HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE CONSTRAINTS IN MEETING THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION'S STANDARDS FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: *The study investigated the perception of heads of departments on the constraints confronting universities in Nigeria in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements. Two universities were purposively selected based on the fact that they were in session when the study was carried out. A total of 100 participants were also selected purposively premised on their position as either former or current heads of departments who had presented programs for NUC's accreditation during their tenure. The instrument used for data collection is a self-developed instrument titled "Heads of Departments' Perceived Constraints in Meeting NUC's Accreditation Requirements'. Four research questions were answered in the study while the data were analyzed using frequency count, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test and Analysis of Variance. The study revealed that delay in releasing fund for accreditation, problem of getting qualified lecturers in the affected programs, poor funding, inadequate library resources, poor record keeping and inefficiency on the part of the members of staff in physical planning unit of the university are the major constrains facing universities in their bid to meet NUC's accreditation requirements. There is no significant difference on the bases of gender and university*

ownership. However, there is a significant difference in their perception based on discipline. The researchers therefore recommend proper funding of university education in Nigeria as funding is the major barrier on which all other constrains are anchored.

Keywords: *Accreditation; Quality control; Quality improvement; Standards; Constraints; Nigerian universities.*

Introduction

The essence of university education is to make optimum contribution to national development through the development of high-level manpower that could advance the overall wellbeing of the entire citizenry and make the nation relevant in the comity of nations. The Nigerian government, in a bid to advance the development of high-level manpower has not only embarked on the establishment of universities but also granted permission to private individuals and bodies to establish universities. According to Ejiogu and Sule (2012), there has been significant increase in the number of higher institutions in Nigeria premised on the establishment of more universities by both federal and state governments and the liberalization of the ownership of university system which promotes the establishment of private universities. This submission has also been attested to by Suleiman, Hanafi and Taslikhan, (2017).

However, the expected national development anchored on the establishment of these universities has not materialized. Attesting to this deficiency, Okonofua (2017) identified the inability of the Nigerian universities to confront and proffer sustainable solutions to the national developmental challenges. Ekpoh and Edet (2017) citing Archibong (2013) also attested to the inefficiency in the Nigerian public universities with respect to quality education delivery which the scholar attributed to sporadic increase in the number of public universities without adequate funding coupled with other challenges such as; poor management culture, infrastructural decay, examination malpractices, increase in student population among others.

It must be noted that the Nigerian governments at various times have been concerned with the need to have quality education at the university level by setting up a regulatory body that is saddled with the responsibility of promoting of quality education in the country's ivory tower. The National Universities Commission (NUC) was specifically established to monitor the

operation of universities in Nigeria in line with the minimum benchmark designed for their operation.

The Commission is saddled with the responsibility of accrediting programs mounted by both public and private universities in Nigeria. The three main objectives of accreditation as contained in the National Universities Commission (NUC) 2012 Accreditation Manual are; to ensure that minimum academic standards are maintained in programs; to assure employers of labor (both local and international) that Nigerian graduates possess required competence in requisite areas of specialization, as well as, confirm to the international community that the programs offered in Nigerian universities are of acceptable standards and their graduates are adequate for further studies. Obi, Muo and Ewuim (2020) citing the NUC (2012) document view accreditation as a system of evaluating academic programs in Nigerian Universities to ascertain the extent to which they merited the stipulated Minimum Academic Standard. The major areas that are focused during the accreditation exercise include; the philosophy and objectives of the program, the curriculum, the quality and quantity of the academic staff, student admission and standard of examination, physical facilities, financial support and library holdings. Folorunsho and Lawrence (2021) viewed accreditation as a process of certifying academic programs in institutions of learning premised on the comparison of the statutory provisions and the reality. Ukala and Obia (2018) posited that accreditation exercise is carried out in Nigerian universities in order to maintain standard and ensure quality service delivery.

To ascertain the compliance of universities with the set standard, resource verification is carried out by NUC before a university can mount any academic program so as to ensure that the institution has all the required resources for the commencement of the program. Universities are also kept abreast of the minimum requirements for the sustainability of any program and well informed of both human and non-human resources that are needed for the full accreditation of a program.

In spite of the adequate knowledge of the requirements for the accreditation by university authorities in Nigeria, a lot of programs across the universities still fail NUC accreditation. Unini (2021) while reporting the outcome of the accreditation exercises conducted across Nigerian universities as presented by the NUC Executive Secretary in 2021 stated that only 25 universities out of 113 universities that presented their programs for accreditation got full accreditation for all their programs. The report also revealed that none of the highly ranked universities secured full accreditation for all their programs. Agbakwuru (2021) while citing the NUC Report attributed the ugly situation to inadequate funding of university education. His submission is in consonance with Paulley (2019).

According to Onwudinjo (2015), poor library holdings is another factor the inability of the Nigerian universities to secure accreditation for their academic programs. This implies that many universities in Nigeria lag behind in terms of adequacy and recency of library books and journals. Ekpoh and Edet (2017) citing Jack (2014) identified poor funding, delay in releasing fund for accreditation, poor library facilities, poor ICT facilities, inadequate physical facilities as the challenges faced by universities during the accreditation exercise.

Accreditation is meant to ensure quality education, put an institution in good standing when it comes to global competition, provide rationale for fund granted by government and external donors and attract more clients to the institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Therefore, the university administrators always place premium on the need to achieve full accreditation for any program presented since the level of patronage that a university receives in terms of student admission is determined by the status of the accreditation of the various program. However, the bulk of the responsibilities to be carried out lies with the department where the program(s) is/are to be accredited thereby placing the head of the department at the receiving end.

Many researches have been conducted in the area of accreditation ranging from the role of accreditation in Nigerian universities, politics of the program to accreditation practices. However, studies on the probable contributory factors responsible for the accreditation failure premised on the view of departmental heads who are always key the players during the accreditation exercise have received scanty attention thus, necessitating this study.

Statement of the Problem
University education is meant to develop high level manpower within the context of the national needs. It is also meant to inculcate knowledge, attitudes and skills needed in the citizens for national development and relevance at the global level. To achieve these, the governments of every nation including Nigeria always set up the regulatory bodies that are responsible for quality assurance in the universities. The National Universities Commission (NUC) is the regulatory body in Nigeria. The body has stipulated minimum benchmark for all the programs that could be mounted in Nigerian universities and failure to meet the criteria could result in outright ban on the university from admitting students into the affected programs. This step is no doubt detrimental to the image of such university. To avoid failure during the accreditation exercise, universities are given prior information on the minimum requirements expected of a program before it can be given full accreditation. However, a lot of universities in Nigeria still fail to secure full accreditation for their program. This situation has been a great concern to the stakeholders in education and many scholars have attempted to investigate this

important but scanty attention has been paid to the assessment of the views of the Head of departments in the Nigerian universities who are always at the front line when it comes to accrediting program. in their departments. This study therefore investigated the perception of Heads of departments on the constraints in meeting the NUC's benchmark for the accreditation of program.

Research Question
1. What are the heads of departments' perceived constraints in meeting the NUC requirements for the accreditation?

2. Is there any significant difference in the heads of departments' perceived constraints in meeting the NUC's requirements for the accreditation based on the ownership of the university?

3. Is there any significant difference in the heads of departments' perceived constraints in meeting the NUC's requirements for the accreditation based on gender?

4. Is there any significant difference in the heads of department perceived constraints in meeting the NUC's requirements for the accreditation based on discipline?

Conceptualizing accreditation
In Nigerian context, accreditation is status granted to tertiary institutions (e.g., Colleges Polytechnics, and Universities) or academic programs that have been found to meet or exceed stated criteria for quality education usually referred to as National Universities Commission Benchmark (NUC-BMAS). From the medical perspective, accreditation is defined as the process by which a credible, independent body assesses the quality of a medical education program to ensure that it produces graduates that are competent to practice safely and effectively under supervision as interns (or equivalent), and have been provided with an appropriate foundation for lifelong learning and further training in any branch of medicine (Association of Medical Regulatory Authorities, 2018). As concerned by the council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2002), accreditation is "a process of external quality review used by Higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement" (p.1).

Quality assurance deals with quality control and continuous quality improvement (Martin, 2006; Magd & Karyamtty, 2022). Quality control relates to processes which assess whether minimum standards are in place in higher education institution or in a given program (Vlasceam, Grunberg &

Parlea, 2007). On the other hand, continuous quality improvement is a process in which programs, institutions, or systems are measured against established standards to provide feedbacks on areas of strength and areas that can be improved upon (Blouin, & Teklan, 2018; Sweet, Vasilias, Clough, Davis, McDonald, Reynolds et al, 2014).

Basically, there are two types of accreditations namely, institutional accreditation and program (specialized) accreditation (Sywelem & Witte, 2009). Institutional accreditation focuses on the institution as a whole, and its ability to manage the development and delivery of quality programs (Andolsek, Nalger, & Weinerth, 2010). Programs accreditation focuses on professional programs such as accounting, law, medicine, engineering, and teacher education, assessing academic and non-teaching staff members' qualifications, funding, learning facilities, and teaching, among other features (Mutereko, 2018). Regardless of the type, the main purpose of accreditation is accountability, quality assurance, and improvement, requiring tertiary institutions or programs to demonstrate effective student learning outcomes for internal and external constituencies (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001).

To better conceptualize the term accreditation, Frank et al (2020, p.6) highlighted the common core elements that constituted accreditation system as follows:

1. **Mandate:** The role and purpose of the accrediting body in reviewing the quality of educational programs, institutions, or systems.

2. **Accreditation standards (criteria, Requirements):** Measures or generally accepted benchmarks used in making decisions about the quality of a program, institution, or system.

3. **Application for accreditation**: The process of reviewing an initial request for accreditation by a program seeking to demonstrate compliance with established standards, and which results in a decision about whether to grant new (first-time) accreditation.

4. **Self-study (self-evaluation, self-assessment)**: The Internal process of reflection undertaken by a program, institution, or system to evaluate compliance with externally established standards.

5. **External assessment of standards**: The process of determining the level of compliance of a program, institution, or system with established accreditation standards, undertaken by individuals external to the program, institution, or system.

6. **Accreditation reports:** The final report by external evaluators regarding the level of compliance of program, institution, or system with established standards.

7. **Accreditation decision:** The final decision on accreditation status, and its associated follow-up, as determined by the accrediting body.

8. **Accreditation cycle:** The phases of an accreditation process dictating how often each program, institution, or system is re-evaluated for compliance with the standards, including the types of phases and activities in the process any follow-up activities that must occur between external assessments.

9. **Site review model:** The approach used by the accrediting body in determining the composition of its external site review team, as well as processes for recruiting, assigning, training and accessing the team members.

10. **Accreditation system administration:** The approaches used by the accrediting body to support the administration and operationalization of the accreditation process; this component includes the business model, the technology used (if any), system review and improvement (including research and scholarship), and oversight and risk management.

In Nigeria, it is mandatory for any newly established tertiary institution whether government or private owned to present itself and its programs for accreditation before it can be granted license to operate as an educational institution or run-away academic program by the constitutionally recognized accreditation body known as National Universities Commission (NUC). Among other responsibilities, this body is saddled with the responsibilities of : establishing Minimum Academic Standards for universities and other degree-awarding institutions in the Federal Republic of Nigeria that are consistence with international benchmark and tailored towards Nigerian national interests, ensuring that quality is maintained within the academic programs of the Nigerian university system, integrating internationally recognized best practices in quality assurance protocols for Nigerian university system, involving the academic staff members comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning, and advising the President and state Governors, through the Minister of education, on the creation of new universities and other degree-awarding institutions in Nigeria (NUC,1974).

In accrediting an institution or an academic program, certain steps are taken in recognition of the fact that accreditation consists of different stages of a systematic process which aim at meeting the performance standards. Seven steps as highlighted below are designed by the NUC in conducting accreditation exercise in Nigerian university:

Step 1: Submission of application for institutional / program accreditation to the NUC by the   institution or program seeking accreditation.

Step 2: Verification of institutional / program eligibility for accreditation through the review   of submitted self-study.

Step 3: Formation of a team of external academic staff members (experts) from other universities   to serve as institutional or program accreditors.

Step 4: Conduct of on-site evaluation to determine if the applicant meets the established   standards and preparation of the report of findings.

Step 5: Accreditation decision made on the findings submitted.

Step 6: Official release of the accreditation reports to the applicant.

Step 7: Periodic follow-up of accredited institution / program.

It should be noted that in Nigeria accreditation is an ongoing and the initial earning of accreditation does not guarantee indefinite accredited status. A renewal of accreditation of a university or program takes place on a cycle of every five years as stipulated in the NUC guidelines.

Method

Descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. This design was used since the study involved the use of representative sample from a population to draw inferences based on available data.

The population of the study comprised all the former and current heads of departments in both public and private universities who have been involved in program accreditation in their various universities. Two universities (one public and one private) in Osun State, Nigeria were purposively selected because they were in session during the investigation. Purposive sampling technique was also used to draw a sample of 100 past and present heads of departments who had participated in NUC Accreditation. The study utilized a self-developed questionnaire titled 'Heads of Departments Perceived Constraints in Meeting NUC's Accreditation Requirements'. The instrument was made up of 15 items while each item was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree", "agree", "neutral", "disagree" to "strongly disagree".

A panel comprising five specialists in Educational Management from different universities assessed the instruments for face and content validity. Panel

members were selected because of their research interest in Quality Assurance, and several modifications were made to improve the quality of the instrument based on the inputs from the panel members. The reliability of the instrument (TKIET) was established using Cronbach Alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained.

Results

Table 1.1: Demographic Information of the Sampled Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
University Type		
Public University	50	50.0
Private University	50	50.0
Total	100	100
Gender		
Male	79	79.0
Female	21	21.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**
Faculty		
Basic Sciences	18	18.0
Health Sciences	5	5.0
Humanity and Art	23	23.0
Engineering	8	8.0
Management Sciences	22	22.0
Education	12	12.0
Law	8	8.0
Agriculture	4	4.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Table 1 shows that 100 heads of departments participated in the study comprising 50 each from the selected public and private universities. This implies equal representation of the universities in terms of ownership. 79% of the respondents are female while the remaining 21% of the respondents are male. The high level of female respondents is attributed to high number of female lecturers that have served as the heads of departments or are currently serving. The table further revealed that 18%, 5%, 23%, 8%, 22%, 12%, 8% and 4% of the respondents are in the areas of basic sciences, health sciences, humanity and arts, engineering, management sciences, education, law and agriculture respectively.

Responses to Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the heads of departments perceived constraints in meeting the   NUC standards for the accreditation

Table 2: Percentage and Mean analysis of Heads of Departments Perceived Constraints in   Meeting the NUC's Standards for the Accreditation

S/N	Variables	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	SD
1	Delay in releasing funds to procure learning and instructional materials	73%	27%	2.96	1.01
2	Sourcing for lecturers specializing in the field to be accredited	71%	29%	2.83	0.99
3	Unnecessary demand from the accreditation team	42%	58%	2.17	1.03
4	Communication gap between the University Director of Academic Programme and the Departmental Heads	23%	77%	1.96	0.93
5	Lack of cooperation among the staff members in the Department	37%	63%	2.21	0.86
6	Inadequate funding of the accreditation exercise	62%	38%	2.77	1.02
7	Poor record keeping at the Departmental level	56%	44%	2.54	1.11
8	Sudden change in accreditation dates	45%	55%	2.39	1.02
9	Demanding for official documents outside what is stipulated in the NUC requirements	34%	66%	2.19	1.05
10	Unfriendly behaviors on the part of the accreditation team	48%	52%	2.34	0.98
11	Inadequate learning resources and poor internet connectivity in the library	63%	37%	2.79	0.99
12	Unnecessary extension the accreditation exercise by the accreditation team	41%	59%	2.22	0.94
13	Procurement of textbooks and other e-resources by the library	52%	48%	2.55	1.15

	authority without due consultation with the Departmental Heads				
14	Counterproductive behavior of the works and physical unit in the repair and maintenance of physical facilities	55%	45%	2.60	1.13
15	Non accessibility of grading criteria	29%	71%	2.15	0.97
	Grand Mean			**2.45**	

Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents agreed that the following are the constraints confronting universities in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements; delay in releasing funds to procure learning and instructional materials $(\bar{x} = 2.96)$; sourcing for lecturers specializing in the field to be accredited $(\bar{x} = 2..83)$; inadequate funding of accreditation exercise $(\bar{x} = 2.77)$; poor record keeping at departmental level $(\bar{x} = 2.54)$; inadequate learning resources and poor internet connectivity in the library $(\bar{x} = 2.79)$; procurement of textbooks and other e-resources by the library authority without due consultation with the departmental heads $(\bar{x} = 2.55)$; counterproductive behavior of the works and physical unit in the repair and maintenance of physical facilities $(\bar{x} = 2.60)$.

On the other hand, the majority of the respondents disagreed that the following are constraints confronting universities in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements; unnecessary demand from the accreditation team $(\bar{x} = 2.17)$; communication gap between the University Director of Academic Programs and the departmental heads $(\bar{x} = 1.96)$; lack of cooperation among the staff members in the Department $(\bar{x} = 2.21)$; sudden change in accreditation dates $(\bar{x} = 2.39)$; demanding for official documents outside what is stipulated in the NUC requirements $(\bar{x} = 2.19)$; unfriendly behaviors on the part of the accreditation team $(\bar{x} = 2.34)$; unnecessary extension the accreditation exercise by the accreditation team $(\bar{x} = 2.22)$; non accessibility of grading criteria $(\bar{x} = 2.15)$.

The grand mean of $(\bar{x} = 2.45)$ shows that the majority of the respondents disagreed with the majority of the items listed, however, delay in releasing fund for accreditation, problem of getting qualified lecturers in the affected program, poor funding, inadequate library resources, poor record

keeping and inefficiency on the part of the members of staff in the physical planning unit of the university are the major constraints facing universities in their bid to meet NUC's accreditation requirements.

Research Question 2: Is there any significant difference in the heads of departments' perceived constraints based on the ownership of the university?

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis on the constraints in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements by universities based on the ownership of the university.

School Type	N	X	SD	Df	T	Sig.	Remark
Public	50	37.74	9.43	98	1.942*	0.252	Not Significant
Private	50	35.60	9.15				

*Denote significance at P>0.05

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference in the constraints in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements by the universities based on school type. This is shown in the mean and standard deviation of public university (M = 37.74, SD = 9.43) and private University (M =35.60, SD = 9.15) with (t= 1.942, df = 98, p>0.05). This result reveals that the perception of public university heads of departments about the constraints preventing them from meeting NUC's accreditation requirements is not significantly different from their private universities counterparts.

Research Question 3: Is there any significant difference in the heads of departments' perceived constraints in meeting the NUC's requirements for the accreditation based on gender?

Table 4: Independent t-test analysis on the difference in the perceived constraints in meeting   NUC's accreditation requirements based on gender.

Gender	N	X	SD	Df	T	Sig.	Remark
Male	79	36.65	8.80	98			Not Significant
Female	21	36.76	11.26		-0.051*	0.960	

*Denote significance at P>0.05

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in the heads of departments' perceived constraints in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements based on gender. This is revealed in the mean and standard deviation of male heads of departments (M = 36.65, SD = 8.80) and female heads of departments (M =36.76, SD = 1.26) with (t= -0.051, df = 98, p>0.05). The result shows that the perception of male heads of departments about the constraints in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements is not different from their female counterparts.

Research Question 4: Is there any significant difference in the heads of departments' perceived constraints in meeting the NUC's requirements for the accreditation based on discipline?

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the heads of departments' perceived constraints in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements based on discipline.

Sources	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	1949.392	7	278.485		
Within Groups	6628.718	92	72.051	3.865	0.001
Total	**8578.110**	**99**			

Table 5 shows F-value of 3.865 and p-value of 0.001 which is less than 0.05 (0.001 < 0.05) significant level. Since 0.001 is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance, it means that there is significant difference in the perceived constraints in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements by heads of departments based on discipline.

Discussion

The study reveals factors such as funding, problem of having enough specialists in the programs to be accredited, inadequate learning resources, and infrastructural decay based on the failure of workers in the Physical Planning Unit as the major constraints facing Nigerian universities in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements. A critical look at these factors reveals poor funding as the major barrier as all other factors depend on it. These findings are in line with Ekpoh and Edet (2017) who identified poor funding, poor management culture, and infrastructural decay as the factors responsible for failing NUC's accreditation by Nigerian universities. The findings are also in consonance with Paulley (2019, Unini (2021), Agbakwuru (2021) in terms of

poor funding as well as Onwudinjo (2015) who identified poor library collections as the impediment to the success of Nigerian universities in relation to the accreditation.

The study further reveals no bias on the perception of the respondents in relation to the constraints in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements on the platform of gender and ownership of universities. This implies that the challenges and constraints are prevalent in both public and private universities. The study also revealed that the respondents did not differ in their perception premised on gender. The result reflects the poor state of many of the universities in Nigeria which could be attributed to poor funding stemming from insufficient budgetary allocation to university education in the country.

The study also shows significant difference in the views of the heads of departments on the constraints facing Nigerian universities in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements based on discipline. The difference could be attributed to the fact that the required resources for the successful accreditation of any program are determined by their nature. For example, when well-equipped laboratories are required in science-based programs, the need may be minima in others thereby placing higher financial implications which cannot be met efficiently in some programs.

Conclusion

The study investigated the perception of heads of departments on the constraints facing universities in meeting NUC's accreditation requirements based on the selection of the respondents from both public and private universities in Osun State, Nigeria. A total of 100 respondents were selected and a self-developed questionnaire was used for data collection. The study revealed poor funding as a major barrier to the successful accreditation of programs in Nigerian universities as all other factors identified can be linked to financial inadequacy. It also reveals lack of bias in the perception of the respondents on the bases of gender and ownership of university. However, there is a significant difference in the perception of the respondents based on the area of discipline.

Recommendations

The researchers therefore recommend the following.

1. Both public *and* private universities should be allocated enough funds by the owners in order to meet the requirements for the NUC's accreditation.
2. Lecturers that are specialists should be employed to handle courses in the various programs at the university level.
3. Workers in the Physical Planning Unit at the university level should ensure proper maintenance of the university physical resources.

4. Universities libraries should be equipped with relevant physical and e-based resources.

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