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Flora Ifeoma Okogwu
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State Nigeria, floraokogwu@gmail.com

Juliana Obiageri Akidi
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria, obyakidij@yahoo.co.uk

The Role of University Libraries in Accreditation of Academic Programmes: Challenges and Prospects

Flora Ifeoma Okogwu[1] and Juliana Obiageri Akidi[2].
[1]Ebonyi State University Library, Abakaliki
PMB 053, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria
Email:floraokogwu@gmail.com; flora.okogwu@ebsu.edu.ng
[2]Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria
Email: obyakidij@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

The National Universities Commission, the supervisory body of all Universities in Nigeria assesses the universities for standards and quality assurance of programmes on regular basis. The paper examined how accreditations are carried out by the National Universities Commission and the accreditation roles of the university libraries were examined. The study also unveiled the challenges of accreditation in University Libraries which include late notification of forthcoming accreditation, financial constraint, out datedness of information resources, and understaff. The study suggested possible ways out of these challenges which include timely notification of date of accreditation, provision of finance to enable the library acquire current information resources and the like.

Keywords: Accreditation, University Libraries, National Universities Commission (NUC), Challenges, Prospects.

Introduction

Universities are tertiary institutions with the mission of conducting demand-driven research, awarding degrees, and generating and disseminating information, skills, and competencies at the highest educational levels. Universities are higher education institutions dedicated to teaching, research, and learning. The overarching goal of universities in any country is to create the ideal environment for the training of a skilled and competent workforce for various developmental and policy-making roles in society.

According to Archibong (2010), the Nigerian tertiary education system hit its lowest in terms of quality in the 1980's. The system was characterized by gross underfunding, infrastructural decay, brain drain, increased enrolment and proliferation of universities, observed Archibong, (2010) as cited in Okogwu and Akidi (2011).

The existence of these problems culminated in the production of poor quality graduates and the non-acceptance of Nigerian university degrees by some nations. In response to the challenge of enhancing quality, the then Nigerian military leadership promulgated Decree No. 16 of 1985. Section 10 of the amended Decree, now known as Section 4 (m) of the National Universities Commission (NUC) Amended Decree No. 49 of 1998, empowered the Commission to establish Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for all Nigerian universities and accredit their degrees and other academic awards (Archibong, 2010).

Presently, the country has 195 approved universities, including 44 federal universities, 52 state universities, and 99 private universities (NUC, 2021) which are supervised by the National University Commission (NUC). These universities follow a set of norms and regulations

established by the National Universities Commission (NUC). Accreditation is primarily concerned with quality and standards. It can be used to denote an accrediting agency's official approval of an accredited school following a successful assessment process (Hornby, 2001).

Accreditation is a self-study and external quality evaluation procedure used in higher education to examine an institution's and/or programs for quality standards and the need for improvement. The procedure is intended to evaluate if an institution has met or exceeded established accreditation standards (established by an external organization such as the government, a national quality assurance agency, or a professional association), as well as whether it is accomplishing its mission and stated goals. A self-evaluation, peer assessment, and a site visit are frequently included in the process. As a result, certification should give a means of recognizing certain levels of performance, quality, and integrity that instill confidence in the public and the broad educational community.

It is worth noting that the governance structure, staff ratio and mix, philosophy, goal and purpose statements, library facilities, curriculum, funding, physical facilities, and student numbers are just a few of the many characteristics that comprise the checklist of various accreditations in Nigerian universities.

Each of these criteria is usually assigned a set of values that must be strictly followed. **The** Commission is charged with the following responsibilities:

1. all academic programs offered by Nigerian universities must be approved.

2. approving the establishment of all higher education institutions that provide degree programs at Nigerian universities;

3. ensure that all academic programs provided in Nigerian universities are of high quality;

4. ensure that all academic programs offered by Nigerian universities are of high quality; and

5. serve as a conduit for all external support to Nigerian institutions.

According to the National Universities Commission (2014), an academic program's accreditation status can be determined at one of three levels:

1. Full Accreditation: this is usually granted to any other academic program that has satisfied the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS). Full accreditation is granted for a period of six (6) academic sessions with a mid-term appraisal after three (3) years. A re-accreditation visit is usually scheduled after the six academic sessions.

2. Interim Accreditation: This is given to any academic program that has minor flaws that must be addressed within a certain time frame. It is authorized for two (2) academic sessions only, after which the program is automatically required for re-visitation.

3. Denial of Accreditation: Any program that has failed to meet the established Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) will be denied accreditation (NUC 2021).

Areas Accessed During Accreditation

The major six areas with their sub units assessed and scores awarded in order to attract full accreditation, interim and/or denied accreditation as the case may be, are as follows.

1. Academic content: This has the philosophy and objectives of the academic content, curriculum, admissions, academic regulations, tests and examinations, evaluation of students' work, practical/project work, student course evaluation, and external examination system.

2. Staffing: In this case, we have a staff/student ratio, a staff mix by rank, qualifications, and competence. Administration, non-teaching staff, staff development.

3. Physical facilities: This includes laboratories, space, equipment etc. Also, in classrooms, they consider the space and equipment. The office accommodation is considered in terms of safety and environmental impact.

4. Funding: The NUC considers the adequacy of funds for the programme to be assessed.

5. Library: The NUC team considers the quality of the holdings and currency of the information materials in stock in the library.

6. Employer's rating. How are the graduates of the university rated in terms of job opportunities? Where are they employed? (NUC, 1999).

Accreditation roles of the University Libraries

The library played an important role in ensuring that the institution passed a successful accreditation. To achieve this, the university libraries ensure the provision of facilities, services, and information resources that are relevant to supporting the teaching, research, and learning activities of their parent institutions. Also, the library ensures that users have access to regular

and timely information in the use of the library's resources. The library provides an adequate number of qualified staff with appropriate education qualifications and experience in library services to achieve the vision and mission of the institution.

The university libraries in Nigeria also provide adequate library contents to support the nature, level, and extent of the institution's many programs. In addition, the libraries maintained readily accessible and well-organized collections for all students, professors, administrative, and research staff. Actions were performed in accordance with accreditation panel recommendations, with a focus on planning, past evaluation findings, information resource utilization, and staff and student involvement and collaboration in collection development. Every program provided at the university has its own collection of books, journals, and other electronic resources. The library focused not only on input metrics like book collection strengths and weaknesses, but also on other information resources and services like staffing and library services.

Hours of operation, technical services, public services, resource allocation, and other areas of library operations were all well-managed. Because the provision and use of information is so important to librarians, they were heavily involved in the accreditation process.

Library holdings: The library is required to present to the accrediting team a compiled list of library holdings in each of the university's disciplines or programme, together with bibliographic information for each. These lists are printed and officially stamped by the University Librarian as an authentication of the documents being provided to them. In addition to the printed copies of the library holdings, an electronic version of the library holdings are provided to the team of accreditation. The goal is for the accreditation team to have a better understanding of the

inventory, with a focus on relevancy, quantity, and currency. The university librarian presents this list to every team that comes for a particular programme in order to reassure them of the quality and up-to-datedness of the library's holdings for the programmes under accreditation.

Display of new arrivals: The most recent books are displayed in the new arrival display racks at the circulation unit of the library. The accreditation team is taken to the new arrival display rack to inspect new arrivals in a given programme undergoing accreditation. Over the years, the library has found this procedure to be extremely valuable because it allows the accreditation team to do on-the-spot checks on some recent titles that the library claims to possess.

Challenges of Accreditation

In the university system, accreditation of programmes attracts a lot of anxiety from the whole community, especially the library that serves as the heart of the institution. The library, as a service institution for all the programmes in the university, is challenged in many ways. They include:

Late Notice: Accreditation preparation takes time. While the faculties and departments are busy preparing for accreditation, the library does not receive timely notification of approaching accreditation from the faculties. This is worst experienced when a copy of the previous report of the accreditation was not given to the library to enable them to know the time, period and areas of shortfalls or deficiencies in the library for improvement in preparation for the next accreditation.

Financial Constraint: Due to financial constraints, libraries do not acquire resources as frequently as they should. Because no university administration wants its institution to lose accreditation, the accreditation period provides an opportunity to update and improve the institution's library collections. Okiy (2005), as cited in Folurunsho and Urhiewhu (2016), noted that of all the different types of libraries in Nigeria, only university libraries have a clearly defined policy of funding, because they are allocated 10% of the recurrent annual budget of their parent institutions. However, it is regrettable that such funds are not forthcoming as most university administrators tend to flout that decision (Okiy, 2005; Yetunde, 2008).

Collection: One of the problems encountered by university libraries in Nigeria is the collection of the library. The accreditation exercise exposes the out-of-dateness of information resources in the library. Often, university libraries acquire library resources that are not recent in various programmes. Often, many university libraries rely on donations, gifts and or exchanges to ensure books are available for presentation. Book collections, as well as their electronic analogues, convey a university's commitment, seriousness of purpose, and intellectual investment at a look. Many university libraries, regrettably, cannot boast of the most recent titles in all fields of study that their collections represent and cover. The management of many universities did not see libraries as an important component of the institution that assisted in their survival until accreditation was slated. The situation is alarming because many librarians are blamed for their inability to obtain current books needed to enrich library stocks, and when books are acquired, they are done haphazardly, not because the books are essential to academic programs, but simply to pass accreditation and impress the accreditation team.

Staffing: Personnel are one of the aspects that determine a university's success during the accrediting process. Many academic libraries are understaffed nowadays, and basic skills required for the effective operation of a conventional academic library are lacking. Many universities have "borrowed mercenaries" on display in their academic libraries in the twenty-first century. If not addressed, this could mark the end of effective library operations, since key stakeholders may not see the value in hiring permanent and skilled people for their university libraries. Recruiting, teaching, and maintaining librarians, as well as the need to recruit and retain competent library leadership, are key issues for the future. Despite the fact that retirements appear to be on the rise, fewer librarians are entering the profession, particularly at academic libraries. It is a challenge for the profession to provide the education of new librarians and the reeducation of existing librarians with skills and knowledge to support new jobs in the digital information era, particularly roles involving teaching and library promotion. Low pay and a lack of diversity in the profession were also important subtopics, which were frequently identified as issues that required collective action.

Prospects

Librarians should continue to fight for increased university financing, but vice chancellors should respect the 10% allocation for library development and leave the librarians to spend the money on library development without undue intervention.

The Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria, which is the supervisory body for registered librarians in Nigeria, needs to demonstrate its importance by lobbying for an enforceable statute that guarantees and protects the 10% allocation for library development.

University management should make efforts to provide the stipulated 10% of the recurrent expenditure of the university's annual budget for the development of the university libraries for the acquisition of current and up-to-date library resources in preparation for accreditation.

In library and information services, the use of technology should be fully investigated and used. This is unavoidable due to the phenomenon of the information explosion, rising awareness of information's value, and strong demand for it.

Librarians, who are not experienced in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), should be employed and those that are not skilled in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) should be trained in order to be more relevant and be in a better position to provide information services. This is needed on the ground that there has been a shift from traditional information services to electronic services in all information services available in the library.

The University management should notify the library of the next accreditation exercise on time and also provide the library with a report of the previous accreditation to enable the library analyze and improve on the areas of deficiencies in the library as observed in the report.

Also, the university management should endeavor to recruit competent and qualified librarians who will ensure effective library service delivery. This is required in the twenty-first century, when library services have shifted from traditional to electronic and technology-driven.

Conclusion

University libraries in Nigeria have been shown to be important not only throughout the accreditation process, but also in pushing research forward by providing timely information and cutting-edge library services that keep them relevant in their drive to meet the information demands of their customers. It has been observed that university libraries are given attention by the university management only when another accreditation exercise is around the corner. This should be discouraged and it is suggested that university management should give adequate attention to the library to make it more relevant at all times, not only during accreditation periods. Adequate and early provision of funds is very essential to enable the university libraries to prepare for the next accreditation in time to forestall all the agitations associated with late preparation. This will enable the university libraries plan ahead of the next accreditation and improve on the areas of weakness as observed in the last accreditation report.

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