

## ACCREDITATION EXERCISE AS A QUALITY ASSURANCE INSTRUMENT IN THE MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE RIVERS OF NIGERIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Increasingly, university institution managers world-wide are seeking for more effective tools for managing their institutions in manners that would demonstrate application of common best practices and hence, gain higher ratings on performance standards. Accreditation exercises have therefore been conceived and are being implemented in Nigerian universities to maintain standards and assure quality in service delivery. This paper examined how far accreditation exercises in universities in Rivers State have contributed to the achievement of this feat and the challenges facing it. The survey involved all the Deans and heads of academic departments in federal and state universities in three sampled universities in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised 182 (25 HoDs and 157 Deans). One self-designed instrument titled Accreditation Exercise as a Quality Assurance Instrument Questionnaire (AEQAIQ). Face and content validities were ensured by experts. The reliability coefficient of 0.81 was established with the help of Cronbach Alpha. The data generated was analysed using mean statistics and independent sample t-test. The result revealed that accreditation exercises impacted moderately on curriculum harmonization, the provision of staff offices, libraries and the general institutional environment. The exercises however have minimal impact on the provision of equipments in laboratories and workshops. Poor funding, poor institutional data base and some lack of commitment to standards by university proprietors were identified as some of the challenges to achieving quality assurance from accreditation exercises. It was concluded that universities in the Rivers State of Nigeria have not sufficiently capitalized on their routine accreditation exercises to adequately assure quality in the delivery and management of university education. The need for university managers to be more pro-active in accreditation exercises and establish internal quality assurance framework to achieve quality in the management of these universities were recommended.*

**KEYWORDS:** Accreditation Exercise, Quality Assurance, Management of Universities

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## INTRODUCTION

History has it that knowledge is power. It has been identified as a key to future growth and social cohesion. Therefore the aim of every society worldwide is to provide a qualitative knowledge based education that would drive the economy of the nation to a greater height. Education has a critical impact on socio-economic, cultural and political development of a nation. It is the only industry that develops man by developing his talents/potentials. Undoubtedly for any nation to survive and grow technologically its educational system would require highly skilled and competent teaching personal, material, physical resources and an enabling environment for the achievement of its goal and objectives as stipulated in its educational policy. On the other hand an ineffective educational system without standard and

qualitative resources incurs wastage of both human, material resources and lack of national development as well as brain drain.

University education is a priority essential for the development of required skilled manpower that drives the economy of a nation. This is because it is only university education that produces highly skilled manpower that is the wealth of a nation. The world economy had changed and is still changing as knowledge supplies the capital as a resource of present, future and wealth development of a nation. As knowledge becomes more and more important so does higher education. As a result, the quality of knowledge generated through university education should be such that can address the challenge of underdevelopment and competitiveness of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

According to Fagelind and Saha in Nwideeduh (2003) contemporary economists are of the view that some element and indices of economic growth are common to the entire developing world. Among these elements are technological change, invention through research, innovations, entrepreneurial spirit and human capital which is a special variety of capital that drives the aforementioned resources. This is based on the premise that economic development is seen as the provision of trained and skilled manpower that would operate the financial and other material resources that move the economy ahead. It is therefore imperative that university institutions that supply these skilled manpower that drives the economy should be monitored, evaluated from time to time in their programmes, facilities and other resources available to students for quality assurance. This will equally ascertain that certificate of competence and credibility presented to students are in congruent with the standard requirement of expectations from the universities. In support of this, the input-output model production function which was developed by Combs (1968) in education maintained that the quality and quantity of resources put into production process determine not just the quantity but also the quality output that comes out of production process. This is also true of the university education since the resources put into it will determine the general output of the quality of human resources.

According to the Nigerian National Policy on education (FRN 2014) the functions of university education are anchored on teaching and research and community service which is knowledge based. However, the objectives are highlighted as follows in section 8 sub section 04-69.

- University education shall make optimum contribution to National development by
  - (a) Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation,
  - (b) Making professional course content to reflect our national requirements,
  - (c) Making all students, as part of a general programme of all - round improvement in university education, to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.
- University research shall be relevant to the nation's developmental goals. In this regard, universities shall be encouraged to disseminate their reservedly results to both government and industries.

- University teaching shall seek to inculcate community spirit in the students through projects and action research.
  - Voluntary agencies, individuals and groups shall be allowed to establish universities provided they comply with minimum standard laid down by the federal government.
- (a) Technically based professional courses in the universities shall have, as components, exposure to relevant future working environment.
- (b) It is imperative that teachers in professional fields have relevant industrial and professional experiences.
- A greater proportion of expenditure on university education shall be devoted to science and technology
- (c) Not less than 60% of places shall be allocated to science and science oriented courses in the conventional universities and not less than 80% in the university of technology.

These are the objectives of university education as endorsed by the Federal Republic of Nigeria in its National Policy on Education. However, each university has a road map, mission statement, vision and strategies on how to actualize these goals under the strict guideline as promulgated into law by Federal Republic of Nigeria.

### **Concept, Purpose and Practices of Accreditation in Nigeria**

Accreditation is a process of ensuring that quality standards are maintained. According to www 50 state corn-college resource, accreditation is a process of validation in which colleges, universities, other institutions of higher learning are evaluated. It is a process by which university institutions are evaluated to assess the quality of educational delivery in the universities. With this exercise, quality and standards are examined, scrutinized to ensure that quality of educational delivery, programme and other educational resources are available in the right proportion or ratio with the student population. Academic accreditation is a type of quality assurance process under which services and operations of educational institutions and programmes are evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards are met. If standards are met, accredited states are granted by the appropriate agency (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/noike/1>).

It is like a comprehensive audit of what goes on in the university. It measures quality of an institution to ascertain its credibility. It is mainly for quality assurance and quality improvement. It is an official approval which can only be granted by an accrediting agency to show that quality standard is maintained.

In Nigeria, the quality assurance function is conducted by National Universities Commission for all the universities. This professional body called (NUC) assesses all the programmes, infrastructure human and material resources availability in the university. The purpose of this is mainly to ensure that quality and standards are maintained and to ensure that competence of the output of human resource measure up to defined standard. This process also acts as a motivating factor for the universities to be cautious in their educational service delivery. This is because accreditation is an event in the universities in Nigeria which can take place at different stages of programme, for example -.verification of programmes, interim accreditations, denial or re-visitation and earned/full accreditation. With these every member

of staff especially the Deans of facilities and the Heads of Department would be up and about to make sure that everything is put in place in order to be awarded a full accreditation status. The result of accreditation is also based on the quality and quantity of educational resources availability to the student ratio.

With the result of accreditation the members of NUC (accreditation body) meet with the administrators and also do a random sampling of students and members of staff to be interviewed, have personal observation of the quality of staff, infrastructure students' competency through interview. The outcome of the whole exercise is to ensure quality assurance and management improvement for quality educational delivery.

### **Assuring Quality in University Management Process**

The system theory in management encourages management to perceive the internal and external environmental factors as an integrated whole. With this the managers view all the educational resources and environmental factors as linkages to form an integrated whole. It is necessary for the university administrators to collaborate with the external administrators outside or within the boundary where the university is established. The focus should be mainly on quality assurance. This is because when there is no peace and harmonious Co-existence between the university and its boundary it inevitably affects the quality of teaching staff and other resources, and even the students. Quality assurance in Nigerian universities especially in Rivers State of Nigeria has become an agenda that gives serious concern to both stakeholders in the university education and members of the public.

### **Statement of the Problem**

NUC adopts very strict mechanism in the accreditation exercises of university programmes and other resources requirement- in order to ensure that quality assurance is maintained in the universities in Nigeria. Despite this effort by NUC, the actualization of quality assurance seems to be a mirage as most corporate bodies, companies, multinationals are complaining bitterly about the graduates that are being chunked out every year in the universities in the Rivers State of Nigeria. Most of them do not seem to fit into the labour market even when they are being re-trained on the job training. Most companies complain that most present day university graduates hardly have the competence to handle responsibility when hired. They seem not to have innovative and entrepreneurial skills to even start and manage their own business. Prior to this period, Nigerian graduates were sought after in the whole world. In view of these experiences stakeholders of the educational system are apprehensive of graduates of our universities in the Rivers State since they can hardly be competitive to meet internationally accepted standards of quality competence and excellence. With this, the researcher is bordered whether quality assurance is assured through accreditation exercises in universities in Rivers State.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The study investigated the prospect of achieving quality assurance through accreditation in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

- (1) find out the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in Universities of Rivers State.

(2) ascertain the challenges to achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in the universities in Rivers State.

### **Research Question**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

(1) What are the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in universities in Rivers State?

(2) What are the challenges to achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in the universities in Rivers State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

(1) There is no significant difference between the perceptions of Head of Department and Deans on the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation in universities in Rivers State

(2) There is no significant difference between the perceptions of Head of Departments and Deans on the challenges of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in universities in Rivers State.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted an analytical research design. The population of the study comprised of all the 157 Head of Departments and 25 Deans in the 3 universities in Rivers State. The sample size of the study was 182 (157 HoDs and 25 Deans). The purposive sampling technique was employed. One self-designed instrument titled Accreditation Exercise as a Quality Assurance Instrument Questionnaire (AEQAIQ). Face and content validities were ensured by experts. The reliability coefficient of 0.81 was established with the help of Cronbach Alpha. The data generated was analysed using mean statistics and independent sample z-test.

## **Results**

**Research Question One:** what are the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in universities in Rivers State?

**Table 1: Weighted mean and standard deviation scores on the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in universities in Rivers State**

s/n		Heads of Departments		Deans	
		mean	sd	mean	Sd
1	impacted moderately on curriculum harmonization	3.54	0.93	3.72	0.62
2	the provision of staff offices	3.44	0.88	3.37	1.07
3	libraries and the general institutional environment	3.42	0.88	3.47	1.01
4	The exercises however have minimal impact on the provision of equipments in laboratories	3.33	0.78	3.22	1.06
5	The exercises however have minimal impact on the provision of equipments in workshops	3.51	0.75	3.08	1.20
<b>Grand mean and standard deviation</b>		17.24	4.22	16.86	4.96
		3.45	0.84	3.37	0.99

Table 1 showed that items with serial numbers 1-5 have mean above the criterion mean value of 2.50 and were agreed by the respondents as the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation in universities in Rivers State. The result revealed that accreditation exercises impacted moderately on curriculum harmonization, the provision of staff offices, libraries and the general institutional environment, the exercises however have minimal impacts on the provision of equipments in laboratories and workshops.

**Research Question Two:** what are the challenges to achieving quality assurance in the universities in Rivers State through accreditation exercise?

**Table 2: Weighted mean and standard deviation scores on the challenges to achieving quality assurance in the universities in Rivers State through accreditation exercise**

s/n		Head of departments		Deans	
		mean	Sd	mean	Sd
6	Poor funding	3.66	0.75	3.54	0.95
7	poor institutional data base	3.59	0.92	3.23	1.06
8	lack of commitment to standards by university proprietors	3.70	0.58	3.41	0.88
9	Belated information on accreditation exercise	3.46	0.81	3.37	1.12
10	Nepotism in the constitution of accreditation adhoc committee	3.28	1.09	3.24	1.19
11	Poor honorarium from the exercise	3.51	1.02	3.49	0.85
<b>Grand mean and standard deviation</b>		21.20	5.17	20.28	6.05
		3.53	0.86	3.28	1.01

Table 2 revealed that items with serial numbers 6-11 have their various mean values above the criteria mean value of 2.50 and were therefore agreed by the respondents as the



challenges of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in universities in Rivers State. It was found that the challenges to achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in the universities are poor funding, poor institutional data base and some lack of commitment to standards by university proprietors, belated information on accreditation exercise, nepotism in the constitution of accreditation adhoc committee and poor honorarium from the exercise.

**Hypothesis One:** there is no significant difference between the perceptions of Head of Department and Deans on the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation in universities in Rivers State.

**Table 3: Independent sample t-test on the mean scores of Head of departments and Deans on the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation in universities in Rivers State**

Categories	N	Mean	Sd	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Remarks
HoDs	157	3.45	0.84	180	0.42	1.96	Not statistically significant
Deans	25	3.37	0.99				

Table 3 revealed that HoDs have mean and standard deviation scores of 3.45 and 0.84 while deans have mean and standard deviation scores of 3.37 and 0.99 respectively. With a degree of freedom of 180, the calculated z-value of 0.42 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96, therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. By implication, there is no significant difference between the perceptions of Head of Department and Deans on the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation in universities in Rivers State.

**Hypothesis Two:** there is no significant difference between the perceptions of Head of Departments and Deans of Faculties on the challenges of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in universities in Rivers State.

**Table 4: Independent sample t-test on the mean scores of head of departments and deans on the challenges of achieving quality assurance through accreditation in universities in Rivers State**

Categories	N	Mean	Sd	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Remarks
HoDs	25	3.53	0.86	180	1.32	1.96	Not statistically significant
Deans	157	3.28	1.01				

Table 3 revealed that HoDs have mean and standard deviation scores of 3.53 and 0.86 while deans have mean and standard deviation scores of 3.28 and 1.01 respectively. With a degree of freedom of 180, the calculated z-value of 1.32 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96, therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. By implication, there is no significant difference between the perceptions of Head of Departments on the challenges of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in universities in Rivers State.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings of the study are discussed under the following subheadings.

### **Prospects of Achieving Quality Assurance through Accreditation in Universities**

The result revealed that accreditation exercises impacted moderately on curriculum harmonization, the provision of staff offices, libraries and the general institutional environment. The exercises however have minimal impact on the provision of equipments in laboratories and workshops. The findings of this study is in agreement with Jacobson (2017) who found that accreditation exercise improves the school in the areas of library equipment, laboratory equipment, office furniture equipment and environment beautification. The study also favoured Alexander (2018) who reported that there is a relationship between accreditation exercise and quality assurance in the universities. Moreso, Azubuike (2015) found that increase in accreditation exercise leads to increase in quality assurance in Nigeria universities. It was found that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of Head of Department and Deans on the prospects of achieving quality assurance through accreditation in universities in Rivers State. The hypothesis showed no significant difference in the perceptions of HOD and Deans because they are fully active participants in accreditation exercises attracted to their universities.

### **The Challenges in Quality Assurance through Accreditation in Universities**

Poor funding, poor institutional data base and some lack of commitment to standards by university proprietors were identified as some of the challenges to achieving quality assurance from accreditation exercises. The finding of Anderson (2017) corroborated with the findings of this study when he reported that accreditation exercise are saddled with the problems of insufficient funding, poor information, facilitators incapacity and poor hospitality of the host. In view of the finding, Akwarandu (2016) reported that quality assurance problems have been domesticated in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria due to poor maintenance culture. It was revealed that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of Head of Departments on the challenges of achieving quality assurance through accreditation exercise in universities in Rivers State. The HODS and Deans reported that they share similar challenges in the universities when it comes to accreditation exercise in the school.

## **CONCLUSION**

It was concluded that universities in the Rivers State of Nigeria have not sufficiently capitalized on their routine accreditation exercises to adequately assure quality in the delivery and management of university education.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The need for university managers to be more pro-active in accreditation exercises and establish internal quality assurance framework to achieve quality in the management



2. The accreditation team from the Nigerian Universities Commission should be objective in reporting the state of the universities without any form of interference by the principal officers in the universities.
3. Parents, clergymen and non-governmental organization like TETFund should do more to assist the universities in the procurement of more facilities that will ensure quality educational delivery in the tertiary institutions.

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