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EDITORIAL DESK

The Centre for General Nigerian Studies has continued to be a frontier for knowledge dissemination through her series of publications, among other activities being performed by the directorate.

This volume 5 journal of Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Economy of March 2025 housed a total of 18 well researched articles from scholars across the geographical boundaries of the Africa sub region. The team of experienced editors subjected the articles to peer review, and their plagiarism checks have satisfied the guild of editors.

The journal is recommended to researchers, scholars, lecturers, and students to read, and the planners can leverage on recommendations as panacea to the doldrums confronting the socio-economic and educational spheres of the Sub Sahara Africa nations

I wish all the contributors and readers Barka Eid Fitri and Easter in advance

Prof. M.O.B Mohammed FNAEAP
Lead Editor

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ENHANCING UNIVERSITY ACCREDITATION INTEGRITY IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES, IMPLICATIONS AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract

The study explored the challenges of the accreditation process in Nigerian higher institutions, analyzing its implications, and suggesting strategies to enhance university accreditation integrity. A systematic review method was used to support the points raised in the study from various sources, including reference books and studies published in both national and international journals. The challenges were found to be, less qualified educators, resistance to change, time and effort required, compliance with standards, corruption and bribery, inadequate funding, stakeholder roles, and technological infrastructure. Some strategies were therefore highlighted in enhancing university accreditation integrity which includes; strengthening of stakeholders roles, capacity building, implementation of anti-corruption measures, diversification of funding sources, and investment in technological infrastructure. The paper then concluded that university administrators, accreditors, staffs (academic and non-academic), and students should note that lack of integrity in the accreditation process will not only damage the university's quality of education but also affect the nation's economy. The study then suggested, regular accreditation panels' visit to institutions, adequate government funding in the educational system, involvement of university students in the accreditation process, and enlightenment of university administrators on honesty to enhance the accreditation process of the university system.

Keywords: Academic standards, accreditation process, higher education, integrity, quality assurance

Introduction

University accreditation ensures that higher education institutions meet certain quality and integrity standards. Accreditation is typically conducted by external regulatory bodies that assess educational institutions based on established criteria, standards, and procedures (Abdel-Haq, 2020). This process aims to ensure that universities meet certain quality requirements and provide students with high-quality education (Absor & Hairunas, 2022). The National Universities Commission (NUC) in Nigeria is authorized to accredit universities and their academic programs including bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. The commission plays its roles in conjunction with designated professional bodies and agencies that assess and accredit the professional contents of some programmes such as; the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria that assesses and accredits the professional contents of Accounting programmes, the

Council of Legal Education that assesses and accredits the professional contents of Law programmes and the Council for Registration of Engineering in Nigeria that assesses and accredits the professional contents of Engineering programmes in Nigerian Universities. The Commission currently regulates 62 federal, 63 state, and 147 private universities in Nigeria (NUC, 2024).

The National Universities Commission (2012) sees accreditation of degree and academic programs as a system that recognizes educational institutions (universities and their programs) for their performance, integrity, and quality, thereby earning the trust of the educational community, the public, and employers. The objectives of accreditation of academic programmes are to; ensure that at least the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standards document are attained, maintained and enhanced, assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programmes have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization, and certifying the international community that the programmes offered in Nigerian universities are of high standards, producing graduates who are well-prepared for work and advanced studies.

The commission designates an Ad-hoc accrediting panel for every degree program or subject or sub-discipline offered in Nigerian universities. The accreditation panel uses the NUC uniform guidelines and criteria to ensure fair play and justice in their assessment requirements and final verdicts. The panel is normally expected to see in every department item listed in the assessment requirement, and members of the panel are also expected to interact with students from whom vital information could be obtained. However, in the case of accreditation in present-day Nigeria, there is no doubt that some panels are to be declared wanted.

Okecha (2008) noted that certain panels primarily evaluate institutions based on submitted documentation, neglecting to verify the physical presence of listed facilities and academic personnel, some universities engage academics lacking integrity for brief periods presenting them as staff during accreditation, some institutions procure equipment and chemicals from affiliated universities, while certain departments deceitfully include professors from other universities as staff members without their consent, some departments exhibit borrowed books and journals from other institutions, certain panels observe overcrowded lecture halls and overlook the recruitment of less experienced academic staff as members of accreditation panels, some panels are swayed by the compensation offered by institutions, occasionally succumbing to bribery, leading to a lack of genuine concern for critical issues. Additionally, some panels exhibit haste in returning to their offices, resulting in incomplete assessments. Osarenren-Osaghae (2014) revealed that this drama begins when the accreditation team must come to the university to carry out their investigations. Thus, continues deception in the accreditation process will jeopardize the quality of education.

Obadara and Alaka (2013) asserted that accreditation processes must be meticulously managed and overseen without political interference to attain educational standards, quality, and efficacy, hence fulfilling the objectives of university education in Nigeria. Hence, the integrity of university accreditation either public or private should be placed on high premium in order to have a quality university education that will produce high level manpower who will fit into the society, make her nation proud as agent of growth and development. Universities that have not fulfilled the requirements for an academic program should not be permitted to provide such a program.

However, the NUC provides accreditation results for programs and institutions which include:

1. **Accreditation Status:** the program or institution may be granted full accreditation status.
2. **Recommendations for Improvement:** the commission may recommend improvement for the program or institution such as; improving funding, improving quality of classrooms, developing and supervising marking schemes, ensuring that academic and non-academic staff participate in conferences and workshops, and ensuring that professorial offices have the required amenities like tables, visitors seats among others.
3. **Program Score:** The program is evaluated based on its success across four core components: academic matters, staffing, physical facilities, and library resources. A score of 70% in all the four core components is recommended for full accreditation.

Challenges of University Accreditation in Nigeria

There are several challenges which have significant implications for the integrity of university accreditation in Nigeria;

1. *Less Qualified Educators:* Having a high number of less qualified educators in the system can hinder the accreditation process, as universities need to demonstrate that they have the necessary resources and faculty expertise to provide quality education (Hernandez-Diaz et al., 2020).
2. *Resistance to Change:* The accreditation process often requires universities to make changes to their programs, policies, and procedures to meet the accreditation standards. However, faculty members may be resistant to these changes, which can impede the accreditation process. Adequate training and support for faculty members are essential to ensure their understanding and commitment to the accreditation process (Mejía et al., 2020).
3. *Time and Effort Required:* Accreditation processes can be time-consuming and demanding, requiring universities to gather and analyze extensive data, prepare self-study reports, and undergo site visits by accrediting bodies (Mejía et al., 2020). This can lead to increased workloads and time requirements for faculty and staff involved in the accreditation process (Mejía et al., 2020).
4. *Compliance with Standards:* The accreditation process aims to ensure conformity with minimum standards (Alani & Ilusanya, 2008). However, some institutions may struggle to meet these standards due to various factors such as inadequate resources, infrastructure, and faculty qualifications (Ebekozen & Aigbavboa, 2022).
5. *Corruption and Bribery:* Corruption is a significant challenge in Nigeria, and it also affects the accreditation process (Osipian, 2008). Some institutions may pay bribes to accreditation agencies to gain or maintain accreditation, compromising the integrity of the process.
6. *Inadequate Funding:* Funding plays a crucial role in maintaining the quality of higher education institutions. However, Nigeria's mono-economy, heavily reliant on oil and gas revenue, poses challenges in funding university degree programs and accreditation processes (Ndubuisi & Jacob, 2020).
7. *Stakeholder Roles:* The roles of stakeholders in improving the quality of university education in Nigeria are crucial (Asiyai, 2014). However, there is a need to clarify and strengthen the roles of stakeholders to ensure their active participation in the accreditation process.
8. *Technological Infrastructure:* The availability of internet connectivity in university libraries and the integration of technology into academic programs are essential for quality education (Baro & Asaba, 2010; Gyau & Gyan, 2023). However, the present state of internet

connectivity in Nigerian university libraries is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Implications of Manipulated Accreditation Processes in Nigerian Universities

The challenges mentioned above have significant implications for university accreditation integrity in Nigeria. Manipulated accreditation process affects all aspects of the institution, including its reputation, financial stability, faculty engagement, and overall quality of education. The lack of clarity in stakeholder roles can lead to a lack of accountability and transparency in the accreditation process (Asiyai, 2014). Non-compliance with standards can result in a decline in the quality of education provided by institutions (Ebekozen & Aigbavboa, 2022). Corruption and bribery undermine the credibility and integrity of the accreditation process (Osipian, 2008). Inadequate funding can lead to a lack of resources and infrastructure, affecting the quality of education (Ndubuisi & Jacob, 2020). The absence of technological infrastructure hinders the integration of technology into academic programs, limiting the quality of education provided (Baro & Asaba, 2010; Gyau & Gyan, 2023).

Strategies to Enhance University Accreditation Integrity in Nigeria

To enhance university accreditation integrity in Nigeria, several strategies can be implemented. Among many are:

1. *Strengthening of Stakeholder Roles:* Clear guidelines and expectations should be established for the roles of stakeholders in the accreditation process (Asiyai, 2014). This will ensure their active participation and promote accountability and transparency. They will get to know what to do and why it should be done as well as consequences of not getting it done.
2. *Capacity Building:* Institutions should be provided with the necessary resources and support to meet accreditation standards (Alani & Ilusanya, 2008). This includes improving infrastructure, faculty qualifications, and research capabilities. Also, the place of maintenance should not be overlook. Maintenance committees if not available should be set up in each institution and they have to be accountable for abuse and misuse of support built from within or externally.
3. *Implementation of Anti-Corruption Measures:* Strong anti-corruption measures should be implemented to prevent bribery and corruption in the accreditation process (Osipian, 2008). This can include the establishment of independent oversight bodies and the enforcement of strict penalties for corrupt practices.
4. *Diversification of Funding Sources:* To address the challenges of inadequate funding, Nigerians should explore alternative sources of funding for higher education (Ndubuisi & Jacob, 2020). This can include public-private partnerships, philanthropic contributions, and international collaborations.
5. *Investment in Technological Infrastructure:* Efforts should be made to improve internet connectivity in university libraries and integrate technology into academic programs (Baro & Asaba, 2010; Gyau & Gyan, 2023). This will enhance the quality of education and ensure that Nigerian institutions are equipped to meet the demands of the digital age.

Conclusion

Accreditation plays an important role in ensuring the quality of universities and promoting continuous improvement. University administrators, accreditors, staffs (*academic* and *non-academic*), and students should note that lack of integrity in the accreditation process will not only damage the university's quality of education but also affect the nation's economy. Thus, a manipulated university accreditation process will lead to the production of half-baked graduates who might not be able to contribute to the national economy nor manage other sectors of the nation effectively and efficiently.

Recommendations

This study therefore recommends;

1. Regular accreditation panels' visit to institutions.
2. Adequate government funding in the educational system.
3. Involvement of university students in the accreditation process.
4. Enlightenment of university administrators on honesty to enhance the accreditation process of the university system

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