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INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES ACCREDITATION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The study examined instruments and procedures for academic programmes accreditation in Nigerian Universities. Two hundred and sixty-seven (267) respondents comprised of Directors of Academic Planning, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academics) and Deans of Faculties were selected from Nigeria Universities using Taro Yamen Formular. The research instrument that was used for data collection was Instruments and Procedures for Academic Programmes Accreditation Questionnaire tagged “(IPAPAQ)” ($r = 0.68$) and document analysis released by the appropriate agency. Two research questions were postulated and data were analysed using mean score and rank order statistical tool. Results showed that the respondents are aware that Self Study Form (SSF), Bench Mark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS), Programme Evaluation Form (PEF), and Accreditation Panel Report Form (APRF) are instruments employed by the NUC for Programme Accreditation exercises as their mean scores (2.91, 2.89, 2.44, 2.39, 2.42) are more than the criterion mean score (2.50). The results also confirmed that the process, timing and notices for accreditation are timely and convenient as the mean scores (2.53, 2.63, 2.68, 2.35, 3.00) are greater than the criterion mean score (2.50). Therefore, the study recommended that National Universities Commission should continue to formulate the rules, standards and conditions governing assessment and academic accreditation, as well as the procedures which guarantee their application in the various academic institutions.

Keywords: Instruments, Procedures, Academic Programmes, Accreditation, Universities

Introduction

In the year preceding 1989, accreditation of programmes in Nigerian Universities System (NUS) was yet to be established despite the fact that the Federal Government of Nigeria through section 10 of Act No 16 of 1985, incorporated as section 4(m) of National Universities Commission (NUC) amended Act No. 49 of 1988 empowered the NUC to lay down Minimum Academic

Standards (MAS) for universities in the Federation and to accredit their degrees and other academic awards (Okojie, 2008).

The National Universities Commission (NUC) complied with the provisions of the Act, 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 Science, Law, Medicine and Dentistry, Management Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Sciences, Social Sciences and Veterinary Medicine. As the need arises, later on Minimum Academic Standards were developed for additional programmes.

The importance and development of the Minimum Academic Standards and their subsequent approval provided the basis for accreditation of all degree programmes taught in Nigerian Universities (Ijeoma and Osagie, 2005). The MAS thus serve as reference documents for the accreditation of programmes in the Nigerian University System. The development of MAS in 1989 made the NUC work out the procedure for the accreditation exercise with the production of the following documents: Manual for accreditation procedures for academic programmes in Nigeria Universities, Self-Study Form (NUC/SSF), Programme Evaluation Form (NUC/PEF), Accreditation Panel Report Form (NUC/APRF), Accreditation Re-Visitation Form (NUC/ARVF) and Bench Mark Minimum Academic Standards Document (BMAS).

Consequently, there are two groups of institutions and agencies that are empowered by law to conduct programme accreditation. The first is the NUC, and the second constitutes the professional bodies and registration council. The second group deals with specialized accreditation which ensures that products from professional programme comply with specified output behaviour for practice. For example, the Medical and Dental council of Nigeria (MDCN) accredits NUC approved medical programme in order to ensure that medical graduates are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to practice medicine in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Also, the Council for the Registration of Engineers (COREN), which accredit engineering programmes. The council for legal Education is responsible for law programmes. There are sixteen such professional bodies and registration councils that conduct specialized accreditation for NUC approved programmes and are empowered by legislation to conduct accreditation. The accreditation of the professional bodies are needed otherwise the graduates of such programme may not be registered for practice (Okebukola and Saliu 2006).

The NUC assumes responsibility for accreditation of all programmes offered in Nigerian Universities-while the professional bodies on specialized accreditation bodies responsibility of a quarter of the programmes. The NUC and the professional bodies are planning to align both accreditation processes to avoid the over load visits on the universities. This alignment of the accreditation process in turns would be done during a singly rather than a dual visit. In lieu of the above mentioned, answers would be provided to the following research questions:

1. What are the instruments employed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for the accreditation of programmes in Nigerian Universities?

2. What are the procedures adopted by National Universities Commission (NUC) in the accreditation of programmes in Nigerian universities?

Literature Review

The evaluation of academic programmes in Nigeria Universities having met the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standards documents (MAS) is done through accreditation of degree and other academic programmes (Saliu, 2006). However, the maiden edition of accreditation of programmes in Nigerian Universities was conducted in 1990 shortly after the Minimum Academic Standards were developed for all programmes existing in Nigeria Universities at that time. It was recorded that the exercise was unparalleled in the African continent as it was the first of its kind in this part of the globe. The exercise was organized and conducted through the platform provided by the National Universities Commission (NUC) with 100% indigenous resource persons. The exercise resulted to the opportunity for the nation to have data-backed information on the state of education delivery in Nigerian Universities.

In 1999/2000, precisely ten years after, a second comprehensive accreditation exercise of academic programmes in Nigeria Universities was conducted. This was followed in 2002 with the accreditation of those programmes that earned denied accreditation status in 1999/2000. The Accreditation of Programmes of first generation private universities was conducted in 2004, while newly matured programmes were evaluated at the beginning of 2005. In November, 2005, 1,343 academic programmes in 48 universities were evaluated for accreditation.

The National Universities Commission in its progressive quality assurance mandate embarked on the accreditation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and MBA programmes in June, 2006. It was the first time ODL and MBA programmes would be accredited in the history of Nigerian Universities. The experience garnered with the MBA accreditation, which was a pilot exercise will definitely come in handy in the eventual accreditation of postgraduate programmes in Nigerian Universities. Having risen to the challenges of the status 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 programmes are continuously maturing for accreditation for reasons such as fulfillment of required validity period for their accreditation status or request for re-visitation because they had earned interim or denied accreditation status in a previous visit or that they are just maturing for accreditation.

The awareness of the dynamics of the society and the universities as the store house of knowledge are evolving new academic programmes and NUC in turn is rising to the challenge of reviewing existing curriculum and setting standards for new programme that have evolved in the universities to meet the needs and aspirations of the changing society by developing a new set of outcome-based minimum benchmark statements to provide the framework for curriculum revision in 2001. Okebukola, Adedipe, Uvah, (2005), carried out a National Needs Assessment/Survey as a preliminary step in the curriculum review process, the survey aimed at identifying skills/subjects– specific knowledge gaps in the existing delivery of university

education which makes the Nigerian Universities graduates not to fit effectively into the world of work. The teams of researchers were seasoned professors in their areas of specialization. The findings were specific to various disciplines and professions but some were reflected in all, such as weak foundation in English and student population and increasing laxity/generosity/liberalism in admission requirements; High student population without commensurate structural, infrastructural and teaching/learning/research facility base, thus overstressing carrying capacity and deficient libraries in terms of currency, number of books and journals/electronic support facilities (Information Communication Technology) and others.

The findings above formed the basis for the objective of the comprehensive curriculum review to accommodate, not only the distinctive expansion in the frontier of knowledge in all academic disciplines but the impact of information and communication technology on teaching and learning as well as competitiveness engendered by globalization. Thereafter, the set benchmark statements and revised minimum academic standards were merged during the curriculum review exercise in 2004 culminating into Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for each academic discipline. The BMAS has taken into consideration changes and innovations that have occurred in the knowledge industry especially in the age of globalization. The new trends reflected in the BMAS for the improvement in the quality of university education include the following among others:

- Introduction of peace studies and conflict resolution as well as entrepreneurial studies for all Nigerian university students;
- Deletion of outdated topics and the inclusion of current topics in the curriculum;
- Adoption of minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 1.5.
- New teacher/student ratios in the disciplines to reflect modern (particularly technological) trends; compulsory practical studies.

The draft BMAS will become public documents for use in the Nigerian university system as soon as the documents are approved by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) Okebukola, Adedipe, Uvuh, (2005). A programme entry into the accreditation process depends on the approval by the NUC. The approval is preceded by a feasibility study and gravity of assent in principle by the senate of the university at which the programme is to be set up. Subsequently, resource verification is carried out by the NUC which, if successfully completed, it results in the approval of the programme by the NUC. A programme must run for two academic years before it is deemed mature for accreditation. The mature programmes, programmes with expired accreditation certificates, programmes denied accreditation and had remedied the deficiencies, are presented to the NUC. The received lists of programmes for accreditation sent to the NUC from the universities and processed Self-Study forms (SSF) are forwarded to the universities for completion. The Self-Study form (SSF) allows the university to assess their programme in terms of minimum academic standards and to effect last minute corrective measures. The completed SSF are returned to the NUC as working documents for the accreditation panels.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. Two hundred and sixty-seven (267) respondents comprised of Directors of Academic Planning, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academics) and Deans of Faculties were selected from Nigeria Universities using Taro Yamen Formular. The research instrument that was used in gleaning the field data was Instruments and Procedures for Academic Programmes Accreditation Questionnaire tagged “(IPAPAQ)” ($r = 0.68$) and document analysis released by the appropriate agency. Two research questions were postulated and data were analysed using rank order and mean score statistical tool, where the criterion mean is 2.50.

Data Analysis

The results of the data analysed are presented below.

Research Question 1

What are the instruments employed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for the accreditation of programmes in Nigerian Universities?

Table 1: Mean Score Analyses Showing the Instruments Employed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for the Accreditation of Programmes in Nigerian Universities

S/No	Questionnaire Items	\bar{x}	Rank Order
1.	The Self Study Form (SSF) is an instrument employed for accreditation.	2.91	1 st
2.	Programme Evaluation Form (PEF) is one of the instruments employed for accreditation.	2.89	2 nd
3.	The Accreditation Panel Report Form (APRF) conforms to present day realities in evaluation.	2.44	3 rd
4.	Manual of Accreditation Procedure (MAP) is an accreditation instruments.	2.39	5 th
5.	Bench Mark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) is an instrument employed by NUC for Accreditation.	2.42	4 th
	Aggregate	2.61	

N= 267

Table 1 above showed that all the questionnaire items listed (items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) have mean scores above the criterion (cut off) mean score of 2.50. The results confirmed that the respondents are aware that Self Study Form (SSF), Bench Mark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS), Programme Evaluation Form (PEF), and Accreditation Panel Report Form (APRF) are instruments employed by the NUC for Programme Accreditation exercises. Programme Evaluation Form (PEF) conforms to present day realities in the evaluation of programmes and

the challenges faced in completing the Manual of Accreditation Procedure (MAP) had the least mean score (2.39) and ranked last among the variables.

Research Question 2

What are the procedures adopted by National Universities Commission (NUC) in the accreditation of programmes in Nigerian universities?

Table 2: Mean Score Analyses Showing the Procedures Adopted by National Universities Commission (NUC) in the Accreditation of Programmes in Nigerian Universities

S/No	Questionnaire Items	\bar{x}	Rank Order
6.	The process, timing and notices for Accreditation are convenient.	2.53	4 th
7.	Visitation Panel members are often adequately suited to perform their functions.	2.63	3 rd
8.	The criteria for scoring performances on accreditation exercise is clearly defined/communicated.	2.68	2 nd
9.	Your University has experienced 'Denied' Accreditation status for some of your programmes.	2.35	5 th
10.	'Denied' Accreditation status influences admission of students into that Programme.	3.00	1 st
	Aggregate Mean	2.57	

N= 267

Table 2 above showed that the mean scores of the entire questionnaire items (6, 7, 8, 9, and 10) are above the criterion (cut off) mean score of 2.50. Therefore, the position as expressed in these items was accepted as correct by majority of the respondents. The results also confirmed that the process, timing and notices for accreditation are timely and convenient. Criteria for scoring performance on accreditation exercise are clearly defined and communicated and Panel members are often adequately selected to perform their function. Consequently, this explains that the procedures employed by the NUC for accreditation of programmes in the Nigerian Universities is accepted.

Discussion of Finding

The research question 1 says: What are the instruments employed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for the accreditation of programmes in Nigerian Universities? It was discovered that the Self Study Form (SSF), Programme Evaluation Form (PEF), Accreditation Panel Report Form (APRF), Manual of Accreditation Procedures (MAP) and Bench Mark Academic standards (BMAS) were among the instruments employed by the National

Universities Commission (NUC) in accreditation of programmes in Nigerian Universities. This finding is in agreement with Nwana (2008) who said that during the accreditation exercise, members of the team working under the directives of the leader (Chairman) fill accreditation instruments (PEF and APRF). The programme Evaluation Form (PEF) is filled per programme visited by all the members of the panel, while the Accreditation Panel Report Form is filled by the Chairman of the Panel for each programme, the APRF is a summary of the Panel' report per programme. SSF are already submitted to the panel on arrival which serves as a working document. Heads of Departments and Faculty-based administration staff are kept on their toes to provide information, answers, to facilitate the exercise. He further pointed out that at the end of the accreditation visitation, the team drafts and produces a final report (Accreditation panel Report Form – APRF) regarding its major findings and recommendations. This report is read to the joint wrap-up or Exit meeting of the visitation team and the representatives of the respective faculty/college/unit visited, as well as the Vice-Chancellor of the university who chairs the wrap up session.

The research question 2 says: What are the procedures adopted by National Universities Commission (NUC) in the accreditation of programmes in Nigerian universities? It was discovered according to Saliu (2007) that the procedures employed by the National Universities Commission for accreditation of programmes includes that the process, timing and notices for accreditation are timely and convenient, visitation panel members are often adequately suited to perform their functions, criteria for scoring performance on accreditation exercise are clearly defined and communicated to the panel members through coordination meeting; there are NUC consultancy services available for universities on how to remedy deficiencies observed by accreditation panel, and denied accreditation status in a programme affect admission of students into that programme.

The adoption of procedures by NUC is necessary for the success of any accreditation exercise. This corroborates Nwana (2008) who stated that prior to the arrival of the Accreditation Teams, the Universities are duly informed or alerted of the exercise and comprehensively informed of the requirements of the exercise as well as required to prepare the (SSF) which contains administrative and academic information of the university and the programme in sections A and B respectively. The Accreditation teams arrives the institutions, schedule for a courtesy call on the Vice-Chancellor, led by the Academic Planning Director (DAP) and Dean of the Faculty. The Panel then settles down in an agreed working room to deal with documents assembled for the exercise, physical inspections of facilities, equipment, interaction with staff and students etc.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Universities programme accreditation is a way of examining the state of the institution in relation to where it ought to be. It is a quality assurance process and primary means by which universities and programmes assure quality to students and the public. Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or programme meets at least minimal standards for its faculty, curriculum, student services and libraries. Accredited status is conveyed only if

institutions and programmes provide evidence of fiscal stability through the application of proper instruments and procedures.

Based on the aforementioned, the study recommends that:

- There should be continuous use and review as the nation's economic need arise for the following instruments namely, Self Study Form (SSF), Programme Evaluation Form (PEF), Accreditation Panel Report form (APRF), Manual of Accreditation Procedures (MAP) and Bench Mark Minimum Academic standards (BMAS) employed by that National Universities Commission (NUC) for accreditation of programmes in the Nigerian Universities.
- The Commission should reinstate the coordination meeting for Chairmen and panel members of accreditation team where procedures/criteria for scoring performance on accreditation exercise are clearly defined, and dully communicated to them to avoid issues of petitions from the universities arising from the accreditation exercises.

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