
QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE EVALUATION IN UNIVERSITIES OF SOUTH SOUTH NIGERIA: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: *This study assessed quality assurance practices and students' performance evaluation in universities of South-South Nigeria using an SEM approach. Three null hypotheses guided the study. Based on factorial research design, and using a stratified random sampling technique, a sample of 878 academic staff were drawn from a sampling frame of 15 universities in South-South Nigeria. Quality Assurance Practices Students' Performance Evaluation Scale (QAPSPEs) with split-half reliability estimates ranging from .86–.92, was used as the instruments for data collection. Multiple regression and Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were used for the analysis of data, model building, and testing of the hypotheses at .05 alpha level. Findings showed a significant composite and relative influence ($F=48.19, P<.05$) of school management, staff, and students' quality assurance practices on students' performance evaluation. The results also indicated that there were positive and significant covariances between the four variables of this study, with the CFI, RMSEA, TLI, and SRMR values indicating a good model fit. It was recommended, based on the findings of this study that, each school should organize quality assurance orientation campaigns for new students and set up quality assurance committees at the school, faculty and departmental levels for optimal performance in schools.*

KEYWORDS: Quality assurance, Performance evaluation, Students' performance, South-South Nigeria, SEM, CFA, Evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of every university is for effective training, research, and development. The Nigerian society, just like every other nation relies heavily on the products from her tertiary education system for problem-solving, knowledge creation, manpower boost, and economic development. It was therefore, expected that every university graduate performs optimally while in school in order to acquire knowledge, develop good research, entrepreneurial, and vocational skills, and to refine or modify their crude cognitive, affective and psychomotor attributes. Each passing year, the universities in South-South Nigeria pours out graduates from various disciplines into the labour market, with a majority of these graduates lacking the requisite skills to perform after being gainfully employed. Such downtrend in the performance of most graduates is a deviation from expectations and a backlash to the growth of the economy.

One of the core issues facing the university system today is the evaluation of students' academic performance. While it is true that tests, examinations, and other continuous assessment tools such as oral presentations, peer review, written reports, case studies, and so on, are good measures of students' performance, these measures have been adulterated with corrupt practices from either staff, students or both, and even parents/guardian during the evaluation process. Thus, it becomes very

difficult to judge students based on their grades from say – an examination or test. For instance, there have been cases where graduates with first class or second-class upper degrees are unable to perform simple tasks expected of graduates with such classes of degrees. In other cases, many graduates are seen bagging good classes of degrees even when most of them cannot really “read and write.” The ugly situation has created a clear disparity between expected standards and observed standards of university students. Apart from the effect it has on the students, it has also contributed to poor economic development due to the macroeconomic issue of unemployment currently facing the nation.

The release of the Human Development Index by UNESCO in 2018 disclosed that Nigeria is in 24th position out of 54 African countries, and in 157th position in the world in terms of educational development (UNESCO, 2018). West African countries like Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya are sitting above Nigeria in the ranking. The more devastating truth is that Nigeria was also classified as having low human development index when small African countries like Seychelles, Mauritius, Algeria, Tunisia, Botswana, Libya, and Gabon are cruising at the top with high human development figures.

This downtrend does not imply that Nigerian populace are not enrolled in school, nor does it imply that those nations rated above Nigeria have more graduates. The placement only suggests that many Nigeria graduates are unproductive vis-à-vis their counterparts in other parts of the world. Thus, while the universities in South-South Nigeria are producing thousands of graduates each year, a significant portion of this population, cannot perform effectively on the job. According to Arop, Ekpang, Nwannunu, & Owan (2018), the university system has failed to produce quality graduates who meet the demands of the society due to the mismatch between what the university system supplies and what the society demands. It was also reported that many Nigerian graduates cannot compete favourably with those of the rest of the world suggesting that there is something wrong with the Nigerian university system, specifically and the educational system generally (Arop, et al, 2018).

Studies have shown that many students do not pay attention to their books, they cheat during examination by copying from friends, bringing textbooks and other materials to examination halls, bribing lecturers with money, gifts and other items so as to enable them pass examination (Arop, et al, 2018; Udim, Abubakar, & Essien, 2018). Many students are less concerned about studies, and are of the view that they can upgrade their poor results through corrupt examination officers (Arop, et al, 2018). Furo (2015) also reported that the importance attached to certificates in Nigeria has prompted most students to engage in examination malpractice to get a certificate, and added that many parents do not seem to see what is wrong in examination malpractices which are a big hindrance even to its eradication. All these negativities within the university system has further compounded difficulties in students’ performance evaluation. Many students’ evaluations output is not a true reflection of their abilities, as ratings are now observed to be above or below actual abilities of students.

Students’ performance evaluation is a process of determining the abilities of learners in performing assigned tasks after undergoing training within a specified time period. Students’ performances are also evaluated to show the extent to which they have understood a lesson, concept, or idea communicated to them. Examinations and tests scores are usually used to evaluate the performance of students in universities, however, there are other techniques of evaluation based on some criteria. These other criteria according to content criteria (which evaluates the degree of a students’ knowledge acquisition and understanding of ideas, facts, concepts, procedures, and principles), process criteria (which determines or evaluate the proficiency level of students’ performance of a task, skill or process including their effectiveness and efficiency in using learned methods and procedures to perform task), quality criteria (used to ascertain the overall quality, level, and performance of individuals), and impact criteria (used to evaluate the overall results or effects of an individual in an organization based

on competent display). Examination and other forms of assessment are in wide use by universities which are good techniques for evaluation of students' performance.

As stated earlier, the issue of examination malpractices, upgrading of results, emphasis on certification, and other forms of corruption have made it very difficult to evaluate graduates' performance. Efforts made by the universities management to cushion examination and other forms of malpractices appear to have only yielded little or no results. Arop et al. (2018) disclosed that different measures have been employed to reduce the menace of corrupt academic practices in universities such as supervision of students during examination, disciplining those caught in the act, conference marking has been used, submission of results after two weeks, banning the idea of class representatives, and the list continues. The persistent difficulty in evaluating students' actual performance raised the curiosity of the researchers after several measures used to improve the academic effectiveness of students have not yielded many fruits. In trying to address this menace, the researchers are poised to determine whether quality assurance activities in universities have any association with students' performance evaluation in South-South Nigeria.

Quality assurance practices are a series of events, affairs, processes, services that are rendered to ensure that there is proper control, organization, and coordination of school activities to meet the expected quality. Quality assurance practices are actions taken to view the quality requirements, auditing the results of control measures, and the analysis of the performance of both staff and students in order to ensure that appropriate quality standards and procedures are appropriately implemented in the school. The rationale behind quality assurance practice in schools is to ensure that planned policies, programmes, and activities are driven to meet best practices. Looney and Clemson (2018) asserted that quality assurance consists of the systematic review of educational programmes and processes to maintain and improve their quality, equity, and efficiency. Quality assurance approaches can include mechanisms that are external and internal to schools. External mechanisms may include national or regional school evaluations and/or large-scale student assessments. Internal mechanisms may include school self-evaluation, staff appraisal and classroom-based student assessments (Looney & Clemson, 2018).

Sadler (2012) disclosed that students' grades should be accurate representations of the levels of students' achievement in a course which is the primary motive for a focus on assuring courses. The author reported further that common practice by academics and their institutions is the design and delivery of academic courses and programmes, within the constraints laid down by accrediting bodies. University teachers in many countries have the freedom to design or select their own assessment plans, items and tasks, and either grade their students' works themselves, or work in course-based teams to do it. "Under such conditions, how can the quality of grades be assured? What are (or should be) the underlying standards?" (Sadler, 2012: 211). Clearly, grades are intended as expressions of summative assessment, certifying levels of attainment students have reached by the end of their courses. Grade integrity is one way of saying that grades represent different levels of student achievement in as absolute a sense as possible, regardless of teaching and learning processes, course design, course sequencing and individual student learning paths. The logical first step is to clarify the desired end-point for quality assurance purposes (Sadler, 2009).

Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018) using an ordinary least squares regression model which explains perceived effectiveness through structural variables and certain quality assurance-related activities of quality managers was developed. The results showed that support by higher education institutions' higher management and cooperation with other education institutions are relevant preconditions for larger perceived degrees of quality assurance effectiveness. Moreover, quality managers' role as promoters of quality assurance exhibits significant correlations with perceived effectiveness.

Arop, Owan, and Ibor (2019) revealed that, there is significant relationship between quality of school facilities ($r = .478, p < .05$), quality of leadership ($r = .928, p < .05$) quality of supervision ($r = .881, p < .05$) respectively with secondary school teachers' job performance; quality of school facilities, leadership, and supervision have significant composite influence ($F=4800.58, p < .05$) on secondary school teachers' job performance. Odigwe (2007) also revealed that the level of infrastructural facilities and quality of school supervision, significantly influenced school effectiveness, while school leadership behaviour does not significantly influence school effectiveness with regards to students' academic achievement in English language and Mathematics. In another study, Arop et al. (2018) established that; discipline and remuneration of lecturers influenced lecturers' corrupt academic practices in the universities, with remuneration having the most influence.

Empirically, studies have established various associations and relationships between quality assurance and other key variables in the school system such as students' performance, teachers' effectiveness and so much more. These studies, conducted in different parts of the world and using different methods, have provided a basis for the present study. The issue of students' academic performance is well captured and documented in the literature, with little or no focus on the evaluation of such performance. Focus in terms of evaluation has been on assessing students' ability to determine the outcome of their performance. However, little efforts have been made to further evaluate the output of learning outcomes of students' outcome for decision making and judgmental purposes within the school system. The present study is different from all other studies and contributes to the existing body of knowledge by modelling the relationships between several quality assurance practices and students' performance evaluation using a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine quality assurance practices and students' performance evaluation in universities of South-South Nigeria. Specifically, this study sought to:

- i. Determine the composite and relative influence of school management quality assurance practices, staff quality assurance practices, and students' quality assurance practices on students' performance evaluation.
- ii. Determine the covariances between staff, students, school management quality assurance practices, and students' performance evaluation in universities.
- iii. Verify whether the data collected for this study are a good fit for measuring the four factors in the Structural Equation Model.

Statement of hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

- i. There is no significant composite influence of school management, staff, and students' quality assurance practices on students' performance evaluation.
- ii. There are no significant covariances between staff, students, school management quality assurance practices, and students' performance evaluation in universities.
- iii. The overall items do not indicate a good fit for measuring the four factors (school management quality assurance practices, staff quality assurance practices, students' quality assurance practices, and students' performance evaluation) in the SEM model.

METHODS

The study adopted a factorial research design due to the examination of several factors and their interaction with the dependent variable. In factor analysis efforts are made to identify variables, or factors, that explains the pattern of correlations within a set of observed variables. Factor analysis is a data reduction technique which identify a small number of factors that explain most of the variance observed in a much larger number of manifest variables. Factor analysis can be also be used to generate hypotheses regarding causal mechanisms or to screen variables for subsequent analysis (for example, to identify collinearity prior to performing a linear regression analysis) (Akinrefon, Ikpah, Bamigbala, & Adeniyi, 2016). This paper was based on the Confirmatory Factor Analysis approach to justify that the observed items used in the regression analysis were a good fit for measuring the latent (unobserved) variables.

The population of this study comprised all the lecturers in the 29 public and private universities in south-south Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting a sampling frame of 15 universities (comprising six federal, four state, and five private universities). Stratified sampling was adopted by the researchers in drawing a sample of 878 academic staff from all the universities in the sampling. Stratification was based on location while respondents were selected through simple random sampling approach.

Quality Assurance Practices and Students' Performance Evaluation Scale (QAPSPES) was used as the instruments for data collection. This scale was designed by the researchers to measure the independent and dependent variables of this study. QAPSPES was constructed with 20 items which were further grouped into school management quality assurance practices with five items (1–5), staff quality assurance practices with five items (6–10), students' quality assurance practices with five items (11–15), while the dependent variable (Students' performance evaluation) was also measured with five items (16–20). All the items were placed on the revised four-points Likert scale of Excellent (E), Good (G), Fair (F), and Poor (P).

The instrument was validated by three experts in test and measurement, while Split-half technique was used to establish the reliability after a trial test was carried out using 50 academic staff from three universities that were part of the population but were not selected as part of the study's sample. The reliability estimates of .86, .92, .87 and .91, obtained for the three sub-variables and the dependent variable respectively, were sufficient evidence that confirmed that the instrument was internally consistent for measurement.

The data for this study were collected from primary sources through the administration of the instruments. Collected data were coded on the person-by-item matrix using a computer spreadsheet program, and scored based on the ratings of the respondents. Multiple regression and Confirmatory Factor Analysis were used for the analysis of data, model building, and testing of the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. All the analyses were performed with the aid of Stata software v15.

Model specification and estimation techniques

The proposed model specification of the factor analysis was not presented due to space limitations. However, the model fit was evaluated using estimation techniques such as Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), The Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). Popular Chi-Square estimation technique was ignored in this study due to the large sample size of this study. When using the Chi-squared technique, a large sample size ($n \geq 400$) will always indicate that a model is not fit all the times, thereby resulting in a

Type I error (Myers, Ahn, & Jin, 2010). According to Gatignon (2010), one difficulty with the chi-squared test of model fit, however, is that researchers may fail to reject an inappropriate model in small sample sizes and reject an appropriate model in large sample sizes.

RESULTS

The results of this study were presented in line with the hypotheses formulated as shown below.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant composite influence of school management, staff, and students' quality assurance practices on students' performance evaluation. This hypothesis was tested at .05 alpha level using multiple regression analysis, and the results from the analysis is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Multiple regression results showing the composite and relative influence of school management, staff, and students quality assurance practices on students' performance evaluation in universities.

Source	SS	Df	MS	Number of obs = 878
Model	9508.58	3	3169.53	F (3, 874) = 48.19
Residual	57483.01	874	65.77	Prob > F = 0.000
Total	66991.59	877	76.39	R-squared = 0.142
				Adj R-squared = 0.139
				Root MSE = 8.110

SPE	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	p t
STAQAPs	.163	.032	5.16	0.000
STUQAPs	.292	.032	9.19	0.000
SMQAPs	.090	.031	2.86	0.004
_Cons	11.401	1.240	9.19	0.000

SPE = Student' performance evaluation

SMQAPS = School management quality assurance practices

STAQAPs = Staff quality assurance practices

STUQAPs = Students quality assurance practices

The results in Table 1 indicated that school management, staff, and students' quality assurance practices could be held accountable for 14.2% of the variance of students' performance evaluation in universities in South-South Nigeria, with the remaining 85.8% of the total variance explained by other independent variables not included in the model. As shown in the table, the p-value of 0.000 is less than .05 alpha level at 3 and 874 degrees of freedom. With this result, there was sufficient statistical evidence to reject the null and retain the alternate hypothesis. By implication, there is a significant composite influence ($F=48.19$, $P<.05$) of school management, staff, and students' quality assurance practices on students' performance evaluation. Therefore, the R-Squared value of 0.142 obtained above was not due to chance.

Relatively, all the independent variables (school management, staff and students' quality assurance practices) were statistically significant in predicting students' performance evaluation in universities, with students quality assurance practices being the highest predictor ($t=9.19$, $p<.05$), followed by staff quality assurance practices ($t=5.16$, $p<.05$), and school management quality assurance practices ($t=2.86$, $p<.05$). The regression equation of the study is:

$$\text{SPE} = 11.401 + .090 \text{ SMQAPs} + 0.163 \text{ STAQAPs} + 0.292 \text{ STUQAPs}$$

Hypothesis two

There are no significant covariances and the collected data are not a good fit for measuring the four factors (school management quality assurance practices, staff quality assurance practices, students' quality assurance practices, and students' performance evaluation) in the SEM model. The factors loadings, covariances details and model fit estimation statistic were used in testing the null hypothesis below.

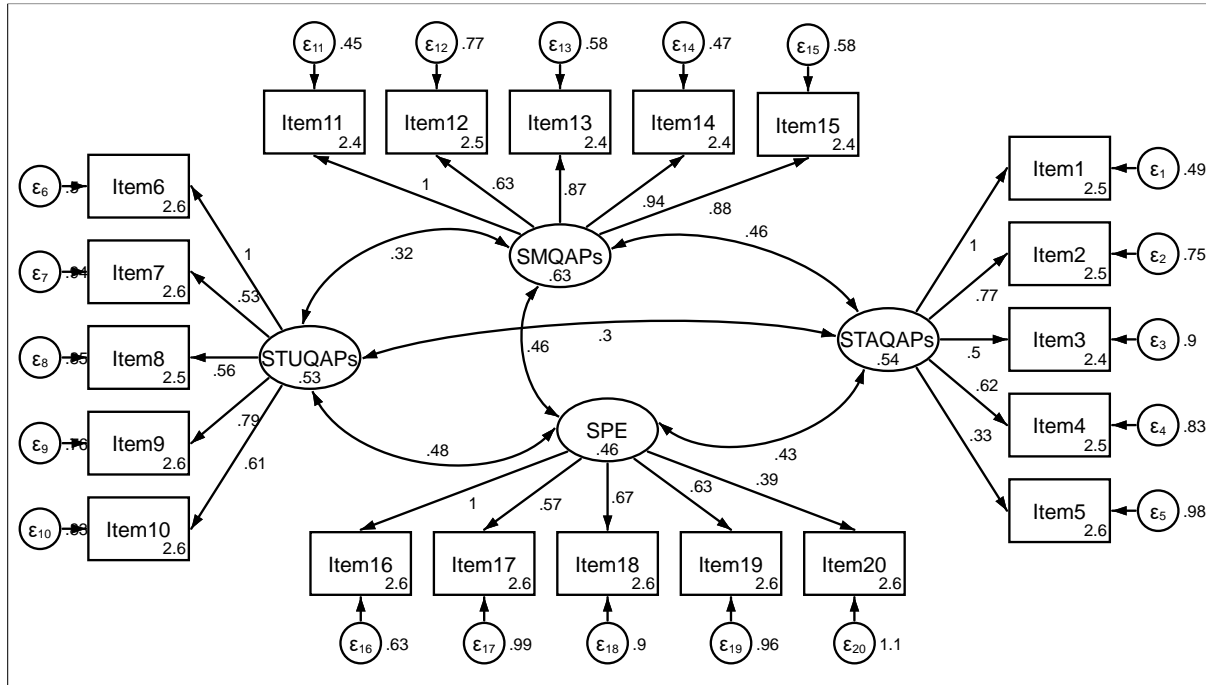


FIGURE ONE: Structural equation model of quality assurance practices and students' performance evaluation in universities in South-South Nigeria.

Number of obs= 878

Estimation method= ml;

Log likelihood = -23698.733

Constrained items:

1. [Item1] STAQAPs = 1
2. [Item6] STUQAPs = 1
3. [Item11] SMQAPs = 1
4. [Item16] SPE = 1

Fig.1 shows that the various items measured their different constructs differently. As required in unstandardized Confirmatory Factor Analysis, the first item measuring a latent variable was constrained to a regression weight of one. Therefore, items 1, 6, 11 and 16 were all constrained to a regression weight of 1. Items 2, 3, 4, and 5, (see appendix) measuring STAQAPS (Staff quality assurance practices) had good factor loadings ranging from .33 – .77 (33% - 77%). This indicates that timely submission of students' examination results, online results uploading by lecturers, proper supervision of students during examination, discipline of erring students, and implementation of class representative removal policy, are good staff quality assurance practices in the universities.

Items 7, 8, 9, and 10 with factor loadings ranging from .53 – .79 (53% - 79%), were also good measures of the latent variable STUQAPS (Student (School quality assurance practices). This implies that good study habits, regular class attendance, non-involvement in examination malpractice,

reporting of erring staff to appropriate authorities and preparation for examination are good quality assurance practices by university students.

Items 12, 13, 14, and 15 measuring the latent variable SMQAPs (School management quality assurance practices) all had high factor loadings ranging from .46 - .94 (46% - 94%) which indicate that they were good items. By implication, supervision of staff, setting up quality assurance committees, discipline of erring staff, organization of students' orientation campaigns, and the formulation of class representative removal policy are good quality assurance practices by the university (school) management.

The dependent variable was measured with items 17, 18, 19, and 20 and their respective factor loadings of .57 (57%), .67 (67%), .63 (63%), and .39 (39%), indicating good measures of the latent variable SPE (students' performance evaluation). This shows that practical demonstration of learned skills by students, oral/physical presentation of ideas, verbal/written interviews, test for application and analysis of ideas, and classroom interactions are good measures for evaluating students' performance.

According to Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008), "it is good practice to assess the fit of each construct and its items individually to determine whether there are any items that are particularly weak" (pp. 56). Items with low multiple r^2 (less than .20) should be removed from the analysis as this is an indication of very high levels of error (Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen). Generally, the factor loadings of all the items apart from the four constrained items were good for measuring the factors STAQAPS, STUQAPS, SMQAPs, and SPE respectively.

Covariances between the independent variables and the dependent variable as indicated in the results in Fig 1 shows that there is a significant positive relationship (cov = .430, $z = .038$, $p < .05$) between staff quality assurance practices and students performance evaluation; students quality assurance practices is positive and significantly related to their performance evaluation (cov=.478, $z=10.81$, $p < .05$); school management quality assurance practices have a positive and significant covariance with students performance evaluation (cov=.456, $z=.035$, $p < .05$).

Covariances amongst the independent variables of this study showed that staff quality assurance practices has a positive and significant covariance (cov=.298, $z=9.12$, $p < .05$) with students quality assurance practices; staff quality assurance practices has a positive and significant covariance (cov=.458, $z=13.04$, $p < .05$) with school management quality assurance practices; students quality assurance practices has a positive and significant covariance (cov=.933, $z=13.71$, $p < .05$) with school management quality assurance practices. With these results, the null hypothesis is rejected indicating that there are significant covariances between staff, students, school management quality assurance practices, and students' performance evaluation in universities.

Hypothesis three

The overall items do not indicate a good fit for measuring the four factors (school management quality assurance practices, staff quality assurance practices, students' quality assurance practices, and students' performance evaluation) in the SEM model. The respective factor loadings have been used to test for items fit as presented in Fig.1 above. However, in determining the overall model fit of the SEM, we take a look at the various indicators of the fit statistic used for testing model fit such as RMSEA, SRMR, CLI and TLI values as presented in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2

Summary of fit statistic showing the indicators of the overall model fit of quality assurance practices in universities in South-South Nigeria.

Fit statistic	Value	Description
Likelihood ratio		
Chi ² _MS (79)	380.237	Model vs. Saturated
p > Chi ²	0.000	
Chi ² _BS (105)	4387.860	Baseline vs Saturated
p > Chi ²	0.000	
Population error		
RMSEA	0.076	Root mean square error of approximation
pclose	0.000	Probability RMSEA <= 0.05
Baseline comparison		
CFI	0.926	Comparative fit index
TLI	0.907	Tucker-Lewis index
Size of residuals		
SRMR	0.040	Standardized root mean squared residual

The results presented in Table 2 shows that the RMSEA value of .076 indicated a good model fit that is statistically significant ($p < .05$). The RMSEA tells us how well the model, with unknown but optimally chosen parameter estimates, would fit the population's covariance matrix (Byrne, 1998). The RMSEA ranges from 0 to 1, with smaller values indicating better model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Brown (2015) disclosed that an RMSEA value of .06 or less is indicative of an acceptable model fit. Up until the early nineties, an RMSEA in the range of 0.05 to 0.10 was considered an indication of fair fit and values above 0.10 indicated poor fit (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). It was then thought that an RMSEA of between 0.08 to 0.10 provides a mediocre fit and below 0.08 shows a good fit (MacCallum et al, 1996).

A cursory look at the CFI value of .926 and the TLI value of .907 all indicated a good model fit. Values for this statistic range between 0.0 and 1.0 with values closer to 1.0 indicating good fit (Hooper, et al, 2008). A cut-off criterion of $CFI \geq 0.90$ was initially advanced however, recent studies have shown that a value greater than 0.90 is needed in order to ensure that misspecified models are not accepted (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Today this index is included in all SEM programs and is one of the most popularly reported fit indices due to being one of the measures least affected by sample size (Fan, Thompson, & Wang, 1999). For the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), a model fit of .80 and above have been recommended as a good model fit (Hooper, et al, 2008). However, Hu and Bentler maintained that TLI values $\geq .95$ indicates a good model fit.

The SRMR value of 0.040 also suggested that the model proposed in this study is properly fitted. The RMR and the SRMR are the square roots of the difference between the residuals of the sample covariance matrix and the hypothesized covariance model (Hooper, et al, 2008). Due to the difficulty in the interpretation of RMR when instruments with different scales are used (e.g. two questionnaires, one on a 0–10 scale, the other on a 1–5 scale), Kline (2005) recommended that the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) which removes this difficulty in interpretation be used, hence, the RMR was ignored. Values for the SRMR range from zero to 1.0 with well-fitting models obtaining values less than .05 (Byrne, 1998; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000).

As earlier stated, the Chi-Square technique was ignored because it is unreliable when large sample sizes are examined. From the foregoing, it can be said generally, that there was a good model fit of the proposed model of quality assurance practices and students' performance evaluation in South-

South Nigeria as measured by the 20 items in the instrument. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained, implying that the overall items indicates a good fit for measuring the four factors in the SEM model.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding of this study revealed that school management, staff, and students' quality assurance practices are significant in predict students' performance evaluation in universities either jointly or respectively. When compared among the three independent variables, students quality assurance practices was the highest predictor of students' performance evaluation followed by staff and school management quality assurance practices. This finding corroborates the findings of Arop, Owan, and Ibor (2019) which revealed that, there is a significant composite influence of quality of school facilities, leadership, and supervision ($F=4800.58$, $p<.05$) on secondary school teachers' job performance. Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018) also showed that support by higher education institutions' higher management and cooperation with other education institutions are relevant preconditions for larger perceived degrees of quality assurance effectiveness.

The significance of the first finding does come as any surprise because the three major human resources responsible for the smooth running of any school system are the management, staff, and students. When these groups with varying responsibilities work ethically according to prescribed patterns, it will boost the respective and collective effectiveness. Thus, students will be zealous, disciplined and become well prepared for school activities. Given that staff are working ethically without any compromise or bridge of standards, a student who is studious will apart from mastering the course content, pass examinations. By so doing, the evaluation of students' performance whether in an examination, workplace or elsewhere, will be an easy task.

The second finding of this study established that there was an overall and specific model fit in the proposed structural equation model of quality assurance practices and students' performance evaluation in universities. This implies that all the items in the instrument measured their respective constructs individually, and the entire phenomena under study collectively. It was also discovered further that there were positive and significant covariances among school management, staff, and students quality assurance practices; and between these practices with the dependent variable (students' performance evaluation). The second finding of this study agrees with Odiqwe (2007) whose study revealed that the level of infrastructural facilities and quality of school supervision, significantly influenced school effectiveness. This is true because the quality of supervision and infrastructural facilities provisions are management quality assurance practices, and as such, can go a long way to influence the way teachers will teach, and learners learning.

When facilities, for instance, are not adequately provided, during examinations learners will be forced to compact themselves to a seat giving room to all forms of examination malpractices. A study (Arop et al, 2018) established that; discipline and remuneration of lecturers influenced lecturers' corrupt academic practices in the universities, with remuneration having the most influence. This tells you that management activities affect to a significant extent, the activities of staff, students, and their performance on the job, examination and beyond. Discussions regarding the model fit were already made during the interpretation of results.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between quality assurance practices and students' performance evaluation in South-South Nigeria is positive and statistically significant. Students' performance evaluation will be more effective when the management, staff, and students actively participate in academic activities following ethical standards. Institutions with effective quality assurance practices will demonstrate a higher efficiency in evaluating the performance of students with little or no error vis-à-vis their ineffective counterparts. The structural equation model proposes a new dimension in tackling quality assurance practices and offers a blueprint for educational administrators and other scholars to test the items of their instruments for fitness even after reliability test must have been performed.

Recommendations

It was recommended based on the findings of this study that:

- i. The school management should adequately supervise and discipline erring staff who are not discharging duties honestly, ethically and in line with the objectives of the school.
- ii. The management of every university should also each school should organize quality assurance orientation campaigns for new students and set up quality assurance committees at the school, faculty and departmental levels for optimal performance in schools.
- iii. The idea of using class representatives as leaders should be strictly abolished within the university system, instead, the use of course representatives for individual lecturers is recommended.
- iv. All the universities in South-South Nigeria should operate 100% online results system where only lecturers who taught courses will be granted access to upload results by themselves without the interference of any third party.
- v. Where offline results management is still practiced, the head of departments should ensure on strict grounds, that lecturers submit examination results after one week from the day such examinations were written.
- vi. The Government should employ adequately, quality academic and non-academic staff through a fair but rigorous process recruitment and selection process.

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APPENDIX**QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SCALE (QAPSPE)**

Please note the followings:

E = Excellent G = Good F = Fair P = Poor

S/N	ITEMS	E	G	F	P
Rate the following statements as staff quality assurance practices					
1	Timely submission of students' examination results				
2	Online results uploading by lecturers				
3	Proper supervision of students during examination				
4	Discipline of erring students				
5	Implementation of class representative removal policy				
Rate the following statements as students' quality assurance practices					
6	Good study habits				
7	Regular class attendance				
8	Non-involvement in examination malpractice				
9	Reporting of erring staff to appropriate authorities				
10	Preparation for examination				
Rate the following statements as school management's quality assurance practices					
11	Supervision of staff				
12	Setting up quality assurance committees				
13	Discipline of erring staff				
14	Organization of students' orientation campaigns				
15	Formulation of class representative removal policy				
Rate the following approaches to students' performance evaluation					
16	Practical demonstration of learned skills by students				
17	Oral/physical presentation of ideas				
18	Verbal/written Interviews				
19	Test for application and analysis of ideas				
20	Classroom interactions				