vibrant Inspectorate Service, manned by efficient and dedicated staff that will guarantee quality education delivery through improved

teaching and learning in the institutions below the tertiary level. The stated mission of the new body include:

- to ensure the attainment of minimum standards and uniform quality education in the nation, to be achieved through a viable supervisory system
- safeguarding and maintaining high quality standard of education through participatory inspection and liaising with major stakeholders of education
- synergizing functions with other quality control agencies
- regular review and updating with inspection tools to reflect contemporary demands
- guaranteeing effective and efficient service delivery, and
- capacity building.

The general idea was to revamp the Inspectorate Service and make it more autonomous. Prior to the instigation of the new Whole School Evaluation (WSE) system, quality assurance was largely done through Inspection based on the colonial format. The WSE now involves, not only inspection, but also monitoring, assessing and evaluating according to agreed standards. This also heavily emphasizes communication of the judgments to all concerned for purposes of correction, integrity, accountability and constant improvement. It was the dissatisfaction of the FIS with the old model that led to the need to establish and instil a strong awareness of quality by prescribing standards and ensuring that the input, process and output meet high standards as well as modern practices globally. Quality assurance is therefore now encouraged to be more participatory and interactive as well as less authoritative and more widely accepted and probably also lead to the creation of a national model; this process is completed with constant evaluation of the quality, feedback and review of the operational system.

Quality assurance in education is a dynamic process descriptive of a good and effective practice. It has its own concepts, theories, roles and responsibilities as well as other interaction and activities. It is in the democratic government system that helps to bridge the gap between policy and practice and helps stakeholders provide a practical way of offering the guidance and support needed to achieve improvement in their offering to those who need it to achieve a better and more relevant education while improving standards in priority areas. The quality assurance process in the formal school system is now based on the new approach of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) system. The process of quality assurance in formal education system was backed by the Decree 16 of 1985 (the Education National Minimum Standards and establishment of Institutions Act). This has been used by administrative authorities

to set, maintain and improve upon minimum educational standards according to the provisions of the National Policy on Education. This is often carried out in Public and Private schools below the tertiary levels while those above use the accreditation process to maintain standards.

The essence of quality assurance is a process and practice basically concerned with the conformance to mission specification and goal achievement within the publicly accepted standards of accountability and integrity (Frazer (1992). Therefore the process of quality assurance in schools has to do with the identification of unsatisfactory standards or quality in school programs and ensuring that rapid action is taken to improve them. It deals with the process of meeting and exceeding expectations of education. If standards are not set, there can be no yardstick to measure against and act as a check and balance. Thus, using these basic concepts, it is possible to fashion out a commensurate model for quality assurance in adult education.

Quality assurance is a dynamic process and is usually attached to the monitoring and evaluation section of education, is essentially a duty overseen by the Federal Inspectorate Service in the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria, at least when it involves schools below the tertiary institutions. This used to be carried out based on the Colonial prototype which mainly involved the Inspection process (usually of the teachers). Nowadays, Quality Assurance is in the process of becoming the rigorous inspection of the school (Whole School Evaluation) through the process of monitoring, assessing according to agreed standards of practise and communicating the findings to all stakeholders concerned so that necessary changes can be made for the integrity and public accountability and for consistent improvement. Thus there must be periodic evaluations, feedback and reviews also of the operations in order to maintain the holistic process and ensure quality awareness.

Efforts to revamp the present practice of quality assurance in Nigeria became more concerted after the 1998 proposal to rejuvenate the FIS through the following arguments, among others:

- need to raise staff morale through the provision of adequate resources and training

- review of the staff postings
- the necessity to allocate more funds for its activities; and
- urgency of further decentralization and setting up of six Zonal Offices to be headed by their own directors.

These suggestions were submitted to the Minister. There was also a second attempt, prompted by the UNESCO's cooperation agreement with the Federal Government. It funded re-orientation Workshops for the Federal and State Inspectors in the zones in a bid to help them harmonise their activities and this culminated in the publication of the book (Inspection Manual and the Trainer's Guide of 2001). Also in 2001, the Education Sector Analyses (ESA) project was set up to diagnose problems inhibiting the rapid development of the Nigerian Education System. They suggest a need to reform the entire Inspection process and the view was formally accepted by a group of stakeholders who agreed on a Road Map. This led to the DFID-funded Workshop in Lokoja which recommended a broadening of the scope of the improvement to cover the entire spectrum of quality assurance rather than mere school inspection alone as was the practice, therefore a task force for quality assurance was there instituted. The Task Force undertook tours to South Africa and the United Kingdom to see best practices, and this brought the idea of whole school evaluation, combined with the updated version of school inspection. All these efforts were tailored towards the formal education system below the tertiary level. As usual, all the efforts and pronouncements were silent on quality assurance for Adult and Non-Formal Education.

Quality Assurance in adult education

The ideal of the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) was defended in 2007 at the national assembly. This Council is one of the bodies that has been solidly behind the improvement of adult education as a field. Unfortunately, it has proved to be easier to conduct quality assurance largely in the Formal arm of adult education because of the complexity and multiplicity of its sponsors, programmes, methods and so on, and because 'Formal' adult education is better organised and coordinated and can be subsumed under the general Formal School System. It may be a bit more cumbersome to implement quality assurance on an industry that is otherwise under-defined and prolific, even if it will be at a scaled

down level to start with, from the rigorous version obtainable in below the tertiary level. Quality assurance in formal education already follows a specific format, using objective and the curriculum to determine the benchmark for standard and using this for the entire school system. This is understandably more complex for adult education with its non-formal mode of delivery which may not rely on a curriculum, thereby making it difficult to determine or derive a benchmark for standard from a curriculum. However, adult education does have objective, often related to the program and the specific objective of the program or the individual learner aspiration as well as relevance and appropriateness can then be used to guide and determine the objective to be evaluated or measured in terms of program and output success. There is a definite gap and there is the need for quality assurance to sanitise the practice of adult education.

Statement of the Problem

The paper considered the status of quality assurance in adult education practice. Since most adult education is supposed to be essentially non-formal (outside the classroom), this poses a problem of evaluation and how to set the standards to be measured in the quality assurance process. It is usually more straightforward in formal education as there is a curriculum that can be used to derive the standard benchmark, this is not easily achievable in adult education in a situation where the evaluation is left largely to the individual adult learner to decide what his objectives are and also chart his progress and decide whether he is achieving his objectives or whether there is a commensurate difference in his behaviour, attitude, skill etc in order for him to decide whether he has gained anything new or improved his standard of living. How then do we set a uniform standard, across board, in a field that may not use a curriculum (unless in a formal setting) and where the setting of the standard may be sometime left to the individual adult learner? There is a dearth of literature on quality assurance in adult education and there have not been many efforts to institute quality assurance models in adult education.

Purpose of the study

The structure and function of adult education at the different levels is slightly different from that of formal education. This is in lieu of the characteristics of the adult learner that comes into play according to Knowles (1984). Apart from

individual aspirations, any program in education has expected outcomes and this is what must be constantly improved to ensure there is a standard and that it is maintained in order to avoid total system collapse. There is a perceived gap in the delivery of quality assurance in adult education practice in Nigeria which is largely attributable to the complex nature of adult education and its non-formal delivery. The purpose of the discourse is to examine the status of quality assurance in adult education *vis-a-vis* that of formal education system and explore the possibility of proposing a working model for quality assurance or prototype for the practice of adult education in Nigeria. The study relied on secondary data and literature as well as previous field work to suggest a model to be used.

Theoretic framework

This work embraces Keeton's (1974) theory of quality assurance in non-traditional programs, using adult education as a base. He examines:

- * Statement of program purposes
- * Given purpose specified at program level
- * The criteria upon which satisfactory performance will be judged at the minimum
- * Strategy for monitoring performance and follow up in acting upon the findings.

It was advocated that the prospective users be provided with adequate information to help improve quality control in non-traditional (referring to adult education rather than the traditional formal education). For example, making sure that a Higher Education Distance Learning course meets student expectations is critical to ensuring the quality of the student's experience. Judging whether a course delivers to its promise is a particular challenge, especially when the course is delivered by Distance Learning and there is no regular face-to-face contact with students; all the more so, when courses are faced with alternative conceptions and external audits of quality. Keeton further identifies the contested nature of quality, examines models of evaluation, relates them to existing forms of evaluation facing education courses, and offers an alternative constructivist approach based on the notion of a service template.

Adult education is mostly non-formal education that takes place outside the four walls of the classroom. The regimented and institutionalized format of formal education makes it easier for quality control whereas the divergence and nebulous boundaries of adult education makes it more difficult to track or maybe establish parameters and its non-formal attribute also contributes to the informality and ability to instil control.

However, quality control is also very essential in adult education or there will be chaos in the field. It merely means that a different approach to quality assurance must be applied. Keeton then lists critical factors that would assist in assuring quality in non-traditional programs in higher education. These factors include:

- (a) a statement of program purposes that has the commitment of the major factors in implementing the program
- (b) given purposes specified at the University as well as Program level, the Institution should have a strategy of instruction viewed as likely to produce the desired outcomes with relative efficiency for the students involved
- (c) The Institution should be able to state the criteria upon which satisfactory performance would be judged and to state the level of proficiency or achievement expected as minimum on these criteria, and
- (d) The Institution should have a strategy for monitoring its performance and for follow-up in acting upon the findings and recommendations emerging from the monitoring activity.

Steps that will best provide improved quality assurance in non-traditional programs are also listed for non-traditional Institutions of Higher Education; Federal and State Regulatory Agencies; Accrediting Agencies, Educational Researchers, and Publishers of information on non-traditional programs; Counseling and Advocacy-Oriented third parties; Prospective Students; Consortia of Institutions of Higher Education all in the adult education category. It is always necessary to provide prospective users adequate information and to improve quality control in non-traditional programs.

Conceptual framework

The following quality assurance model is hereby proposed to help unify practices in adult education and ensure the integration of quality assurance in all. In the formal education sector, inspection is supposed to be facilitative. There must be accountability, effectiveness and constant program review to upgrade. This can be achieved through accreditation that is organised by the stakeholders. There is also a quality assurance body in Nigeria known as Service Compact (SERVICOM). This national body was instituted to oversee quality assurance in the public sector for efficient public service practice delivery as enunciated and recommended by the Federal Government Service Compact (SERVICOM 2004). Its quality assurance indicators should permeate the adult learning process and used as a yardstick to ensure quality assurance in adult education. This suggested model of quality assurance for adult education is drawn from Keeton's idea and in consonance with the practice of SERVICOM and seen in terms of what the quality assurance process should be in adult education as represented diagrammatically below:

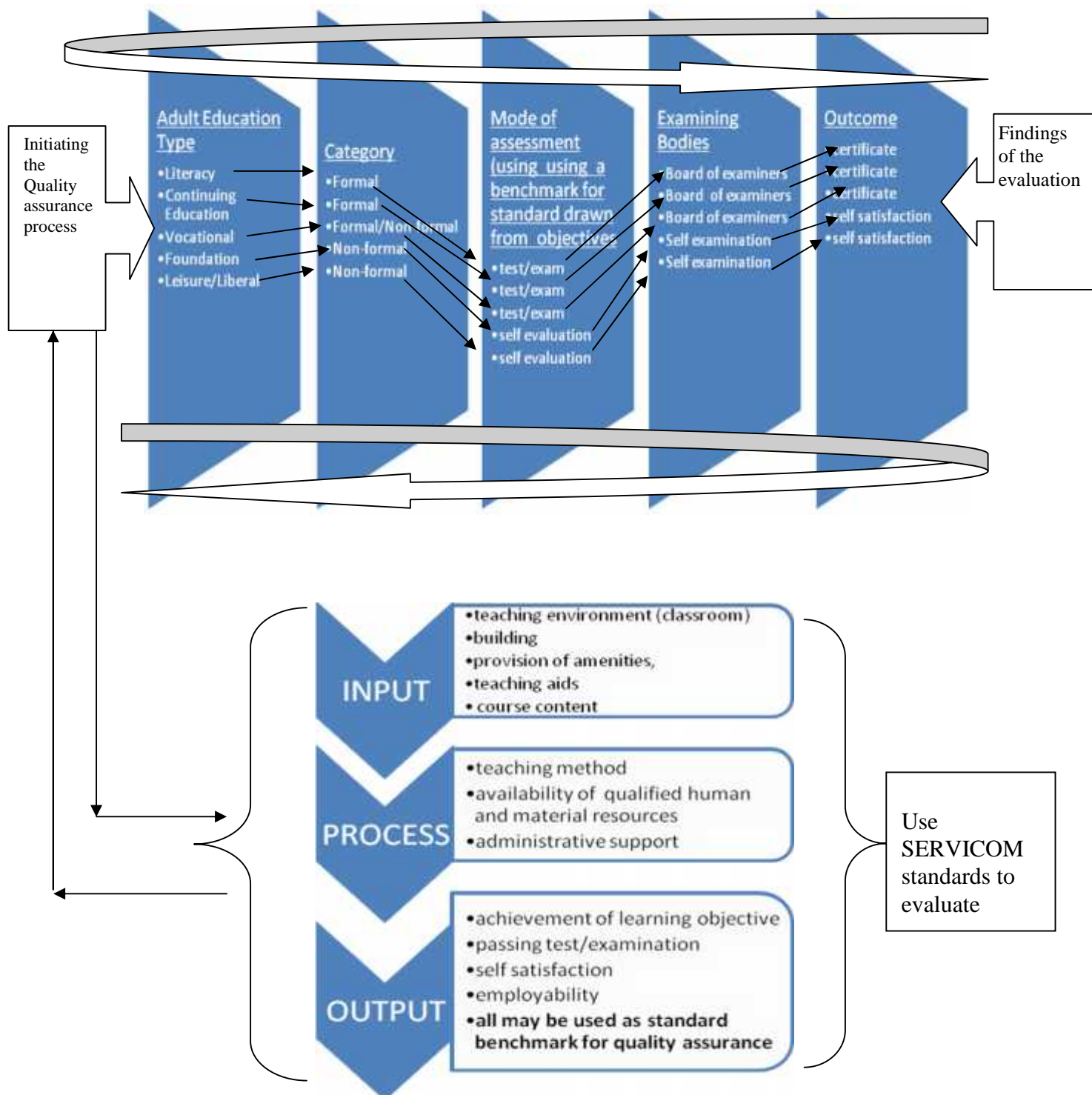


Figure one: Proposed process of quality assurance in adult education
Source: Bakare (2011) field work.

The diagram indicates the relationship between the adult education type, category, mode of assessment up to the outcome. The inference is that the different ways of examining will influence the achievement of objectives (outcome).

This diagram is a representation of the process of quality assurance in adult education. The quality assurance process involves a consideration of the adult education type under consideration as this has an impact on the evaluation process. The adult education type, depending on whether it is conducted formally or non-formally will inform the mode of assessment. If it is formal, usually the test or examination is the common means of evaluation by the requisite bodies managing the program. The more non-formal the adult education type, the more the mode of assessment tends to be personal for the adult learner, which is further influenced by the purpose - whether it is for certification or self-actualization. Regardless of what the type, category or purpose is, quality assurance is premised on the initial objective which will be factored in to determine the benchmark for the standard that is expected. Right from the initial stage, it is necessary to clearly indicate the benchmark against which the quality will be measured and this is derived from the end objective. Thus, if from the stated objective a certain standard is set, results can then be measured against this and if it meets or exceeds the standard, it is taken that quality is assured. However, determining the benchmark for standard in adult education is what may not be uniform and therefore create controversy.

The quality assurance process also consists of the Input, Process and Output stages which are to be used on any of the adult education type. The input include all the elements put in place to support the educational process; it is at this stage that the benchmark for standard is also decided, based on the end goal. The process refers to the actual activities and tasks performed to ensure that the objectives are achieved. The output is the result of the entire process. It is often at this stage that the achievement is measured against the standard benchmark to determine whether it is higher or lower. When this is met, it is assumed that the standard has been achieved and quality can be assured. It is important to think SMART when stating objectives in adult education as this will help to focus on the evaluation process. Any stated objective must therefore be:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Result-oriented, and
Time-bound

Source: Palomba (2002)

The most vital element is that anything that is brought out as a result must be ploughed back into the system to begin again, so that it can continue to help refine the process which must also be self-generating.

Assuring quality in adult education is clearly not as straight-forward as in the regular formal situation because of the unusual mode of assessment which may often not be stated, generalized or standardized. This however does not mean that quality cannot or should not be maintained in adult education especially if the field is to be fully accepted into the mainstream of educational practice. The most important thing in quality assurance is that the process be cyclic and whatever has been found at the output stage must be related and re-incorporated into the input stage so that the findings can be implemented and used as a basis for the decision at the input stage again to re-generate the objective and form a basis of operation and also make for an effective and reliable quality assurance process. Findings of the evaluation process will indicate the adequacy or otherwise of the provision and availability of the elements in the input-process-output model.

Conclusion

Quality education must be more than a mantra to be merely bandied around. It should be an achievement that involves a consideration of the education type, delivery method, evaluation and administration among others. The big question is whether it is reasonable to apply the same criteria used to assess quality in formal education context for adult education? Obviously adult education needs its own format. This discourse has thoroughly examined the practice of quality assurance in formal education which seems to be the more favoured sector. This is probably also because it is more straightforward to measure, given the clear guidelines to follow. It was also argued that contrary to the dearth of information on or effort to focus on quality assurance in adult education, it is not impossible to do so and thus a prototype quality assurance model was proposed. Quality assurance in adult education may require

more effort, attention, manpower and funding, but it is also a necessary element of consolidating adult education practise in Nigeria. It is therefore suggested that the issue of quality assurance in adult education be tackled with the same vigour as in formal education. The services of SERVICOM (Service Compact), a national body set up to oversee issue of quality assurance in the work place should also be more diligently exploited. It is also advocated that proper policies be put in place to ensure standard practice and quality assurance in adult education. First a generally acceptable standard must be set and subsequently maintained across board.

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