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**EDUCATORS' PERCEPTION OF ACCREDITATION PROCESSES IN
UNIVERSITY-BASED LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
SCHOOLS IN SOUTH-EAST, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine educators' perception of accreditation processes in university-based library and information science schools in south-east, Nigeria. The survey research design was adopted. The sample size comprises 38 library and information science educators working in the selected university-based library schools in South-east, Nigeria. The questionnaire was used for data collection. The generated data were analyzed using mean rating. Inadequacy of funds, shortage of qualified personnel, poorly equipped laboratory, shortage of teaching staff at the professorial cadre, lack of well equipped practical laboratory and non-participation of LRCN in accreditation process affect the accreditation of university-based library schools in the south-east zone. The paper concludes that state of accreditation process in university-based library schools is worrisome. There is a dire need to restructure the accreditation processes of university-based library schools and bring various stakeholders in librarianship into the streamline. Adequate funding of library schools, involvement of LRCN in accreditation of library schools, recruitment of qualified lecturers and engaging in exchange/collaboration programme were recommended.

Key words: Accreditation; Library Educators; Information Science Educators; Library Schools; South-east-Nigeria

Introduction

Decree No 16 of 1985 empowers the National Universities Commission (NUC) to lay down Minimum Academic Standard for all academic programmes taught in Nigerian universities and also to accredit such programmes. Standards are required to maintain professional balance, regulate advances in library research and prescribe core areas of education and training of the individual professional. Standards are a norm that cover specific technologies, products and procedures, and constitutes an indispensable tool for planners and administrators in education. Standards are set of detailed guidelines used as a means of establishing uniformity in an area. They are set up and established by an authority as the rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value or quality (Lawal, 2009; Nwosu, 2007; Haruna, 2007)

Any discipline that would contribute significantly to the educational sector and the economic development of any nation must adhere to the standards stipulated by the regulatory body. Library and information science (LIS) discipline cannot be exempted from this; hence Okoro (2007) argues for the need to produce and follow a standard curriculum (which is an average acceptable, regular, normal and conventional) for the training of LIS professionals in Nigerian universities, as such, standards would lead to effective training, improvement in practice and professional ethos, and worthy recruitment and placement principles.

LIS education plays a significant role in the production of high quality LIS professionals who occupy a unique position in national development (Abioye, 2013). However, the nature, scope and characteristics of LIS programs offered in Nigerian library schools as put forward by Nwosu (2007) are purely not the same when the contents of the course are compared and from the available curricular of various library schools in Nigeria, it was observed that each library

schools developed its own curriculum. This scenario shows that there is complete lack of uniformity in the curricula used in training librarians in the library schools and exposed the lack of standards with regard to curricula design and delivery.

According to Okoro (2007), though the NUC gives a minimum standard for departments, this process has come under severe knocks now and then, as many do not agree on what is “minimum”. There is a need to stabilize not just the content but standardize the overall programmes of library schools in Nigeria with emphasis on university-based schools since librarianship is now globally a graduate profession. However, to uphold standards, there is need to confirm with specifications, otherwise a department may lose its accreditation status, or worse still, have no students to teach with denied status and one of the inevitable feature among others, of any, internationally recognized profession is the extent of standardized and well structured formal academic programme (Lawal, 2007; Nwosu, 2007).

Accreditation is the establishment or of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme or module of study. Accreditation status indicates that a college, university or programme meets the standards of quality set by the accreditation organization in terms of faculty, curriculum, administration, libraries, financial well-being and student’s services (Onwudinjo, Nwosu & Ugwu, 2014). Accreditation standards and guideline in Nigeria education system is aimed at strengthening programme for quality assurance and quality improvement. It is a process that aid institutions in developing and sustaining effective educational programs and assures the educational community, the general public and other organizations that accredited institution has met high standards of quality and effectiveness (Obadara & Alaka, 2013). Accreditation of universities be it institutional or programme is a way of examining the state of the institution in relation to where it ought to be (Okojie, 2008).

The process of accreditation is undertaken in order to evaluate an institution or programs against some (usually not clearly articulated) minimally accepted standards which protect the institutions themselves, their students and the public (Adeola, 2014). Such accreditation process is the tool used around the world to monitor, assess, and evaluate the standards and quality of the education a student receives at a college, university or other institutions of higher learning (NUC, cited in Onwudinjo, Nwosu & Ugwu, 2014).

No doubt, there have been concerns over the quality of products from library and information science (LIS) schools in Nigeria and this cannot be unconnected with the quality assurance that exists in these schools. Meanwhile, the processes associated with accreditation for the purpose of quality assurance is always a challenge facing LIS schools in Nigeria; and passing through the processes and emerging successfully are usually not possible without various challenges. This study therefore examines LIS educators' perceived challenges affecting accreditation as well as strategies to put in place for enhancing such accreditation exercise in university-based LIS schools in South-east, Nigeria. This study therefore is focused on the perception of LIS educators on the status of accreditation in these schools in the South-east and the strategies that could be applied to enhance the quality of their products.

In view of the foregoing, this study therefore seeks to:

- i. ascertain the educators' perceived challenges affecting accreditation in university-based LIS schools in South-east, Nigeria; and
- ii. identify the educators' perceived strategies that could be applied for enhancing accreditation of university-based LIS schools in South-east, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Madu and Alhassan (2009) are of the view that all those involved with teaching and learning are expected to meet the appropriate professional standard and indicative of such standards are those set down by the regulating bodies like the NUC and the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN). According to Diso (2009), Nigerian Association of Library and Information Science Educators (NALISE) is the most competent professional group to undertake LIS standardization project in Nigeria and thus suggest that NALISE must rise, assert itself, and take its rightful place as a major player in formulating minimum academic standards and all accreditation criteria for LIS programmes.

Standards, according to Okozor and Obidike (2006), as a necessity, must be general in application and as specific as each situation demands. Okozor and Obidike (2006) looked at the major standards concerned in libraries in terms of practice (method, process), form (nomenclature, usage), quantity and quality, and further asserted that, for standards to be effective, they must be authorized (to receive the imprimatur of some approved institutions). Although Library and Information Science has not really come of age as a profession when compared alongside law and medicine, whereby beyond the statutory NUC accreditation exercises, the professional controlling bodies of the two professions, i.e. the Council of Legal Education and the Nigerian Medical Council, visit the various universities for professional accreditation (Okoro, 2009). However, developments in LIS profession suggest that LRCN will start living up to its expectation soon. In other words, the LRCN is expected to also visit the various LIS schools for professional accreditation.

According to Adeola (2014), accreditation of the university programmes and subsequent standardization across the tertiary institutions nationwide by the N.U.C. remain substantively superficial especially in the absence of mechanism to ascertain or ensure that the prescribed programmes are implemented by competent and qualified personnel both in the administrative and academic sectors of the university, according to down criteria. Obadara and Alaka (2013) submit that accreditation is important to students for a smooth transfer of courses and programmes among universities. It is viewed carefully and is considered an important indicator of quality. Accreditation status of an institution or programme to them, is important to employees when evaluating credentials of job applicants and when deciding whether to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education.

Onwudinjo, Nwosu and Ugwu (2014) contends that for any accreditation exercise to be successful and approved, it must follow a set standard, which is an acceptable point of reference or basis of comparison or common norms of the people. Obadara and Alaka (2013:35), posits that the process of accreditation is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met or exceeded the published standards (set by external body such as government, national quality assurance agency, or a professional association) for accreditation, and whether it is achieving its mission and stated purpose. The process to them usually, includes a self-evaluation, peer review and a site visit.

Onwudinjo (2015) observed that some institutions in the past failed accreditation because of their inability in meeting the accreditation requirements with regards to the law libraries collection. He noted further that the failure of accreditation by any institution or faculty means loss of confidence by students, parents and the general public in the university concerned. Okojie and Omotoso (2013) admitted that LRCN now undertake a joint accreditation with NUC on LIS

course to ensure that universities produce quality manpower for the LIS sector. They however, advanced that curriculum development and accreditation of LIS programmes should not be one man show, static and narrow in concept. It should be all encompassing, dynamic and robust. Abioye (2013) notes that not much is being done at the moment to foster collaboration between the two LIS schools in LIS education despite the high level of awareness of the potentials of collaboration among faculty members in the two LIS schools studied.

Anunobi (2015) contend that the evolution of competences required by LIS professional employers justifies the need for continuing updates of curriculum. However, many library schools do not update the curriculum as expected. Shem (2015) suggests that the curricular must be reviewed to remain relevant and also meet modern day market demands. He sees revamping of LIS programs and library services as essential to satisfy the impatient information's seekers.

As noted by Okoro (2007), unless LIS educators allow the training of these professionals to pass through the oven of a standardized curriculum, we will not realize the breed needed for professional growth, appreciation in our institutions, society and Nigeria in this 21st century. According to Nwosu (2007), majority of the courses presently offered in the library schools are lecture-based while librarianship is a service-oriented course, thus canvassing that the courses be more practical-oriented with well-thought out and prepared practical manuals with which students practical session, both in professional and ICT courses, will continuously be assessed.

Okojie (2008) expressed satisfaction with NUC, affirming that as far as accreditation is concerned in Nigeria, the NUC is doing creditably well and the commission's effort in this direction is not only nationally recognized but internationally acclaimed. Ibrahim (2009) averred that it is evident that there is no comprehensive standard for LIS programme in Nigeria. Every formal education programme in any academic discipline should have uniformed curricula.

Nwosu (2007) pointed out that uniformity and conformity to it by all operators are very necessary, so as to achieve common professional demands. Similarly, Haruna (2007) observed that a number of library schools in Nigerian have been established in federal, state and private universities without due regard to standards in the employment of appropriate personnel to promote qualitative teaching and learning.

Lawal (2009) submits that there are inherent problems of library courses being overshadowed by education components in the overall library programmes in education, where as in the social science, there are courses, such as sociology, elements of which promote and have salutary relevance to library-user dichotomy research. Nwosu (2007) pointed out that the curriculum used in training librarians in the 20th century is what is still being used by some, if not all, library schools in training in this 21st century and greater majority of library educators and librarians in Nigeria are resistant to change.

From the reviewed literature, there is no doubt that there are issues surrounding the accreditation processes in library schools, hence the need to carry out a study that empirically show the perception of library and information science educators on the state of university-based library schools in terms of accreditation

Research Method

The survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprises all the LIS educators in the four university-based library schools used for the study. Thirty-eight LIS educators were purposively selected from the cadre of Professor, Associate Professor and Senior Lecturers from the university-based library schools selected for the study. The following university-based library schools in South-east, Nigeria, namely: Abia State University, Uturu (ABSU), Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU), Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,

Umudike (MOUAAU) and Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka (NAU). The instrument for generating data for the study was the questionnaire that was designed using 4 points Likert rating scale. The data collected were analyzed using mean rating decision.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Educators' perceived challenges affecting accreditation in university-based LIS schools (N=38)

	ITEMS	SA(4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D(1)	TOTAL	MEAN
i.	Inadequacy of fund is affecting the accreditation process	18 (72)	15 (45)	2 (4)	3 (3)	124	3.26
ii.	Shortage of qualified personnel is affecting the accreditation process	10 (40)	23 (69)	1 (2)	4 (4)	115	3.03
iii.	Shortage of teaching staff at the professorial cadre is an obstacle to successful accreditation	14 (56)	21 (63)	2 (2)	1 (1)	122	3.21
iv.	Lack of well equipped practical laboratory is an obstacle to successful accreditation	5 (20)	33 (99)	-	-	119	3.13
v.	Non-participation of LRCN in accreditation is an obstacle to successful accreditation	9 (36)	20 (60)	9 (18)	-	114	3.00
vi.	Non involvement of NALISE is affecting the standards applied to accreditation	2 (8)	19 (57)	16 (32)	1 (1)	98	2.58
vii.	Library schools in Nigeria hardly meet the minimum standards	7 (28)	21 (63)	8 (16)	2 (2)	109	2.87
viii.	Non prescription of courses by NLA limits success of accreditation of library schools in Nigeria	6 (24)	15 (45)	7 (34)	-	103	2.71

Significant mean = 2.97

Table 1 shows educators' perceived challenges affecting accreditation in university-based LIS schools in South-east, Nigeria. At a significant mean of 2.97. Some of the items were significant because they score above the significant mean of 2.97. These includes inadequacy of funds ($x = 3.26$), shortage of qualified personal ($x = 3.03$), poorly equipped laboratory affects accreditation process ($x = 3.13$). Shortage of teaching staff at the professional cadre ($x = 3.21$) and non-participation of LRCN in accreditation process ($x = 3.00$) affects accreditation process.

Other items seem insignificant because their mean score were below 2.97. They are: the library schools in Nigeria hardly meet the minimum standards ($x = 2.87$) and non prescription of courses by NLA limits success of accreditation of library schools in Nigeria ($x = 2.71$). Non involvement of NALISE affects standard applied to accreditation ($x = 2.58$)

Table 2: Educators' perceived strategies that could be applied for enhancing accreditation of university-based LIS schools

	ITEMS	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	TOTAL	MEAN
i.	Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) should be involved in the accreditation of library schools	27 (108)	9 (27)	-	2 (2)	137	3.61
ii.	Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should be involved in the accreditation of library schools	9 (36)	16 (48)	5 (10)	8 (8)	102	2.68
iii.	Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) should stipulate standards and give to NUC	18 (72)	11 (33)	5 (10)	4 (4)	119	3.13
iv.	All library schools should use uniform curriculum	17 (68)	9 (27)	6 (12)	6 (6)	113	2.97
v.	Qualified lecturers should be employed based on the required ratios	21 (84)	16 (48)	1 (2)	-	134	3.53
vi.	Schedule of unexpected mock accreditation should be carried out periodically by LRCN	12 (48)	20 (60)	-	6 (6)	114	3.00
vii.	Exchange / collaboration effort between institutions should be adopted	14 (56)	19 (57)	4 (8)	1 (1)	122	3.21
viii.	There should be discouragement of borrowing of staff and equipment for accreditation process	21 (84)	8 (24)	3 (6)	5 (5)	119	3.13
ix.	Adequate provision of fund to recruit competent/qualified staff and procure facilities	26 (104)	12 (36)	-	-	140	3.68
x.	Introduction of preliminary accreditation by LRCN	10 (40)	16 (48)	5 (10)	7 (7)	105	2.76
xi.	Compulsory registration of library schools by LRCN based on successful accreditation process	18 (92)	15 (45)	-	5 (5)	122	3.21

Significant mean = 3.17

Table 2 shows the educators' perceived strategies that could be applied for enhancing accreditation of university-based LIS schools in South-east Nigeria. At a significant mean of

3.17, adequate provision of funds to recruit competent and qualified staff and procure facilities ranked highest with the mean ($x = 3.68$), following this closely is that LRCN should be involved in the accreditation of library schools ($x = 3.61$). Qualified lecturers should be employed based on the required ratios and exchange / collaboration effort between institution should be adopted with mean of ($x = 3.53$) and ($x = 3.21$) respectively. Also, compulsory registration of library schools by LRCN based on successful accreditation process had a mean of $x = 3.21$.

Other items seem to be insignificant because their mean score was below the significant mean of 3.17. These include Nigerian Library Association (NLA) being involved in the accreditation process ($x = 2.68$), use of uniform curriculum by the various library schools ($x = 2.97$), scheduling of unexpected mock accreditation by LRCN ($x = 3.00$), there should be discouragement of borrowing of staff and equipment for accreditation process ($x = 3.13$) and introduction of preliminary accreditation by LRCN ($x = 2.76$).

Discussion of Findings

The study showed that library and information science educators (LISE) perception on the state of accreditation in university-based library schools, inadequacy of funds, shortage of teaching staff at the professional cadre, lack of well equipped practical laboratory, non-participation of LRCN in accreditation, non-prescription of courses by NLA and inability of library schools in Nigeria to meet the minimum standards were all revealed as situations affecting accreditation process in university-based library schools. This finding corroborates the submission of Ibrahim (2009) that there is no comprehensive standard for LIS programme in Nigeria.

The study also indicate that recruitment of qualified lecturers, involvement of LRCN, adequate provision of fund to recruit competent staff and procure facilities are viable strategies for enhancing accreditation process in university-based library schools. These perceptions affirms the worry of Abionje (2013), who noted that not much is being done at the moment to foster collaboration between LIS schools despite the high level of awareness of the potentials inherent in collaboration. The need to recruit qualified lecturers corroborates the observation of Haruna (2007) that a number of library school, in Nigeria do not comply with standards in the employment of appropriate personnel to promote qualitative teaching and learning.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has examined educators' perception of accreditation processes in university-based library and information science schools in south-east, Nigeria. The findings have shown that inadequacy of funds, shortage of qualified personnel, poorly equipped laboratory, shortage of teaching staff at the professorial cadre, lack of well equipped practical laboratory and non-participation of LRCN in accreditation process affect the accreditation of university-based library schools in the south-east zone. The state of accreditation process in university-based library schools is worrisome. There is the need to restructure the accreditation process and bring various stakeholders in librarianship into the streamline. It is also important that efforts should be made to see that LRCN cross-examine what is done in other renowned profession like Law, Medicine, and Engineering to ensure that same is applied in library schools.

Recommendations

i. ***Adequate funding of library schools in Nigerian universities:*** There is need to adequately fund university-based library schools in Nigeria. Effort should be made by heads of library schools in collaboration with the institutions management team to ensure that funds are provided. The funds when provided would be used in recruiting staff, procuring of equipments for the practical laboratory.

ii. ***Involvement of LRCN in accreditation process:*** There is need to fully involve LRCN in the accreditation process of library schools. The same is obtained in some other disciplines, for instance ICAN is always involved in the accreditation of accounting courses in the universities.

iii. ***Recruitment of qualified lecturers:*** University-based library schools can only boast of the quality of its products when the quality of the lecturers is adequate in terms of the required ratio as stipulated by NUC.

iv. ***Exchange / Collaboration Programmes:*** In such a time as this, library schools in Nigeria should be fully involved in staff exchange programmes; as this will help to enhance the quality of the programmes and provide a platform for cross fertilization of ideology and philosophy.

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