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The Library and Accreditation of Nigerian Universities: the Case of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State

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Accreditation of universities in Nigerian is of utmost importance. Without it, most Nigerian Universities would definitely be substandard, and at best be glorified secondary schools. This paper examines the role of the library in accreditation in Nigerian universities with particular focus on University of Nigeria, Nsukka Library. It highlights the legal backing of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in regulating institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. The paper founds that University Libraries face a lot of challenges during accreditation exercises. These include lateness in getting information about upcoming accreditation exercises, inadequacy of funds for collection development and delays in accessing approved funds. To solve these problems, the paper recommends that funds meant for the University Library should be released on time; the NUC should monitor compliance with the policy which stipulates that universities in Nigeria should set aside 10% of their budget for library development; sanctions should be imposed on universities that divert library allocation and finally accreditation of university libraries should go beyond simply assessing the quantity and quality of collections. In addition, the NUC should also assess the adequacy and competence of librarians, the sitting capacity of libraries in relation to the user population and the extent to which libraries collaborate with faculties in the general university education.

Keywords: Accreditation, Library, University, Nigeria, National Universities Commission and Law.

INTRODUCTION

Universities are institutions of higher learning established for teaching, research and learning. The over-riding objective of universities in any country is to provide the right environment in which qualified and competent manpower needed to occupy different developmental and policy making positions of the society would be produced. To ensure that universities meet this enormous responsibility thrust upon them, a system of quality

assurance and validation is put in place. This is called accreditation.

Accreditation standards are set by a peer revie2Ebelechukwu Lawretta Okiche (Ph.D.)w board made up of members of faculties from various accredited colleges and universities (Accreditation, 2014).

During an accreditation exercise, the following areas are usually assessed: philosophy and objective of the programme; curriculum; quantity and quality of teaching staff; student admission; standard of examination; physical facilities, financial support and the library (Okojie, 2012), (Akinfolarin, 2003). In every accreditation exercise, the university library which is the general "laboratory" that provides both the information resources and enabling environment necessary for the pursuit of academic programmes plays a very critical role. This is because failure to meet the standards required from the library in terms of quantity of stock and quality of content brings a negative outcome to the accreditation of the university in question. Thus, accreditation of universities provides a veritable opportunity for university libraries to increase their stock of resources. It however, also creates anxiety among librarians and faculties in the university concerned.

As a result of the pride of place accreditation and library occupy in the development and academic life of every nation, both concepts have generated a lot of literature most of which helped to enrich our paper. However, none of the literature reviewed is on all fours with our study. Odukoya et al (2015) and Agbetuyi et al (2017) are interested in accreditation (quality assurance) as it concerns private Nigerian universities. Our work is entirely on a Federal Government owned University which has a different funding structure from that of private universities. Nkiko and Yusuf (2007) discussed accreditation and library extensively but their main concern is the role professional or statutory library organisations such as the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) should play in the accreditation of libraries and not on the role of libraries in accreditation per se.

Peter Materu (2007) in a study commissioned by the World Bank thoroughly examined the issue of accreditation of tertiary institutions in the whole of African continent. It says nothing about the library. Nwabueze et al (2010) looks at the indispensability of libraries in learning and research but has nothing on the role of the library in accreditation which is the main thrust of our research.

Olaleye and Kolade (2016) study is on the NUC and the challenges it faces in carrying out its statutory duty of accrediting universities in Nigeria. Of all the works reviewed, Joseph and Urhiewhu (2016) is the closest to our topic but our paper goes much further to explore the legal backing of NUC. Furthermore, using both literature sources and examples arising from the researchers'

experiences, our study seeks to demonstrate some practical roles which the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library system, University of Nigeria, plays in accreditation in the university. The objective is to provide some practical tips that other librarians and libraries could adopt to increase their chances of succeeding in the accreditation process, as the University of Nigeria has done over the years.

Conceptual Clarifications

Programme accreditation by the NUC generally means a system of evaluating academic programmes in Nigerian universities as having met the provisions of minimum academic standard document (Okoji, 2012). It is the validation of an institution of higher learning and its academic programmes. Obadara and Akinfolarin (2014), see it as a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinise an institution and/or its programmes for quality standards and need for quality improvement. Oladosu (2011), on his part, brings out three interpretations of the concept: it can signify the official approval given to an institution at the end of an accreditation exercise by an accrediting agency which implies that it has met the conditions for existence; the process by which the quality and standard of education institutions are assessed, and the assessment usually set up by the government through the Ministry of Education or by professional organisations. However, for purposes of this study, the term refers to a quality assurance (QA) programme of the NUC which serves to assess available resources and their effectiveness on teaching, learning and research in Nigerian universities with emphasis on the library (Ahmed, 2011).

QA, for Obadara and Alaka (2013) simply means consistently meeting product specification or getting things right the first time, and every time. Ajayi and Akindutire (cited in Obadara and Alaka, 2013) see QA in the light of the university system as ensuring that universities meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their outputs or graduates. The NUC, on its own part, defines QA as the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained (NUC, 2006).

Accreditation can either be institutional or specialised. As the names suggest, institutional accreditation focuses on the institution as a whole while specialised accreditation specifically targets professional programmes at the unit or programme level. The NUC is the body charged with the responsibility of carrying out institutional accreditation in Nigerian universities be they federal, state or private universities. Specialised accreditation are done by such professional bodies as the Nigerian Medical and Dental Council (Medicine); the

Council of Legal Education (Law); the Council for Registration of Engineering in Nigeria (Engineering), the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (Accountancy) and other agencies that may come from outside the universities (Oladosu, 2011). It should be noted that specialised accreditation is done in addition to the NUC accreditation where a professional course is involved.

The aim of accreditation is to establish whether requirements for continuing existence are met or if improvements need to be made (Okojie, 2012, Nikko & Yusuf, 2007). The importance of the exercise can never be over emphasised for even though universities should periodically embark on self-study, external validation is necessary for a more objective assessment to ensure that universities comply with established standards.

Library is a collection of sources of information and similar resources made available for a defined community for reference and borrowing (Edoka, 2000). It could be set up, organised or maintained by a public body, an institution of learning, a corporate body or a private individual (Omekwu, 2015). It provides physical and digital access to reading materials. In addition to this, libraries also provide services of librarians who are expert at finding, organizing and interpreting information. Librarians are the intermediaries between the library and the members of the academic community. It is their responsibility to ensure that academic programmes of faculties and colleges are not only supported with relevant information resources but that the university community has access to these resources.

The Legal Backing of the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) The NUC was established in 1962 as an arm of the office of the Prime Minister. In 1974, it became a parastatal in the Federal Ministry of Education and was given the statutory responsibility for regulating academic, administrative and financial activities of Nigerian Universities (Okojie cited in Oladosu, 2011). The NUC gets its legal backing from the National Universities Commissions Act of 1974.

Section 1 of the Act establishes the NUC as a body corporate with perpetual succession and common seal, capable of suing or being sued in its own name. The Act charges the NUC with the omnibus responsibility of advising the Federal and State governments on all aspects of university education and the general development of universities in Nigeria.

To ensure that there is sufficient expertise in developing and regulating the academic activities of Nigerian universities, section 2 of the Act provides that the membership of the Commission must include persons with sufficient knowledge in various academic disciplines including agriculture and veterinary sciences, education, environmental sciences, humanities, social and management sciences, health sciences, engineering sciences and technology, earth, mineral and natural sciences and law.

More pertinent to this paper is the inquiry into the legal powers of the NUC to accredit universities or otherwise refuse to do so. Such powers can be deduced from some functions of the Commission stated in section 4 of the NUC Act. Particularly, section 4(I)(b) of the Act mandates the Commission to 'prepare, after consultation with the State Governors, the universities, the national manpower boards and such other bodies as it considers appropriate, periodic master plans for the balanced and coordinated development of all universities in Nigeria.' This shall include periodic master plans to review the general programmes to be studied in universities to make sure they meet the needs and objectives of the national interest. (Section 4(I)(b)(i))

Legal backing to carry out accreditation can also be inferred by section 4(I)(c) of the Act which gives the Commission the power to carry out other investigations relating to higher education as it may deem necessary keeping in mind national interest objectives. The NUC can also make recommendations for 'the establishment of new academic units in existing universities or the approval or disapproval of proposals to establish such academic units.' (Section 4(b)(iii))

In addition to the above, the power to carry out accreditation lay down minimum standards and to ensure quality assurance of Nigeria universities is vested in the NUC in line with the Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Act, Cap. E3, Laws of the Federation, 2010 (formerly Section 10 of Act No. 16 of 1985). Section 10 of the Act provides that The power to lay down minimum standards for all universities and other institutions of higher learning in the Federation and the accreditation of their degrees and other academic awards is hereby vested in the National Universities Commission in formal consultation with the universities for that purpose, after obtaining prior approval therefore through the Minister, from the President.

In excising this power, the Act mandates the NUC in section 11 to develop such standards in view of the need to promote and encourage scholarship and research. This is another legal reason why an effective and efficient library (should) constitute a significant score for accreditation of courses in Nigerian universities. This Education Minimum Standards Act vests far reaching powers on the NUC as it relates to supervision of Nigerian universities. Section 15 empowers the NUC as the 'appropriate authority' to appoint inspectors to ascertain the adequacy of the instruction given at approved institutions to persons attending courses of training; and the examinations as a result of which approved qualifications are attained and appropriate certificates are awarded.

Under section 15(2), it shall be the duty of an inspector appointed by the appropriate authority to give a report on;

(a) the sufficiency or otherwise of the instruction given to persons attending courses of training at the institution inspected by him;

(b) the sufficiency or otherwise of the examinations overseen by him; and (c) any other matter relating to the institutions or examinations on which the appropriate authority may, either generally or in a particular case, request their inspector to report,

Section 15(3) provides that the inspector appointed under the Act may inspect any book or register or document or remove any such document or book which will enable him/her discharge his duties effectively under the Act. He/she may require the authorities of any university or their employee to provide any information which in the opinion of the inspector would assist in the inspection and ascertainment of compliance with the standards prescribed by or pursuant to this Act.

Finally, this section empowers him/her to enter the premises of any university upon which he/she has a reason to believe that there is a contravention of this Act or any other subsidiary legislation made in pursuant to this Act or in relation to the NUC.

This Act also makes provision for sanctions including the power to punish universities or university employees who disrupts the activities of the inspectors duly appointed by the appropriate authority and in some cases close down erring institutions established otherwise than compliance of the Act. Pursuant to the above stated powers, including the power to issue guidelines on various aspects of university education under s 24 of the Act, the NUC issued the Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) for academic programmes taught in Nigerian universities in 1989 and this provided the basis for accreditation of degree programmes including professional disciplines in Nigerian universities. In 2004, the Benchmarks Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) was introduced and this still forms the basis of accreditation exercises in Nigerian universities.

Functions of the National Universities Commission

Aside the powers discussed above, the Commission is also vested with the following functions;

a. To make such other investigations relating to higher education as the Commission may consider necessary in the national interest;

b. To inquire into and advise the Federal Government on the financial needs, both recurrent and capital, of universities research and to ensure that adequate provision is made for this in the universities,

c. To take into account in advising the Federal and State Governors on universities financial needs, such grants as may be made to the universities by the Federal and State Governments, private proprietors and by persons and institutions in and outside Nigeria;

d. To undertake periodic reviews of the terms and conditions of service of personnel engaged in the universities and to make recommendations thereon to the Federal Government where appropriate;

e   To recommend to the Visitor of a university that a visitation be made to such university as and when it considers it necessary;

f. To act as the agency for channeling all external aid to the universities in Nigeria;

g. To receive block grants from the Federal Government and allocate them to the federal universities in accordance with such formula as may be laid down by the National Council of Ministers.

The foregoing shows that the powers of the NUC are all encompassing.

The overriding objective is to ensure that higher education institutions in Nigeria can maintain standards which would give their graduates the ability to compete internationally.

The Role of the Library in Accreditation

The library plays a very critical role not only in the academic life of members of educational institutions, but also in their moral development (Oladosu, 2011) Zhang (2004) points out that the library has always been the intellectual heart of the university, as it has the responsibility of acquiring and providing access to recorded documents that represent the knowledge and wisdom of centuries of civilisation. This important role has led to the library being variously described as the academic engine house, centre of university education and the university intellectual powerhouse. In fact, Kwanpong (cited in Aguolu 1978) describes the university library as "the aorta and life blood of the university", while Foote (cited in Smith 2008) makes bold to say that "the university is a group of buildings gathered around a library." All these because of the perceived centrality of the library in the academic endeavour given that it has the responsibility of collecting, organising and retrieving information and information resources and making all

these accessible to users.

To this end, the academic success of any university depends so much on the state and health of its library as no university can boast of academic excellence if it does not have a good and functional library to back up its teaching, learning and research functions. It can safely be said that the extent of the success of the university in achieving its objectives can be measured by the extent to which its library resources and services are able to meet the needs of the academic community (Gates cited in Chaudhary, 2001). It can also be argued that the understanding of the role of the library in academics was central to the decision in many countries to accord academic status to librarians in academic institutions.

From the foregoing, one can easily understand the reason why the library is evaluated during accreditation.

On this the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS, 1988) notes that library resources are essential to learning. Simmons (1989) observes that it is in the interest of academic institutions to show their effectiveness in graduating students who are information literate.

They further state that ensuring that the general education programmes are supported with library based resources must be seen as a joint responsibility between librarians and faculties. In effect any accrediting body that does not include a strong component on the value of library support for all programmes will certainly be deficient (Simmons, 1991).

The NUC (2012) outlines the following as criteria for evaluation and scoring of programmes in accreditation exercises in Nigeria: staffing (32%); academic content (18%); physical facilities (27%); library (18%); funding (3%) and employer's rating (2%). This clearly shows that library holding is one of the four core areas in programme accreditation. The NUC affirms that a full programme accreditation status requires a total overall score of 70% and above in addition to the university concerned scoring 70% in each of the four core areas (NUC, 2012). This lends credence to Oladosu's view that institutional accreditation is a holistic assessment of the performance of a university in terms of clearly identified criteria, sub-criteria and relevant minimum standards (Oladosu, 2011). Ahmed (2011) contends that although the percentage allotted to the library may not be considered substantial, the fact that it is recognised at all in the scoring is worthy of note especially as most universities in Nigeria have been known to have failed accreditation because of the inadequacy of their libraries.

However, while it is expected that university libraries in Nigeria contribute to their university's success in the accreditation exercise, sadly this is not matched with commensurate provision of funds; no wonder some library administrators have been known to get into a state

of confusion at the mention of accreditation. Funds, if at all released, have been known to come so late as not to make much impact. This is why some advocates contend that accreditation should be done more frequently to compel university administrators to pay more attention to the development of libraries. All the same, libraries must device means to ensure that the library component of accreditation is not seen as the 'Achilles heel' in their universities' accreditation exercises. This entails that some survival strategies are necessary and this is where the University of Nigeria displays its ingenuity which other university libraries could borrow from.

The University of Nigeria Library and It's Role in the University's Accreditation

The University of Nigeria is among the first-generation universities in Nigeria. It came into existence in October 1960 as the very first indigenous university in Nigeria. It runs a multi-campus system. The main campus is situated at Nsukka town in Enugu State, Nigeria. Another campus of the university is situated in the city of Enugu, about 49.88 kilometres from the main campus. The Enugu Campus of the university houses the professional faculties, and such includes a teaching hospital at Ituku-Ozalla, about 15 kilometres away from the city of Enugu. The campus is administratively under the Deputy Vice Chancellor at the Enugu campus.

The University Library started with 12,000 books, some journals and pamphlets on various subjects donated by Right Honourable Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1960 (UNN Portal). It is made up of the mother library;

Nnamdi Azikiwe Library at the main campus of the university at Nsukka and the divisional library at Enugu Campus comprising the Main Library, the Medical Library and the Law Library. Although these libraries are separated by distance, they are administratively under the supervision of the University Librarian at Nsukka. However, the day to day running of the libraries at Enugu Campus is carried out by a Deputy Librarian, (in the absence of one, a Principal Librarian is assigned to take charge). For purposes of this work, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, Nsukka will be used as the umbrella term to refer to all the libraries in the campuses.

The Nnamdi Azikiwe Library has collections of over 5,741,300 books and non-book materials in addition to online public access catalogue (OPAC) and C D Rom services, Institutional Repository, EBSCO Host e-content, Research gate presences, Online Resources, ICT e-Education Library, Turnitin etc (UNN Portal). Library holdings can, however, never be enough. It is not a secret that many educational institutions especially those in the developing countries are experiencing inadequate

funding. This situation affects the internal running of the various arms of universities including the library.

Collection development especially in journal subscription is seriously affected demanding that libraries devise some strategies to ensure that accreditation exercises are successful from the angle of the library. The Nnamdi Azikiwe Library system is seriously committed to this and this has always paid off. All the fifteen faculties and over fifty departments institutes and centres are all accredited (UNN Portal).

The strategy is that the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library has in place a system wherein librarians are assigned to various faculties as Library/Faculty Liaison Officers. These assignments are made based on the subject area specialization of the librarians. The Library/Faculty Liaison Officers are drawn from the ranks of Deputy Librarians to Senior Librarians, with librarians from the ranks of Librarian I, Librarian II and Assistant librarian assisting them. The Liaison officers are expected to attend the Faculty Board meetings of the faculties assigned to them to know their information needs and how the library can help meet these needs. The Liaison Officer keeps the University Librarian informed on matters emanating from his/her faculty. During accreditation exercises the Liaison Officer with his/her assistants do the following:

> Collection/Compilation of Required Materials: The Liaison Officer makes concerted efforts to collect lists of recommended information materials such as books, journals, and electronic resources from each lecturer in the faculty. The lists are submitted to the Acquisitions Librarian who compiles them by subject areas and forwards same to the University Librarian. The Acquisition Librarian also contacts relevant book publishers and vendors for their price lists. These are compiled based on the need as articulated by the faculties and request for approval and release of funds is made by the University Librarian to the Vice-Chancellor. As soon as the funds are released, the Librarian ensures that the materials are acquired and processed.

> Compilation of Library Holdings: The Library is expected to submit to the accreditation team compiled list of the library holdings in the different disciplines offered in the university giving the bibliographic details of each. The aim is for the accreditation team to have a clearer view of the stock, with attention paid to relevance, quantity and currency. It is the responsibility of the Liaison to see to it that the library holding of his/her faculty is compiled and bound for submission to the accreditation team.

The Liaison also ensures that the list is continually updated with each new addition to the collection.

Online Search for Useful Websites and Articles: Since it is not possible for any library to acquire all the materials it needs, most libraries in Nigeria depend on online resources as a complement to their collection. It is also not possible for a library to subscribe to every fee-based educational database and so in many cases
free ones are used. It is the responsibility of the Librarians to search out open access sites and link them to the university library website. In some cases, relevant open access articles are downloaded for use by faculties. These are merged with the library collection.

Relevant websites in relevant subject disciplines are bookmarked, organised and printed. Titles of open access journals in relevant subject disciplines are also downloaded and compiled. These are organised, printed and bound. During accreditation visits to the library, websites are visited to prove to the team that the library has internet connectivity and that both students and staff have access to these sites. The library in partnership with the University Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centre ensures that internet connection stays on. The library also makes provision for an alternative source of electricity in the case of power outage.

Exhibition/Display: As a method of ensuring that the library puts its best foot out, an exhibition of most of the core materials is mounted in an exhibition space. The accreditation team is taken to this area where they inspect the materials on display. The library has found this method very useful over the years as it allows the accreditation team to do on the spot check of some titles which the library claims to possess. Leaving them on the shelf may not provide enough visibility.

Organisation of Faculty and Departmental Libraries:

Faculty Libraries at the main library at Nsukka are run by Librarians from the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library who report to the University Librarian. These Librarians ensure that Faculty libraries are prepared for accreditation exercises. However, the Library at Enugu does not provide librarians to run faculty or departmental libraries. The staffing situation makes this rather difficult. To ensure that accreditation is successful in the Enugu Campus, the

Liaison Officer together with his/her assistants ensures that the Faculty libraries are well organised. They help in whatever form the faculty requests.

Accreditation Challenges

Generally, accreditation exercises come with some anxiety as the library struggles to ensure that it meets expectations. Over the years the library has had the following challenges:

Late Communication of Accreditation Date to the Library:

Preparing for accreditation requires enough time. However, on many occasions, the library does not get timely information of impending accreditation from faculties. Because of the finance the libraries do not acquire materials as regularly as they should. Since no university administration would like its school to fail accreditation, the accreditation period provides an opportunity to update and upgrade stock. Obara and Abayomi (2013) reveal in their study that there is a significant relationship between accreditation and resource input in Nigerian universities. If information comes late, the planning process is shortened, and the library may not get as much as it would have wanted.

Inadequacy of Funds: Collection development is a capital-intensive project. Because of the general poor funding situation faced by institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, subscriptions to journals have literally been put on hold. The library relies heavily on journal donations from foreign organisations and agencies. These do not always meet the needs of the library or academic programmes. Accreditation teams usually raise questions on the scarcity of journals hence the need to complement with online resources. Ahmed and Nwalo 2013; Tunde and Issa (2013) also identify inadequacy of funds as a major challenge in collection development in Nigerian university libraries.

Delays in Assessing Approved Funds: The library also experiences some bureaucratic bottlenecks in assessing approved funds. It is important that the process of acquisitions be started early because a lot of things is involved; moreover only few vendors or publishers are comfortable with releasing their materials to the libraries on trust.

Where funds are accessed late, and materials brought in late, the staff have been known to work overtime to ensure that the materials are processed and made ready for the accreditation and mistakes are never ruled out in such situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Accreditation must be approached with the seriousness and attention it deserves. Planning for accreditation should begin quite early to avoid anxiety and confusion which the exercise tends to generate. Also, the university administration and government should be more committed to funding the library and to ensuring that constant review of stocks and facilities are carried out for quality assurance.

It is instructive that the NUC regulation stipulates that 10% of universities' budget should be set aside for library development. This should be adhered to as this is not the case in many universities. The NUC must put in place a system that monitors compliance and sanctions erring universities. By so doing, acquisitions by libraries would be on a continuing basis and not ad-hoc as is the reality on the ground presently.

Finally, the basis for accreditation of libraries should go beyond the superficial level of assessing quantity and stock to include assessment of the capacity of the library building viz a viz the population of users, adequacy and competence of librarians in library service delivery and assessment of the extent of collaboration between the library and faculties in the general university education.

CONCLUSION

Accreditation is a necessary exercise for assessment of universities and their academic programmes to ensure that quality is maintained.

This is especially important in Nigeria at this time when there seems to be questions raised about the quality of graduates turned out by universities in Nigeria. The Nnamdi Azikiwe Library system as the arm of the university charged with the responsibility to ensure that information resources needed to support academic programmes are acquired, organised and disseminated is also evaluated during accreditation as it rightly should.

As we have seen the library plays a very important role in seeing that the university succeeds in the accreditation process. As a matter of fact the first and only time a faculty of the University failed an accreditation exercise was in 2008 during the specialized accreditation of the Law programme by Council of Legal Education (CLE). Part of the reason was that the Faculty of Law Library was not separated from the Main Library at Enugu Campus in line with the requirement of the for CLE that a separate building be designated as Law Library. However, accreditation was restored in 2009 after a re-organisation of the Library. This clearly underscores the indispensability of the Library in accreditation. Thus even though the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library faces daunting challenges in its bid to play its role in accreditation, it has always stood up to the challenges by seeing to it that it

does all it could to meet expectations.

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