

Accreditation of Academic Programs in Public Universities in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward

by

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Abstract

Academic programme accreditation is one of the programs of the universities that are handled by the regulatory institutions in the country like the National Universities Commission. Every year National Universities Commission conducts academic programme accreditation in the universities in Nigeria. Many public universities that present programs for accreditation end up not meeting up with the accreditation standard due to many internal challenges. This paper intends to examine the challenges preventing effective academic program accreditation in public Universities in Nigeria. Both primary and secondary data were used to provide empirical support for the various points raised in the presentation. The paper identified inadequate funding, poor preparation, inadequate academic staff, shortage of infrastructure facilities, insecurity problems, strike actions and corruption as challenges preventing effective academic programme accreditation in the public Universities in Nigeria. To address these problems, the paper recommended among other things that increment in the funding of public universities, and effective planning of academic programme accreditation.

Keywords: Accreditation, program, public universities.

Introduction:

Public universities are universities owned by the government. Public universities are universities established to provide post-secondary schools for Nigeria. Public universities are universities established by the act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public universities deal with the provision of teaching, research and community services (Ogunode, 2020). The objectives of the universities in Nigerian higher education, including professional education have the following aims: the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of

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the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2014).

Public universities in Nigeria are grouped into federal and state-owned universities. The federal universities are owned by the federal government of Nigeria while the state universities are owned by the state government. The National universities commission supervises over 200 universities, consisting of 48 Federal owned, 54 State-owned and 99 privately owned institutions. The Nigerian universities have about 2.1 million students and a staff strength of about 170,000 non-teaching and 100,000 academic staff (NUC, 2022a). The federal government of Nigeria established the National universities commission to oversee the external administration and supervision of all universities in Nigeria. The NUC is empowered by law to lay down Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for universities in the Federation and to accredit their degree programs. This led to the preparation, with the use of experts, of the Minimum Academic Standards for the 13 disciplines taught in Nigerian Universities in 1989 (NUC, 2022a).

University education in Nigeria is aimed according to Akpan & Etor (2018) at producing high-level manpower to man the various sectors of the Nigerian economy. To achieve this goal, the universities need to carry out quality student intake, quality teaching/learning processes, quality research and provide quality infrastructural facilities, services and resources. They need to provide quality and adequate students support services to enhance quality learning outcomes. One way of stimulating authorities of universities to provide these services is through accreditation because no university wants to be denied accreditation.

Akpan & Etor (2018) observed that accreditation of academic programs in Nigerian universities dated back to 1990 when the first accreditation exercise was carried out. Since then, accreditation of academic programs has become a culture and a continuous process to ensure that the provision of the minimum academic standard by NUC is adhered to.

Accreditation of academic programs is one of the quality assurance mechanisms initiated by the National Universities Commission (NUC) to regulate academic standards and enhance the quality of university education in Nigeria (Akpan, & Etor, 2018). According to Obadara and Alaka (2013), accreditation is a process that aids institutions in developing and sustaining effective educational programs and assuring the educational community, the general public and other organizations that the accredited institution has met the high standard of quality and effectiveness. It is a measure of the quality of academic programs on the acceptable minimum standard provided by the accrediting agency. Okebukola (2006) described accreditation as a process of examining the availability and adequacy of resources, and merit rating of resources and programs to enhance the quality of output. This means that accreditation involves the process of ensuring that curricula, physical facilities, personnel, funds and so on meet the needs of the university to achieve its stated philosophy and objectives. Hence, it is a measure of the quality of academic programs and it is aimed at strengthening academic programs for quality assurance and quality improvement. Akpan & Etor (2018) accreditation of academic programs is all-embracing and involves assessing the appropriateness of programme philosophy and objectives, the adequacy and relevance of the curricula to the students in their specific areas of study and the world of work. It involves examining the adequacy of students' admission and graduation requirements, quality and quantity of teaching staff, support staff, teacher/student ratio, external examiners' reports on moderation of degree examination questions and scores, adequacy of budgetary allocation and other sources of funds to support the programs. It also involves evaluating the status of physical facilities in terms of office accommodation, lecture halls, library facilities and the report of employers' assessment

of graduates in their employ. Accreditation, therefore, is a process that involves a peer review and rating of these resources to the accreditation criteria.

Accreditation of degree programs by the NUC is a system of evaluating academic programs in Nigerian universities to ensure that they meet the provisions of the MAS documents. The objectives of accreditation of academic programs are to; Ensure that the provisions of the MAS are attained, maintained and enhanced (NUC, 2022b).

The objectives of accreditation of higher institutions/programs as outlined by the NUC (2012a) include.

- i. To ensure that at least the minimum academic standards documents are attained, maintained and enhanced.
- ii. To assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programs have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization.
- iii. To certify to the international community that the programs offered in Nigerian universities are of a high standard and their graduates are adequate for employment and further studies.

A cursory look at these objectives reveals that accreditation according to Akpan, & Etor (2018) focuses on the production of quality graduates with needed skills, and technical and professional knowledge that would enable them to contribute to national development and compete favorably in the employment market. Therefore, accreditation enhances the provision of resources to achieve these objectives. The NUC (2012b) outlines the criteria for the accreditation of academic programs to include: the philosophy and objectives of the programme, the curriculum, teaching staff (quality and quantity), students' admission and graduation requirements, standard of degree examination, financial support, the status of physical facilities, administration of department and employers rating of graduates.

Challenges Facing Academic Program Accreditation in Nigerian Public Universities:

Many challenges are hindering effective academic programme accreditation in the public universities in Nigeria. Some of the challenges include; inadequate funding, poor preparation, inadequate academic staff, shortage of infrastructure facilities, insecurity problems, strike actions and corruption.

- i. **Inadequate Funding:** Inadequate funding is one of the major problems facing program accreditation in Nigerian public universities. Programme accreditation of universities is capital intensive. There are many financial commitments required to carry out programme accreditation. This fund is what the school administrators do not have to spend. Ogunode & Omenuko (2021) and Godwin & Ogunode (2021) observed that higher institution administrators do not have access to adequate funding for the effective running and administration of the institutions under their care. Government funding for higher education in the country has been inadequate for decades. The annual budgetary allocation for the administration of universities in Nigeria is grossly inadequate. The inability of the federal government to stick to the UNESCO 26% of the national budget for education is affecting the management of Nigerian universities (Ogunode, Ahmed, Gregory & Abubakar, 2020; Ogunode

& Abubakar, 2020). The inability of the school administrators to access adequate funds for the running of the universities makes it impossible for them to acquire all human and material resources for program accreditation in their respective universities. This is the reason why many public universities programme are not accredited because the expected human and materials resources that are supposed to be in place are not on the ground. Okani, Ogunode & Ajape (2021) and Ogunode (2020) submitted that factors responsible for inadequate funding of public universities in Nigeria include lack of political will, corruption, increase in population, inflation, fall in national revenue and poor financial planning and the implications of underfunding of the public universities include; inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staff, poor quality of education, brain-drain and strike action.

- ii. **Poor Preparation:** Poor preparation for accreditation of the academic program by intending universities is another problem hindering effective programme accreditation in the public universities in Nigeria. Poor preparation from the school administrators, deans, head of departments and senate committee on accreditation is some tin responsible for why many public universities fail academic program accreditation in their universities. The inability of the Bursar to release the money to the department to acquire the human and materials resources on time, poor participation of the senate committee on accreditation and the inability of the department to procure all the items and resources needed for the accreditation due to poor management. Akpan & Etor (2018) observed that in some universities, management does not release money on time to affected departments to prepare for the exercise. It seems our Ivory towers are plagued by inadequate infrastructural facilities and teaching personnel for quality instructional delivery.
- iii. **Inadequate Academic Staff:** Inadequate academic staff is another major problem hindering effective program accreditation in public universities. Academic staff is one of the critical factor elements in the accreditation process. Akpan (2011) submitted that the quality of teachers determines to a great extent the quality of students' learning outcomes. Hence, no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. The instructional delivery effectiveness depends greatly on the quality of the teachers, their qualifications, experiences, professional exposure and morale. The adequacy of academic personnel to handle the various courses of a given programme is equally important because this helps to determine the teacher/student ratio. Staff or resources requirements for (Department of Primary/Elementary Education) according to NUC (2007) include; Graduate Assistant (A Good Bachelor's Degree) 2. Assistant Lecturer (A Masters' Degree in relevant field.) 3. Lecturer II ((i) A Doctoral Degree in relevant field). (ii) Promotional prospectus for Assistant Lecturer with at least three years' experience subject to availability of necessary publications. 4. Lecturer I ((i) A Doctoral Degree in a relevant field with at least three (3) years' experience on the job. The three-year period is for eligibility for consideration i. e. apart from the stated periods, the candidate will be assessed for quality of teaching, publications, and contribution to the University and Community. (ii) As in 3 (ii) plus 4 years of experience and an adequate number of publications in referred journals). 5. Senior Lecturer At least three (3) years in Lecturer I, adequate publications, teaching and

services to the University and the Community. Possession of a doctoral degree is required). vi. Reader/ Associate Professor. At least three years as Senior Lecturer with considerable publications. Outstanding research and teaching coupled with services to the University and the Community plus positive external assessment. Possession of a doctoral degree is required. vii. Professor At least three (3) years as Reader/Associate Professor. b) Non-Academic Staff Every Department should have at least the following: (a) One Secretary (Computer literate) (b) One Clerical Officer (c) Two Office Attendants/Cleaners (d) Two Typists (e) One Laboratory attendant (f) One Technician. Rank mixes and ratios in the Department shall be such that admits 20% in the professorial grade, 35% in the Senior Lecturer grade and 45% in the Lecturer I grade and below. e) Staff: The student Ratio shall be 1:30 for all programs. It is unfortunate that many public universities in Nigeria are understaffed and lack the financial capacity to employ adequate staff (Ojo, 2018; Ogunode & Babatunde, 2021; Ogunode, Akinlade & Musa, 2021; NUC, 2022; Ogunode, Ukozor & Iroegbu, 2022). Many public universities have lost their accreditation status because of inadequate academic staff while those proposing new programs failed to be accredited because of inadequate academic staff. It is difficult to man a new programme like Computer engineering, Cyber security because professionals in that specialization are limited in the country. The inability of the school managers to assemble all the needed lecturers made them hire or rent lecturers from other universities. This was confirmed by Akpan & Etor (2018) who observed that in some institutions, facilities and equipment are borrowed and used for accreditation. NEEDS (2014) submitted that the shortage of lecturers in many departments and faculties is responsible for the high teacher-student ratio in Nigerian Universities? The Federal Government's needs assessment of Nigerian public universities carried out in (2012) articulated the shortage of qualified teachers in Nigerian universities. According to the reports, only about 43 per cent of university lecturers have PhD qualifications. The remaining 57 per cent have qualifications below PhD. Only seven universities have up to 60 per cent of their teaching staff with PhD qualifications. There are universities with fewer than five professors. For instance, the Kano State University of Science and Technology, Wudil, established 11 years ago and has been turning out graduates, has only one teaching staff with a professor ranking and 25 lecturers who are PhD degree holders. Similarly, the Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, established in 2006, has only two teaching staff in the professor category and five lecturers who have PhD qualifications. The understaffing of universities in Nigeria has serious implications for quality instruction and academic productivity in the institutions. The situation has led to an increasing culture of visiting lecturers in the system. The few available qualified lecturers are recycled as visiting, adjunct, sabbatical and contract lecturers to work in many universities at the same time. Many of them are always on the road travelling from one university town to another and unable to meet their primary obligations with their tenure-employer (NEEDS, 2014, Federal Ministry of Education, 2012). NUC (2022), Ogunode, Akinlade & Musa (2021), Ogunode (2020) and Ogunode, Yiolokun & Akeredolu (2019) observed that the problem of inadequate lecturers in public universities is caused by underfunding of the universities, corruptions, brain-drain, poor motivation,

unconducive working environment and lack of manpower planning. The implication of a shortage of academic staff in the Nigerian public universities includes a high student-teacher ratio, poor learning, poor delivery of teaching, low productivity and poor quality of education.

- iv. **Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities:** Inadequate infrastructural facilities are another challenge facing program accreditation in Nigerian public universities. Physical Facilities requirements for a new program e. g. (Department of Primary/Elementary Education) according to NUC (2007) include (a) Academic, Classrooms, Lecture Theatres, Laboratories, Studios, Staff Offices, Adequate classrooms, lecture theatres, auditoria, laboratories, studios, staff offices, workshops for technical and vocational education etc., should be provided to ensure proper execution/implementation of programs. Every Faculty of Education should have a Computer Laboratory, Internet Access and Resource Room. b) Equipment: i) Adequate equipment should be provided for laboratories, workshops, studios, etc. ii) Relevant software materials and chemicals to be used along with the equipment should be supplied constantly; iii) Each Department and indeed senior academic staff should be equipped with computers which should be from time to time replenished with the latest software materials; iv) Equipment for language laboratories for language programs, and special education centre for special education programs, should be provided and replenished from time to time. v) A well-equipped teaching support unit (educational technology department) should exist to provide media services for instruction and research for producing materials and organizing workshops for academic staff. Necessary facilities for using the equipment should be built into the classrooms. Library and Information Current basic texts, reference books, journals and other relevant textual and non-textual materials should be readily available in the library. Unfortunately, most public universities in Nigeria do not have adequate infrastructure facilities according to Okebukola (2018), Ishaya & Ogunode (2021), Ohiare, Udebu, Ogunode & Rauf (2021) and Ogunode, Ukozor & Iroegbu (2022). Ogunode, Jegede & Musa (2021) and Ogunode & Abubakar (2020) submitted that many public universities in Nigeria do not have adequate lecture halls, laboratories and offices for both students and academic staff. Many academic and non-academic staff do not have offices and para-venture they have one is been shared by five to six lecturers. The offices of the deans and heads of departments are not something to write home about. Otokunefor (2015) reported that the poor quality of our university graduates is due to the interwoven nature of the infrastructural deficiencies of the universities. According to him, magic facilities spring up overnight before accreditation exercises and disappear soon after. Sometimes, spaces allocated to and used by other departments are simply relabeled for the sake of accreditation. After the exercise, the facilities revert to the original owners and the struggle for survival continues (Otokunefor, 2015). Tunde and Issa (2013) carried out a study that attributed inadequate facilities to poor funding of education in Nigeria which makes university administrators unable to provide adequate and quality infrastructural facilities and equipment for effective teaching and learning. Tunde and Issa (2013) concluded that the non-commensurate of funding with other growing indices in Nigerian universities harms the quality of education as the universities are

constantly being shut down as a result of staff unions agitating for one form of demand or the other. The inability of the school administrators to have adequate infrastructure facilities in the universities makes them go and rent or hire resources for accreditation programs in their universities. Akomolafe and Ibijola (2014) in their study reported the low status of infrastructure in our universities and they attributed this to funding challenges despite the monitoring and compliance-driven mechanism. The factors responsible for inadequate infrastructural facilities in Nigerian public universities according to Ogunode (2020) include; underfunding, increased student population, corruption, poor infrastructural facilities planning, poor supervision and inflation. The implication of inadequate infrastructural facilities in the Nigerian public universities include; poor quality of education, poor teaching and learning, low productivity, brain drain and overcrowding of lecture halls.

- v. **Insecurity:** Insecurity is another problem facing the accreditation of academic programs of public universities in Nigeria. Ogunode (2020) submitted that insecurity is affecting the administration of public universities in Nigeria. Nigeria is facing an insecurity challenge and this is affecting the entire educational institutions in the country. The Islamic sect called Boko haram meaning western education is forbidden is attacking educational institutions in the Northern part of Nigeria. Many public universities located in Northern Nigeria have been victims of continuous attacks. Ogunode, Okwelogu, Enyinnaya, & Yahaya (2021) observed that many students, lecturers and administrators have been killed while others kidnapped. The various attacks on the universities have resulted in school closure leading to an unstable academic program. The continuous school closure disrupts the accreditation calendar of the National universities commission. Obi, (2015); Ogunode & Ahaotu (2021a) and Ogunode & Abubakar (2021b) observed that the activities of the dreaded Boko Haram have caused the higher institutions and especially the universities more harm. Many of the universities located in the Northern part of the country have been attacked and many lecturers and students killed. The continuous attack on the universities in the Northern part of Nigeria by the insurgence is preventing effective supervision of the universities. Ogunode & Ahaotu (2021) stated that the supervision of many universities in Nigeria has been stopped due to insecurity in the country especially the Northern part of the country. Many universities in the North East and North-West Nigeria that are due for programs verification and accreditation cannot hold, because of the high level of insecurity in the states. The insecurity has led to the death of many students, lecturers and school administrators. Many universities have been attacked which resulted in the closure of the universities for some period.
- vi. **Strike Actions:** Strike action is a major problem facing Nigerian public universities (Ogunode, 2020; Ogunode, Akinjobi & Musa, 2022; Ogunode, Ukozor & Jegede, 2022). Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu & Ajape, 2020; Ogunode & Musa, 2020). Ogunode (2020b) and Ogunode & Abubakar (2020) submitted that strike actions always disrupt the academic programme of the schools, causing more costs and prolonging student programs. Strike actions in the tertiary institutions of learning have constituted a serious threat to effective learning. All the tertiary institutions witnessed a strike action in 2009. Non-accreditation of some of our tertiary

institutions as a result of strike actions. There are other activities in the higher institutions that the strike actions *are* affecting. In the area of academic program accreditation, Ogunode, Ugochukwu & Jegede (2022) concluded that *continuous* strike actions in the Nigerian higher institutions *are* affecting the accreditation programme of many higher institutions. Programme accreditation is a special program for all higher institutions. Regulatory bodies of different higher institutions are saddled with the responsibilities of periodically ensuring new *programs* are accredited and old *programs* are also checked for fitness. In Nigeria, the National Universities Commission [NUC], National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE] and the National Board for Technical Education [NBTE] are the institutions in charge of programme accreditation. The strikes embarked by different union groups in the higher institutions always lead to the suspension of programme accreditation in the higher institutions. The strike actions by the different labor unions in the higher institutions in Nigeria have also affected the rating of the various higher institutions, especially the universities. A stable academic program is among the criteria for rating the performance of higher institutions. Ogunode & Atobauka (2021a) and Musa (2015) submitted that one of the *reasons* Nigerian public universities are not performing well in international ranking is the problem of strike actions that always *occur* in the various higher institutions disrupting the academic programme, and hence performance. The National universities commission submitted that the release of the result for the accreditation exercise was delayed because of the strike actions and COVID-19 (NUC, 2021d).

- vii. **Corruption:** Corruption in the administration of public universities is another problem hindering effective academic program accreditation in public universities. Ololube (2016), Godwin (2017), Ogunode (2020) and Ogunode & Ishaya (2021) observed that the high rate of corruption in the Nigerian public universities has hindered the effective administration of the universities. Ogunode & Ahaotu (2021) and Ogunode, Ajape & Jegede (2020) submitted that many public universities are in the present condition because of the corruption in the system. Funds provided for implementation of the program, provision of infrastructural facilities, employment of staff and programme development ended up being looted or diverted into a private account. Punch (2020) submitted that much of the little funds that go into the universities are stolen. In the course of the face-off, the government claimed “the fraud in the universities is amazing and you will be shocked. ICPC did a system check recently, and it was so shocking. The worst two organizations they mentioned are the Teaching Hospitals and our universities.” In 2018, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project claimed that there were allegations of corruption in several federal universities relating to the unfair allocation of grades; contract inflation; truncation of staff’s salary on the payroll; employment of unqualified staff; certificate scandal; examination malpractice; sexual harassment; and issuance of results for expelled students to graduate. Ogunode, Josiah & Ajape (2021) concluded that the effects of corruption on the public university administration in Nigeria include the following: reduction of funds for administrative functions, shortage of infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staff, poor quality of education, resources wastage, increase in administrative cost, hampering the

development of public universities and resulting to the poor image of public universities in international communities.

Way Forward:

Based on the challenges identified, the following was recommended:

- i. The government should increase the funding of public universities. This would make the school administrators access to adequate funds to carry out a program like the academic program accreditation.
- ii. The universities should prepare on time for academic programme accreditation. The committee on program accreditation should carry out at least two pilots of academic program accreditation before the actual accreditation programme exercise by the national universities commission.
- iii. School administrators should inform the government on time of the need to conduct new recruitment exercise to employ new academic and non-academic staff in the various universities before the accreditation programme
- iv. The government should direct TET fund to complete all abandoned projects in the public universities and commence new ones to develop more facilities in the public universities.
- v. The government should employ all strategies to address the problem of insecurity in the country. Factors causing insecurity like high youth unemployment, injustice, and corruption should be addressed.
- vi. The government should ensure that all agreements entered with the different union groups are implemented as signed to prevent strikes in the public universities.
- vii. The government should direct all anti-corruption agencies to establish an office in the public universities to fight corruption.

Conclusion:

Academic programme accreditation is a mechanism for ensuring quality in the universities. It is a system designed to promote quality standards in the universities. Academic program accreditation is handled by National Universities Commission. The academic programme accreditation programme is faced with many challenges in the public universities in Nigeria. Inadequate funding, poor preparation, inadequate academic staff, shortage of infrastructure facilities, insecurity problems, strike actions and corruption were identified as the challenges preventing effective academic programme accreditation in Nigerian public universities. To address these challenges, the government should increase the funding of public universities, public universities should prepare for academic programme accreditation on time, employment of adequate academic and non-academic staff, and provision more infrastructure facilities and adequate security in the universities. The government should implement the agreement signed with various union groups in the universities and corruption within the universities should be addressed through the use of anti-corruption agencies.

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