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Table of Contents

QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACCREDITATION

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Abstract
As the global need for higher education increases, measures continue to be needed to meet people's expectations for this level of education. Thus, this study determined how important accreditation is to the quality of higher education in Nigeria. It further discussed the role of accreditation on quality higher education under conceptual issues. The descriptive survey research design was adopted with a population of ninety academic staff who responded to the designed questionnaires to collect data on accreditation and quality of higher education in Nigeria. Frequency tables and percentages were used to analyse the data collected. The findings revealed that accreditation determined quality education in Nigeria's higher education and that academic development programmes and capacity building for academic staff enhanced quality education. Thus, the paper recommended that periodic orientation be carried out on both students and the university staff since their responses influenced the educational system. In conclusion, the major constraint included problems of post-assessment exercise which might expose some of the schools that are used to borrowing facilities for accreditation. Hence, the study provided the best for the stakeholders to identify and prioritize capacity enhancement for quality improvement in higher education through the accreditation of academic programmes.

Keywords: Higher Education, Accreditation, University, Quality and Programmes.

Introduction
The need for higher education, especially university education, is growing globally because of its contributions to the growth of human capital. No matter how much it costs, a forward-thinking government will make sure that her people receive focused, high-quality education.

Although basic education could be promoted in countries with extremely high rates of illiteracy, it should not receive as much attention as higher education. While basic education is widely recognized as the cornerstone upon which all subsequent educational levels are built, higher education has been identified as a key to a country's technical growth and a method of achieving economic empowerment (Adesope, 2021 and United Nations, 2020).

It is in the bid to acquire this form of education that gave rise to its demand in which the population has overgrown the facilities available. According to Ogunode and Abubakar (2020), there is a general perception among Nigerians that only a university degree can promise a good future and such gave rise to the high population seeking admission in the nation's universities. He noted that the demand for university education has reached an unprecedented high level and the current number of universities in the country will be required to fill this need. As a result of this increase in the demand for university education, individuals, religious bodies, and corporate organisation now invests in building higher institutions especially universities. Though a university must fulfil the necessary accreditation requirements before it can be approved to commence the dissemination of knowledge fully as a higher institution, thus has this standard been achieved? It is not enough to license a higher education institution to operate; there must be a constant evaluation to ensure that set standards and operational guides are not violated.

A system that grows is such that sets standards and disciplines itself to attain them. Accreditation of universities be it institutional or programme is a way of examining the state of the institutions in relation to where it ought to be. It has been observed that some of the owners of universities start without even going through the supposed due process of accreditation and even getting full approval from the federal government before commencing with the operations of their higher institutions for learning. This is because these institutions sometimes are established by the owners mostly because of the financial benefits been envisaged, thus making the financial gains a major priority for setting up these universities and showing little or less interest on quality. Today, certificates of the degree of graduates from some universities are not acknowledged by employers of labour because they cannot be justified by the owners of the certificates.

Hence, as a result of this, most universities are denied accreditation and closed down by NUC (National Universities Commission) from time to time due to lack of basic requirements to meet with the criteria for accreditation.

In 2024, NUC (National Universities Commission) announced the closure of 58 Universities and 8 universities placed under investigation because that the under-listed "Degree Mills" have not been licensed by the Federal Government and have, therefore, been closed down for violating the Education (National Minimum Standards etc.) Act CAP E3 Law of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. These Universities comprised of

The impact has been seen in the progressive increase in the performance of Universities in the accreditation exercises over the years. More programmes have earned Full accreditation status, while fewer have interim and denied status. This also attests to the fact that external and internal quality assurance has generally been effective in the Nigerian University System (Akpan & Etor, 2016). In 2021-2024, the Centre for World Ranking (CWUR) announced the University of Ibadan as the 1st University is Nigeria and 16th position in Africa. More so, Ibadan was also ranked the best among Nigerian Universities in terms of Ph.D graduate output in 2024. In addition, the recent global ranking by CWUR for 2021-2024 places Ibadan at 1083 out of 20,966 in the world. In other words, the University of Ibadan has both academic and non-academic staff that contribute to the effectiveness and survival of the institution. Thus, this paper examines the relevance of accreditation to higher education in Nigeria. It also attempted to determine the impact of accreditation on higher education funding and academic infrastructure.

Conceptual Issues
The term accreditation is considered in a variety of ways and has different meanings in different parts of the world. In general, accreditation is defined as a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize colleges, Universities and higher education programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement (Akomolafe and Adesua, 2020). The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded

nationally published standards for accreditation as well as achieving its mission and stated purpose.

The processes usually include a self-evaluation, peer review and site visits (NUC, 2019). For an institution to qualify as accredited, it is expected to have undergone the following:

- A self-study prepared by the candidate of higher education institution or programme.
- An external peer review that focuses on academic programmes, teaching, research and service as well as the quality and activities of the faculty.
- A site visit to assess the institution or programme by a peer review team. This is based on standards or criteria for the process set by the quality assurance agency.
- A report on the site visit which focuses on institutional academic standards, and
- A decision resulting from the review to accredit or deny accreditation, or some intermediate status such as candidacy for accreditation or probation.

It is increasingly recognized that quality higher education is central to economic and political development, and vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalized world (World Bank, 2019). The articulation of this recognition has focused increased attention on quality assurance and accreditation as critical factors to ensuring quality improvement and relevance. Bloom, Canning and Chan (2009) indicate that expanding tertiary education may promote faster technological catch-up and improve a country's ability to maximize its economic output.

Accreditation serves as a gatekeeper for a threshold level of quality through its screening functions of eligibility, candidacy for initial accreditation, and the grant of initial accreditation. Institutions and programmes that lack sound academic and fiscal practices in Nigeria are not considered for accredited status nor will they receive initial accreditation.

Accreditation as perceived by regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission, National Board for Technical Education and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NUC, NBTE and NCCE) enhances quality by requiring that institutions and programmes routinely engage in quality improvement. It also provides

major regional and national fora in which higher education faculties and administrators meet to identify and carry out their responsibilities for quality assurance, (Akpan & Etor, 2016).

In other words, the academic values of higher education through accreditation enhance institutional autonomy, academic freedom, commitment to education and governance. These values allow institutions to independently pursue a diverse array of missions to serve diverse groups of students. The values also define the distinctiveness of higher education in national development. It also builds an academic foundation on the philosophy of the students to become self-reliant after graduation.

Accreditation as a buffer against the politicizing of higher education.

The willingness and wisdom of federal and state governments to rely on accreditation to assure academic quality has resulted in a measure of protection for institutions and programmes against undue political influence within the academic communities, for example, faculty/ institution wide appointments is not predetermined by the government officials, rather they are done by the institutions' regulatory authority (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2008).

Accreditation in other words assist students and families, government and employers when making key financial, personal, or career decisions related to higher education. Students and families report that accredited status of a programme is a significant factor when selecting a university to undergo their course, or programme, (Akpan & Etor, 2016).

The National Universities Commission (NUC)

The National Universities Commission (NUC) is the regulatory agency of the Federal Ministry of Education, charged with the responsibility of coordinating the orderly development of the Nigerian University System. It was established as an administrative unit in the Cabinet Office in 1962. It became a statutory body through the Act. No. 1 of 1974 which was later amended by Act No. 49 of 1988. Act. No. 16 empowers NUC to lay down minimum academic standards and accredit programmes. The provisions of Act 9 of 1993 empower the National Universities Commission to coordinate the licensing and establishment

of private universities. The following are the stated objectives of the Nigeria Universities Commission:

- Ensure that at least the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) documents are attained, maintained and enhanced;
- Assure employers of labour and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programmes have attained an acceptable level of competence in their areas of specialization; and
- Certify to the International community that the programmes offered in Nigerian universities are of high standards and that their graduates are adequate for employment and for further studies.

Certain criteria are used to assess the discipline or programme by the National Universities Commission and they are stated according to Okebukola (2002: p 89) as follows;

> *Philosophy and objectives of the programmes, curriculum content: philosophy and objectives of the programme admission into the programme academic regulations, Evaluation of students work, practical work/ degree project, standard of test and examination, Students' course evaluation and external examination; Staffing – academic staff and non-academic staff, Administration of the department and staff development programme; Physical facilities which includes laboratories classroom facilities and staff office, as well as safety and environmental sanitation, Funding of the programme by the university, library facilities and employer's rating of graduates of the programmes.*

According to the National Universities Commission Accreditation manual, the accreditation status for a programme is determined after a summary of the scores awarded by each panel member is entered into the Accreditation Panel Report Form (NUC/APRF) which becomes the accreditation panel's recommendation. For the evaluation of programmes, a total of 100% is required and they are evaluated under the following:

- Staffing 32

- Academic Content 23
- Physical Facilities 25
- Library 12
- Funding 5
- Employers Rating 3

Thus, accreditation of a programme can be awarded in the following status:

a. Full accreditation status: A total overall score of 70% and above in addition to scoring at least 70% in **each** of the core areas of Staffing, Academic Content, Physical Facilities and Library.

b. Interim accreditation status: An overall score of 60% or more but less than 70% OR an overall total score of 70% and above but with a score of less than 70% in any of the four core areas identified in (a) above.

c. Denied accreditation status: An overall score of less than 60%.

The Commission also noted that there has been a significant increase in the number of programmes with Full accreditation status in the Nigerian University system (NUS).

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What was the most area accreditation improved in quality higher education in Nigeria?
2. Are students' outputs in accredited courses better than those not accredited?
3. Has accreditation of academic programmes resulted in quality academic staff and students?
4. To what extent has accreditation enhanced staff capacity building in Nigerian Universities?
5. Has accreditation led to improved academic infrastructures?
6. In what way does accreditation enhance funding of higher education in Nigeria?

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the relevance of accreditation on quality higher education. Specifically an attempt was

made to determine the impact of accreditation on higher education financing and academic infrastructure.

Significance of the study

The study will serve as a guide to policy makers, development partners and education accreditation boards to treat accreditation as key component of strategies to improve higher education in Nigeria. It will also provide information to the higher education stakeholders on ways to assist them with the identification and prioritization of capacity enhancement for quality improvement.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The researchers collected data from the key informants (KIs) through structured questionnaires which were used to examine the effect and significance of accreditation on quality higher education in Nigerian Universities. Face validity was employed to test for the validity of the instrument. Senior colleagues in the field of study and vast in the area of determining the quality of research instruments validated the content of the instrument by comparing the questions to the objective of the study. Modifications were then made based on their inputs. While a pretest study was conducted to which the Cronbach Alpha reliability statistics was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient obtained indicated that the Cronbach Alpha value was 0.870; this is against the acceptable Cronbach Alpha reliability statistics of 0.70, therefore, the instrument for this study was deemed reliable.

The population for the study was ninety (90) lecturers from the University of Ibadan, who were selected through a random sampling technique in four faculties in the University namely: the Faculty of Education, Arts, Social Sciences and Agriculture and Forestry.

Method of data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed through frequency tables and percentages.

Presentation of Results
The analysis and results are presented with the aid of frequency tables and percentages.

Decision Rule: Any question item > 40% shows that accreditation improves the quality of higher Education in Nigeria.

Table 1.1 Distribution of Respondents by Faculty

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Social Sciences	20	22.2
Education	25	27.8
Agricultural/Forest	20	22.2
Arts	25	27.8
Total	90	100

Table 1.1 shows that 20 respondents representing 22.2 percent were from the Social Sciences, 27.8 percent were from Education, 22.2 percent of respondents were from Agricultural/Forest and 27.8 percent were from the Faculty of Arts.

Table 1.2 Distribution of Respondents by Designation

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Graduate Assistant	8	8.9
Assistant Lecturer	10	11.1
Lecturer II	35	38.9
Lecturer I	26	28.8
Senior Lecturer	11	12.2
Professor	-	-
Total	90	100

Table 1.2 shows that 8.9 percent of the respondents were Graduate Assistants, 11.1 percent were Assistant Lecturers, 38.9 percent were Lecturer II, 28.8 percent were Lecturer I, while 12.2 percent were Senior Lecturers.

Table 1.3 Influence of accreditation on improved quality higher education

S/N	Statement	Frequency	%	Decision
1	Student learning behaviour	20	22.2	Rejected
2	Quality course content	18	20.0	Rejected
3	Lecturers' academic improvement	52	57.8	Accepted
	Total	90	100	

Table 1.3 shows that over 57 percent of the sampled lecturers accepted that the most area accreditation of academic programmes has improved in the quality higher education in Nigeria, was on the improvement of lecturers. While 22.2 percent agreed that students' learning behaviour was the most improved. On the other hand, it was the view of 18 respondents (20%) that quality course contents were the most improved area in the quality of higher education through accreditation.

Table 1.4: Students' output in accredited courses and courses not accredited

S/N	Statement	Frequency	%	Decision
1	There is an increase in the academic output of students in accredited courses.	57	63.3	Accepted
2	There is no increase in the academic output of students in accredited courses.	10	11.1	Rejected
3	The students academic output in both accredited and non-accredited courses are at parity.	23	25.6	Rejected
	Total	90	100	

Table 1.4 shows academic staff response to students' academic output concerning the accreditation of courses and its impact on students. Generally, the respondents believed that there has been an increase in the academic output of students in accredited courses, with an acceptance response of 63.3%. While 11.1 % and 25.6% respectively believed that there was no increase in the academic output of students in accredited courses and as well that students' academic output in both accredited and non-accredited courses was at parity. This implies that the lecturers are confident to state categorically that the academic output of the students over time has improved as a result of the accreditation of academic programmes.

Table 1.5: Accreditation of academic programmes and quality academic staff and students

S/N	Statement	Frequency	%	Decision
1	Accreditation of courses has not brought about quality change in teaching and learning.	-	-	Rejected
2	Accreditation has improved the Quality output of teachers and students.	50	55.6	Accepted
3	Accreditation is a factor to quality academic improvement.	40	44.4	Accepted
	Total	90	100	

In Table 1.5, the accreditation of academic programmes has resulted in quality academic staff and students. Thus, a total of fifty respondents (55.6%) agreed with the position that accreditation has improved the quality output of teachers and students. In the same manner, 40 respondents representing 44.4% also accepted the view that accreditation was a factor in quality academic improvement in the nation's institutions of higher learning. The overall perception on this is that based on the target put in place by the academic regulatory body, there was an improvement both on the lecturers and the students.

Table 1.6: Accreditation and enhanced staff capacity building in Nigerian Universities

S/N	Statement	Frequency	%	Decision
1	Accreditation has improved the teaching and learning method	42	46.7	Accepted
2	Accreditation has increased the training capacity of the staff	38	42.2	Accepted
3	Staff are still use to old teaching methodology	6	6.7	Rejected
4	Accreditation has not added value to quality academic staff.	4	4.4	Rejected
	Total	90	100	

From Table 1.6, it can be observed that the respondents agreed with the opinion that accreditation enhanced staff capacity building in Nigerian Universities as 46.7% of the total respondents agreed with the view that accreditation improved the teaching and learning method. As were 38 respondents representing (42.2%) whose accepted decision was that accreditation over time has increased the training capacity of the staff. Against 6.7% and 4.4 % perceptions that staff are still used to the old teaching methodology and that accreditation has not added value to quality academic staff were rejected based on the standing decision rule.

Table 1.7: Accreditation and improved academic infrastructures

S/N	Statement	Frequency	%	Decision
1	Academic infrastructures have improved as a result of accreditation	60	66.7	Accepted
2	Infrastructures in the higher education system have been worse under accreditation of programmes.	2	2.2	Rejected

3	Academic infrastructures have remained the same despite accreditation of programmes.	28	31.1	Rejected
	Total	90	100	

In a related manner, table 1.7 also revealed that 66.7% of the total respondents subscribed to the view that academic infrastructures have improved as a result of the accreditation of academic programmes. While less than 33.5% of the total respondents believed that infrastructures in the higher education system have been worse and remained the same despite accreditation of programmes. Based on this observation the implication is that accreditation plays a key role in universities infrastructural development.

Table 1.8: Accreditation and enhance funding of higher education in Nigeria

S/N	Statement	Frequency	%	Decision
1	Academic Management and the Government have injected more funds into the school due to the denial of courses for accreditation.	44	48.9	Accepted
2	The school Management is indifferent to funding despite accreditation denial of some courses.	6	6.7	Rejected
3	The school authority funds academic programmes/infrastructures to enhance the quality standards of education.	40	44.4	Accepted
	Total	90	100	

From Table 1.8 the information gathered can be inferred that over 93.3% of the total respondents were of the view that accreditation enhances funding of higher education in Nigeria. This conforms with

the NUC, 2019 pronouncement on the impact of accreditation in university education which has resulted in greater opportunity for some departments to have acquired equipment, appropriate facilities for research and injection of funds into the University to salvage the deficiencies identified during the accreditation exercise.

Discussion

It would be clearly stated that accreditation has influenced the quality of higher education in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that academic benchmarks set by the university's academic regulatory body to access the quality of programmes run by the universities have improved the quality of students' output. It was also evident as revealed by the study in Table 1.5 that since accreditation was put in place to check poor academic delivery, the quality of both academic and the students has improved based on the predefined quality standards.

The result on table1.6 revealed that accreditation has also helped to build the capacities of academic staff, this is in consonance with the submission of Akpan and Etor (2016) that Prior to the accreditation of a university, some quality indices are taken into consideration to ensure that they have basic academic infrastructures, conducive learning environment and quality human capital base to discharge her academic activities.

The result in Table 1.7 also revealed that due to the requirements for quality academic infrastructures prescribed by the academic regulatory body, the infrastructures have improved. This is evident as 66.7% agreed with the view. This was also in accordance with the informal comments from the staff of the universities who point to the fact that accreditation exercises often give the departments the opportunity of getting the university to construct new buildings, renovate old ones, buy them equipment and appropriate facilities for teaching and research. Some of the KIs have wondered what the state of universities would have been if accreditation were non-existent.

The findings of the study in a related manner revealed that accreditation has also enhanced the funding of higher education in Nigeria as over 93% of the total respondents are in agreement with this belief. This, however, upholds NUC 2019 Report, that journals, other

resource materials for academic programme, and fund injection helped to achieve a higher qualitative education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have shown that accreditation is a determinant of quality education in Nigeria's higher education. It is also evident that the components of accreditation as outlined in the study (i.e. academic staff, resource materials, physical facilities, finances and academic contents) are important tools in measuring quality education. In addition, the study revealed that academic development programme and capacity building for academic staff enhanced quality education in Nigeria as revealed by the study.

As made known by the study, there were improved higher education standards as a result of the accreditation of academic programmes, this implies that educational standards have improved. The major constraints facing accreditation of higher education are problems of post-assessment exercise which might expose some of the institutions that are used to borrowing facilities for accreditation. The moment these are not followed up, the quality of education in such institutions will face grave challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Efforts should be made by government and proprietors of private higher education to engage the NUC on regular accreditation.
- NUC should intensify effort on post accreditation exercise of university education in Nigeria. In addition, the resultant effects that were necessary for accreditation refusal should be disqualified in order to create consciousness for quality education.
- There should be no favouritism in accreditation of any institution to ensure credibility of the exercise.
- In the bid to enhance quality education, financing of higher education should be given the highest priority in the country.

- Periodic orientation should be carried out on both students and the universities staff, since their responses influence the academic system.
- Finally, universities, faculties and departments that were denied accreditation should not be allowed to graduate students, as this will help to prevent the production of lower quality graduates outturn.

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