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CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING QUALITY ASSURANCE TO SIMULTANEOUSLY IMPROVE INTERNAL EFFICIENCY IN BAYELSA STATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges and strategies for enhancing quality assurance (QA) to simultaneously improve internal efficiency in Bayelsa State universities. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample size of 301 academic staff (25 Heads of Department and 270 other teaching staff) was selected for the study through stratified random sampling technique from a population of 1,220 staff across universities in Bayelsa State. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire (CVI = 0.85; reliability coefficients = 0.82 and 0.85) and analyzed using means, standard deviations, and independent samples t-test at 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that inadequate funding (mean = 3.78), poor infrastructure (mean = 3.71), shortage of qualified staff (mean = 3.65), high staff turnover (mean = 3.59), and lack of regular training (mean = 3.54) were the most significant challenges hindering QA integration and internal efficiency. The most effective strategies identified included implementing regular staff development programs (mean = 3.81), increasing government and private funding (mean = 3.79), adopting ICT tools for data management (mean = 3.74), and improving infrastructure through targeted investments (mean = 3.69). Hypothesis testing showed no significant differences between HODs and other academic staff in their perceptions of both challenges (p = 0.157) and effective strategies (p = 0.094), indicating shared institutional experiences. The study concluded that strengthening institutional capacity, improving resource availability, and modernizing QA practices are essential for achieving sustainable internal efficiency in Bayelsa State universities.

Keywords: Challenges, Strategies, Quality Assurance, Internal Efficiency, Bayelsa State, Universities

1.1 Introduction

Higher education in Nigeria plays an essential role in national development, serving as a cornerstone for human capital formation, innovation, and socioeconomic progress. Established in

the mid-20th century, Nigerian universities have expanded rapidly to meet the growing demand for skilled professionals, with enrollment surging from fewer than 10,000 students in the 1960s to over 2 million by the early 2020s (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2023). This expansion, while commendable, has been accompanied by systemic strains, including resource constraints, infrastructural deficits, and governance challenges, which undermine the quality and efficiency of tertiary institutions. In Bayelsa State, a resource-rich yet underdeveloped region in Nigeria's Niger Delta, universities such as the Niger Delta University (NDU) exemplify these tensions. This institution, established to address local educational needs amid environmental and economic vulnerabilities, grapple with integrating quality assurance (QA) processes to enhance internal efficiency defined as the optimal utilization of resources to achieve educational outcomes with minimal waste (Okebukola, 2017).

Quality assurance in higher education refers to systematic processes designed to monitor, evaluate, and improve academic standards, teaching, research, and administrative functions (Harvey & Green, 1993). In the Nigerian system, QA is institutionalized through bodies like the NUC, which mandates internal QA units in universities to ensure compliance with benchmarks for curriculum, staff qualifications, and student assessment. Internal efficiency, on the other hand, encompasses metrics such as student throughput rates, graduation timeliness, resource allocation, and cost-effectiveness in operations (Psacharopoulos, 1990). The simultaneous pursuit of QA and internal efficiency is crucial, as robust QA frameworks can streamline processes, reduce redundancies, and foster accountability, thereby amplifying efficiency gains. However, in Bayelsa State universities, where oil-related environmental degradation exacerbates funding volatility and infrastructural decay, achieving this synergy remains elusive (Bayelsa State Ministry of Education, 2022).

The background of QA in Nigerian higher education traces back to colonial legacies, where British models emphasized elitist standards, evolving post-independence into mass education paradigms influenced by global trends like the Bologna Process and African Union harmonization initiatives (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). The NUC's establishment in 1962 marked a formal commitment to QA, with policies like the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) introduced in 2020s to standardize programs. Yet, despite these reforms, Nigerian universities rank poorly on global indices, with only a handful in the top 1,000 of the QS World University Rankings 2024 (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2024). In Bayelsa, state-owned and federal institutions face unique hurdles: NDU, for instance, contends with flooding, which disrupt academic calendars and inflate operational costs (Amakiri, 2021). These contextual factors highlight the need for tailored QA strategies that not only assure quality but also bolster internal efficiency, such as through digital resource management and staff workload optimization.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigerian universities, including those in Bayelsa State, face escalating pressures to deliver high-quality education amid dwindling resources and rising enrollment. Quality assurance processes, intended to uphold standards in teaching, research, and administration, are inconsistently implemented, leading to inefficiencies such as prolonged graduation timelines (averaging 6-7 years for a 4-year program) and high dropout rates (up to 30%) (NUC, 2023). In Bayelsa, institutions like NDU contend with acute challenges: chronic underfunding (state allocation <10% of needs), exacerbated by oil revenue fluctuations; staff shortages, with vacancy rates exceeding 40%; and infrastructural deficits, including flood-prone campuses that disrupt operations (Bayelsa State University Commission, 2022). These issues hinder QA's potential to streamline internal efficiency optimal resource use for outputs like graduate employability and research productivity resulting in systemic waste estimated at 20-25% of budgets (World Bank, 2021). The problem intensifies as global competitiveness demands aligned QA-efficiency frameworks, yet Nigerian literature reveals implementation gaps. Studies highlight funding and capacity barriers but rarely quantify their impact on efficiency metrics in state contexts (Ekpoh & Asuquo, 2020). Bayelsa-specific research is nascent, focusing on policies without managerial perceptions or evidence-based strategies (Ugolo, & Onukwu 2022). This gap perpetuates a cycle: weak QA erodes efficiency, deterring investments and talent retention, threatening sustainable development in the Niger Delta. Thus, there is need to examine the challenges and strategies for enhancing quality assurance to simultaneously improve internal efficiency in Bayelsa state universities.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions were raised.

1. What are the most significant challenges faced by university management in integrating QA processes to simultaneously Improve Internal Efficiency?
2. What strategies are perceived as the most effective ways to improve overall QA implementation?

1.4 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at significance level of 0.05.

1. There is no significant difference between HODs and other academic staff in their perception of QA challenges.
2. There is no significant difference between HODs and other academic staff in their perception of the most effective ways to improve overall QA implementation.

2. Literature Review

The literature on QA in Nigerian universities highlights a paradox: abundant policy frameworks juxtaposed against implementation deficits. Early studies framed QA as a response to globalization pressures, arguing that without robust mechanisms, Nigerian graduates risk unemployability in competitive markets (Okebukola, 2004). For instance, Saint et al. (2003)

analyzed the "brain drain" phenomenon, attributing it to subpar QA, where underqualified staff and outdated curricula erode institutional credibility. This view aligns with human capital theory, positing that efficient resource use in education yields long-term economic dividends (Becker, 1964). In state universities, human resource utilization emerges as a critical determinant of internal efficiency. A study by Ogbodo and Okeke (2011) on state-owned institutions found a positive correlation between staff training and efficiency metrics, such as reduced dropout rates ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.05$), yet highlighted underutilization due to poor succession planning. Extending this, Ekpoh and Asuquo (2020) surveyed 640 academics across South-South federal universities, revealing moderate QA implementation (mean score = 2.8 on a 4-point scale), hampered by management apathy and funding shortfalls. Their findings indicate that non-merit-based admissions exacerbate inefficiencies, inflating class sizes and straining facilities.

Funding emerges as a perennial challenge in the QA study. Underfunding, with education budgets hovering at 5-7% of GDP below UNESCO's 15-20% recommendation manifests in dilapidated infrastructure and delayed salaries, eroding staff morale (UNESCO, 2020). In a comparative analysis, Ogunnaike et al. (2022) examined enrollment explosions in public universities, noting that student-to-lecturer ratios exceeding 50:1 in institutions compromise pedagogical quality and efficiency. This inefficiency is quantified through internal efficiency indices, where wastage rates (dropouts + repeats) reach 25-30% in Nigerian universities, compared to 10-15% in sub-Saharan nations (World Bank, 2019). Staff capacity deficits compound this; a dearth of PhD holders (only 30% of staff in state universities) and inadequate professional development programs hinder QA enforcement (NUC, 2023). Literature from the South-South region, including Bayelsa, points to data collection issues: fragmented management information systems lead to unreliable metrics for efficiency audits (Eze & Okoli, 2018).

On strategies, authors advocate evidence-based interventions. Curriculum review and accreditation compliance are foundational, as evidenced by Ajuonuma's (2015) framework for assessment QA, which integrates continuous evaluation to align teaching with employability outcomes. Staff development programs, including ICT training, are proposed to enhance delivery efficiency; Okoro (2015) reported a 20% improvement in business education outcomes post-intervention in Nigerian universities. For internal efficiency, strategic planning is key. Nwadiani (2011) linked resource utilization to efficiency, recommending performance-based budgeting to minimize waste in state universities. In Bayelsa-specific studies, a survey by Ugolo, and Onukwu (2022) on internal QA policies identified participatory management and stakeholder engagement as effective strategies, with 68% of respondents favouring routine audits to integrate QA with efficiency goals.

Global perspectives enrich the Nigerian narrative. Vläsceanu et al. (2007) from UNESCO delineate QA as a multi-stakeholder process, emphasizing peer reviews and tracer studies tools underutilized in Nigeria due to institutional resistance (Adeyemi, 2025). Recent works like Zimba

(2021) advocate performance evaluation systems for teaching enhancement, reporting sustained improvements in graduate employability when linked to QA. In the African context, Teferra (2013) critiques donor-driven QA models, urging localization; for Bayelsa, this implies adapting strategies to oil-funded volatility, such as green infrastructure for resilient efficiency. Empirical gaps persist while broad Nigerian studies abound, Bayelsa-focused research is sparse, often limited to secondary education (e.g., quality assurance in unity schools; Ogbuanya & Njoku, 2022). Moreover, few integrate QA with internal efficiency quantitatively, overlooking metrics like cost-per-graduate or throughput efficiency in resource-scarce settings (Okebukola & Olaniyonu, 2021). Studies portrays QA as indispensable for efficiency yet beleaguered by structural barriers. Enhancing QA in Bayelsa demands holistic strategies that leverage local assets, such as public-private partnerships in the oil sector, to foster sustainable improvements.

3. Methods

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the challenges and strategies for enhancing quality assurance (QA) to improve internal efficiency in Bayelsa State universities. The design was appropriate because it enabled the collection of self-reported data from academic staff on existing practices, perceptions, and constraints without manipulating variables. The population comprised 1,220 academic staff drawn from universities in Bayelsa State, including 104 Heads of Departments (HODs) and 1,116 other teaching staff. Academic staff were selected because of their direct involvement in QA processes such as curriculum implementation, monitoring, and resource utilization. A sample of 301 respondents was determined using Slovin's formula at a 0.05 margin of error. Stratified random sampling was adopted to ensure representation of HODs and other teaching staff, after which simple random sampling was used within each stratum.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled QCSEQAIE, developed from research questions and relevant literature. The instrument contained two sections: 12 items on challenges to QA and internal efficiency; and 12 items on strategies for improving QA, all rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The items covered key issues such as funding, staffing, infrastructure, policy consistency, training, audits, ICT use, stakeholder engagement, and resource management. Validity was ensured through expert review, resulting in a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.85, confirming item relevance and alignment with the study purpose. Reliability was established through a pilot test involving 30 academic staff who were not part of the main study, yielding Cronbach's alpha values of 0.82 for the challenges section and 0.85 for the strategies section indicating good internal consistency and stability. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations to determine the significance of challenges and effectiveness of strategies using a decision mean of 2.50. While hypotheses were tested using t-test at significance level of 0.05.

4. Results

Research Question 1: What are the most significant challenges faced by university management in integrating QA processes to simultaneously Improve Internal Efficiency?

Table 1: Mean score analysis on the most significant challenges faced by university management in integrating QA processes to simultaneously Improve Internal Efficiency

S/N	QA Challenges	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Inadequate funding hinders effective QA implementation	3.78	0.42	Very Significant
2	Poor infrastructure (e.g., facilities, equipment) impedes internal efficiency	3.71	0.48	Very Significant
3	Shortage of qualified staff affects QA monitoring	3.65	0.51	Very Significant
4	High staff turnover due to poor motivation	3.59	0.57	Very Significant
5	Lack of regular staff training on QA processes	3.54	0.60	Very Significant
6	Overreliance on manual processes leads to inefficiencies	3.48	0.64	Significant
7	Enrollment explosion overwhelms existing QA resources	3.42	0.68	Significant
8	Data collection and management issues for efficiency audits	3.39	0.71	Significant
9	Inconsistent government policies disrupt QA integration	3.31	0.76	Significant
10	Insecurity in the region affects academic operations and QA	3.25	0.82	Significant
11	Limited stakeholder involvement in QA decision-making	3.18	0.85	Significant
12	Curriculum misalignment with industry needs	3.12	0.89	Significant

Decision rule: Mean ≥ 3.50 = Very Significant; 2.50–3.49 = Significant; < 2.50 = Not Significant

The results in Table 1 show that university management faces several significant challenges in integrating quality assurance (QA) processes to improve internal efficiency, with inadequate funding (mean = 3.78) and poor infrastructure (mean = 3.71) emerging as the most critical constraints. Other very significant challenges include shortage of qualified staff for QA monitoring, high staff turnover, and insufficient staff training, indicating systemic human resource gaps that weaken QA implementation. Additional challenges rated as significant such as reliance on manual processes, enrollment pressure, data management issues, inconsistent government policies, insecurity, limited stakeholder involvement, and curriculum misalignment further highlight operational and environmental factors that disrupt effective QA integration. Overall, the findings suggest that both resource-related and administrative challenges jointly hinder the ability of Bayelsa State universities to implement QA processes that drive internal efficiency.

Research Question 2: What strategies are perceived as the most effective ways to improve overall QA implementation?

Table 2: Mean score analysis on strategies perceived as the most effective ways to improve overall QA implementation

S/N	Perceived Strategies	Mean	SD	Remarks
13	Implementing regular staff development and training programs	3.81	0.39	Very Effective
14	Increasing government and private funding for QA initiatives	3.79	0.43	Very Effective
15	Adopting ICT tools for data management and efficiency tracking	3.74	0.47	Very Effective
16	Improving infrastructure through targeted investments	3.69	0.52	Very Effective
17	Conducting periodic internal audits and evaluations	3.64	0.56	Very Effective
18	Establishing performance-based incentives for staff	3.59	0.61	Very Effective
19	Enhancing stakeholder engagement (e.g., industry partnerships)	3.52	0.65	Very Effective
20	Optimizing resource allocation via strategic planning	3.48	0.69	Significant
21	Revising curricula to align with global standards and efficiency goals	3.44	0.72	Significant
22	Integrating student feedback mechanisms into QA processes	3.39	0.76	Significant
23	Promoting policy consistency and advocacy at national levels	3.33	0.80	Significant
24	Fostering collaborations with international QA bodies	3.27	0.84	Significant

Decision rule: Mean ≥ 3.50 = Very Effective; 2.50–3.49 = Significant; < 2.50 = Not Effective

The findings in Table 2 indicate that university staff perceive several strategies as highly effective for improving overall quality assurance (QA) implementation. The most effective strategies include implementing regular staff development and training programmes (mean = 3.81), increasing government and private funding for QA initiatives (mean = 3.79), adopting ICT tools for data management (mean = 3.74), and improving infrastructure through targeted investments (mean = 3.69). Other very effective measures are conducting periodic internal audits, establishing performance-based incentives, and strengthening stakeholder engagement, all of which reinforce continuous improvement and accountability. Strategies rated as significant rather than very effective such as optimizing resource allocation, curriculum review, student feedback integration, policy consistency, and international QA collaboration still contribute meaningfully but are perceived as less impactful compared to capacity building, funding, technology adoption, and infrastructural enhancement. Overall, the results show that strengthening human capacity, providing adequate funding, upgrading facilities, and leveraging ICT are regarded as the most powerful drivers of effective QA implementation.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between HODs and other academic staff in their perception of QA challenges.

Table 3: t-test analysis between HODs and other academic staff in their perception of QA challenges

Groups	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	p-value	Remark
Heads of Department	25	3.68	0.44	293	1.42	0.157	Not Rejected (Fail to reject H_0
Other Academic Staff	270	3.51	0.58				

The result of the independent samples t-test in Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference between Heads of Department (HODs) and other academic staff in their perception of QA challenges. Although HODs recorded a slightly higher mean score (3.68) compared to other academic staff (3.51), the difference is not statistically significant, as indicated by the t-value of 1.42 and a p-value of 0.157, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. This means the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, both groups share similar views regarding the severity of challenges affecting quality assurance implementation, suggesting that the constraints are widely experienced across all academic ranks within the universities.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between HODs and other academic staff in their perception of the most effective ways to improve overall QA implementation.

Table 4: t-test analysis between HODs and other academic staff in their perception of the most effective ways to improve overall QA implementation

Groups	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	p-value	Remark
Heads of Department	25	3.74	0.41	293	1.68	0.094	Not Rejected (Fail to reject H_0
Other Academic Staff	270	3.58	0.55				

The independent samples t-test result in Table 4 reveals that there is no significant difference between Heads of Department (HODs) and other academic staff in their perception of the most effective strategies for improving overall QA implementation. Although HODs reported a slightly higher mean score (3.74) compared to other academic staff (3.58), this difference is not statistically significant, as shown by the t-value of 1.68 and a p-value of 0.094, which exceeds the 0.05 significance benchmark. Consequently, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This indicates that both groups generally agree on the effectiveness of the identified strategies, suggesting broad consensus across academic roles on the measures needed to strengthen QA implementation in Bayelsa State universities.

5. Discussion of the Findings

Findings revealed that inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, a shortage of qualified staff, high staff turnover, and a lack of regular staff training were the most significant challenges hindering the effective integration of QA processes to improve internal efficiency. The hypothesis tested found no significant difference between Heads of Department and other academic staff in their perception of QA challenges, indicating that both groups experience similar constraints across the university system. The findings emerged largely because the major challenges identified, such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, shortage of qualified staff, high staff turnover, and limited training opportunities, are systemic issues that cut across all levels of academic staff, meaning both Heads of Department and other lecturers are equally affected by these constraints in their daily operations. This shared institutional environment explains why there was no significant difference in their perceptions of QA challenges. These challenges align with systemic issues in Nigerian higher education, where chronic underfunding limits infrastructural upgrades and resource allocation, leading to dilapidated facilities and overcrowded environments that compromise teaching and learning outcomes (Uche et al., 2011; Maiyeri et al., 2022). Similarly, staff shortages and high turnover exacerbate QA deficits, as brain drain and poor motivation drive qualified academics away, resulting in overburdened remaining personnel and inconsistent monitoring (Okodugha et al., 2024; Gbenu et al., 2014). Nkedishu's (2021) study on teachers' utilization in Delta State educational centers highlights underutilization due to training deficits and staff reporting inadequate professional development, underscoring the need for targeted interventions in neighbouring Bayelsa. The absence of ongoing training further perpetuates these gaps, as lecturers lack updated skills for modern QA integration, mirroring broader policy inconsistencies and insecurity that affect all institutional levels (Usman & Chinyere, 2021). Nkedishu's (2022) work on administrative efficiencies and teacher productivity in Delta State demonstrates uniform perceptions of efficiency barriers among administrative and teaching staff, with no significant group differences ($t = 1.12$, $p > 0.05$), validating the homogeneity observed in Bayelsa. The hypothesis tested found no significant difference between Heads of Department and other academic staff in their perception of QA challenges, indicating that both groups experience similar constraints across the university system. The findings emerged largely because the major challenges identified, such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, shortage of qualified staff, high staff turnover, and limited training opportunities, are systemic issues that cut across all levels of academic staff, meaning both Heads of Department and other lecturers are equally affected by these constraints in their daily operations. This shared institutional environment explains why there was no significant difference in their perceptions of QA challenges.

Findings also showed that strategies such as regular staff development, increased funding, adoption of ICT tools, infrastructural improvement, periodic internal audits, and performance-based incentives were perceived as the most effective ways to strengthen QA implementation. The hypothesis tested revealed no significant difference between HODs and other academic staff in their perception of effective QA improvement strategies, showing broad agreement on the measures needed to enhance QA processes in Bayelsa State universities. The strong agreement on effective strategies such as staff development, increased funding, ICT adoption, infrastructure improvements, internal audits, and performance-based incentives stems from the fact that these

interventions directly address the core deficiencies currently weakening QA processes. Since both groups rely on the same institutional support systems and work within the same resource and policy constraints, they naturally converge on which measures are most likely to improve QA implementation and enhance internal efficiency across the university system. These strategies align with established recommendations for Nigerian universities, emphasizing faculty training programs to build QA competencies and foster continuous improvement in teaching effectiveness (Alakija et al., 2025; Osuji & Uriri, 2022). Enhanced funding and targeted infrastructural investments are crucial for creating conducive environments, while ICT adoption streamlines data management and efficiency tracking, directly addressing performance bottlenecks (Allison & Dickay, 2024; Abba et al., 2023). Integrating Nkedishu's (2025) findings on environmental maintenance and scholastic accomplishment, which advocate for sustained infrastructural audits to boost efficiency, these strategies gain practical applicability for Bayelsa, where flood-resilient facilities could mitigate QA disruptions. Periodic audits and incentives further promote accountability and motivation, aligning with calls for policy-driven QA cultures that integrate stakeholder feedback and global standards (Ibara, 2015). The hypothesis tested revealed no significant difference between HODs and other academic staff in their perception of effective QA improvement strategies, showing broad agreement on the measures needed to enhance QA processes in Bayelsa State universities. The strong agreement on effective strategies such as staff development, increased funding, ICT adoption, infrastructure improvements, internal audits, and performance-based incentives stems from the fact that these interventions directly address the core deficiencies currently weakening QA processes. Since both groups rely on the same institutional support systems and work within the same resource and policy constraints, they naturally converge on which measures are most likely to improve QA implementation and enhance internal efficiency across the university system.

6. Conclusion

The study's findings show that Bayelsa State universities face substantial challenges in integrating quality assurance (QA) processes to improve internal efficiency, with inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, a shortage of qualified staff, limited training, and high staff turnover emerging as the most critical constraints. Despite these challenges, both Heads of Department and other academic staff share similar perceptions regarding the nature of the problems and the most effective strategies for improvement. Key strategies perceived as highly effective include increasing funding, implementing regular staff development programmes, adopting ICT tools, upgrading infrastructure, and conducting periodic internal audits. The overall results suggest that strengthening institutional capacity, improving resource availability, and modernizing QA practices are essential for achieving sustainable internal efficiency in the universities.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should increase and sustain funding for QA activities, including investment in modern infrastructure, ICT systems, and essential teaching/learning resources that support effective monitoring and evaluation.

2. The institutions should strengthen human capacity through continuous professional development, targeted training on QA procedures, and improved staff motivation strategies to reduce turnover and enhance expertise in quality-related roles.
3. There is a need to institutionalize data-driven QA practices by promoting ICT-based management systems, conducting regular internal audits, and enhancing stakeholder engagement, particularly involving students, industry partners, and regulatory bodies, to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with best practices.

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