

# Academic Quality Assurance Variables in Nigerian Universities: Exploring Lecturers' Perception

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## Abstract

The level of job performance, international comparability and competitiveness of Nigerian university graduates are burning issues. Consequently, the academic quality of Nigerian universities has come under severe criticism. Since university lecturers are key players in quality assurance in universities, this study explored their perceptions of variables important to quality assurance in Nigerian universities. Five hundred lecturers from public universities in the South-South geopolitical zone responded to a 25-item survey. Five research questions were framed and descriptive statistics were used in analysing and presenting the data. The result showed that lecturers perceived availability of adequate number of qualified staff, students' attitude to study, early publication of students' examination results, availability of well-equipped laboratories and workshops, and funding of tertiary education as the most important variables in academic quality assurance.

**Keywords:** quality assurance, university education, lecturers

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Quality in Nigerian Universities

Education is generally recognized as the bedrock of sustainable development and as such, inestimable premium should be placed on how high quality education is sustained. Quality education has become the optimum desire of every nation. Nations should, thus, give attention to the mechanisms of its promotion.

Nigerian universities are supervised by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The body is responsible for funding, quality assurance and control. University accreditation is the sole preserve of the NUC. The NUC is however, answerable to the Federal Ministry of Education and the presidency. The Federal Ministry of Education (2008), (cited in Ayo-Sobowale & Akinyemi, 2011) expects the Nigerian tertiary education system to be relevant and responsive to the need of the society. Both quantity and quality must be sufficient. The lecturers must have high levels of qualification, skills, knowledge and motivation. Their products should be equipped to impact their society positively and be ready to operate in a globalised environment.

In recent times, the level of job performance, international comparability and competitiveness of Nigerian university graduates have become burning issues. In fact, observers believe that the quality of Nigerian tertiary institutions are plummeting, a condition Saint, Hartnett, and Strassner (2003) described as "...a precipitous fall in the quality of university education..." (p. 364).

In addition, Okebukola (2010), Okojie (2013), Ejemot-Nwadiaro, Timothy, and Obiekezie (2014) comment about the poor quality of Nigerian universities. They note that the schools are overpopulated. There are poor quality facilities and staff. Besides, research lacks uptake. The authors blame those factors for poor quality of education. Therefore, this study sought to find out from lecturers the factors they thought are important in quality assurance in the universities.

## 1.2 Literature Review

### 1.2.1 Quality Assurance Disambiguated

Quality assurance has to do with the process of education while control involves the product (Adegbasen, 2011). Both relate. Adegbesan (2011) describes quality control as a means of “establishing quality assurance.” (p.149). Okojie (2013) accepts that most agencies use quality control and assurance interchangeably. Whereas “QA inspects the process ... QC controls process and the end product” (Okojie, 2013, p. 7). Quality assurance, therefore, refers to deliberate, evidence-based strategies and processes of satisfying quality expectations. This is based on the processes, environment and product (Okebukola, 2010; Okojie, 2013).

Quality is defined as “conformance to requirements” (Crosby, 1979, p. 17). In other words, quality is conformity to established standards. The British Standards Institute defines quality as “the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy needs” (Cited in Babalola, Adedeji, & Erwat, 2007, p. 242). Quality of education is often considered an indefinable construct that is nebulous and at best abstract. Adegbesan (2011) points out that product in education is different from product in industry since the latter is “a definable and tangible item (output) manufactured according to specifications”

However, the fact that even the uneducated lament the poor quality of education is an indication that there must be something tangible with which to assess the quality of education. Therefore, quality education, according to Mosha (1986) is “measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment” (p. 113-134). For Adegbesan (2011) comparability and international competitiveness of educational products are the central characteristics of education quality.

In addition, Okebukola (2010) remarks that the quality of education is equal to the quality of teachers. Mosha (1986), however, sees quality from the quality of the graduates. A more holistic perspective of education quality is that offered by Maduwesi (2005) who sees educational quality as encapsulating learning content, how learning is organised and managed, what goes on in the learning environment and the outcome of learning. Furthermore, Ciwar (2005) believes an index of quality is the admission policy. Other indices include supervision, quality of teachers and facilities. Course content and quality of exam items also indicate quality.

### 1.3.2 The Role of the Teacher in Education Quality Assurance

As the quality of university education comes under severe criticism from stakeholders in recent years, it has become imperative for internal and external mechanisms to be deployed to control education quality. There are many stakeholders who contribute to quality. Yet, the university lecturer is considered central to the quality process. The European Trade Union Committee for Education General Assembly (2001) concedes that education is a complex process whose outcome is the result of the interplay of several factors. The committee observes as follows:

...it has also to be recognized that the work of the teacher in the classroom plays a crucial role in this whole system. What is happening in the classroom is “the moments of truth” in the education system. There are very few measures which could be taken to really improve education which would not involve the teacher and practice in the classroom (p. 4).

In other words, the teacher and teaching are central to issues of education quality. The National Policy on Education (2004) clearly states that “no educational system can rise above the qualities of its teachers.” Similarly, no tertiary education quality can supersede the quality of the lecturers. Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008), therefore, admit that teachers are responsible for ensuring positive changes in the lives of students. Similarly, Adegbesan (2011) hints at the pivotal role of teachers in ensuring education quality. The author observes that a nation can only achieve quality education if the principal actors such as the teachers, learners and the environment are cooperatively organized. “In other words, the teacher must be adequate in quality and quantity, the students must be well trained and facilities must be provided as well” (p. 147).

Consequently, this paper examines university lecturers’ perception of factors pertinent to quality of education in Nigerian universities considering internal and external dimensions of quality assurance mechanisms.

## 2. Methodology

This study is an exploratory descriptive design. Five hundred lecturers from ten universities in the South-South region of Nigeria were randomly selected for the study. Five research assistants were employed to administer questionnaires titled “Quality Assurance Variables Survey (QAVS)” to the participants. The respondents’ anonymity was assured. The name and contact information of the corresponding author were provided on the

questionnaires for feedback. Of the 500 respondents, 298 were male while 202 were female. Most of the respondents (31%) were from Faculty of Education. For years of experience majority had between 6-10 years of teaching experience (24.4%). Most respondents (74.2%) had PhDs. Only lecturers from federal and state universities (public universities) participated. The survey elicited data on lecturer's perception of internal and external variables important to quality assurance in Nigerian universities. For validity, three experts in test and measurements examined the instrument. Based on their suggestions, the items were reviewed. The Cronbach alpha reliability index was 0.77. This was considered sufficiently high.

### 2.1 Research Questions

Five research questions were formulated to guide the study.

- 1) What teacher-related variables do lecturers perceive to influence quality assurance in universities in south-south zone in Nigeria?
- 2) What student-related variables do lecturers perceive to influence quality assurance in universities in south-south zone in Nigeria?
- 3) What examination-related variables do lecturers perceive to influence quality assurance in universities in south-south zone in Nigeria?
- 4) What administration-related variables do lecturers perceive as important to academic quality assurance in Nigeria universities?
- 5) What government related variables do lecturers perceive as important to academic quality assurance in Nigeria universities?

### 2.2 Data Analysis

Simple descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The data were presented in frequencies and percentages. Graphs were also used to present the data.

Research question 1. What teacher-related variables do lecturers perceive to influence quality assurance in universities in south-south zone in Nigeria?

Simple percentages were used in analyzing lecturers' responses to the questionnaires items. Lecturers perceived as important to academic quality assurance the number of qualified academic staff (76%), lecturers' skills in lesson presentation (44.8%), and mastery of the subject matter (60%). Also considered important were lecturers' knowledge and use of ICT (28.8 %). Lecturers' regular attendance of professional conferences was perceived as important to academic quality assurance in universities in Nigeria by 36 percent of the respondents. The result is represented in Figure 1.

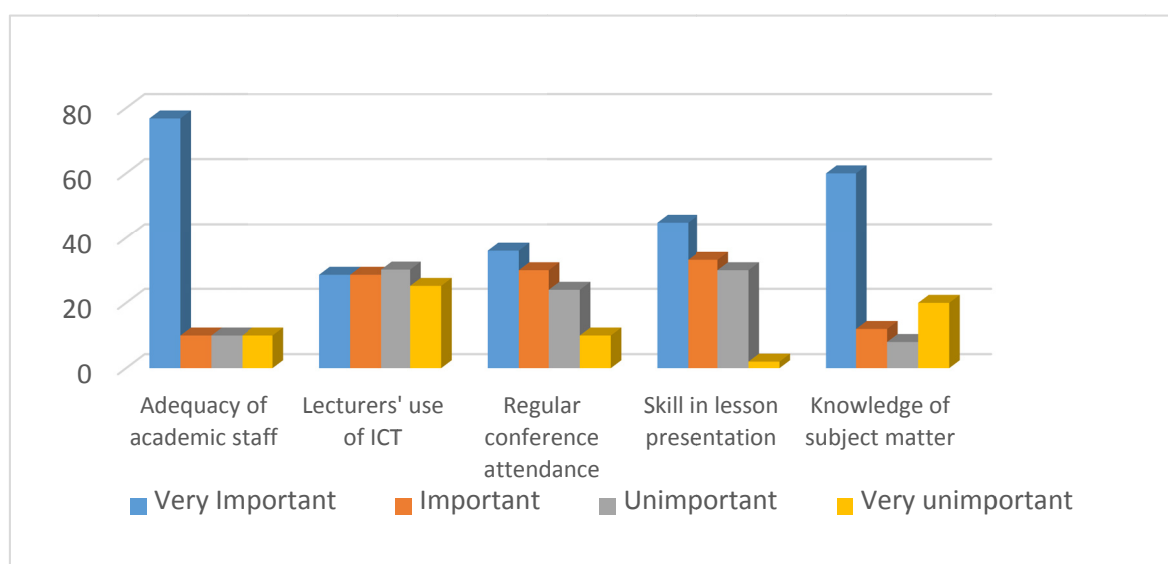


Figure 1. Teacher-related variables in quality assurance

Research question 2: What student-related variables do lecturers perceive to influence quality assurance in universities in south-south zone in Nigeria?

The data derived from lecturers’ responses were analysed with simple percentages. Regarding student-related components of academic quality assurance, 70 percent of lecturers believed that students’ attitude to studies was the most important variable. Students’ access to study materials was next in importance. The result is presented in Figure 2.

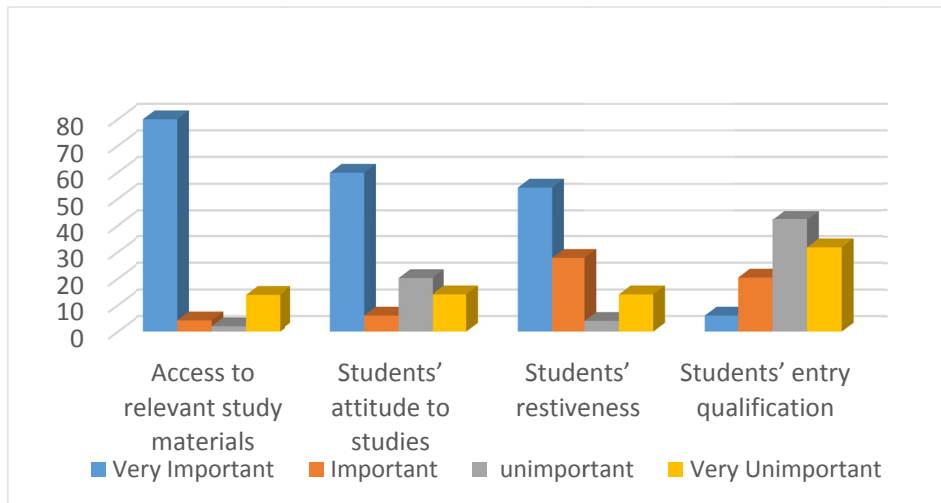


Figure 2. Students’ related variables of academic quality assurance

It is therefore evident that from lecturers’ perspective that students’ attitude to studies and access to relevant study materials are the most important variables to academic quality assurance.

Research question 3: What examination-related variables do lecturers perceive to influence quality assurance in universities in south-south zone in Nigeria?

The study investigated vetting of exams question by a senior academic, external moderation of final year exams, and vetting of marking schemes. Others include conference marking and early publication of students’ results. The analysis used percentages. The result is presented in Figure 3.

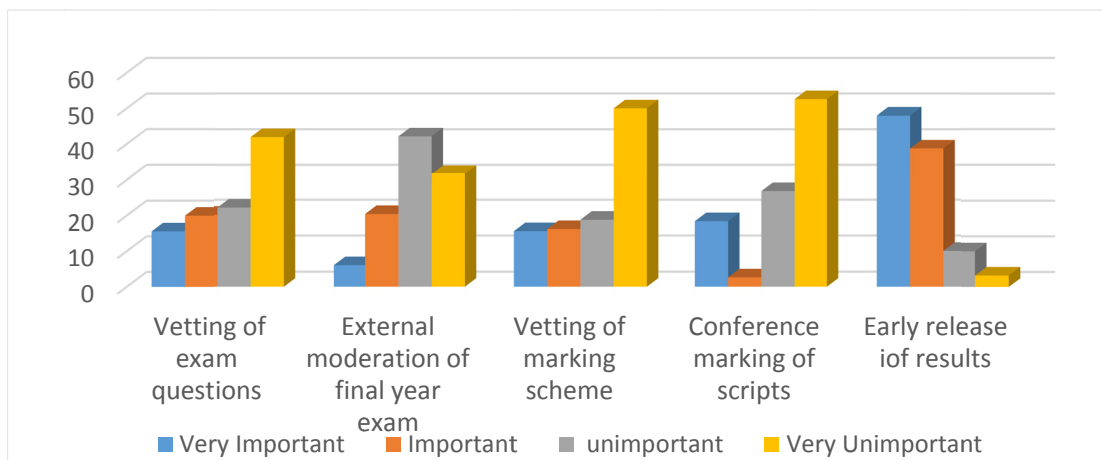


Figure 3. Exam related variables of academic quality assurance

The result showed that 48 percent of the lecturers considered early release of students’ result very important. 38.8 percent agreed that early publication of students’ result was important. Regarding external moderation of

examination questions, 5.6 percent of the respondents considered it very important. 20 percent agreed it was important. For vetting of marking scheme 15.4 percent strongly agreed and 16 percent agreed. For conference marking 18.2 percent strongly agreed and 2.6 percent agreed.

Research question 4: What internal administration-related variables do lecturers perceive as important to quality assurance in Nigerian universities?

Based on the responses to the survey instrument, analysis of the data was done using simple percentages. Data analysis showed that lecturers’ perceived as very important availability of internet in university departments (80%). Next in importance was accessible university library with modern e-books or links to journals (60%). Students teachers’ ratio ranked third (58%). Spacious and well-equipped classrooms/theatres were perceived as very important by 58% of the lecturers. Figure 4 provides more information about the result.

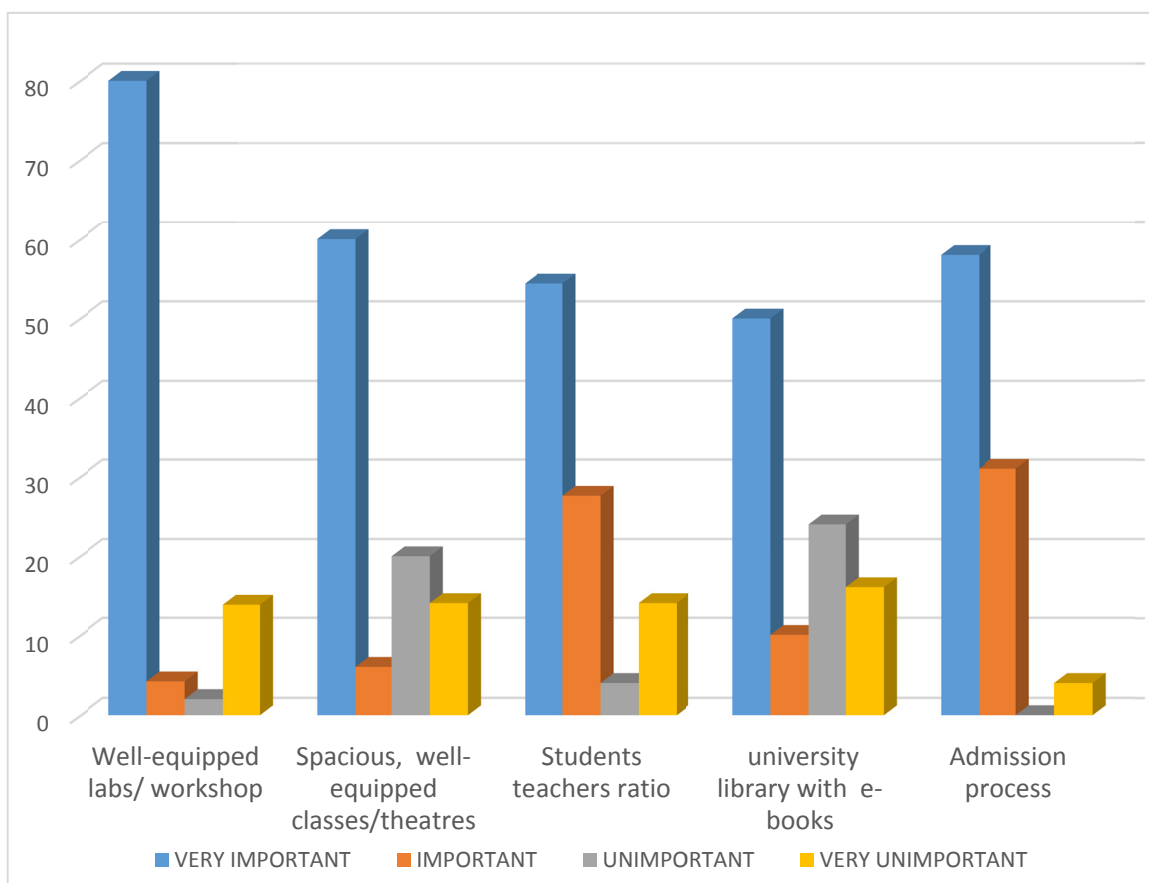


Figure 4. Internal administration indices of quality assurance

Research question 5: What government related variables do lecturers perceive as important to academic quality assurance in Nigeria universities?

Data from the responses to the survey instrument formed the basis of the analysis. Simple percentages were used in the analysis. The analysis showed that 64.2 percent of lecturers perceived that funding of tertiary education was a very important. Concerning other variables, 59.4 percent of the respondents perceived that accreditation by the National Universities Commission (NUC) very important. The least important was university autonomy (10.4%). The result is presented in Figure 5. Therefore, lecturers considered funding and accreditation processes as most important to academic quality assurance in Nigerian universities.

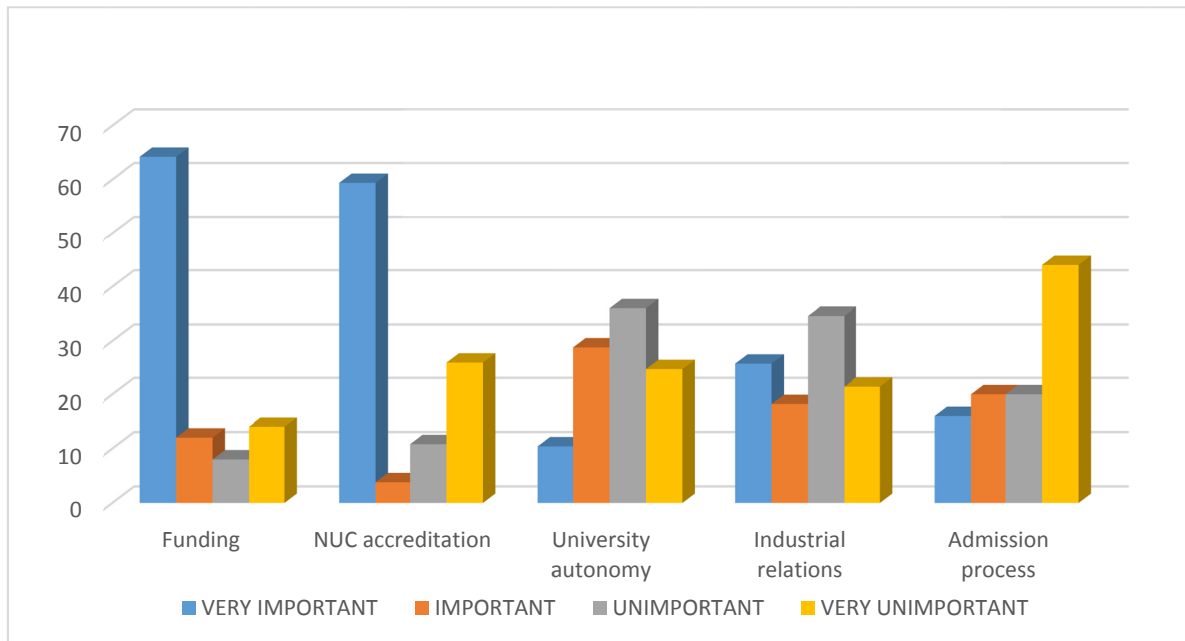


Figure 5. Government-related indices of academic quality assurance

### 3. Discussion

Whenever nations seek progress, innovation and development, they tend to look to the education sector for directions. Unfortunately, the university education in Nigeria has been subjected to severe criticism for quality. The teacher is pivotal to academic quality. Thus, this study explored academic quality assurance variables in Nigerian university through the prism of the university lecturers.

The results showed that the lecturer-related factor that lecturers perceived as most important to academic quality assurance was the number of qualified staff followed by lecturers' skills in lesson presentation. This position is supported by Adegbesan (2011), Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) as well as The European Trade Union Committee For Education General Assembly (2001) who have all linked quality education to the quality of teachers and teaching. Thus, the Federal Ministry of Education (2009) revealed that, as at 2006, there were only 30,452 academic staff as opposed to the required 50,000. Even the then President, Goodluck Jonathan is quoted by Adeyemo (2012) to have said that about 60 percent of lecturers in Nigerian universities do not have doctorate degrees. When this is compounded with the large influx of students into universities, one can understand, why the university system cannot perform optimally. The number of qualified lecturers is a crucial factor in university quality assurance. This opinion is strongly shared by Okebukola (2010), Adegbesan (2011) and Okojie (2013).

Another variable perceived by lecturers as crucial to quality assurance was students' attitude to studies. Nuhana and Yenagi (2009) identified poor study habit as one of the factors responsible for poor academic performance. Ayodele and Adebisi (2013), also agrees that attitude of students toward study contributes significantly to academic achievement. Students need to develop and sustain positive attitudes to their studies. Otherwise, sophisticated equipment and skilled personnel can only become museum pieces. After all, the final measure of academic quality is the student and not the plethora of equipment and facilities.

Furthermore, early publication of students' examination results was the most important examination related variable academic quality. This supports research that feedback is significant to students' performance (Ajogbeje & Alonge, 2012; Ajogbeje, Adewale, & Olarenwaju, 2013). If students' results are released early, they can remedy any shortcoming. This can equally stimulate a better study attitude and thus better performance. There are cases where students have reached their final year in the university before their second year results were published. For academic quality assurance, it is important to publish students' results early.

In addition, the findings that availability of well-equipped laboratories and workshops, and funding of tertiary education were perceived by lecturers as the most important internal administration-related variable and government-related variable, respectively shows the relationship between funding and adequacy of school facilities. Without adequate funding from government, internal administration's good intentions cannot be

translated to reality. This is consistent with Umoh (2002) who identified funding as an aspect that must be looked into if the quality of university education must be improved in the country. Adegbesan (2011) and Okojie (2013), opine that funding is at the core of achieving quality education in terms of input, process and output. Based on the findings of this study, there seems to be a strong link between funding of university and most of the variables which lecturers perceived as pertinent to quality assurance.

#### 4. Conclusion

The paper investigated the academic quality assurance variables that lecturers perceived as important. The result showed that lecturers perceived availability of adequate number of qualified staff as critical to quality assurance. Other variables teachers viewed as very important included students' attitude to study, early publication of students' examination results, availability of well-equipped laboratories and workshops. Funding was the most important variables in academic quality assurance.

Quality assurance is critical to quality education. But, it is the responsibility of government, lecturers and students to assure the quality of education. This will put Nigerian universities at par with top ranking universities. It will further produce high quality graduates. Thus, this paper will draw lecturers' attention to their specific roles in ensuring that the quality of university education is optimum and coheres with the market logic of modern university education. Students and government will understand the role they ought to play to ensure high quality education.

#### 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, there seems to be a strong link between funding of university and most of the variables which lecturers perceived as pertinent to quality assurance. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) There is need to increase funds to universities in Nigeria. This will lead to better facilities and high quality lecturers. This will reduce the frequent industrial actions by university workers.
- 2) Universities need to explore more collaboration with organized private sector and industries. As university research becomes more relevant to industry, the industry can become an alternative source of university funding. This will reduce the undue dependence on government for funding.
- 3) Students need to develop positive attitudes towards their studies. This will stem the spate of examination malpractices and the low prestige of Nigerian university degrees.
- 4) Lecturers need to explore opportunities for advanced professional development and sharpen their pedagogical skills to match the sophistication of the modern Nigerian student.

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