

**IMPORTANCE OF THE LIBRARY IN THE ACCREDITATION OF UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES  
IN REPOSITIONING OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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**ABSTRACT:**

National Universities Commission (NUC) is the body set up by the Federal Government of Nigeria to assess on regular basis at interval of three (3) to five (5) years, the quality and standards of all Nigerian university academic programmes vis a vis the role of the library in achieving excellence in these programmes. The importance of the library holdings, quantity, quality of materials and their currency before accreditation of the university academic programme is well emphasized. Objectives and procedures of accreditation are also outlined in the paper. The legal basis for accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian Universities and the National Universities Commission's definition of accreditation were enumerated. The advantage of accreditation and types of accreditation awarded each academic programme after the exercise is explained. Some of the areas identified for assessment during accreditation include – philosophy and objectives of the programmes, curriculum, quality and quality of academic staff, student admission, and standard of examination, physical facilities, and financial support and library holdings. Suggestions were made for the identified challenges in the accreditation of programmes while recommendations were also made to the National University Commission (NUC) of Nigeria on development of library in the future accreditation of university programmes.

**KEYWORDS:** National Universities Commission, Nigeria, academic programmes, Nigerian Universities, programme accreditation

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Accreditation of academic programmes could mean the process by which the quality and the standard of educational institutions and programmes of a country are assessed.(Okogwu & Akidi, 2011). It could also indicate the granting of approval to an institution of higher learning by an official review board after the school has met certain requirements.

In Nigerian Universities, various programmes are run at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. These academic programmes are regularly assessed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) by means of peer review. The team that makes up the Accreditation panel cuts across the professionals and academics in the areas to be accredited to ensure proper assessment.

Therefore, this paper is to identify and appraise the roles of the library in successful accreditation exercise of academic programmes in any Nigerian university system. Accreditation is such as a sign of program competence, excellence, and quality. Institutions that are accredited can be looked up to as an example of best practices and networking opportunities. Accreditation enables institutions to apply for federal, corporate, and foundation funds. It aids schools and departments to compete with other campus programs for resources.

Accreditation is a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize an institution and/or its programs for quality standards and need for quality improvement. (Corazon, 2002) The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded the published standards (set by an external body such as a government, national quality assurance agency, or a professional association) for accreditation and whether it is achieving its mission and stated objectives. The process usually includes a self-evaluation, peer review and a site visit.

Institutional accreditation has to incorporate both internal self-assessment and external judgments. While it is very necessary that there should be certain minimum standards agreed upon and which guide the operations of institutions of similar status nationwide, it is equally desirable that recognition is given to the internal peculiarities of each.(Commission on Colleges Southern Association of Colleges and School 2001).

Therefore, the process of accreditation should provide a means of recognizing some levels of performance, quality and integrity which engenders confidence from the public and the broad educational community. A perceived belief is that accreditation is purported to provide quality assessment which is monitored by bodies assessing quality in post-secondary education, including governmental agencies and professional associations, (Enser, 2002).

### **1.1 MEANING AND NATURE OF ACCREDITATION:**

Accreditation may be used to signify the official approval granted by an accrediting agency to an accredited institution at the end of a successful assessment exercise (Hornby, 2001 p. 8); it could also mean the process by which the quality and standard of educational institutions are assessed; the assessment is usually conducted by accrediting agencies set up by the Government through the Ministry of Education or by professional organizations; in Nigeria, this quality assurance function is conducted by the National Universities commission (NUC) for Federal, State and Private Universities. The professional content of some programmes is also assessed by designated bodies and agencies; thus, the Nigerian Medical and Dental Council (NMDC) accredits the professional content of Medical Programmes, the Council of Legal Education (CLE) assesses the professional content of Law Programmes. The Council for Registration of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN) accredits the professional content of the Engineering Programmes while the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria assesses the professional content of Accounting Programmes; accreditation is essentially about Quality and Standard.

### **1.2 UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS:**

Universities are tertiary institutions established to conduct demand-driven researches, award degrees, generate and disseminate knowledge, skills and competencies at the highest educational level. It also provides high level manpower training, provide high quality career counselling, lifelong learning programmes, and promote scholarship, entrepreneurship programmes and community service. Each university has a way of expressing the same sentiments through institutional statement of vision, mission and strategic objectives. Currently, there are 117 legitimate universities in the country which include: 36 Federal Universities, 36 State Universities and 45 Private Universities. (NUC, 2011). These universities operate within clearly laid down rules and regulations determined by the National Universities Commission (NUC).

### **1.3 THE RELEVANCE OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION (NUC):**

The National Universities Commission (NUC) was established in 1962 and attached to the office of the Prime Minister. In 1974, it became a parastatal in the Federal Ministry of Education and a statutory commission charged with the responsibility of regulating the academic, administrative, and the financial activities of Nigerian Universities (Okojie, 2010; p. 101). It prepares master plans, from time to time, for the balanced and coordinated development of universities in Nigeria, advises the federal government on the financial needs of the universities, reviews the terms and conditions of service of university staff and makes appropriate recommendations to the Federal Government. It channels all external aids to the universities, receives and allocates Federal Government grants to

federal universities, lays down minimum Academic Standards for the universities and carries out the accreditation of the degrees and other academic awards of the universities (Okojie, 2010, p. 101-102).

#### **1.4 JUSTIFICATION AND LEGAL BASIS FOR ACCREDITATION:**

The Nigerian tertiary education system hit its lowest in terms of quality in the 1980's. According to (Archibong 2010), the system was characterized by gross underfunding, infrastructural decay, brain drain, increased enrolment and proliferation of universities.

The existence of these problems culminated in the production of poor quality graduates and non-acceptance of Nigerian University degrees by some nations. In response to the challenge of enhancing quality, the then Nigerian military leadership promulgated Decree No. 16 of 1985, Section 10 of the Decree amended as Section 4 (m) of the National University Commission (NUC) Amended Decree No. 49 of 1988 empowered the commission to lay down minimum Academic Standard (MAS) for all Nigerian Universities and to accredit their degrees and other academic award (Archibong, 2010) & (Okojie 2008).

The legal backing granted National Universities Commission (NUC) by this Decree led to the development of the Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) documents which were utilized for the first accreditation exercise conducted by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1990. The exercise which was conducted with 100% indigenous resource persons according to Okojie (2008) gave the nation the opportunity to have data-backed information on the state of education delivery in Nigerian Universities.

On the strength of the above Act, the NUC developed a set of Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) to guide Nigerian Universities in the development, implementation and evaluation of their curricula. The MAS was reviewed by the NUC in 2004 and resulted in the development of Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) (Okojie, 2008). Institutional compliance with the stipulated standards is measured through specially designed accreditation instrument.

As indicated earlier, there are 117 Universities approved by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Universities Commission. If these institutions are allowed to operate without an accrediting agency, the standard of education would be compromised, the ultimate goal of producing a high-level manpower would remain a mirage and the graduates of the system would not be able to compete favourably with their peers in other parts of the world. Hence, the justifications for a body like the NUC to oversee and regulate the activities of these universities. But even then, there are currently 44 universities operating illegally, in different states of the Federation. This is apart from eight illegal ones with on-going investigations and court cases (NUC, 2011, PP. 11-12).

### **1.5 QUALITY AND STANDARD IN EDUCATION:**

Within the context of higher education, quality is multidimensional and captures a wide range of functions and activities. In a university setting, for example, it permeates every aspect of the University System including: teaching, learning, academic programmes, research, scholarship, academic and non-academic staff, students, physical structures, facilities, equipment, community services and academic milieu (Njenga et al, 2008, pp. 4).

Quality entails the inclusion of an international dimension in the functions of a higher education; E.g. internationalization of knowledge, interactive networking with the outside world, mobility of teachers and students across the country and off-shores, as well as international research endeavours without necessarily losing sight of local, national and regional norms, values and circumstances (Njenga et al, 2008).

Academic and research collaborations with as many as possible universities across the globe and the admission of students from other parts of the world. Closely germane to accreditation is the concept of “Quality Assurance”. This has been described as the process of monitoring quality and ensuring that standards are not only continuously sustained but equally improved upon. The continuous monitoring exercises conducted internally by the Academic Planning Units of Universities, the Academic Offices, the Student Affairs and other Unites within Universities in general, are practical examples of “Internal Quality Assurance” mechanisms. The assessment visits conducted periodically, by the National Universities Commission, the Nigerian Medical and Dental Council, the Council of Legal Education, the Council for Registration of Engineering in Nigeria, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, and other agencies from outside the universities, are examples of “External Quality Assurance” procedures otherwise called Accreditation.

### **1.6 ACCREDITATION INSTRUMENTS:**

The National Universities Commission measures institutional compliance with the Minimum Academic Standards using the following instruments:

- i. Self-Study form (SSF)
- ii. Manual of Accreditation Procedure for Academic Programmes in Nigerian Universities
- iii. Programme Evaluation Form (PEF)
- iv. Accreditation Panel Report Form (APRF)
- v. Minimum Academic Standards Document

The above accreditation instrument applies to Programme Accreditation. As for Institutional Accreditation, this seeks to objectively measure the performance of a university holistically, guided by a clearly identified criteria, sub-criteria and relevant minimum standards. Our review of related

literature revealed that the draft tool for conducting an Institutional Self Accreditation was labelled “INSTRUMENT FOR ISNTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION” designed jointly by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and Association of African Universities (AAU).

The National Universities Commissions (NUC) identified six major areas with their sub-units assessed and scores awarded in order to attract full, interim and or denied accreditation, as the case may be, are as follows:

1. Academic content (23%): This has the philosophy and objectives of the academic content, curriculum, admission, academic regulations, test and examination, evaluation of student’s work, practical/project work, student course evaluation and external examination system.
2. Staffing (32%): In this case, there is staff/student ratio, staff mix by rank, qualifications, and competence, administration, non-teaching staff, staff development.
3. Physical facilities (25%): This includes Laboratories, space, equipment, etc. Also in the classrooms, space and equipment are considered. The office accommodation for staff is considered in terms of safety and environment.
4. Funding (5%): The NUC considers the adequacy of funds for the programme to be assessed.
5. Library (12%): The NUC team considers the quality of the holdings and currency of the information materials in stock in the library.
6. Employer’s rating (3%): How are the graduates of the University rated in terms of job opportunities? Where are they employed? (NUC, 1999).

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES OF ACCREDITATION OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES:**

The objectives of accreditation of Nigerian universities academic programmes were further identified by Bello (2014) as follows:

- To ensure that, at least, the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) documents are attained,
- To assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates from all academic programmes have attained an acceptable level of competence in their areas of specialisations.
- To certify to the international community that the programmes offered in Nigerian universities are of high standards and their graduates have sufficient intellect for employment and further studies (NUC, 1999).

## **3.0 ADVANTAGES OF ACCREDITATION:**

Okogwu & Akidi (2011) ascertained that accreditation is all about quality. In preparing for NUC accreditation team, it gives the Nigeria University whose courses/programmes are to be accredited

the opportunity to acquire equipment and appropriate facilities for teaching and research. It also makes the government that owns the university under accreditation to inject funds into institution in order to remedy the deficiencies identified during accreditation. Even after the accreditation exercise, it gives room for amendments and improvement of facilities as recommended by the accreditation team. It also helps in the funding of the universities since finance are needed to acquire the necessary facilities needed for the departments.

There is no doubt that the quality of higher education determines the quality of human resources of a Country. One of the major objectives of the university is to produce qualified, skilled and globally competent workforce for the labor market of business and industry, which is a critical factor to national growth and development. Since no nation can develop beyond the quality of its higher education. Recent developments such as increasing student enrolments; reduced state funding for public higher education; increasing number of private providers; internationalization cross border education have also influenced the purpose and functions of higher education (Hayward, 2006). The need for global competitiveness is another recent development that has impacted higher education in Nigeria. National Universities Commission (NUC) which is the regulatory body established to oversee the administration and delivery of higher education in Nigeria ensures the orderly development of a well-coordinated and productive university system that will guarantee quality and relevant education for national development and global competitiveness (NUC, 2009).

#### **THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN ACCREDITATION EXERCISE:**

The role of the library in accreditation of academic programmes cannot be overemphasized as the library is the centre for learning for which all the activities in the university revolve. No educational institution, especially, the universities can pass any accreditation exercise without a standard and well equipped library. The library plays a vital role in the accreditation exercise of any given university. The objective of the university library in supporting the teaching, research and learning of the university can be well appreciated during accreditation process since library is the hub around which other activities revolve (Okogwu & Akidi, 2011).

Accreditation is a once in a lifetime opportunity for advancement not only of the physical plant and collection but also the career and economic status of the library staff. The library played a stirring role in the accreditation process of an institution.

The Library provides a sufficient number of qualified staff with appropriate education and experiences in library and other learning information resources to accomplish the mission of the institution Provision of adequate library materials to support the nature, level and scope of the different programs offered by the institution was also put in place. The library also maintained

adequate and well organized collections which are accessible to all students, faculty, administrative and research staff.

Books, Journals and other electronic resources were acquired to build up collections in every program offered in the institution. The library did not only focus on input measures such as strengths and weaknesses of book collection but other information resources and services such as staffing, library hours, technical services, public services, allocation of resources and other aspects of library operations were also well taken care of Librarians were actively involved in the accreditation because the provision and use of library materials and services affects the quality of the students' educational experience.

The library must strive to acquire and organize both printed and electronic resources in local and international standard for accessibility and use by the university community. Also available by the library for the accreditation exercise is record showing the library holdings in order to convince the accreditation team of the availability of these books in the library. Prior to the date of accreditation, the University Librarian will liaise with Deans of faculties and Heads of Departments for selection of latest editions of relevant books and journals to be acquired for various programmes by the library. This is done either by giving them publishers' catalogues for the selection or ask the lecturers in each department to submit the list of the latest textbooks (both local and foreign) they use to teach the courses to the University Librarian within a time frame. There should be a balance of local and foreign textbooks in the university library acquisition of new publications for all the courses for the purpose of accreditation; this is because most of the time, the experienced professional or lecturers among the accreditation team do ask for indigenous textbooks in their discipline. The newly acquired books for the purpose of increasing the library collections should not be dumped in the workroom, more than half of them should be classified and catalogued by the professional staff of the library and be put on the shelves. The remaining new books that are still under processing should be conspicuously displayed faculty by faculty in the workroom for easy assessment by the accreditation team. Moreover, the accreditation team often ask for the list of new books that had been acquired on each discipline since the last accreditation exercise in the university. Therefore, library makes efforts to update its acquisition on both local and international resources for all the departments that are being accredited.

At this juncture, the importance of faculty and departmental libraries should be emphasized. There should be encouragement from the main library for each faculty to provide space and furniture for a library, source for funds to buy books and journals. Appeal can go to their departmental alumni, or corporate bodies in the country to compliment the departmental library acquisitions. These

donations can be in cash or kind. The alumni can renovate the space provided for the departmental library; provide modern furniture and Internet facilities.

The entire faculty or departmental libraries' collections will be classified and catalogued in the main library before distribution to faculty libraries. Retrieval tools like catalogue cards, catalogue boxes, computer systems for Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and Internet facilities for assessing E-databases should be provided in the faculty libraries by the main library, professional and paraprofessional staff whose services contribute to the educational effectiveness of the institution should also be adequately available in the main university library and all faculty libraries.

Besides these library resources, there should be evidence of library trainings for effective retrieval of e-resources for both staff and students in each faculty. For example, the Elsevier Publishers once organized workshop for university lecturers and postgraduate students in some university libraries on how to use *Science Direct* electronic database. The electronic resource is an expensive database and such workshop to train the trainers among the library professionals and other faculty members is also a motivation for university to acquire the product because the training is free of charge. There should also be adequate awareness programme and announcement probably in the university or library website for the training from the library to all users. The library also provides access to electronic information materials to augment the available print materials. All students, especially postgraduates should be able to download and print library acquired electronic databases and free-links from their respective faculty libraries and even in their halls of residence. Examples of such e-database are Springer E-books, Ebscohost and Science Direct. Other useful e-databases are TEEAL (The Essential Electronic Agriculture Library), JSTOR, AGORA (Agriculture), HINARI (Health Internetwork Access to Research Initiatives), ARDI (Applied science and technology). Some of these resources are used via IP authentication or login credentials.

Therefore, the library must have its own well developed Information and Communication Technology (ICT) unit fully powered with state-of-the-art facilities such as high end server, access to store in the cloud, local area network, dedicated bandwidth for Internet connectivity, power backups in case of power failure which predominates third world countries like Nigeria.

All these above enumerated facilities should be inspected by the accreditation team in the university library and make reports of their availability, accessibility and efficiency in supporting the academic programme of the universities under accreditation. It is also a good forum of assessing the adequacy of utilization of the Tertiary Education Fund (TETFUND) given to all government owned tertiary institution of learning by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Each library in every government owned tertiary institution in Nigeria (Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education) do collect

millions of Nigerian currency from the Tertiary Education Fund (TETFUND) for acquisition of books, journals, e-databases, buildings, furniture, equipment, etc. This library fund is directly disbursed from the TETFUND and is separated from the rest of each university TETFUND allocation. This is the reason why the National Universities Commission (NUC) set up accreditation programme to assess how far the availability of the government funds harnessed are improving the academic programmes of Nigerian universities.

Other facilities to be inspected in the library by the accreditation team are the statutory units and sections in the university library namely:

1. Reference Section
2. Cataloguing Section
3. Acquisition Section
4. Catalogue Hall with Catalogue Boxes filled with filed cards as backup to OPAC
5. Serials Section
6. Postgraduate library
7. Research Unit
8. Reprographic Unit for photocopying & scanning
9. Bindery Section
10. Information and Communication Technology Section
11. The E-libraries
12. Reading rooms, according to discipline in the university with adequate sitting capacity in good ratio to students population, for example,
  - (a) Science based courses Reading Room
  - (b) Humanities
  - (c) Social Sciences
  - (d) Education
  - (e) Environmental Design courses.

There should be a separate Medical library in the teaching hospital setting of the university and Law library very close to the Faculty of Law.

The accreditation team are also expected to check the students' Cloak Room and ensure that it's well arranged and organized with tally for each student. This ensures adequate security of the students' belongings.

The sanitation of the library too must be expected by the accreditation team. There should be adequate and efficient standard basic infrastructures that will make the library environment highly

conclusive for reading. This is not peculiar to the main library; it should be extended to all faculty and departmental libraries too.

#### **FUTURE CONSIDERATION IN THE LIBRARY:**

According to the (NUC, 1999) manual of accreditation procedures for academic programmes in Nigerian Universities, breakdown of scoring criteria for library are only on holdings and currency. This means that the NUC team considers only the quality of holdings and currency of the information materials in stock in the library.

Following the above roles and the importance of the library in any given institution, the NUC should consider as a matter of necessity the following in the library in their future accreditation programmes.

The staff-student ratio in the library will be aligned with what is applicable to other academic departments. The library must be adequately staffed by professional librarians who hold professional degrees at the graduate level in library or information science (SACS, 1988).

The ratio of the professional and para-professional staff against the users should be considered, this can be ascertained on the sitting capacity of the library vis-à-vis the staff record. Also to be considered is the qualification of the staff that assists in the discharging of the library services. How efficient are they? What are their minimum academic qualifications? The sitting capacity should be in the right proportion to the number of students who are to use the library. The building should also be considered and befitting to a standard library and all the library collections must be up-to-date and current.

The accreditation of Nigerian Academic Programmes by National Universities Commission has brought some outstanding benefits since its inception and the library which is seen as the heart of the institution has played a great role in that effect.

The quality of the university library is important to the reputation of the university. Olorunsola, (2009) posits that the quality and effectiveness of academic programmes of a university are measured in part by the quality of the library. Consequently, the university library is used in evaluating and scoring academic programmes. During an accreditation exercise, if the university library is scored less than 70%, but all other components are scored 100%, those programmes will not get full accreditation. Academic worth, intellectual vitality, and effectiveness of any university depend upon the state of its library (Aguolu, 1984).

Conclusively, all these above enumerated facts about the importance of the library are suggestions to the Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC) for future assessment and evaluation of academic programmes in Nigerian universities with special emphasizes on the library.

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