

An Examination of the Contributions of National Universities Commission to the Development of Universities System in Nigeria

Osamor Margret Nkechi, Edah Harry

Department of Educational Management and Foundations, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

osamormargret@gmail.com, johnharryedah@gmail.com

OKORO, TESSIANA ONYINYECHI

Educational Administration and Planning, Faculty of Education, University of Abuja, Nigeria
okoro.tessiana@uniabuja.edu.ng

Abstract: The paper examined the contributions of National Universities Commission to the development of Nigeria university system. The paper used secondary data. The secondary data were collected from both print and online publications. Content analysis was used to analyze the selection of literature for the study. The paper revealed that National universities commission has contributed to the development of Nigerian university system and such development includes curriculum development, accreditation development and formulation of quality universities policies, quality assurance, improvement in data generation and improvement in international ranking and expansion of universities education. Based on this finding; the paper recommends that the Federal government should increase the budgetary allocation of the commission. The staff of the commission should be provided with training opportunities both local and foreign. Private institutions and international organizations should support the commission with technical support to improve its operation.

Keywords: Contribution, National Universities Commission, University system.



This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license

1. Introduction

University education is the final stage of education. University education is the education after secondary school education. University education is the education for the transformation of the communities, states and nations. University education is the education that produces manpower of all categories for social, and economic development and technological advancement (Ogunode, Olowonefa & Idowu, (2023). University education is an organized education and systematically leads to the award of certificates after graduation. University education is an educational system that is centred on teaching, researching and provision of community services (Oweikpodor, Akpotu, & Anho, 2024). According to the NPE (FRN, 2004), university education is expected to

make optimum contribution to national development through the intensification and diversification of its programs for the development of high level human resources base within the context of the needs of the nation; make professional course contents to reflect Nigeria's national requirements; make all students, part of the general program of all-round improvement and to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism. Universities are expected to encourage and disseminate their research results to both government and industries. Universities are expected to inculcate community spirit in their students through projects and action research. They are expected to ensure that faculty in their professional fields have relevant industrial and specialized experience.

In order to ensure quality of university education in Nigeria, the Federal government established the National Universities Commission. The National Universities Commission was established in 1962 as an advisory agency in the Cabinet Office. However, in 1974, it became a statutory body and the first Executive Secretary, in the person of Prof. Jibril Aminu was then appointed. The National Universities Commission (NUC) is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education (FME). NEEDS (2014) and Ehichoya & Ogunode (2020) submitted that the National Universities Commission was established in 1962 and the functions of the NUC include: to coordinate the entire activities in all Nigeria universities; to harmonize and co-ordinate the development of Nigeria universities to meet the national goals; to advice the government on the financial needs of the universities; to distribute funds to the Universities when such is made available by the government; to set the minimum benchmark for Nigerian universities; to ensure compliance of the Universities to the minimum bench mark standard; to Collect, collate, analyze and store data collected from Nigerian Universities for use in advising the government on the need to expand the existing universities or establish new ones; to set standards to be followed in establishing universities in Nigeria; to issue operating license to Nigerian universities; to accredits courses in Nigerian universities; to participate in universities annual estimate hearings to determine the financial need of the universities; and to Keep accurate and up-to-date financial records for all local and foreign transactions (Ogunode & Samuel 2022).

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Concept of National Universities Commission

The National Universities Commission is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education. It was established in 1962 as an advisory unit in the Cabinet Office with the responsibility of advising the Federal Government of Nigeria on the development of University Education. However, in 1974, it became a statutory body following the promulgation of Degree No. 1 of 1974, (now Act No. 1 of 1974) and the first Executive Secretary, in the person of Professor Jubril Aminu was then appointed. In contemporary times, the powers of the NUC are derived from the National Universities Commission Act, CAP. N81, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004, and, Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Act, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 (As Amended). These Laws are in simple parlance referred to as NUC's Establishing and Operational Acts, respectively (Bisong, Asemota, & Edinoh, 2025). According to Bisong,(2025), the functions of NUC include to: advise the President, States Governors and Private Proprietors through the Minister of Education on the creation of new universities and other degree awarding institutions in Nigeria; prepare, after consultation with all the State Governors, the universities , the National Manpower Board and such other bodies as it considers appropriate, periodic master plans for the balanced and coordinated development of all universities in Nigeria, and such plans shall include: the general programmes to be offered by the universities in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to meet the national needs and objectives; undertake periodic reviews of the terms and conditions of service of personnel engaged in the universities and to make recommendation thereon to the Federal Government where appropriate; lay down Minimum Standards for all universities in the Federation and to

accredit their degrees and other academic awards after obtaining prior approval therefor, through the Minister from the President; be the regulatory agency responsible for the work related to the proper conduct of the affairs of universities, provided that the accreditation of degrees and other academic awards shall be in accordance with such guidelines as may be laid down and approved by the Commission from time to time. Derivable from its functions, the mandates of NUC according to Olaleye, & Oyewole, (2016), and Ogunode, & Samuel (2022) are as follows: determination and maintenance of Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in the NUS: approval of programmes and courses in Nigerian Universities and other degree-awarding institutions; accreditation of academic programmes run in the NUS; monitoring of universities; and the provision of guidelines and processing of applications for the establishment of private universities in Nigeria.

The Commission has thirteen Directorates namely; i, Directorate of Academic Planning (DAP); ii. Directorate of Inspection and Monitoring (DIM); iii. Directorate of Human Resource (DHR); iv. Directorate of Student (DoS); v. Directorate of Research, Innovations and Information Technology (DRIIT); vi. Directorate of Executive Secretary's Office (DESO); vii. Directorate of Accreditation (DA); viii. Directorate for the Establishment of Private Universities (DEPU); ix. Directorate of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship (DSDE); x. Directorate of Open, Distance and e-Learning (DODEL); xi. Directorate of Finance and Accounts (DFA); xii. Directorate of Special Projects (DSP); and Directorate of Public Administration (DPA). The National Universities Commission, as the apex body for overseeing university education in Nigeria, plays a crucial role in the orderly development of the Nigerian University System (NUS) for the production of quality graduates and research output relevant to national development in the face of global competitiveness. In doing so, the determination and regulation of benchmark standards and quality is pivotal to its mandate. With the increasing trend towards digitization in various industries, it is important to assess the potential impact of digitalization on the Commission vis-à-vis its associated Universities. The NUC functions include: granting approval for all academic programmes in Nigerian universities; granting approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programmes; and ensuring quality assurance, through regular accreditation, of all academic programmes in universities (Bisong, et al 2025).

3.0 Method

The contributions of National Universities Commission to the development of Nigeria university system is a position paper that adopted a systematic literature review-based method. The method allows to collect and review the related previous literature from various online sources. With the aid of digital platform, the researcher collected secondary information to generate knowledge on this topic from 2015-2025. The position paper followed qualitative narrative design method. The researcher has visited different online sites to collect the previous literature and analyze the literatures on the contributions of National Universities Commission to the development of Nigeria university system. The previous findings are critically analyzed and presented in different themes on contributions of National Universities Commission to the development of Nigeria university system. (Adapted from Ogunode, 2025d).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion

This output of the literatures on the contributions of National Universities Commission to the development of Nigeria university system presents an in-depth study and result the can infer conclusion on the topic. The study includes; online publication; conference paper, journals sorted from from reputable international journals such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, Learn Techlib, SAGE, Nebraska and Springer.

Exclusion

Also, the literature review excludes information from edited books, preprints, monographs, information below 2015 and book chapters (Adapted from Ogunode, 2025d).

4.0 Result and Discussion on Contributions of National Universities Commission to the development of Universities education in Nigeria

Curriculum development, accreditation development, formulation of quality universities policies, quality assurance, improvement in data generation, improvement in international ranking and expansion of universities education are the contributions of National Universities Commission.

Curriculum development

The National universities commission has contributed immensely to the development of the universities' curriculum in Nigeria. NUC. (2022) noted that Section 10 (1) of the Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Act, Cap E3, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, empowers the National Universities Commission to lay down minimum standards for all universities and other degree awarding institutions of higher learning in the Federation and the accreditation of their degrees and other academic awards. The earliest efforts at giving effect to this legal framework in the Nigerian University System (NUS) started in 1989 following the collaboration between the Commission and Nigerian Universities, which led to the development of the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for all programmes in Nigerian universities. The MAS documents were subsequently approved by the Federal Government for use as a major instrument for quality assurance in the Nigerian University System (NUS). The documents were employed in the accreditation of programmes in the NUS for over a decade. In 2001, the Commission initiated a process to revise the documents because the said MAS documents were essentially content-based and merely prescriptive. In 2004, the Commission developed outcome-based benchmark statements for all the programmes through a workshop that allowed for exhaustive deliberations by relevant stakeholders. Following comments and feedback from the universities to the effect that the Benchmark-style Statements were too sketchy to meaningfully guide the development of curriculum and inadequate for the purpose of accreditation, the Commission, in 2007 put in place a mechanism for the merger of the Benchmark-style Statements and the revised Minimum Academic Standards, which birthed the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS). The resultant BMAS, an amalgam of the outcome-based Benchmark statements and the content-based MAS clearly articulated the Learning Outcomes and competencies expected of graduates of each academic programme in Nigerian Universities without being overly prescriptive while at the same time providing the requisite flexibility and innovativeness consistent with institutional autonomy. In all, the BMAS documents were developed for the thirteen existing disciplines namely, Administration and Management, Agriculture, Arts, Basic Medical Sciences, Education, Engineering and Technology, Environmental Sciences, Law, Medicine and Dentistry, Pharmaceutical Science, Sciences, Social Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (NUC 2022).

The Commission, in 2016, in its sustained commitment to make the NUS adaptable to global trends in higher education, constituted a group of relevant academic experts to develop a BMAS in **Computing**, thus increasing the number of disciplines in Nigerian Universities to fourteen. In keeping with its mandate of making university education in Nigeria more responsive to the needs of the society, the National Universities Commission commenced the journey to restructure the BMAS in 2018, introducing in its place, the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS), to reflect the 21st Century realities, in the existing and new disciplines and programmes in the Nigerian University System. The new CCMAS is a product of sustained stakeholder interactions over two years. The composition of each panel took into consideration, the triple helix model, as a unique feature. This involved a blend of academic experts, academics,

government (represented by NUC), professional bodies and of course, the private sector represented by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) (NUC, 2022).

Accreditation development

The National universities commission a commission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that is saddled with external supervision of the Nigerian universities has contributed positively to the development of accreditation processes in the Universities. Accreditation is a mechanism designed in the tertiary institutions to ensure that academic programme offered are of standard and meet various policies and quality of national and international standard (Ogunode, Edinoh, & Rauf, 2023). 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 (Akpan & Etor 2018). Akpan, et al, (2016) defined accreditation as a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize an institution and/or its programmes for quality standards and need for quality improvement. The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded the published standards (set by an external body such as a government, national quality assurance agency, or a professional association) for accreditation, and whether it is achieving its mission and stated purpose.

The objectives of accreditation of higher institutions/programmes as outlined by the NUC in Ogunode, and Samuel,(2022) include; to ensure that at least the minimum academic standards documents are attained, maintained and enhanced; to assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programmes have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization and to certify to the international community that the programmes offered in Nigerian universities are of high standard and their graduates are adequate for employment and further studies. Accreditation aid quality assurance and delivery of quality education in higher institutions (Ahaotu, & Akor, 2015; Ogunode, Edinoh, & Rauf, 2023). The National universities commission have helped to sustain stable accreditation proceses in the universities. The commission has helped to accredit both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes in the various universities across Nigeria.steady accreditation in the universities have help to improve the quality of university education in Nigeria.

Formulation of quality universities policies

The national universities Commission since inception in bidding of improving the quality of Nigerian universities and to ensure full development of the system have been formulating and introducing policies to ensure sustainable development of the universities. Akpan, (2014) listed National Virtual Library project policy and the carrying capacity. According to him, the National Virtual Library project embarked upon by the NUC is another milestone to ensuring quality of university education in Nigeria. The aim is to improve the quality of teaching and research in universities and other higher institutions in the country. The virtual library project provides access to current textbooks and journals not available in our university libraries. It also provides access to national and international libraries and other information resources held by global network of on-line libraries through shared digital technology. Also, he noted that the carrying capacity is a strategy initiated by the NUC to control the enrolment of students in Nigerian universities in order to deliver quality education. The carrying capacity is the maximum number of students that the institution can sustain for qualitative education based on available human and material resources. The human resources are the teachers defined in terms of quality and quantity. The material resources include the classrooms, libraries, laboratories, offices and other support physical resources for teaching and research. It is worth noting that a university with a negative deviation from its carrying capacity has over-enrolled and this could have a negative impact on the quality of university education. With the introduction of the carrying capacity, the enrolment of students is greatly controlled and the average number of students' per teacher reduced to manageable limit.

This approach, therefore, enhance quality graduates as there is an improved teacher-student relationship (Akpan & Esirah, in Femi (2020)).

Ensuring quality assurance

The National Universities Commission has also contributed to the development of quality assurance in the Nigerian universities. The Commission gave directive and designed framework that led to the establishment of quality assurance departments in the Nigerian universities. These departments are under the office of VC. Quality assurance as viewed by Ekong in Femi (2020) involves all the policies, systems and processes directed to ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of educational provision within an institution. The definition depicts that quality assurance involves the process of demonstrating excellence and value for money. It is therefore, a regulatory mechanism focusing on accountability and improvement, thus, establishing confidence in stakeholders that inputs, processes and outputs of educational system fulfill the expectations or measure up to minimum standards or requirements [1]. In the university system, quality assurance is the guarantee of confidence and certainty that standard and quality of a program run by the university are being maintained and enhanced. To achieve this, quality assurance system has to be established. This is the system by which a university confirms to itself and others that the conditions are in place for students to achieve the standard it has set (Akpan, 2014). The role of the National Universities Commission (NUC) according to Akpan, (2014) in assuring quality in university education in Nigeria has been outlined to include establishment of Minimum Academic Standards (MAS), procedural guidelines for establishment of new universities and programs, accreditation of academic programs etc. These steps taken by the NUC depicts that Nigeria is not lagging behind in her quest to provide quality university education to her citizenry and to ensure that our university graduates compete favorably well internationally.

Improvement in data generation

National Universities Commission have supported the Nigerian University system to generate, disseminate and storage data to aid effective university planning, resource allocation and to improve decision making in the system. University planning according to Ogunode, Olowonefa & Idowu, (2023); Joseph, Cinjel, & Ayeni, (2017); Nayan, (2017); Halal Ahmed, and Bhuiyan, (2021) involves the identification of university goals, programmes and visions and systematically identifying means to realise these goals and programmes within a set time. Data is what is needed to plan the university system. Effective data management in the system will assist the university manager and administrators to plan the university system well. Ogunode and Ajape (2021) noted that data is very important to the realization of goals and programmes of higher institutions, especially universities. Data is needed to plan the universities. The Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission said that for the Nigerian University System (NUS) to be respected globally, it must live above board by managing an effective and reliable information system that would guarantee accurate, reliable and timely data that could be used in advising the government on issues of national planning. He observed that without accurate data, effective and strategic planning would not only be difficult for the university but also the government. He said that as Ivory Towers, Universities were expected to have adequate and reliable information across all variables such as total number of students enrolment; total number of students by programme; faculty; gender; age; mode of entry into the university; Local Government of origin; State of origin; nationality; geo-political zone; distribution in term of PhD, Masters, PGD programmes and students (NUC, 2016). Zafar, Mohammad & Yasir in Femi (2020) maintained that the availability of accurate, valid, reliable, and timely information is a pre-requisite for planning and management of education. Educational planning and management is no exception, it requires the availability and use of a diverse set of data for effective planning and successful management. Effective data management in the universities helps to improve the quality of education (Udeme, 2017; Thompson & ObinnaNonso. 2019; QuartzAfrica 2020)

Improvement in international ranking

Policies and programme designed by National Universities Commission for implementation in the Nigerian universities have led to improvement in the national and international ranking of the universities in Nigeria. Covenant University according to Fadehen, (2025) has once again secured the top spot in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025. The ranking, which evaluates universities across various performance metrics, placed the Ota-based institution ahead of other leading Nigerian universities, reaffirming its position as a leader in higher education. The rankings, which surveyed 1,907 universities across 108 countries, assessed the institutions based on 18 performance indicators across five key areas: teaching, research environment, research quality, industry, and international outlook. CU emerged as Nigeria's best, outperforming Ahmadu Bello University, Landmark University, and the University of Ibadan, which ranked second, third, and fourth respectively. The 2025 list also reflected a shift in the global higher education landscape, with more than 134 million citations from 16.5 million research publications analyzed and survey responses from over 68,000 scholars collected globally. Other Nigerian universities making the top ten include the University of Lagos, Bayero University, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Federal University of Technology, Minna, University of Benin, and University of Ilorin also earned a spot in the top tier, securing 10th place.....acknowledged that this improvement in the international ranking can be linked to the NUC policy and quality assurance measures designed for the Nigerian universities. Also, NUC introduced national ranking of the Nigerian universities, According to Akpan,(2014), another bold step taken by NUC to improve the quality of university education in Nigeria is the introduction of national ranking policies for the universities.. The commission made use of the 1999/2000 accreditation results to rank Nigerian universities based on performance of their programs. The ranking was based on a multiple set of performance indicators which included academic excellence, governance, research and adherence to the minimum academic standards and approved national norm. Universities with top level performance were encouraged to strive to maintain and enhance the quality of their programs, while those at the bottom of their performance were expected to take necessary steps to remedy the deficiencies identified in order to improve upon the qualities of the programs. According to Uvah, (2005), the aim of ranking of Nigerian universities by NUC is to encourage healthy competition in maintenance of academic quality and good governance.

Expansion of universities education

In order to improve access to higher education especially the university education in Nigeria, the National Universities commission have embark on expansion of universities policies. This involves encouraging expansion and the establishment of more public and private universities in Nigeria. The National Universities commission' expansion programme have had moved the Nigerian universities from 5 universities at its inception in 1962, to the presently superintends over 298 Nigerian Universities (72 Federal Universities, 67 State Universities, and 159 Private Universities), 4 Inter-university Centers, 104 Affiliate Institutions and the emerging 19 Dual Mode Federal Colleges of Education (Bisong, 2025). Businessday (2024) reported that the National Universities Commission (NUC) noted that it will continue to approve more universities to be established in the country to increase access to tertiary education. The commission observed that almost two million candidates seek admission into universities, but only between 500,000 and 700,000 students get admitted. The Commission concluded that Nigeria will continue to widen university access by approving more universities to meet its demands and supply of quality education. NUC submitted that countries like Brazil, Indonesia, and others, with populations smaller than Nigeria's, have more than 1,000 universities; stating that efforts were underway to revitalize the university system through transnational education by permitting foreign universities to establish operations in the country. The masification and expansion of universities education in Nigeria has help to increment enrolment into university education and production of more manpower.

Findings

The paper established that the National universities commission has contributed to the development of Nigerian universities system and such development includes curriculum development, accreditation development, formulation of quality universities policies, quality assurance, improvement in data generation and improvement in international ranking and expansion of universities education.

4.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the paper assessed the contributions of National Universities Commission to the development of Nigeria university system. The paper concluded that National universities commission has contributed to the development of Nigerian university system and such development includes curriculum development, accreditation development and formulation of quality universities policies, quality assurance, improvement in data generation and improvement in international ranking and expansion of universities education.

Based on this finding; the paper recommends that the Federal government should increase the budgetary allocation of the commission. The staff of the commission should be provided with training opportunities both local and foreign. Private institutions and international organizations should support the commission with technical support to improve its operation.

References

1. Akpan, C.P. & Esirah, E. (2005). Strategies for Realistic Quality Assurance in Knowledge Generation in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. In D.N. Eze & N. Onyegegbu (eds.) Knowledge Generation and Dissemination: Issues and Challenges in Nigerian Universities. Enugu, Pearl and Gold.
2. Akpan, C. (2014). Quality Assurance In Nigerian Universities: The Role Of The National Universities Commission. *Proceedings of INTED2014 Conference 10th-12th March 2014, Valencia, Spain*. 1293- 1299.
3. Bisong, J.N (2025) The Nigerian University System, Structure, Governance and Best Practices: Keynote Paper Presented At The Three - Day Council And Management Retreat Of The Federal University Of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State, Holding At Chrispan Hotel, Jos, From 22nd – 25th April, 2025.
4. Bisong, J., N., Asemota, R. & Edinoh, K (2025). Digitalization and the National Universities Commission in Nigeria .*AMERICAN Journal of Science on Integration and Human Development*, 3,(7), 15-22
5. Businessday (2024). Why we'll continue to approve more schools – National Universities Commission. <https://businessday.ng/news/article/why-well-continue-to-approve-more-schools-national-universities-commission/?amp=1>
6. Ekong D. (1998), Quality: trends from UNESCO Regional Consultations on Higher Education. Paris: UNESCO, Paper of Synthesis of Regional Conference.
7. Fadehen, A (2025). Full-list-covenant-emerges-nigerias-best-university-for-2024 <https://punchng.com/full-list-covenant-emerges-nigerias-best-university-for-2024/>
8. Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004). *National policy of education*. Lagos, Nigeria: NERDC.
9. Ogunode, N., J. Olowonefa J., A & Idowu, O., M (2023). Effective Data Management and University Education Administration in Nigeria. *Synergy: Cross-Disciplinary Journal Of Digital Investigation*, 2(4), 32-39

10. Ogunode N, J., & Ajape T, S (2021). Planning of Higher Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward. *American journal of social and humanitarian research* 2(3), 19-28
11. Olaleye, F. O, & Oyewole, B. K (2016) Quality Assurance in Nigerian University Education: The Role of the National Universities Commission (NUC) as a Regulatory Body. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 5, (4).
12. Ololube, N. P. (2016). Education Fund Misappropriation and Mismanagement and the Provision of Quality Higher Education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 9(4), 333-349. Retrieved [DATE] from <http://www.ij sre.com>
13. Rabi u, I. (2022) Nigerian Universities' Global recognition <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/10/15/nigerian-universities-global-recognition/>
14. Thompson C & Obinna Nonso. A. (2019). "School administrators' utilization of management information system for administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Enugu education zone." *International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah*, 7(9), 102-109.
15. Quartz africa (2020). Poor data hurts African countries' ability to make good policy decisions. <https://qz.com/africa/762729/poor-data-is-hurting-african-countries-ability-to-make-good-policy-decisions/>
16. Udeme, U. (2017). Planning Nigerian Education: Problems, Issues, and Proposed Solutions. publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316682135>
17. Uv ah, I. I. (2005) Quality Assurance and Institutional Stability in the Nigerian University System, *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning* 5 (1); pp. 2-20.
18. Zafar I. M., Mohammad, N. A., & Yasir. I. (2011). National Education Management Information System Academy of Educational Planning and Management Ministry of Professional & Technical Training, Islamabad