

An Assessment of Factors Responsible for Denial of Academic Programme Accreditation in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract: Accreditation holds a paramount significance for the advancement of tertiary educational institutions. The process of accreditation facilitates the assurance of quality within these institutions. In Nigeria, the accreditation process is conducted by the appropriate commission overseeing tertiary education. Recently, the accreditation outcomes for many tertiary institutions in Nigeria have led to the unfortunate denial of accreditation. This study examines in depth the factors contributing to the failure and partial success of academic programme accreditation within Nigerian tertiary institutions. The analysis is predominantly reliant on secondary data sources. These secondary data were amassed from both printed and digital publications. A content analysis methodology was employed to condense the literature to a more manageable size. The study concludes that inadequate planning and preparation, insufficient funding, a lack of infrastructure, and shortage of qualified staff are critical factors discovered. Furthermore, the paper suggest several recommendations to enhance the accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian tertiary institutions. These recommendations include adequate planning and preparation, increased funding, improved infrastructural facilities, and the recruitment of sufficient and qualify academic staff across all tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Academic programme, Accreditation, Tertiary education.



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Introduction

Tertiary education, as explained by Ogunode & Ahmed (2022), constitutes a systematically organized advanced educational framework that transpires subsequently to the successful completion of secondary education, encompassing primary functions such as teaching, researching, and the delivery of community services.

Tertiary education is characterized as an educational process encompassing teaching and learning specifically tailored for undergraduate and graduate students, which is initiated upon the successful conclusion of secondary education. This category of education may include vocational post-secondary institutions that culminate in a certificate, as well as higher educational institutions that confer degrees, despite the fact that the term is frequently employed interchangeably with higher education. Campbell and Rozsnyai further assert that tertiary education represents a formal, non-mandatory educational phase that succeeds secondary education. They conclude that tertiary educational institutions are distinctly differentiated from educational structures at primary and secondary levels (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002). Tertiary education is defined as the teaching and learning processes that transpire following the completion of secondary education, culminating in the awarding of credits, certificates, diplomas, and degrees by universities, university colleges, polytechnics, community colleges, and analogous institutions. It is emphasized that this level of education may also encompass technical and vocational training. Tertiary education serves as a catalyst and driving force behind national objectives and aspirations, particularly when the quality of education is diligently upheld (Tewarie, 1998).

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, in its National Policy on Education (2013), delineates the objectives of tertiary education as follows: to contribute to national development through the cultivation of high-level manpower training; to facilitate accessible and affordable quality educational opportunities within both formal and informal educational contexts, aligned with the needs and interests of the Nigerian populace; to provide high-quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes designed to equip students with the requisite knowledge and skills for self-sufficiency and successful integration into the workforce; to mitigate skill shortages through the production of skilled personnel pertinent to the demands of the labour market; to promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship, and community engagement; to foster and reinforce national unity; and to advance national and international understanding and interaction (FRN, 2013). From above, tertiary education can be seen in this paper as a planned education system designed for national development and manpower development via teaching, research and community service.

In pursuit of quality within Nigerian tertiary institutions, the Nigerian government instituted several commissions, including the National Universities Commission, the National Commission for Colleges of Education, and the National Board for Technical Education.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) functions as a parastatal organization operating under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Education (FME). Founded in 1962, the Commission is entrusted with the responsibility of advancing and monitoring university education within Nigeria. Its mandates include: granting authorization for all academic programmes conducted within Nigerian universities; providing approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions that confer degree programmes; and ensuring the maintenance of quality through systematic accreditation processes applicable to all academic programmes offered by universities.

National Commission for Colleges of Education: The NCCE is a parastatal of the FME, instituted by Decree 13 of 1989. The formation of the Commission was a consequential outcome of the paramount significance attributed to the enhancement of quality teacher education by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Since its establishment, the Commission has persistently endeavoured to achieve the objectives of quality assurance in the domain of teacher education. It has continuously reviewed and standardized the curriculum of colleges of education across the nation through programme accreditation, which is conducted once every five-years (NEEDS, 2014).

National Board for Technical Education: Formed by Act No. 9 of 1977, the NBTE is a parastatal of the FME specifically designated to oversee all facets of technical and vocational education that lie outside the purview of university education. The Board is responsible for the supervision and

regulation of the programmes provided by technical institutions at both secondary and post-secondary educational levels through a rigorous accreditation process. Additionally, it is involved in the financial support of polytechnics owned by the Government of Nigeria. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria submit their diverse academic programmes for accreditation and re-accreditation to the aforementioned commissions, namely the National Universities Commission, National Commission for Colleges of Education, and National Board for Technical Education, every five-years, particularly in the case of universities. The accreditation process for academic programmes in Nigerian tertiary institutions appears to encounter numerous challenges, resulting in either failed academic programmes or the issuance of interim or denial accreditation. Many tertiary institutions have experienced the repercussions of receiving either interim or denial accreditation (NEEDS, 2014).

The accreditation of academic programmes is an indicator to ensure quality within tertiary institutions. Okebukola (2006) conceptualized accreditation as a systematic process of evaluating the availability and sufficiency of resources, as well as assessing the merit of resources and programmes to enhance the quality of educational output. Accreditation is defined as the methodical examination of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructural adequacy are upheld (Anugom, 2016). Accreditation constitutes a process that facilitates university institutions in the development and sustenance of effective educational programmes, thereby assuring the educational community of the minimum acceptable standards delineated by the National Universities Commission (NUC) (2012).

Recently, many tertiary institutions in Nigeria have encountered challenges in obtaining full accreditation for the majority of their academic programmes, which consequently impedes the advancement of these programs within the institutions. Each time the supervisory commission; the National Universities Commission, the National Commission for Colleges of Education, and the National Board for Technical Education conduct their accreditation evaluations for academic programmes, it is noted that many tertiary institutions got denial accreditation status. It is essential to investigate the factors contributing to the denial of academic programme accreditation within Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Concept of Accreditation

Accreditation can be articulated as a systematic mechanism established within tertiary institutions to guarantee that academic programme offers adhere to established standards and comply with various national and international quality policies (Ogunode, Edinoh, & Rauf, 2023). The accreditation of academic programmes is comprehensive and entails an evaluation of the relevance and appropriateness of programme philosophies and objectives, as well as the adequacy and pertinence of curriculum in relation to students' specific fields of study and the labour market (Akpan & Etor, 2018). According to Akpan et al. (2016), accreditation is characterized as a process involving self-evaluation and external quality assessment in tertiary institution, aimed at scrutinizing an institution and/or its programmes to ascertain compliance with quality standards and the necessity for quality enhancement. This process is formulated to ascertain whether an institution has met or surpassed the standards established by an external body, such as governmental bodies, national quality assurance agencies, or professional associations, and whether it is fulfilling its mission and stated objectives.

As posited by Obadara and Alaka (2013), accreditation serves as a mechanism that assists institutions in the development and maintenance of effective educational programmes, thereby assuring the educational community, the general public, and other organizations that the accredited institution has fulfilled rigorous standards of quality and effectiveness. It acts as an indicator of the quality of academic programmes against the minimum acceptable standards stipulated by the accrediting agency. Accreditation is characterized as an external quality assurance activity conducted to ensure that a given educational institution operates within the

framework of established guidelines laid down by an officially recognized accreditation agency (Ahaotu & Akor, 2014). From the above, accreditation in this paper can be seen as is an organized programme designed by institutions to ensure validity and reliability of an academic programme that institutions are currently offering as programme and to ensure the quality assurance in the institutions. Accreditation is a system designed for higher institutions to ensure academic programmes offer in the institutions meet up with national and international standard.

The objectives of the accreditation of higher educational institutions/programmes, as stated by the NUC (2012), include:

1. To ensure that the minimum academic standards documented are attained, maintained, and enhanced.
2. To provide assurance to employers and other community members that Nigerian graduates from all academic programmes have achieved an acceptable level of competency in their specialized fields.
3. To certify to the international community that the programmes offered at Nigerian universities are of high quality, and that their graduates are adequately prepared for employment and further academic pursuits.

The NUC is legally authorized to accredit all academic programmes administered by universities in Nigeria for the purpose of quality assurance. The accreditation guidelines for programmes specify the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (B-MAS) that a course must fulfill in order to obtain full accreditation. Some of the principal domains that are meticulously evaluated during accreditation processes encompass faculty strength; objectives of the academic programme; the workload of lecturers within a specific programme; the pertinence of course content to national development; admission criteria for prospective candidates; graduation prerequisites in terms of credit hours; the integrity of examination questions and reports from external examiners on moderated questions and outcomes; the sufficiency of lecture halls; the availability of learning resources, including well-equipped laboratories and workshops; as well as the quality and relevance of library resources (Daily Trust 2016).

An academic programme that complies with the established B-MAS criteria is awarded full accreditation, which remains valid for five academic sessions, subsequent to which it is subjected to a re-accreditation process. An academic programme receives interim accreditation if it fulfills the fundamental requirements but exhibits deficiencies in certain areas. Interim accreditation necessitates the rectification of deficiencies within the affected programme, which must be re-submitted for accreditation within a two-year timeframe. An academic programme is denied accreditation if the deficiencies that warranted its interim accreditation remain unaddressed after the two-year period. The regulations set forth by the NUC dictate that no candidate shall be admitted into any programme that has been denied accreditation. Such a programme forfeits its right to operate. However, students who currently enrolled in a programme with denied accreditation are permitted to continue until their graduation (Daily Trust 2016).

There exist three categories of accreditation status, which include denial, interim, and full accreditation.

Denial accreditation status

Denial accreditation status is ascribed when the proposed academic programme attains a score below 60%. This indicates that the programme cannot be implemented within the institutions. According to Okojie (2008), a programme is categorized as having denied accreditation status if its overall score is below 60%. A status of denied accreditation signifies that no additional student enrolment is permitted until the programme undergoes re-evaluation and reaccreditation.

Interim accreditation status

Interim accreditation status is attained when the proposed academic programme achieves a score of 60% but has certain deficiencies, allowing it to operate for the next two years prior to another verification of resources. Ahaotu et al. (2014) observed that a programme attains interim accreditation status when its overall score is 60% or higher but falls short of 70% in core areas of focus, thereby permitting such a programme to proceed for a duration of two years to facilitate re-accreditation or further evaluative attention.

Full accreditation status

Full accreditation status is granted when the proposed academic programme achieves a score exceeding 70%. This indicates that the academic programme is authorized to function within the institutions. The academic programme possesses the requisite human and material resources necessary for its operation in the institutions. Ahaotu et al. (2014) noted that full accreditation status is attained by a programme when it achieves a total overall score of 70% or above, in addition to securing a minimum of 70% in each of the core areas encompassing staffing, academic content, physical facilities, and library resources. A programme that has been accredited may be subject to re-evaluation after five years for the purpose of follow-up.

The following points explain the significance of accreditation as recognized by the Nigerian Universities Commission.

- A) Guaranteeing that a fundamental level of academic standards and proficiency is achieved, sustained, and improved upon;
- B) Assuring employers and other stakeholders within the community that graduates from Nigerian academic programmes have reached an acceptable standard of expertise in their respective fields of specialization;
- C) Certifying to the global community that the educational programmes provided by Nigerian universities meet high standards and that the graduates possess adequate qualifications that are comparable for employment and further academic pursuits;
- D) Acting as a mechanism for providing counsel to proprietors of higher educational institutions to rejuvenate them in instances where they are failing to fulfill their objectives;
- E) Offering universities opportunities for self-evaluation, particularly when the findings of the accrediting panel align with the institution's own assessment of its activities;
- F) Fostering confidence and assurance among faculty and students in pursuing a programme that has achieved full accreditation status (Udom, 1996).

Factors Contributing to the Denial of Programme Accreditation in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

There exists a multitude of factors that contribute to the denial of accreditation for academic programmes within Nigerian tertiary institutions. Among these factors are inadequate planning and preparation, insufficient financial resources, a lack of infrastructural facilities, and inadequacy of qualified staff..

Inadequate Planning and Preparation

Effective planning is paramount for the successful accreditation of programmes within tertiary institutions. Planning enables these institutions to allocate the necessary human and material resources that will facilitate effective accreditation. The failure to engage in proper planning equates to planning for failure. It is regrettable that many tertiary institutions in Nigeria do not adequately prepare for their academic programme accreditation; their lack of planning and requisite actions has led to the denial and interim accreditation of academic programmes in many

of these institutions throughout Nigeria. Ogunode, Edinoh, and Rauf (2023) expressed concern that the elevated incidence of denial and interim academic programme accreditations in Nigerian universities comes from inadequate preparation and planning by the respective institutions. Ogunode and Samuel (2022) and Muhammed (2020) asserted that the deficiencies in planning during pilot accreditation by institutions are the primary reasons for the denial and interim status of academic programme accreditation across various institutions. Ogunode and Okwudinma (2024) noted that insufficient preparation for the accreditation of academic programmes by prospective universities constitutes another barrier to effective programme accreditation in public universities within Nigeria. The lack of adequate preparation by school administrators, deans, heads of departments, and senate committees on accreditation contributes significantly to the failure of many public universities in achieving successful academic programme accreditation. The failure of the Bursar to timely release funds to departments for the procurement of necessary human and material resources, poor engagement from the senate committee on accreditation, and the departments' inability to acquire all requisite items and resources for accreditation due to ineffective management (Ogunode et al., 2022a).

Inadequate funds

Insufficient financial resources within the various tertiary institutions in Nigeria have adversely impacted the accreditation of academic programmes. The challenge of inadequate funding in these tertiary institutions is a critical factor contributing to the denial and interim status of academic programme accreditation across several institutions. Managers and administrators of tertiary institutions frequently lack the necessary financial resources to procure the essential materials that would otherwise facilitate the attainment of full accreditation for all their academic programmes. Muhamed (2020) posited that the inability of tertiary institutions to secure adequate funding has led to a deficiency in infrastructural facilities as well as a shortage of both academic and non-academic personnel, which has significantly influenced the accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Udida, Bassey, and Udofia (2009) concluded that the predominant challenge in educational advancement is the scarcity of financial resources. One of the most critical issues jeopardizing the viability of educational systems is the declining level of public funding amidst increasing demands and consequently escalating costs of higher education. This financial scarcity adversely affects job performance and inhibits institutional growth. Higher educational institutions are unable to operate at optimal levels in the absence of sufficient funding. This predicament necessitates enhanced funding initiatives from both the government and educational stakeholders to maintain the momentum and development of the education sector. The Nigerian government's failure to objectively acknowledge and implement the 26% funding formula for education recommended by UNESCO has detrimental effects on the performance and sustainability of higher education.

Insufficient Infrastructural Facilities

Insufficient infrastructural facilities represent another significant reason for the denial and interim accreditation of programmes at many tertiary institutions in Nigeria. According to Ogunode and Agwor (2021), infrastructural facilities constitute a form of social capital within the educational system. These facilities encompass school buildings and complexes such as classrooms, examination halls, tables, chairs, auditoria, desks, staff offices, seminar/conference/board rooms, laboratories, workshops, studios, farms, gymnasias, central libraries, specialized/professional libraries, and departmental libraries, among others. Additionally, institutions and centers should be equipped with specialized and innovative facilities, including ICT infrastructure, specialized laboratories, and conference facilities, as well as boards such as interactive, magnetic screens, and chalkboards. Further, ICT resources such as computer laboratories and services, network connectivity, multimedia systems, public address systems, slide and video projectors, and ergonomic furnishings in laboratories, libraries, lecture rooms, theaters, moot courts, and studios

are essential for effective technical and vocational education (Ifeyinwa & Okemute, 2023; Ishaya & Ogunode 2021). Moreover, each Faculty of Education should be adequately equipped with a computer laboratory, internet access, and a resource room. These facilities are indispensable for the efficient execution and implementation of academic programmes and necessitate considerable financial investment. (Adams, Zubair, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022). The provision of these facilities in adequate quantities and qualities is essential for fulfilling accreditation prerequisites (Okebukola, 2018; Ogunode & Mohammed, 2024). A significant number of tertiary institutions lack these facilities, which has adversely impacted their accreditation standings. The academic programs of numerous tertiary institutions have faced denial and interim accreditation statuses due to insufficient and outdated infrastructural facilities within various institutions. Daily Trust (2016) and Akomolafe and Ibijola (2014) noted that many universities within the nation currently exhibit deficiencies in many of the domains for which the National Universities Commission (NUC) has established Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) facilities. The physical infrastructure and educational equipment are critically lacking in most universities. This deficiency was predominantly cited by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as a primary factor contributing to poor accreditation performance in universities and the series of strikes from 2009 to the present. The availability of facilities is integral to achieving full accreditation of academic programmes, and the insufficiency of such facilities is a principal factor leading to the denial of accreditation in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Shortage of Staff

The shortage of staff or insufficiency of personnel has significantly contributed to the denial and interim accreditation of academic programmes in most of the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Staff play a pivotal role in the execution of tertiary institutional programmes, which encompass teaching, research, and community service. For example, the National Universities Commission, in its Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) of 2012 for Nigerian universities, specified particular requirements for non-academic staff within each department during programme accreditation. These requirements include the necessity of having at least one computer-literate secretary, one clerical officer, two office attendants/cleaners, two typists, one laboratory attendant, and one technician. Furthermore, academic staff appointments must conform to specific rank mixes and ratios, comprising 20% in the professorial category, 35% in the senior lecturer category, and 45% in the lecturer I category and below. The NUC BMAS of 2007 suggested teacher/student ratios for various disciplines, such as 1:20 in the sciences, 1:15 in engineering and technology, and 1:10 in medicine, veterinary medicine, and pharmacy. The recruitment of both academic and non-academic staff necessitates substantial financial investment, and many tertiary institutions fail to secure accreditation as a result of staff shortages associated with inadequate funding (Tunde & Issa, 2013). Ogunode and Adamu (2021) expressed concern that many tertiary institutions in Nigeria are understaffed, which has adversely affected their accreditation programmes. The report from Dateline (2022), as reflected in National Universities Commission data, indicated that federal universities in Nigeria experience a scarcity of full-time professors. According to the data, no federal university achieved a score of 50 percent or higher in the ranking of full professors. This suggests that no federal university possesses the requisite number of full professors. Among some of the federal universities that ranked within the top 10 are Usmanu Dan-Fodiyo University, Sokoto, with 36.44 percent; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, at 35.80 percent; Federal University of Technology, Akure, at 27.28 percent; Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, at 27.25 percent; University of Abuja, at 25.33 percent; University of Benin, at 23.26 percent; University of Port Harcourt, at 21.26 percent; University of Calabar, at 21.20 percent; and University of Ilorin, at 21.12 percent. The inability of most of these higher education institutions to effectively implement and satisfy the accreditation criteria established by various regulatory bodies has led to the denial and interim accreditation of academic programmes in a majority of institutions within Nigeria.

Findings

The investigation revealed that insufficient planning and poor preparation, lack of financial resources, deficiencies in infrastructural facilities, and a scarcity of qualified staff are the primary factors contributing to the denial of academic programme accreditation in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study determined that inadequate planning and poor preparation, insufficient financial resources, lack of infrastructural facilities, and a shortage of qualified staff are the principal reasons for the denial of academic programme accreditation in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Nevertheless, the study recommends several measures to enhance the process of academic programme accreditation in Nigerian tertiary institutions, which include: robust planning and adequate preparation, effective fundraising strategies and the capability of institutional management to allocate funds, the provision of relevant and sufficient infrastructural facilities, and the recruitment of adequately qualified staff across all tertiary institutions.

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