Roles of Academic Libraries in University Accreditation in Nigerian: Challenges and Way Forward

Folorunso Femi Joseph[1] & Lucky Oghenetega Urhiewhu (CLN)[2]
University Library, University of Medical Sciences Ondo City, Ondo State[1,2]

Abstract

Purpose: The research paper was on roles of academic libraries in University accreditation in Nigerian: Challenges and way forward. Theoretically, library in higher institution has impact to academic development of both faculty members and students. The real purpose is to look at the major role academic libraries play to achieve success during accreditation.

Design/Methodology/Approach: It is a prose literature type which stresses the value of academic libraries during accreditation in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Findings: The paper identifies that honest among NUC term, fund, staff, and collection are the major challenges face by universities during accreditation exercise

Implications: The research emphasised that there should be adequate awareness on the benefits of honest accreditation and the major challenges face by universities during accreditation exercise.

Originality/value: From the findings, libraries should continue to join in the struggle for improved funding of the university, but the Vice chancellors should respect the 10% allocation to library development and allow the librarians to spend the funds on the library development instead of undue interference. There is need for the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria to show their relevance by pushing for an enforceable law that will ensure that the 10% allocation for library development is guarantee and protected. The application of I.T should be fully explored and exploited in library and information services.

Keywords: Academic; Libraries; Accreditation; University; Challenges.

Introduction

An academic library is a warehouse of information resources, processed and accessible for research works and human resources development. Academic libraries are established in an institution of higher learning to cater for the research problems of students and researchers (Onwurah and Ifeka, 2012). Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnic institutions, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, colleges of technology and also research institutes (Akporhonor, 2005). Singh and Kaur (2009) stressed that preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of academic libraries alongside supporting the mission of their parent institutions which is teaching and research.

Academic libraries are at the forefront of providing information services to their respective communities which comprises of students, lecturers, and researchers in order to support their teaching, learning and research needs. Scholars have emphasized on the crucial role of academic libraries in research and scholarship in institutions of higher learning. Many a times, academic libraries are referred to as the heart or nerve centres of institutions of higher learning where all academic activities revolved

Universities are tertiary institutions established to: conduct demand-driven researches; award degrees; generate and disseminate knowledge, skills and competencies at the highest educational level.; provide high level manpower training, high quality career counseling, lifelong learning programmes; promote scholarship; provide entrepreneurship programmes; provide community service; promote national and international understanding and collaboration (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2007, Draft National Policy on Education, p36). These are general statement of educational purposes endorsed by the Federal Government of Nigeria; each university has a way of expressing the same sentiments through institutional statement of vision, mission and strategic objectives, for example, the mission of the University of Medical Sciences Ondo is: To provide exceptional quality and comprehensive health

care and integrated education and research in all health related sciences, to expand access to compassionate and high quality health care for under-served population, and to lead the scientific pathway for reducing the burden of disease in her areas of operation and Its Vision : To be a thriving Medical and Health sciences University, locally, nationally and internationally recognized for excellence and innovation in health education and research, and for ability to translate research findings for the improvement of health in communities with high burden of disease Its strategic objectives include, among other things: "to encourage the advancement of learning, promote scholarship, conduct research in all fields of human endeavor, produce high-quality graduates, deploy ICT facilities in all university functions, foster linkages, promote global best practices, etc." (University of Medical Sciences Ondo, 2016 Academic Brief). The above is just one example of the several examples that could be cited for each of the Nigerian Universities.

Currently, there are 144 legitimate Universities in the country which include: 40 Federal Universities, 43 State Universities, and 61Private Universities. (NUC, 2016).These universities operate within clearly laid down rules and regulations determined by the National Universities Commission (NUC). This body is also in charge if accreditation in Nigerian Universities. Accreditation is essentially, about Quality and Standard. It may be used to signify the official approval granted by an accrediting agency to an accredited institution at the end of a successful assessment exercise (Hornby, 2001).

Definition of Terms

Accreditation: Accreditation is a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize an institution and/or its programs for quality standards and need for quality improvement. The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded the published standards (set by an external body such as a government, national quality assurance agency, or a professional association) for accreditation, and whether it is achieving its mission and stated objectives. The process usually includes a self evaluation, peer review and a site visit. Therefore, the process of accreditation should provide a means of recognizing some levels of performance, quality and integrity which engenders confidence from the public and the

broad educational community. A perceived belief is that accreditation is purported to provide quality assessment which is monitored by bodies assessing quality in post secondary education, including governmental agencies and professional associations (Enser, 2002). It could also mean the process by which the quality and standard of educational institutions are assessed. The assessment is usually conducted by accrediting agencies set up by the Government through the Ministry of Education or by professional organisations; in Nigeria, this quality assurance function is conducted by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for Federal, State and Private Universities;

The same function is carried out by the National Board for Technical Education for Polytechnics and Monotechnics (NABTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for this category of Educational Institutions (Adesina, 2005); the professional content of some programmes is also assessed by designated bodies and agencies; thus, the Nigerian Medical and Dental Council (NMDC) accredits the professional content of Medical Programmes, the Council of Legal Education (CLE) assesses the professional content of Law Programmes; the Council for Registration of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN) accredits the professional content of the Engineering Programmes while the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria assesses the professional content of Accounting Programmes; and Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN)accredits the professional content of the Librarianship programmes respectively.

Quality and Standard in Accreditation

The two concepts of Quality and Standard are not easy to define (Njenga, Bissoonauth and Diara (2008). Our review of the related literature shows that "standard" is an integral part of "quality" and also that many scholars have alluded to how challenging it is to define this concept. Despite these challenges, however, there seems to be a consensus among a good number of scholars that quality refers to: how good or bad somebody or something is; the degree of excellence attained by somebody or something; the degree of somebody's or something's worth; a product's value level; and a standard against which others could be judged.

Within the context of higher education, quality is multidimensional and captures a wide range of functions and activities. In a university setting,

for example, it permeates every aspect of the University System including: teaching, learning, academic programmes, research, scholarship, academic and non-academic staff, students, physical structures, facilities, equipment, community services and academic milieu (Njenga et al, 2008, pp 4);.

"Internal self-evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international expertise, are vital for enhancing quality; quality entails the inclusion of an international dimension in the functions of a higher education; e.g. internationalization of knowledge, interactive networking with the outside world, mobility of teachers and students across the country and off-shores, as well as international research endeavours without necessarily losing sight of local, national and regional norms, values and circumstances (Njenga et al, 2008).

Academic and research collaborations with as many as possible Universities across the globe; and the admission of students from other parts the world,closely germane to Accreditation is the concept of "Quality Assurance". This has been described as the process of monitoring quality and ensuring that standards are not only continuously sustained but equally improved upon;

The process is known as "Internal Quality Assurance" when it borders on policies and mechanisms effected internally to ensure that a particular institution, programme, profession or discipline continues to achieve its spelt-out objectives and to maintain standards expected of a higher education;The monitoring process is known as "External Quality Assurance" if it is conducted by an external agency from outside the educational institution to find out the extent of its compliance with the established standards (Martin and Stella, 2007);

The continuous monitoring exercises conducted internally by the Academic Planning Units of Universities, the Academic Offices, the Student Affairs and other Units within Universities in general, are practical examples of "Internal Quality Assurance" mechanisms; The assessment visits conducted periodically, by the National Universities Commission, the Nigerian Medical and Dental Council, Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria, the Council of Legal Education, the Council for Registration of Engineering in Nigeria, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, and other agencies from outside the universities, are examples of "External Quality Assurance" procedures otherwise called Accreditation.

Role of Libraries in University Accreditation

Accreditation is a once in a lifetime opportunity for advancement not only of the physical infrastructure and collections but also the career and economic status of the library staff. The library played a stirring role in the accreditation process of an institution. Academic libraries have successfully navigated a paradigm shift from information repositories to learning enterprises (Bennett, 2009) by embedding innovative library education, resources, and services in the teaching and learning activities of their institutions and designing facilities that increasingly engage students in learning. University Library, University of Medical Sciences Ondo ensures the provision of facilities, services, and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support teaching, research, and Community service keeping which focus in the vision and mission of the institution. Also, the library ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources. The library provides a sufficient number of qualified staff with appropriate education and experiences in library and other learning/ information resources to accomplish the mission of the institution. Provision of adequate library materials to support the nature, level and scope of the different programs offered by the institution was also put in place. The library also maintained readily available and well organized collections which are accessible to all students, faculty, administrative and research staff. Actions were taken in compliance to team of accreditation recommendations with emphasis on planning, outcomes of previous evaluation, utilization of information resources, involvement and collaboration of faculty and students in collection building. Books, Journals and other electronic resources were acquired to build up collections in every program offered in the institution. The library did not only focus on input measures such as strengths and weaknesses of book collection but other information resources and services such as staffing, library hours, technical services, public services, allocation of resources and other aspects of library operations were also well taken care of. Librarians were actively involved in the accreditation because the provision and use of

library materials and services affects the quality of the students' educational experience.

The way the university library manages and support library resources reflects the priorities of the institution, the educational goals and methods of faculty, and the performance of students and graduates

Ethical Considerations in University Accreditation

The moral rectitude and value system that surrounds accreditation determines the validity and global acceptance of such reports. It behooves both accrediting agents and institutions concerned to preserve the sacred and sanctity of the ideals which the exercise represents. Such ethical considerations include and not limited to:

Honesty: the situation where institutions engage in massive window-dressing to impress the accreditors is not only misleading but outright misrepresentation. This kind of dishonest practices range from hiring personnel on contract for accreditation purpose, borrowing books and other equipment which are return as soon as the exercise is over, creating fictitious records and files, etc. It is only when institutions are transparent that accreditation reports will reflect the true state of affairs.

Integrity: visiting panel members must be above board in their dealings with the institutions. They must stick to principles even in the face of pressure. There is this belief that everybody has a price-tag and must be negotiated. It is really about preserving the future of higher education. The joy of advancing the education and development of posterity should be priced above personal gains and aggrandizement.

Objectivity: panelists must conduct the review in a way that places them above prejudices, biases, self-interest, religious inclination and ethnic preferences. Assessments have to be fair, transparent and consistent with the checklist. Pre-conceived notions should be jettisoned while facts are celebrated, enthroned and properly reported.

Mutuality: any genuine and worthwhile accreditation seeks ways to make constructive contributions that advance the current practices in the department or programme concerned. The university management must be unnecessarily defensive, but be willing to learn and benefit from experience of external colleagues. This type of mutuality provides a most conducive atmosphere for effective accreditation.the

Challenges of Nigerian University Libraries before and during Accreditation Exercise;

Collection: One of the Myriads of problems encountered by University Libraries today center on their library collections. More often than not, accreditation exercise exposes the dearth of information resources needed to accomplish the very core mandate of establishing the university-Teaching, learning, research and community service, many Universities rely on donations,gift and or exchanges to ensure books are available for use. At a glance, book collections and its electronics counterparts reveal the commitment, seriousness of purpose and intellectual investment of any university. Sad but true, many academic libraries cannot boast of latest titles of books in all fields of studies that their collections represent and cover. Many University CEOs today see libraries as secondary factor in the survival of their Institution until accreditation exercise is at the corner, the situation is worrisome as many Heads of Libraries receive blames for their inability to acquire current books needed to enrich the library stocks, and when books are to be acquired, this is done in an haphazard manner, not because of the essentiality to the academic programmes, but just to pass accreditation and to impress the accreditation team.

Staffing: One of the factors that determine the success of any University during accreditation exercise is personnel. It is worrisome today that many academic Libraries are understaffed and lack basic skills needed in the smooth-running of a standard academic library. Many universities are found parading "borrowed mercenaries" in the twenty-first century academic libraries. This, if not checked may spell doom of efficient library operations as important stakeholders may not see good reasons in recruiting permanent and competent personnel for their university Libraries. Recruiting, educating, and retaining of librarians, and the need to find and retain quality leadership for libraries are a core issue for the future. Even as retirements seem to increase, fewer librarians are entering the profession as a whole, and fewer librarians are entering the academic library field in particular. Ensuring education of new librarians and reeducating existing librarians with skills and knowledge to support new roles in a digital information age, especially roles involving teaching and library

promotion, is a challenge for the profession. In addition, low salaries and the lack of diversity in the profession were relevant subtopics, often mentioned as problems that need collective action.

Funding: Academic libraries in Nigeria are at crossroads. This is because they are operating in an era of dwindling finances where resources (financial and materials) are not forthcoming. Nigerian academic libraries derive the greater part of their funds from the government (both Federal and State). Okiy (2005) 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 monies are not forthcoming as most university administrators tend to flout that decision (Okiy, 2005; Yetunde, 2008)

The situation in private universities also tends to portray a gloomy picture as the story seems to be the same. Yetunde (2008) observed that in most private universities in Nigeria the founder and the board of trustees usually determine the share of university library's budget which in most instances is not adequate. This ugly situation affects the efficiency and effectiveness of their functions. However, despite the not so encourage situation in terms of funding, recent efforts made in the area of Internet and ICTs in academic libraries in Nigeria has been reported in the literature (Womboh and Abba, 2008; Fatoki, 2005; Etim, 2006; Ani et al, 2005) where academic libraries made series of attempts to adopt the technologies for improved services. Despite the efforts, very little success has been recorded. A lot still need to be done.

Funding remains a fundamental factor in the setup, establishment and running of good academic Libraries. It is worrisome that many academic libraries today are largely underfunded, and as such they have been grappling with survival in the face of diminishing fund, it is so disheartening that stakeholders in Nigerian Universities do not accord befitting respect to libraries accordingly as against other academic facilities. Accreditation exercise exposes the vulnerability of many University libraries in Nigeria as this is the time Universities turn attention to their libraries after long abandonment.

Way forward for Nigerian university Libraries

- o Librarians should continue to join in the struggle for improved funding of the university, but the Vice chancellors should respect the 10% allocation to library development and allow the librarians to spend the funds on the library development instead of undue interference.
- o There is need for the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria to show their relevance by pushing for an enforceable law that will ensure that the 10% allocation for library development is guarantee and protected.
- o The application of I.T should be fully explored and exploited in library and information services. The phenomenon of information explosion, the increasing awareness of information and its value and the high demand for it make this inevitable.
- o With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the role and position of libraries has dramatically changed. Etim (2004) cited in Okon (2005) observes that the rapid pace of development in the field of information technology and the advent of networked information services have prompted a comprehensive review of the Library and Information Sciences (LIS) profession. The global trend is now characterized with a fundamental shift from traditional information environment to an e-environment where emphasis is placed more on the acquisition of e-resources such as e-books, e-journals as well as online databases, librarians should be ready to remain relevant in the scheme of things and ensure they are more serviceable to the information and research needs of their Universities.

Conclusion

Academic Libraries in Nigeria are found to be valuable not during the accreditation exercise alone, they have been very dependable in pushing forward the frontiers of research through the provision of timely information and cutting-edge library services that make them relevant in their quest to meeting the information needs of their patrons. However, stakeholders

should start considering academic libraries as one of the paramount arm of the University that must be given priority attention in other to make it more effective, functional and relevant for the university at all time as this paper has shown that academic libraries are veritable tool that Universities must nourish, cherish and utilizeto the fullest for the actualization of University vision, mission statement and to record success in theiraccreditation exercise in the future.

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