SUSTAINING QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA THROUGH ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

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Abstract

This paper examines Quality Control and its sustenance in the Higher Education System in Nigeria, through the instrumentation of Accreditation and Quality Assurance framework and programs. It examines the evolution and growth of higher education in the country, from the early 20th century, its diversity and proprietorship/ownership structure. Furthermore, Licensing, Accreditation and quality assurance procedures and its implementation challenges, as well as its impact on the standard of higher education were also examined. Given the historical performance and appraisal of the regulatory powers, roles and functions of the National University Commission, the paper submits that the Accreditation and Quality Assurance procedures have significantly assisted to achieve standards in the system, and sustained quality of the programs outcomes or products. The paper recommends that, to sustain and enhance the quality and achievements in the face of global competitiveness in the educational sector, government, proprietors and all stakeholders should continually address the common challenges of adequate financing, continuous quality assurance and accreditation framework, boosting infrastructure, enhance ICT deployment, through effective policy consistency, continuity, and political commitment to set goals.

INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND

In all countries of the world, education has been recognized as the engine for economic growth and as a catalyst for national transformation. All discussion on poverty reduction, wealth creation and innovation begins with education. In today's knowledge based economy, individuals of any country need the right type of education and training to be able to function effectively in their society, create wealth and compete globally. Nations can compete based on a variety of factors such as abundant natural resources and by their skilled and educated workforce. The skill base of a nation's human capital can be developed in institutions of higher learning via entrepreneurship education and training.

The demand for higher education, particularly university education is on the increase all over the world. Consequently, there must be a proactive orchestration of efforts to satisfy the yearnings of the people for this level of education. A forward looking government, no matter what it costs, will ensure that its citizenry is educated; not just any kind of education but a focused and qualitative one. For nations with very high rates of illiteracy levels there could be advocacy for basic education; at least they must start somewhere. Nevertheless, there is a level a nation cannot go beyond with basic education rests. Higher development is therefore the key to technological advancement of any nation (Okojie 2008). The developed countries of the world have proved it to be true as most of them have a long history of higher education. Developing nations must take a cue from them.

It is not enough to license a higher education institution to operate; there must be a constant evaluation to ensure that set standards and operational guides are not violated. A system that grows is such that sets standards and disciplines itself to attain them. Accreditation of universities be it institutional or program is a way of examining the state of the institution in relation to where it ought to be. It is a quality assurance process. Prior to the licensing of university, some quality indices are taken into consideration to ensure that they take off on the right footing. Consequently, licensing, accreditation and quality assurance are related in a wider context. It is a truism that, no nation can develop beyond the quality of its higher education.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Higher Education in Nigeria dates back to the 19th century when, propelled by the ideals of liberal education as introduced by the early missionaries, Nigerians sought opportunities to acquire this new and exciting vision of life, which was then only available overseas. Responding to the pressures generated by this hunger for knowledge, the colonial government established the Yaba Higher College in 1932. The College was established to provide "well qualified assistants" in medical, engineering, and other vocations as well as teachers for secondary schools, then known as "higher middle schools". With passage o time, the college offered sub-degree courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture and teacher training to fill specific vacancies in the colonial administration.

The restricted scope and vision of Yaba College generated greater pressures on the colonial administration to expand the opportunities for higher education. The British government responded by establishing the Elliot Commission in 1945. In its report, the Commission suggested that "the need for educated Africans in West Africa in general far outruns the supply, present and potential" and proceeded to recommend the establishment of a University College in Nigeria. Thus in 1948, the University College of Ibadan was established as a residential and tutorial college under the tutelage of the University of London.

In 1959, another Commission, the Ashby Commission was established to ascertain Nigeria's post0independence educational needs. In 1960, the University of Nigeria Nsukka was established as the first indigenous University in Nigeria. The findings of the Ashby Commission regarding balance in the structure and geographical distribution of University education led to the establishment of Universities of Lagos and Ife in 1962, the same year the University College, Ibadan attained an autonomous status as a degree awarding institution. Propelled by the increased income from oil and the increased demand for higher education in the country, in 1975 the Federal Government decided to take over the regional Universities at Zaria, Ile-Ife, and Nsukka as well as establish new ones – the Universities of Benin, Calabar, Jos and Maiduguri, with University Colleges at Ilorin, Port-Harcourt and Kano, all of which became full-fledged Universities in 1977.

As the Federal Universities grew in number and population of students, State Universities started emerging in 1979 with the Rivers State University of Science and Technology taking the lead. In the same vein, the emergence of private providers of university education in Nigeria became a reality when the first three Private Universities were licensed to operate in 1999 after an earlier failed attempt. Currently, Nigeria has about 130 universities comprising federal universities (40), state universities (39) and private universities (50).(See Statistical Data Analysis on Nigerian Universities by Ownership Structure).

One of the major conclusions of the 2014 World Economic Forum held from January 22 to 25 in Davos, Switzerland is the need for leaders of the world to address inequities in the socio-economic configuration of national, regional and global communities especially through education and partnerships. As Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labor Organization noted at the Forum, "Well-designed education and training systems are needed that respond to labor market needs, and equip young workforce for the jobs of tomorrow." Within the inclusive growth sub-theme of the WEF, higher education is seen as a potent pathway for enriching human capital through knowledge development.

The eight heads of African governments that were in Davos embraced a commitment to bolster higher education especially its quality dimensions, a commitment which was echoed at the Africa Economic Forum, held in May 2014 in Abuja, Nigeria. There is a refreshing attention being turned at the global and Africa regional level to the power of quality higher education on a promise of a more socio-economically equitable world.

THE DIVERSITY OF NIGERIA HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The African higher education system is made up of over 2,450 post-secondary institutions; about 7% of the world's total, with Nigeria accounting for a significant proportion of the figure, particularly in the last 20 years (Okebukola, 2014). The diversity of these institutions is seen in varying institutional types, ownership,

linguistic orientation, curriculum, and student characteristics. The greatest proportion (over 65%) of institutions in the system is made up of universities (UIS, 2010). Non-university higher education institutions include polytechnics, colleges of education, as well as vocational and technical institutes. This institutional diversity comes with varying missions and mandates. While the universities generally have teaching and research thrusts, non-university institutions are more focused on specific programs leading to acquisition of skills e.g. for teaching (colleges of education) and for varying technological enterprises (polytechnics). These differing missions come with variability in staff qualifications and expectations for career advancement with implications for quality standards.

Within institutional diversity, universities lead the pack in the choice of secondary school products aspiring for higher education. This trend which in cases like Ghana, Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa leaves about 10 candidates struggling for one available university space. In 2007 at Osun State University, Nigeria, over 100,000 candidates applied for 500 available spaces! In 2011, a total of 99,195 candidates applied to the University of Lagos. Only about 9,000 could be offered admission. The preponderance of the bright and more intellectually-able takes up such spaces. The non-university higher education institutions is where many of the others find repose, although a good number who are bright but would want vocational and technical career paths elect for these institutions as first choice. The preference for universities and the quest to increase high-level human resources have led many African countries to expand university spaces through converting technical institutions to universities as exemplified by South Africa and aspirational by Nigeria or to increase the number of universities under private ownership. Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania provide examples (Okebukola, 2011; 2012).

Diversity exists even within institutional categories. Specialized universities have continued to thrive in response to societal demand for specific skills. Of the 129 universities in Nigeria, ten are specialized universities of technology and five are universities of agriculture. Ghana has a specialized University of Development Studies and one which specializes in telecommunication. Both Nigeria and Ghana have specialized universities of education. Ivory Coast has a University of Science and Technology. In Kenya, there is the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. Namibia has a University of Management. Somalia has the Somaliland University of Technology.

Beginning from the 1990s, the African higher education space opened to greater private participation. The diversity in public-private ownership has become a distinguishing feature of the system. In many countries, private higher education institutions range in proportion of total from 15% in Ghana and Ethiopia, through 20% in Kenya to 33% in Nigeria. While private higher institutions have maintained high numbers, enrolment in these institutions is relatively low compared with public institutions.

Diversity is also seen in the ethnic composition of staff and students in Nigeria tertiary institutions, due to the competitive nature of placement/admission. This is however more pronounced in Federal Institutions, where quota system are usually applied and in private institutions where the "rich and comfortable" Nigerians send their children/ward. There is also diversity with regard to gender in several institutions. The preponderance of male has been widely rapid across the country (and indeed Africa) with females accounting for an average of 32% of undergraduate enrolment but the statistics is higher in some geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The percentage of the physically challenged (disabled) students is still very low (less than 1%), hence the need for policy re-alignment for competitiveness globally.

ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

We have in the introductory part of the presentation situate and recognize the place of education (indeed Tertiary education) in the transformation and development of any nation. For the sake of emphasis, the following among several others are the roles of the various university and non-university institutions in Nigeria:

- Citadel or Centre for Learning and Education
- Centre for Research and Development
- Base for Technological Development
- Manpower Development and Training for Self Reliance
- Centre for Regional and International Partnership for Sustainable Development
- Centre for Moral and Value Re-orientation

It is instructive to note that, the score card in the honest assessment of the "Ivory Towers" performance of these roles, leave more to be desired, hence the nationwide dialogue on how to enhance better service delivery in the education sector. Thus, the quality and performance output is being challenged from several fronts.

Shabani (2014) identified and ranked what he called "Ten Top Challenges to Quality of Higher Education in Africa", these includes:

TABLE 1
Top Ten Challenges to Quality in Higher Education in Africa

Rank	Challenges
1	Depreciating quality of higher education teachers
2	Research capacity deficit
3	Infrastructural/facilities inadequacies

4	Lack of a regional quality assurance framework and accreditation system
5	Slow adoption of ICT for delivering quality higher education including distance education
6	Capacity deficit of quality assurance agencies
7	Weak internationalization of higher education
8	Management inefficiencies
9	Slow adoption of LMD reforms
10	Poor quality of entrants into higher education from the secondary level

Source: Shabani (2014).

Challenges of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Whilst Shabani (2014) 10 top quality issues are true and relevant to the Nigerian education system, certain specific challenges confronting the system need to be reiterated, if our system is to be global competitive and relevant. They include:

- The funding/financing – (Budgeting Adequacy and Management)
- Infrastructure provisioning – (Deficits for Teaching, Learning Research)
- Manpower Development and Staff Training – (Still Low)
- Quality Assurance and Standards Management framework – (Fairly Weak)
- Falling Standards/Quality of Teachers and Students
- Administrative Mismanagement, Dis-management, Under-management (Corruption)
- Politicization of the Education System (Government, Union, etc.)
- Moral decadence and social vices – cultism, sexual harassment, examination malpractice, gangsterism, rapism, indecent dressing, sexual perversion and arson.

THE LICENCING AND ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Tertiary Institution and their programs must be Licensed and accredited before commencement and subsequent operations, this Institutional Programs and Procedural Certification are necessary to ensure compliance with the minimum quality benchmark and to guarantee Standards and quality Sustenance.

Licensing Procedures

From the historical account of the Nigeria University System, it is obvious that there are three different proprietors of university education in Nigeria. These are the Federal government, the State governments and the private or corporate bodies. Irrespective of proprietorship, government is responsible for the licensing of universities in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the procedures are different.

Federal Universities
The old regional governments in Nigeria licensed the first set of universities in the different regions of the country. These universities were eventually taken over by the federal government. Subsequently, the federal government established universities in the country based on need and the necessity to have a balanced spread across the regions and States of the Federation.

Whenever such needs are identified, the government through the National Universities Commission carries out the necessary assessments and resource verification that eventually lead to the establishment of such federal universities. The financial implication for the smooth take-off of such universities are worked out following which the government release take-off grants to the university to begin its operations. This was also the case for the recently established 14 new Federal Universities around.

State Universities
In the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, education is on the concurrent list. Consequently, State governments have the constitutional backing to establish their own universities. Once the State House of Assembly promulgates the Act for establishing the university and the Governor ascents to the bill, the law is passed for the establishment of the state university. Although the National Universities, it is responsible for ensuring that laid down standards are adhered to; thus ensuring the delivery of quality education in the universities. Herein, lies the standardization and quality assurance and control role of the National Universities Commission. (NUC)

Private Universities
As a result of growing increase in the number of prospective candidate for admission into universities and increasing inability of existing public universities to cope with the rate of increase in demand for university placement, as well as government's (both Federal and State) inability to adequately fund the Nigerian universities, the Federal government invited private individuals into the operation of universities following wide consultation with relevant university organs. Therefore, government promulgated Act No 9 of 1993.

Act No. 9 of 1993, repealed the Private Universities (Abolition and Prohibition) Act of 1984 and allowed individuals, organizations, corporate bodies as well as local governments to establish and run private universities upon meeting laid down guidelines and subsequently obtaining approval of government. The decree stipulated the various documents that should be submitted to NUC by proprietors of proposed universities as well as other conditions that should be met to enable the Commission assess the adequacy or otherwise of the applications for government's approval. Thus, the NUC started issuing application forms to prospective proprietors of private universities, as far back as September 1993.

In order to avoid the serious threats to standards of teaching and learning which was posed on Nigeria universities by the twenty-four private institutions that operated in the 80's, the Management of the National Universities Commission rose to the challenges faced during the process of approving private universities by establishing the Standing Committee is to ensure a fair, effective, thorough and prompt evaluation of all application forms received by the Commission from individuals, organizations as well as corporate bodies wishing to establish private universities bearing in mind the sensitive nature of the issue.

Upon obtaining application forms, the proprietors of proposed universities are expected to complete ten copies of such application forms and submit same to the Federal Ministry of Education through the National Universities Commission. SCOPU then promptly attends to the processing of these forms, and considers the requests to establish Private Universities. Starting with the collection of application forms, there is a 12-stage process to be fulfilled by prospective (would-be) private providers. The stages are as follows:

Application in writing stating the intent for the establishment of the university;
- Collection of Application Forms;
- Submission of Application Forms and relevant documents;
- Intensive review/analysis of documents by experts in relevant NUC Department;
- Revision of documentation by proprietor(s) based on report by SCOPU;
- Interactive Meeting of SCOPU with the proposed universities;
- First Site Assessment visit;
- Finalization of documentation;
- Second (final) Site Assessment visit;
- Security Screening of Proprietors and Board of Trustee;
- Approval by NUC Management;
- Approval by NUC Board;
- Approval by Federal Executive Council (Composition of the Council includes, the President, the Vice President and the Ministers)

Each of these stages requires an enormous amount of information thus, making the process of establishing private university, to say the least, a difficult task.

ACCREDITATION OF PROGRAMS

In the years preceding 1989, accreditation of programs in the Nigerian University System (NUS) was nonexistent despite the fact that the Federal Government of Nigeria had promulgated the necessary law towards the process. The Federal Government of Nigeria through Section 10 of Act No. 16 of 1985, incorporated as section 4(m) of the National Universities Commission (NUC) amended Act No. 49 of 1988 empowered the NUC to lay down Minimum Academic Standards

(MAS) for universities in the Federal and to accredit their degrees and other academic awards.

In its bid to comply with the provisions of the Act, the National Universities Commission through the use of experts from the universities prepared the Minimum Academic Standards in respect of 13 disciplines taught in Nigerian Universities in 1989. The disciplines include: Administration, Agriculture, Arts, Education, Engineering and Technology, Environmental Sciences, Law, Medicine and Dentistry, Management Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Sciences, Social Sciences and Veterinary Medicine. Later on MAS were developed for additional programs.

The development of the Minimum Academic Standards and their subsequent approval provided the basis for accreditation of all degree programs taught in Nigerian universities. The MAS thus serve as reference documents for the accreditation of programs in the Nigerian University System. In 2004, the Commission employing the services of distinguished professors in Nigerian universities embarked on the review of the MAS documents. The exercise culminated in the evolution of Benchmarks Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for various disciplines in the Nigerian University System. These documents were then forwarded to the Federal Executive Council for approval and subsequent use by Nigeria universities.

Following the development of MAS in 1989, the NUC also worked out the procedure for the accreditation exercise with the production of the following documents:
- Manual for accreditation procedures for academic programs in Nigeria universities
- Self-Study form (NUC/SSF)
- Program Evaluation Form (NUC/PEF)
- Accreditation Panel Report Form (NUC/APRF)
- Accreditation Re-visitation Form (NUC/ARVF)

Accreditation of degree and other academic programs by the NUC is a system of evaluating academic programs in Nigeria universities as having met the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standard documents. The objectives of accreditation of academic programs in Nigeria universities are to:
- Ensure that at least the provisions of the MAS documents are attained, maintained and enhanced;
- Assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programs have an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization;
- Certify to the international community that the programs offered in Nigerian Universities are of high standards and their graduates are adequate for employment and for further studies.

The first in the history of accreditation of programs in Nigeria universities was conducted in 1990 shortly after the Minimum Academic Standards were developed for all programs existing in Nigerian universities at that time. It is on record that the exercise was unparalleled in the African continent as it was the first of its kind in this part of the globe. It was organized and conducted through the platform provided by the NUC with 100% indigenous resource persons. The exercise gave the nation the opportunity to have data-backed information on the state of education delivery in Nigeria universities.

Ten years after (1999/2000), a second comprehensive accreditation exercise of academic programs in Nigeria universities was conducted. This was followed in 2002 with the accreditation of those programs that denied accreditation status in 1999/2000. Programs of first generation private universities were accredited in 2004, while newly matured programs were evaluated at the beginning of 2005. In November, 2005, 1,343 academic programs in 48 universities were evaluated for accreditation.

The NUC took a step further in its quality assurance mandate by embarking on the accreditation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and MBA programs in June 2006. It was the first time ODL and MBA programs would be accredited in the history of Nigerian Universities. The experiences garnered with the MBA accreditation, which was a pilot exercise will definitely come in handy in the eventual accreditation of postgraduate programs in Nigerian universities.

Having risen to the challenges of the statute governing its quality assurance mandate, the National Universities Commission, no doubt, is fully stabilized on its accreditation process. This is evident in the fact that the exercise now comes up every year as programs are continuously maturing for accreditation because they have fulfilled the required validity period for their accreditation status or that had to make a request for re-visitation because they earned denied accreditation status in a previous visit or that they are just maturing for accreditation.

ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES IN THE NIGERIA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

When a program is due for accreditation, the NUC gives at least three months' notice to the concerned university of an accreditation visit to the particular program, discipline or sub-disciple. At the time of the notice a Self-Study form is sent to the University for Completion. The university is expected to complete and return twelve copies of the form in respect of each program, discipline or sub-discipline to be accredited.

On receipt of the completed form, the NUC constitutes an Ad-Hoc Accreditation Panel which consists of a chairman and four other persons from the academics,

professional associations and regulatory boards or councils. In addition, the panel is serviced by a staff of the NUC. Panel membership is limited to full professors in a discipline who have a track record of objectivity, integrity and of not compromising standards. Vice-chancellors make nominations to complement selection from the NUC database of experts. Professional bodies and registration councils also nominate their members to serve on the NUC accreditation panels. The leader of each panel is elected from among members. He/she is usually the most senior professor with accreditation experience.

With the panel in place, a coordination meeting is held to induct new members and refresh former ones, regarding the accreditation process mechanisms. Once panel members are well versed in using the instruments, simulation exercises are carried out. During such exercises, hypothetical case scenarios concerning what may be encountered during actual accreditation visits are presented for scoring. Panel members' scores are discussed and harmonized. The simulation exercise continues until the differential between the scores of all panel members on each item in the assessment instrument is reduced to zero. The impetus behind the entire exercise is designed to enhance inter-rater reliability. At the end of the coordination meeting, the panels leave for their accreditation sites. Care is taken to ensure that no member serves within 300km of his or her university catchment area.

Program Evaluation

At the accreditation site, the panel meets with the Vice-Chancellor, and then with the Dean of faculty, Head of Department and staff of program to be evaluated. After the introductory meeting, the panel settles down to work for two days on assessing program content, facilities, delivery and evaluation modes. Interviews are held with students and sample lectures and practicals are observed. Each member of the panel scores the performance of the program during the two-day period. At the end of the visit, the panel writes its report, which is discussed with the program staff and the Vice Chancellor. The report must be commented on and signed by the Vice-Chancellor, or his or her representative. Finally, the report, together with a quantitative assessment of the program and recommendations regarding accreditation status achieved, are sent to the NUC.

TABLE 2
Components of Accreditation

S/N	Components	Sub-component
a)	Academic Matters	The program philosophy and objectives

		The curriculum Admission requirements Academic regulation Course evaluation (examination and continuous assessment) Student course evaluation External examination system
b)	Staffing	Academic staff Non-academic staff Head of department/ discipline/ sub-discipline Staff development
c)	Physical Facilities	Laboratory/clinic/studio facility (area per student) and equipment Classroom facilities and equipment Laboratory size (area per student) and equipment Safety and environment
d)	Financing of program by the university	
e)	Books, journals and other resource materials for the program	
f)	Employer's rating of graduates, if any	

Source: NUC – Nigerian Universities' system document (2008)

Accreditation Status and Its Impact
The accreditation status awarded to a program may be full, interim or denied, depending on the total score.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITIES

As it is all over the world, quality assurance in Nigeria Universities has both the external and internal component. The standard set, which must be followed helps to guarantee quality of products and sustainability of outputs produced.

External Quality Assurance
The Federal Government, through the National Universities Commission plays a major role in the external quality assurance process of Nigerian Universities. The professional bodies on the other hand, for instance, perform minor roles in university quality assurance in the sense that they focus only on the appropriate professional programs in the universities to ensure that the respective professional standards are adhered to: The external quality regulatory mechanism in Nigeria therefore includes processes leading to the establishment of universities and their

programs, accreditation of programs, admission of qualified candidates into Nigerian universities, institutional audit by the visitor to universities, monitoring and evaluation of the state of universities from time to time and collaboration with professional bodies for effective university education quality assurance.

In order to fully entrench quality assurance process, some innovative ideas were adopted to stimulate and promote quality in university education delivery. These include; strategic planning and management, Curriculum reform and review, Nigerian Universities System Annual Review Meetings (USARM), Linkages and collaboration with national and international development partners, development of physical structures and facilities, Nigerian Universities Research and Development Fair (NURESDEF), Linkage with Experts and Academics in the Diaspora (LEAD) to mention but a few. (Okojie 2008)

Internal Quality Assurance
These are the processes of evaluation, maintenance and promotion of quality within the university by the university. Every process of the administration of a university should automatically lead to delivery of quality university education. The internal mechanisms start from the point of admission into the university. In all universities, the minimum admission requirements are often stated as a basis of admission, while the admissions committees are usually set up to take care of the process. Quality is assured through the various inputs from Departments and Faculties. This ensures that candidates which do not meet the minimum requirements are not admitted.

Proposals for the establishment of programs also follow strict internal guidelines, through which such proposals emanate from the Department, and scrutinized through faculty boards and senate. This way all relevant inputs and queries would have been made and addressed. Universities also carry out both regular monitoring, and periodic review of their programs.

Monitoring considers how effectively a program achieves its stated aims, and the success of students in attaining the intended learning outcomes. It is usually undertaken by the department providing the program, and often involves a program team appraising its own performance at the end of an academic year. The process may take into account reports from external examiners, staff and student feedback, reports from any professional body that accredits the program, and feedback from former students and their employers. It may result in adjustments to the curriculum or to assessment, to ensure continued effectiveness.

SUMMARY

Impact and Challenges of Quality Assurance and Accreditation
Achievements with respect to licensing, accreditation and quality assurance in Nigerian Universities could be seen from their impact on the Nigerian University System in particular and the nation in general.

Improvements in University Program Accreditation Status
One of the measures of the quality of programs offered in Nigerian universities is their accreditation status. As earlier mentioned, programs are evaluated based on quality and quality of input such as student, staff and facilities; quality of curriculum; quality of process especially program delivery and evaluation; as well as employers' rating of graduates. These variables are measured against the minimum Academic Standards to determine the standing of the programs.

The impact of accreditation has been seen in the progressive increase in performance of universities in the accreditation exercises over the years. More programs have earned Full accreditation status while relatively less have Interim and Denied status. This also attests to the fact that generally both external and internal quality assurances have been effective in the Nigerian University System.

Impact on the Public
The National Universities Commission as part of its statutory obligation owes the public a duty to publicize results of accreditation exercises. Since the NUC began to publish the result of accreditation exercises and apply appropriate sanctions where necessary, the public has been responding positively to the information the Commission pushes to the public domain on accreditation. It is now a common occurrence for parents and prospective university students, to come or write to the NUC seeking the status of programs before they subscribe to them.

Licensing of universities, especially the private ones in the recent past, has to some extent put the System in the right path towards fully addressing the problem of access to university education in Nigeria.

Impact on Universities
The direct impact of the NUC accreditation on Nigerian universities cannot be overemphasized. Informal comments from staff of the universities point to the fact that accreditation exercises often give the departments the opportunity of getting the university to buy them equipment and appropriate facilities for teaching and research. Some have wondered what the state of universities would be if accreditation were nonexistent. For the NUC, this is not the desirable. Nevertheless, the Commission believes that with time Nigerian universities will imbibe the culture of self-assessment for continuous quality improvement; thus making their internal quality assurance process complementary to the external process.

Further on the impact of accreditation on Nigerian universities, there are instances where proprietors have injected unprecedented amounts of money into their universities in order to remedy the deficiencies identified during accreditation exercises. A notable example is seen with Kogi State University, Anyigba where more than three quarter of its programs presented for accreditation earned denied accreditation status in one of the accreditation exercises. When the result of the exercise was made public, the Governor of the state visited the NUC to consult on the way forward. The cost implication for remedying the university's deficiency was presented to the Governor and within a month he released the money to the university, change the management of the university and most of the university's programs today are at the full accreditation status level.

Licensing of universities on the other hand has created the opportunity for healthy competition within the Nigerian University System. It is expected that issues relating to the quality of teaching, research and community service will be positively affected by the licensing of private universities in Nigeria.

Impact on NUC
As far as accreditation is concerned in Nigeria, the NUC is doing creditably well and the Commission's effort in this direction is not only nationally recognized but accreditation of programs in Nigerian universities has ensured a continuous improvement in the process. Having made such progress with accreditation of undergraduate programs, the NUC has equally commence the accreditation of postgraduate programs in the system. In addition plans NUC have introduced institutional accreditation in the system; thus making the accreditation system more robust.

While it could be said that the NUC accreditation system has impacted on the system positively, there is still room for improvement. The Commission needs to deepen the institutional accreditation to complement its current program accreditation so that the entire institution could be object of focus rather than the programs only. In addition, accreditation should be included in annual national budget to forestall the cost sharing of the exercise's expenditure with the universities.

WAY FORWARD/ RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening the Nigerian Tertiary Education System for Global Competitiveness and will no doubt require an holistic and strategic approach toward addressing the multi-facets challenges earlier identified, through appropriate regulatory/monitoring mechanism and quality assurance management and control. The vehicle now is the Transformation Agenda and Vision 20; 2020 which must necessarily address the following issues frontally and sincerely too:-

- Funding the System – Budget Adequacy, Timely Releases and Effective Implementation.
- Development of effective standard, quality assurance and accreditation framework, e.g. Regional Quality Assurance framework to support the current NUC framework.
- Creation of National Centre for Excellence and Networking across the six geopolitical zones to promote competitive spirit and creativity.
- Strategic planning and implementation for infrastructural facilities provisioning and embracing global best practices of public-private partnership model.
- Strengthening capacity building programs for Academic and Non-Academic staff (i.e. inclusive, periodic, systematic and action/result directed).
- Re-orientation and wake-up call to all stakeholders in the sector – Teachers, Staff, Students, Parents, Communities, etc. to address the morals decadence.
- Development and implementation of virtual learning and networking program to boost the standard/quality through benchmarking, competitive and knowledge exchange.
- Adoption of ICT for effective education service delivery and for distance learning programs.
- Imbibe best management practices in Tertiary Institutions administration and eschew corruption, mediocrity and favoritism.
- Also, government should discourage political interference in the administration of higher institutions and thus promotes quality standards and relevancies.

CONCLUSION

Taking a cursory look at the history of higher education – particularly university education in Nigeria, we can easily know where we are coming from, where we have passed through and where we are today. A number of scholars in Nigeria had the privilege of passing through the system (in the 1960s, 70s and 80s) when the universities in the country rubbed shoulders with the best in the world; when high quality expatriates academics desired to be in the scholarly environment made possible by our ivory towers; when foreign university were eager to forge collaborative links with lecturers in Nigerian universities and when our students had no problem getting placements abroad for graduate studies. The goal of the National Universities Commission according to the Executive Secretary is to get Nigerian Universities to levels that are comparable to if not surpass the enviable level of the past. It is believed that as we keep forging on with result oriented quality assurance and strengthen our cooperation with the international community, our dream for the desired Nigerian University System will soon be

realized. Thus, qualitatively and quantitatively, quality must be enshrined and sustained both at Institutional level and in the program hosted.

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