Accreditation as a Tool for Quality Assurance: The Roles of National Universities Commission (NUC)

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Abstract

Accreditation is a key to quality education in tertiary institutions in the country. This involves ensuring compliance with standards as prescribed by relevant regulatory agencies constituted by the Federal Government of Nigeria under the Federal Ministry of Education. The regulatory bodies that are constituted to accredit programmes/courses and ensure quality in the tertiary education are National Universities Commission (NUC) for universities education, National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for colleges of education programmes and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for polytechnics and other technical education. The paper therefore dealt with the roles of NUC, NCCE and NBTE on accreditation in ensuring quality, it also dealt with the accreditation parameters and status for the grading of accredited institutions. It was therefore concluded that accreditation exercise in the tertiary institution is a tool for quality assurance based on the roles play by these external regulatory agencies.

Key words: Accreditation; Quality Assurance; NUC; NCCE and NBTE

Introduction

Accreditation is one of the major tools in ensuring quality in the tertiary level of educational system in Nigeria. Therefore, for an improved quality in our higher education system, regular accreditation of existing facilities in our institutions must be carried out and done by the relevant constituted agencies. Also, National Universities Commission (NUC) in addition to other regulatory bodies were established with the primary aim of ensuring a logical advancement of a well coordinated and productive university system that will guarantee quality and relevant education for national development and global competitiveness (NUC, 2019). Moreover, according to NUC (2019), accreditation of programmes in Nigeria tertiary institutions is primarily based on three major objectives, they are: to ensure that the provision of Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) are attained and maintained in programmes; to also assure employers of labour (internally and internationally) that Nigerian graduates of all programmes possess required competence in their areas of specialization; and to confirm to the international community that programmes offered in Nigerian Universities are of suitable standards and to also ascertain that their

graduates are adequate for further studies. Therefore, it is based on this that Ibijola (2014) opined that accreditation is an evaluation of institutions' offerings against the minimum academic standard and qualities of a certain status.

Different regulatory agencies were established and commissioned to handle the process of accreditation in tertiary education in Nigeria. For university education, NUC was established in 1962 as an advisory agency in the cabinet office and became a parastatal like other regulatory bodies under the Federal Ministry of Education in 1974. It was statutorily commissioned with the responsibility of regulating all the administrative, financial, and the academic programmes of all Universities in Nigeria (NUC, 2019). It was further mandated to handle accreditation process and other related matters in Nigerian universities while, National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) was commissioned by an enabling Decree (now Act no.3) of January,1989 and (amended decree No.12, 1993) under the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to handle all issues regarding accreditation in Colleges of Education for both private and public Colleges in Nigeria, and to lay down minimum standards for all progammes of teacher education, among other statutory responsibilities. Also, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria under Act 9 of January, 1977 with the primary aim of maintaining quality through accreditation in Nigerian polytechnics, colleges of agriculture, innovation enterprise institutions, colleges of health sciences, specialized institutions, technical colleges and vocational enterprises. In addition to this, the NBTE regulates the award of certificates by the institutions after satisfying the set standard requirements for the award and such certificates include: Higher National Diploma (HND), National Diploma (ND), full Professional Diploma (Post-HND), National Innovation Diploma (NID), National Vocational Certificate (NVC), National Technical Certificate (NTC), Advanced National Technical Certificate (ANTC) and Advanced National Business Certificate (ANBC) (NBTE, 2019). Therefore, the three agencies (NUC, NCCE & NBTE) were statutorily constituted to set standards for these institutions, maintain quality and ensure regular accreditation of existing facilities in the institutions among others.

Moreover, these agencies among other roles play, are responsible for the licensing of new institutions and withdrawal of any license from any institutions that fall below the set standards or do not meet the require criteria for setting up such institution in Nigeria. Generally, for proper and effective monitoring, accreditation status in tertiary level of education is classified into full, interim and denied accreditation status and the status is based on four major core areas which must be satisfied in accordance with the prescribed rating. The core areas the accreditation status covers are; staffing, academic contents, physical facilities and library (including e-library) and these are accessed on percentage scored.

In view of this, accreditation according to Oladosu (2011) referred to as the process through which the quality and standard of educational institution are assessed concurrently to meet the minimum standard set by the relevant agencies. In addition, it is identified as the official approval granted by an accrediting statutory agencies (NUC, NCCE & NBTE) to an accredited institution of higher education after the assessment exercise has been conducted. In Nigeria today, Federal Government under the Federal Ministry of Education has established NUC, NCCE and NBTE as External Quality Assurance agencies to ensure standards in higher education system. In connection with this, Bosu and Amakyi (2014) referred to quality assurance as a process of systematic planning and review of an institution or programme to ensure whether the minimum standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being met, maintained, and improved in the educational system.

The Roles of NUC, NCCE & NBTE on Quality Assurance

To ensure quality in our educational system, NUC, NCCE and NBTE as an external quality assurance agencies play major significant roles in ensuring set standards are met in the higher level of education system. Therefore, experts from these agencies were constituted to set standard for the universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and other institutions in the country and this must always be followed to ensure strict compliance with the standard to guarantee educational quality in the system. Quality assurance is therefore presented as a process of continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning activities which will be achieved through the employment of both external and internal mechanisms into the tertiary education system (Okebukola, 2004).

Okojie (2008) therefore identified these agencies as the external quality assurance agency which set regulatory mechanism to improve the quality of education at the tertiary level in the following areas:

i.   To set standards for accreditation of programme at the respective institutions,

ii.   To monitor and evaluate the status of universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and others institutions in Nigeria,

iii.   To set standards for admission of qualified candidates into Nigerian higher level of institutions,

iv.   To handle the review and reform of institution's curriculum from time to time,

v.   To link up and collaborate with national and international development partners for improved educational quality,

vi.   To ensure proper and adequate development of physical structures in the institution through its monitoring mechanism,

vii.   To ensure linkage with experts and academics in the diaspora to ensure educational quality,

viii. To lay down the methods and procedures of assessing students for the award of relevant certificates (Okojie, 2008),

ix. To inquire into and advise the Federal Government on the financial needs of the Colleges to enable them meet the objectives of producing the trained qualified teachers for the country,

x. To carry out evaluation and assessment of NCE in-service Teacher programmes (NCCE, 2019),

xi. To make recommendation(s) for Pre-vocational, Technical, Agricultural, Business and Home Economics programmes (NBTE, 2019),

xii. To make recommendations for the entry requirements and duration of courses in the tertiary education system,

xiii. To approve guidelines setting out criteria for accreditation of all programmes in Nigeria higher education,

xiv. To set and design a strategic planning for improved educational quality in the tertiary level of education system in Nigeria (Okojie, 2008).

Accreditation Parameters and Status to ensure Educational Quality

Accreditation involves the process of physical inspection and assessment of facilities in the institution be it universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, technical institutions, colleges of health science and others. To buttress this, Olasanmi (2016) referred to accreditation as the process of carrying out a viability test on academic programmes and activities in Nigerian institutions of higher learning through relevant regulatory bodies or agencies. Also, accreditation is referred to as an independent appraisal of an institution by relevant regulatory bodies during which the institution's overall educational quality (including outcomes), professional status among other similar institutions, financial stability and operational ethics are evaluated (ACICS, 2016). For programme accreditation, the following parameters have been set up to ensure quality in the education system:

1. **Staffing:** in the process of accreditation, the concern institution must comply with this parameter on required academic work force, skilled and qualification requirements for the programme (maintaining minimum teaching qualifications at all levels), non-academic staff requirements for the available departments and staff development within the institution should be put in place (an evidence of existence of staff development programme need to be provided) (Olasanmi, 2016).

2. **Academic Contents:** involve identifying the philosophy and objectives of the programme, the programme curriculum (which must be reviewed from time to time), strict compliance with admission requirements (minimum of 5 'O' level subjects requirement in WAEC/NECO/NABTEB & also meeting the

JAMB/UTME/DE entry requirements), standardized test and examinations to cover the academic curriculum, evaluation of students' course work, and practical/project work which must be fully complied with before the final award of certificates.

3. **Physical facilities:** to include assessment of existing laboratory, clinic and studio facilities which must be well equipped, classroom/lecture room facilities must be adequate and provided with necessary furniture/fittings, provision of adequate office space for the staff & hostel accommodation and well ventilated and conducive environment for teaching/learning.

4. **Library (e-library necessitated):** This parameter must include library structure/building and relevant library facilities/materials which must include recent and up-to-date materials and e-library facilities which must be put in place for the users with the provision of internet facilities accessible within the campus environment for students/staff usage.

5. **Funding:** provision of funds must be made available by the institution for programme financing. (Olasanmi, 2016).

Programme Accreditation Status for Educational Quality

The accreditation status as set by the regulatory bodies like NUC, NCCE and NBTE to maintain education quality in higher institutions are categorized into the following:

i. Full Accreditation: this status is awarded to any academic programme that has a minimum aggregate score of 70% during the accreditation exercise conducted by relevant regulatory agencies and also scored more than 70% in the four core parameters like staffing, academic contents, physical facilities and the library. This status is valid for 5 years before a re-accreditation inspection can be made to such an institution (Oladosu, 2011).

ii. Interim Accreditation: this accreditation status is granted to any institutional programmes/course of tertiary education system provided it was rated not below the mark of 60% of the aggregate score but score less than 70% in any of the four core parameters during the accreditation process. The interim status is therefore awarded for a score less than 70% in the area of staff requirement & qualification, academic contents, physical facilities and library facilities (Oladosu, 2011).

iii. Denied Accreditation: this status applies to institutions programme that has an aggregate score of less than 60% and in all the accreditation parameters (staffing, academic contents, physical facilities and library facilities). This implies a re-visitation will be done by the accreditation team on behalf of

the regulatory body. In this case, such institution will stop to admit students into the affected programme/course with effect from the subsequent admission year/exercise. More so, students from the affected programme will not be mobilized for the NYSC programme and the certificate will not be recognized subsequently (Olasanmi, 2016).

Therefore, the reports of the accreditation team on the status earned will be officially communicated to the institution concerned after the official accreditation visit has been completed by the accreditation team/committee of each regulatory body. In addition to this, those programmes/institution(s) with denied accreditation status will be officially published in the dailies for public attention and information purpose. Moreover, such decision or information will be communicated to the relevant bodies like Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), various Federal and State Scholarship Boards, Civil Service Commission and many other organizations of their denied accreditation status of a particular programme (Okojie, 2008).

After the completion of initial accreditation which lasted for five years or two years depending on the accreditation status earned, there is need for renewal of accreditation and the application for the renewal will be filled by the concerned institutions to the relevant regulatory bodies such as NUC, NCCE and NBTE. It is therefore the responsibility of the institution to obtain and submit an application for such, in accompany with the appropriate fees for a renewal of accreditation within the time frame given by the accrediting agencies. This process involves the submission of the institution's renewal self-study form with necessary supporting documents (ACICS, 2016). In addition to this, Okojie (2008) identified the following documents to be provided by the regulatory body to concern accrediting institution for proper assessment of their programmes: manual for accreditation procedures for academic programmes, Self-Study form (SSF), Programme Evaluation Form (PEF), Accreditation Panel Report Form (APRF) and Accreditation Re-visitation Form (ARVF).

Challenges of Accreditation Process on Educational Quality

Accreditation is a tool to quality education if properly carried out and ensure strict compliance with the provision of Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in the tertiary education system. It is therefore affirmed by Jack (2014) that one of the benefits of accreditation is to identify the strength and weakness of institution's programmes using external-based evaluation in order to ensure quality assurance in the higher education system. However, Okecha (2008) alleged that some accreditation panel are found wanting during the

accreditation exercise which pose serious challenges to achieving educational standard and quality in the institutions. These challenges as identified by Okecha (2008) are:

i. Some institutions do hire external academic personnel to help improve their staffing position during the accreditation exercise in front of the accrediting panel,

ii. Some institutions do borrow equipments and chemicals from sister institution to satisfy the accreditation requirements within the period,

iii. Most often, the accreditation team do not insist on sighting all those listed as academic staff, therefore depend wholly on paper documents provided,

iv. Some departments in the accrediting institutions do hire support staff majorly to cater for the accreditation requirements,

v. Some institutions do borrow books and journals from other institution during accreditation,

vi. Overcrowded lecture halls being noticed as a result of students population are usually over looked by the accreditation team which is contrary to the staff/student ratio benchmark which may jeopardized the objectives of accreditation, and

vii. Some institutions offer monetary gift-back to the members of the accreditation panel, this will however hinder the production of sincere final report for the exercise.

Conclusion

Looking at the reason behind the implementation of comprehensive accreditation exercise/processes in order to improve the quality assurance in the tertiary education in the country, there is need for the establishment of NUC, NCCE and NBTE. Therefore, these agencies were established to serve as the external quality assurance agencies in all branches of the tertiary education with the primary vision and mission of improving the standard of education in Nigeria. Generally, it is also clear that the more efficient and effective an accreditation regulatory agency in tertiary institutions is, the higher will be the quality of our educational inputs and also the higher the overall quality of such educational outputs will be. Therefore, it is concluded that accreditation is a tool for quality assurance in the universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and other institutions based on the relevant available standards and parameter set by the regulatory bodies, which includes on site visitation/inspection of the available facilities in the system and ensure strict compliance with the Minimum Academic Standard (MAS).

Recommendations

Based on the challenges raised in this paper and the conclusion reached, it is therefore recommended that adequate funding should be provided for all tertiary institutions in the country to give them the opportunity of acquiring all necessary facilities, equipment and

chemicals for the laboratories for them to scale through the accreditation process rather than resulting to borrowing.

Also, effort should be made by the institution's management to engage the services of more qualified and experienced personnel into relevant departments to avoid hiring of staff from sister institutions or sister department within the institution as well as the supporting staff in the department. This effort will help cater for the teeming population of students faced in the country in the recent time to ensure compliance with the lecturer/students ratio minimum benchmark.

On the part of the regulatory agencies (NUC, NCCE and NBTE), effort should be made to ensure that adequate and appropriate allowance is awarded and paid to the accreditation team/panel members with other necessary logistics to prevent them from taking monetary gift-back from the management of the institution visited.

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