

Programme Accreditation Practices and Challenges in University Libraries: The Case of Osun State University College of Humanities Library

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Abstract

The Nigerian Universities Commission is empowered under the law to accredit academic programmes in Nigerian Universities based on stipulated standards and to ensure quality maintenance. This work documented the experience of the College of Humanities, Osun State University Library in its role as a major contributor to the success of accreditation exercises in the College for four different sessions, including a resources verification exercise, highlighting the successes recorded. The study specifically examines the practices and challenges of programme accreditation in the College Library. Some of the challenges to programme accreditation practice as identified by staff of the library are in e-library services provision, including unreliable Internet connectivity and too much dependency on University Information and Communications Technology (ICT) other challenges of the library including inadequate funding, poor power supply and shortage of staff. Suggestions to remedy the challenges to programme accreditation practices in the university library include, the need for improved funding in terms of budgetary allocation, need to enhance better internal quality assurance and ensuring early preparation for NUC programme accreditation exercise.

Keywords: Challenges, College Library, National Universities Commission, Practices, Programme Accreditation, Osun State, University Libraries

Introduction

Legal backing has been granted to the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) by the Decree No 16 of 1985, to lay down Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for all Nigerian Universities and to accredit their degrees and other academic awards (Archibong, 2010). The essence of the University library as the hub of knowledge and reliable source of information flow is especially exemplified in the course of the conduct of accreditation exercises. This is because the extent of provision of current and quality information materials for supporting academic activities of the Universities so as to achieve needed research, teaching, and learning objectives, is closely ascertained. Okogwu and Akidi (2011) observed that the type and qualification possessed by the personnel also has a direct effect on the quantity and quality of information services that are provided. Invariably such staff will ensure that the right quality information resources are provided and this will immensely contribute to the success or failure of the accreditation exercise being conducted in a given institution. The role of the library is crucial because it provides standard and well-equipped resources that will ensure that a university passes an accreditation and there is no gainsaying the fact that an institution will automatically fail if such necessary provisions are not put in place.

Crucial developments in the educational sector led to the NUC policy on accreditation practice in universities. As submitted by Ekpoh and Edet (2017), at some point in 1991, the government was worried about the standard of products coming out of these institutions, particularly due to the absence of quality assurance mechanism put in place. Based on the foregoing, National Universities Commission introduced accreditation to Nigerian Universities. The accreditation of degree programmes is a system which the NUC visualized as a way of evaluating academic programs in Nigerian Universities in order that these institutions might be able to meet the provisions of the approved Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) (Okebukola, 2019). Therefore, accreditation has been used as a formal confirmation indicating that the programmes on offer to students by these universities are nationally recognized for meeting quality assurance and educational requirements which also satisfies regulatory assessments. However, ever since accreditation was introduced to Universities in Nigeria, many challenges have been faced in executing credible accreditation in Nigeria. Some of these problems include staffing issues, and lack of adequate equipment and physical facilities in

different departments in institutions most of which are the result of inadequacy of funding or misplacement of priorities on the part of universities management. Aside from these, many academic libraries are also faced with different challenges from their own end. Osun State University is not excluded from these inherent challenges hence the need for this paper.

According to Ekpoh and Edet (2017), programme accreditation refers to the evaluation of programmes meant to bring about improvement in excellence, and enable higher institutions to compete and attract patronage, thereby providing necessary profile for better result achievement and also provide the basis for government and external donors funding. Ibijola (2014) defines programme accreditation as an evaluation of an institution's offerings against the minimum academic standards and qualities of a certain status. Bowles (2019) explains that Professional accreditation of universities courses of study is intended to ensure that a course of study meets essential criteria in the training and education of its students in the relevant professional discipline, and that graduates from that discipline achieves the professional competencies and learning outcomes necessary for entry into the relevant level of professional practice. The National Universities Commission, NUC (2012) highlighted the 3 main objectives of accreditation to include: to ensure that minimum academic standards are maintained in programmes; to ensure employers of labour, whether locally or internationally, that Nigerian graduates possess necessary competences in requisite areas of specialization; and also to assure the international community that programmes offered in Nigerian universities are of right standard and the graduates are adequate for further studies. In a study, Jack (2014) provided two benefits of accreditation as first, the need to identify the strengths and weaknesses of universities programmes using external-based evaluation and also to ensure quality assurance. Nnorom (2019) observed that NUC programme accreditation has helped to identify deficiencies in programmes offered and these deficiencies have been rectified. The programme accreditation by NUC has also greatly helped in enhancing quality improvements in academic programmes (Obadara & Alake, 2013; Ibijola, 2014). Amaechina (2014) explained that even though there is need to provide quality and adequate students' support services that will improve the quality of learning outcomes, accreditation remains a viable way of ensuring that university authorities provide students' support services, especially since the universities would not want to be denied accreditation.

In their work on the politics of NUC programme accreditation practices, Ekpoh and Edet (2017) studied universities in Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers states, Nigeria. Findings revealed that politics is a critical part of programme accreditation practices in the universities. Politics of accreditation discovered included politics of funding, borrowed facilities, window dressing of facilities, and others. The findings further showed major challenges of programme accreditation as identified by respondents to include inadequate funding, inadequate and obsolete facilities and too much paper documentation. Nnorom (2019) study on NUC programme accreditation practices in universities in South-east geo-political zone, Nigeria, had responses from heads of departments on challenges to NUC programme accreditation to include: inadequate funding for the departments, delay in the release of funds for accreditation by university management, inadequate physical facilities, lack of office accommodation for academic staff, poor library facilities, lack of information and communication technology, among other challenges. In a work, Akuegwu (2014) observed that higher institutions were deficient in infrastructural facilities, such as, classrooms, furniture, books, laboratory equipment and such others, and even those that are available are obsolete.

Brief history of accreditation in Osun State University College of Humanities Library

Osun State University was established after its ratification by the University establishment law passed by the State House of Assembly and the University was thereafter licensed by National Universities Commission on 21st December, 2006. Osun State University was approved and recognized as the 80th University in Nigeria and 30th State University. It started off as a Multi-campus University located in the six geopolitical zones of the State. The College of Humanities and Culture is located in Ikire with 10 undergraduate academic programs and additional five postgraduate programmes added over time. These programs have been accredited as follows:

2010/2011 NUC Accreditation

S/N	Programme	Accreditation
1.	History and International Studies	Full
2.	French and International Studies	Full

3.	English Language and International Studies	Full
4.	Linguistics and Communication	Full

2013/2014 NUC Accreditation

S/N	Programme	Accreditation
1.	History and International Studies	Full
2.	French and International Studies	Full
3.	English Language and International Studies	Full
4.	Linguistics	Full
5.	Communication studies	Full

2016/2017 NUC Accreditation

S/N	Programme	Accreditation
1.	History and International Studies	Full
2.	French and International Studies	Full
3.	English Language and International Studies	Full
4.	Linguistics	Full
5.	Communication studies	Full

2019/2020 NUC Accreditation

S/N	Programme	Accreditation
1.	History and International Studies	Full
2.	French and International Studies	Full

3.	English Language and International Studies	Full
4.	Linguistics	Full
5.	Communication studies	Full

2018 Resource Verification

S/N	Programme	Verification
1.	Yoruba Studies	Verified
2.	Theatre Arts	Verified
3.	Tourism Studies	Verified
4.	Philosophy	Verified
5.	Islamic Studies	Verified
6.	Arabic Studies	Verified

The role of the library during the accreditation exercises has been outstanding despite the challenges often faced. The library has been able to successfully present relevant information resources and facilities to meet up with the standard required for the library to host a successful accreditation exercise. The success of the library is however not independent of the contributions and support of various stakeholders within the University community.

Faculty and management contributions to accreditation

The proximity of the Faculty of Humanities and Culture, Ikire building complex to the College library has been an advantage to the library in carrying out its primary responsibility towards the academic community which is to provide them with timely and relevant access to information resources required to make their research work and that of the students become seamless. The departments through their lecturers function as part of the selection process for acquiring books, e-books, and subscription to journals most especially special programs such as French and International Studies and Arabic & Islamic Studies. Furthermore, several members of

academic staff have contributed to the collection development of the college library through their philanthropic donation of books and facilities. Prominent among these donors include: Professor Mojola (French department); Professor Siyan Oyeweso (History and International Relation Studies department); Dr Sunmade Gbotosho (College Library); and Dr Fasan (English Language department).

Mock accreditations were also conducted by the faculty to evaluate the readiness of the library for accreditation exercises by National Universities Commission. In terms of funding, the University management has consistently provided support to the library through regular provision of funds to the library to acquire new books, subscribe to journals, electronic databases such as JSTOR, SAGE, ERIC, Research for Life and EBSCOHOST. The acquisition of modern ICT and internet facilities has also been funded by the University which has helped the College stand a good stead before, during and after any accreditation exercise.

The E-library and its challenges

The advent of Information and Communication Technology in the last two decades has ensured that all facets of human existence and sectors adjust to its introduction and onward adoption. Telecommunication companies have moved from the era of using land lines for communication to using smart phones, laptops, among others to facilitate seamless communication. The agriculture, health, transportation and education sectors have all been affected by the evolution of ICT. Hence, University libraries globally and in particular Nigeria, which are part of the education sector have gradually begun to adopt the use of ICT tools to help them in fulfilling their objectives. Libraries world over are moving their library into the digital space. Books can now be read and borrowed online. Information resources can now be accessed using different electronic databases from any part of the world using the required username and password.

The situation of Osun State University College library, Ikire is not different from the aforementioned. The library possesses a functional electronic library where users have unrestricted access to e-books, recent and old foreign and local journals through the electronic databases subscribed to by the library with the help of the University management. State of the art ICT tools such as laptops, internet routers, active connection to the University server and active internet subscriptions are available to facilitate timely and easy access to the available

information on offer in the e-library. This section has always been crucial to the success of the accreditation exercises as the accreditors are able to evaluate and confirm presence and real time access to information resources remotely and through the internet by users.

However, the e-library section over the years has also encountered challenges inherent to most public universities in Nigeria. These challenges have been lingering and there are calls for a lasting solution to avoid the dangers it could pose to the success of subsequent accreditation exercises in Osun State University College library, Ikire. The major challenges that face the e-library within the College library are as follows:

- i. **Poor power supply:** The College community entirely depends on the diesel generator for power on a daily basis. This has been the situation for many years now and as a result of the continuous inflation in the economy, such is unsustainable as it only results in the rationalization of the available fuel. This implies that the diesel does not run on an 8 hours basis between 8am and 4pm. This is therefore counterproductive as it affects the productivity of the library especially in the e-library which requires steady power supply to function at full capacity.
- ii. **Fluctuating and unreliable server net-work.:** The bandwidth of the internet available to the College library at times is not strong and as a result it affects the speed of downloads and access to some information resources in the e-library thereby wasting the time of the library user. This could discourage the library user from making use of the e-library subsequently.
- iii. Subscription to sites which may not contain books relevant to the programs on offer in the College of Humanities and Culture, Ikire Campus.
- iv. Non-availability of adequate human resources in the e-library.
- v. **Dependence on the University ICT section:** This is an inherent challenge that needs to be addressed. This is because the continuous dependence of the College library on the ICT section of the University often times put the library at a disadvantage as it has to share the available bandwidth to the entire College community. Sometimes when the University server is down, the College library is in limbo as they are not able to provide services to the library users in the e-library section.

Challenges to hosting a successful accreditation exercise by the College Library

Some of the problems facing the library as it affects accreditation exercises over the years at the College of Humanities and Culture, Ikire are:

- i. **Shortage of library staff:** There is a shortage of staff in the college library and this is partly due to the fact that some staff is being transferred to other departments within the University and have not been replaced. Also, the college librarian does not have a secretary posted from the registry unit who is supposed to carry out all the clerical duties within the library. As such, this often tends to hamper the seamless preparation for accreditation and beyond as the limited staff experience work overload which could affect the successful hosting of accreditation by the College library. The quality assurance department of the University has a great role to play in ensuring that this abnormally is corrected.
- ii. **Lack of a Systems Analyst to manage the college e-library section:** Often times, this has always been the albatross of many public Universities especially in the library as the round pegs are placed in the square hole. The failure of the University community to engage the services of a qualified Systems Analyst on a full-time appointment hampers the functionality of the e-library as there is no expert to provide advice and help to successfully manage the facilities and resources within the library.
- iii. The fire brigade approach of the University when it comes to preparation for accreditation often times affects the accreditation. Funds are released late at times and in some instances meagre funds are released to that effect. This has often put the limited library staff under unnecessary stress during the run-in to the accreditation exercises.
- iv. Funding of the College library over the years have been deemed to be inadequate as meagre funds released to purchase information resources affects the quantity and quality of resources to be acquired.
- v. **Vehicle for the College Library:** Due to the multi campus system that the University operates, the College library tends to be immensely hampered by the need to constantly be in touch with the main campus in Osogbo during the preparatory stages of the accreditation. During these periods, meetings are scheduled at the main campus

and this requires the presence of the College librarian to attend. Due to these, the absence of a vehicle for the College library hampers staff participation in these meetings. This is often detrimental to the successful planning and preparation for the successful hosting of accreditation exercises.

Conclusion

Programme accreditation in universities is intended to promote institutional culture of quality assurance and self-analysis by encouraging universities to develop strong internal quality assurance mechanism. It is therefore important for these universities including Osun State University to strictly imbibe the vision and mission of NUC on university accreditation.

Recommendation

In order for Osun State University to strictly imbibe the vision and mission of NUC on University accreditation, and as well overcome her inherent challenges, stakeholders including the University management and college library, the following are recommended:

1. Need to advocate for improved budgetary allocation. The college library especially is positioned to continuously advocate for adequate provision of needed library facilities. It is best to develop a library that grows consistently in maintaining best practices. Also, the University management should see the library as the heartbeat of the institution and a focal point for the successful hosting of accreditation exercises. This will help inform their decision to improve the funding to the library.
2. Enhancing proper internal quality assurance mechanisms. This affects every aspect of library services provision including engaging the services of qualified human resources on a permanent basis. These human resources include: Librarians, library assistants, library officers, System Analysts, college library secretary. It involves adopting periodic staff training policy. This is necessary to ensure that staff acquires current and innovative ideas to bring to bear on their work. It also involves acquiring current information resources and quality equipment.
3. Engage in early preparation for NUC accreditation exercise. Such preparation can be as early as the end of the previous accreditation exercise to allow for ample time to prepare

without stress and room for non-negligible errors. It is best to rectify deficiencies identified in the course of an accreditation exercise.

4. Provide back-up generator or solar power supply to enhance uninterrupted power supply provision of access to information resources in the college library and by extension the e-library.
5. Establish an ICT section within the library independent of the University ICT unit. This will help the college library advance at its own pace and provide unhindered internet access to facilitate services within the library.
6. Vehicle should be provided to the college library to ensure seamless preparation for accreditation exercises and after.

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