TOWARDS EFFECTIVE ACCREDITATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA: A CASE FOR TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN APPROACH

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Abstract

Monitoring and evaluation of academic standard in federal, state and private colleges of education in the country is fundamental to promoting qualitative teacher education in Nigeria. To ensure this, the accreditation exercise on its own, has to be both continuous and effective. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) is a body saddled with the responsibility to ensure compliance to minimum standards for quality assurance and effectiveness in teacher education. Given the paradigm shift towards technology-driven process in virtually all aspects of the educational process, there is the need to evolve a technology driven accreditation process for effectiveness. This paper therefore explores the employability and benefits of technology in the accreditation process by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Nigeria for a more effective accreditation process, and makes a cases for a blended approach of integrating technology in the accreditation process.

Key words: Accreditation, teacher education, NCCE

Accreditation is the process in which certification of competency, authority, or credibility is presented. The accreditation process ensures that certification practices are acceptable. Educational accreditation is a type of quality assurance process under which services and operations of educational institutions or programmes are evaluated by an

external body to determine if applicable standards are met. If standards are met, accredited status is granted by the appropriate body which in this case is the National Commission for Colleges of Education. This paper explores the meaning of accreditation and educational accreditation; explicates types, importance and process/components of accreditation; and expounds the concepts of teacher education and the National Council of Colleges of Education. It finally makes a case for technology enabled accreditation for effectiveness, hinging this on relevant theoretical basis.

Meaning of Accreditation and Educational Accreditation

Accreditation involves the certification of a programme, service, organization, institution or agency by an authorized external body using process to assess performance in relation to established standards in order to support continuous improvement (Drolen and Markward, 1999). Accreditation is a quality assurance process. It is a term used to describe the process that institutions of higher education undergo to confirm they meet the strictest educational standards. According to Murray (2005), it provides a framework for education programmes to continually self-assess and conduct evidence-based analysis of their programmes and their efficacy. These evidence-based shifts, rooted in continuous improvement, are helping to ensure that preparation programmes are more likely to produce successful educationists. Accreditation is a formal recognition of an educational programme or institution in accordance with the standards of quality set by the accreditation body to produce graduates ready to enter the critical fields of education (Eaton, 2010). It is a seal of approval that assures quality in education. The purpose of accreditation is to create a set of standards for institutions of higher education to be held to, while also encouraging schools to be the best they can be. Further, accreditation aims to ensure accountability of schools and programmes in order to boost public trust and confidence. When an institution or programme is properly accredited, students and the public are able to gauge its overall quality without conducting a detailed analysis on their own. Accreditation is a voluntary evaluation process that institutions of higher education undergo in order to maintain standards of educational quality agreed upon by members of an accrediting body. It may include self-study on the part of the institution as well as evaluations by representatives of peer institutions who belong to the same accrediting body(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accreditation).

Types of Accreditation

According to Wise (2005), accreditation can be of two types: institution and programme/specialised accreditation. Institutional accreditation normally applies to an entire institution, indicating that each of an institution's parts is contributing to the achievement of the institution's objectives, although not necessarily all at the same level of quality. Programme/Specialized accreditation on the other hand, normally

applies to the evaluation of programmes, departments, or schools which usually are parts of a total collegiate or institution. The unit accredited may be as large as a college or school within a college or as small as a curriculum within a discipline Programme accreditation is generally administered by professionally oriented specialty accrediting panel. The idea is that professionals in a given field are best able to judge a programme's educational quality. For instance, language programmes are best accredited by language experts from colleges.

Importance of Accreditation
Kubitskey, Rutherford, Wylo and Liggit (2011) enumerate the importance of accreditation thus: It
•   helps determine if an institution meets or exceeds minimum standards of quality;
•   helps students determine acceptable institutions for enrollment;
•   assists institutions in determining acceptability of transfer credits;
•   helps employers determine the validity of programmes of study and whether a graduate is qualified; employers often require evidence that applicants have received a certificate from an accredited school or programme;
•   enables graduates to sit for certification examinations;
•   involves staff, faculty, students, graduates, and advisory boards in institutional evaluation and planning;
•   creates goals for institutional self-improvement;
•   provides a self-regulatory alternative for state oversight functions;
•   provides a basis for determining eligibility for federal student/staff assistance;
•   students/staff must belong to an accredited institution to apply for federal grants or loans.

The Accreditation Process
Following formal application/request for accreditation as well as an official communication of the approval to an institution, the following accreditation process as laid down by NCCE follows:

Self-study Process: The gathering of evidence is an ongoing process integrated into the provider's own quality assurance systems. Throughout the accreditation cycle, providers gather and organize evidence to make a case that their educator preparation programs meet minimum standards. The Self-study Report is the collection of evidence and supporting narrative which forms the basis of the accreditation review and is the first source of information for the visiting team.

Formative Review: After providers submit their self-study report, a formative review occurs for providers across all three pathways. NCCE assigns a visitor team of trained

peer reviewers to conduct a formative offsite review in which they explore the quality and depth of evidence that providers use to make their case for meeting standards and determine the focus of the site visit.They evaluates the resources, course materials, and curriculum of the school seeking accreditation. The committee then compares the institution's operations against the standards of the NCCE Minimum Standards for learning resources, support services, teachers, educational programmes, effectiveness, administration, and institutional mission.

Visit: This is an essential and unique step in the accreditation process; and as such, site visitors serve a critical role in providing information to the Commission about the quality of educational programmes. Site visitors act as the "eyes and ears" of the Commission. It is through the written report of the site visitors that it is possible to verify self-study information and receive a perspective about the programme operation that can only be obtained through direct observation. Since representatives of the programs do not appear before the Commission, it is only the site visit team that has face-to-face contact with resources involved in the programme.

After the formative review, the team then conducts a two- to four-day site visit to review evidence, verify data, and examine pedagogical artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, quality of teaching, student work samples, facilities, etc.). During the visit, the team also interviews provider leaders, deans, teachers, students, administrators, and others. The visitor team identifies the extent to which evidence supports each standard, including any particular strengths or deficiencies. The visitor team provides a written report to NCCE that includes a summary team evaluation of the completeness, quality and strength of evidence for each standard.

Review of report: The NCCE receives the report by the visitor team and does a critical analysis of the report vis a vis the accompanying evidence. Following the initial evaluation, the accrediting agency makes a decision as to whether or not the institution has successfully met its standards. In addition, the decision may include recommendations that the institution agree to constant monitoring to ensure that the standards continue to be met.

Decision/Feedback: Following the initial evaluation, the accrediting agency makes a decision as to whether or not the school has successfully met its standards. In addition, the decision may include recommendations that the school agree to constant monitoring to ensure that the standards continue to be met. Institution receives a formal communication of review team's findings. The programme is formally notified of the accreditation action/status via the Final Statement to the institution. This then would determine the period for the next accreditation or re-accreditation as the case may be.

Periodic review: Once a school is granted accreditation, the agency conducts reviews on a regular basis to ensure that the school is continuing to perform as expected; these reviews can also allow the agency to identify any areas in which the institution may need to improve. How often a college is reviewed will vary according to the level of the degree program and the type of institution itself; time frames range from every two years to every 5 years

The Concept of Teacher Education

Teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider community(Wikipedia, 2015).Kumar (2010) posits that teacher education refers to the policies and programmes designed to equip teachers with the knowledge, behaviours and skills required to perform their task effectively in the school and classroom. Teacher education is a component of the educational system which involves the training of teachers in order to acquire competencies and skills of teaching for the improvement of teachers for the school system. Teacher education has been identified world over, as the bedrock of quality and relevance of education at all levels.

As no country can rise above the level of its educational system, the role of the teacher in the educational system is indispensable. It is along this line that Agulanna (2007) opines that the place of the teacher in any educational system cannot be over emphasized. This is because, there can be no meaningful discourse about quality education without first discussing the quality of teachers. Olseni (2005) is of the opinion that teacher education makes a difference on the standard of Education. Griffths and Houston (2007), stress the importance of highly qualified teachers in the education system. The potentials of an educational organization is directly related to the ability of the teachers. That is to say that, the more trained and qualified the teachers are, the easier it is to effect curriculum development. Without qualified teachers, no matter the quality of curriculum and other components of education system, the implementation of curriculum content might come to naught.

Perceiving the role of teachers in the educational sector as critical and imperative, The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) stipulates the objectives of teacher Education thus;

1)   To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the education system;

2)   To encourage further , the spirit of inquiry and creativity in teachers;

3)   To help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals;

4)   To provide teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations and;

5)   To enhance teachers commitment to teaching profession.

Quality in education relates to the quality of the work undertaken by a teacher, which has significant effects upon his or her pupils or students. Further, those who pay teachers' salaries, whether through taxes or through school fees, wish to be assured that they are receiving value for money. Ways to measure the quality of work of individual teachers, of schools, or of education systems as a whole, are therefore often sought Given the paramount role of the teacher in building a formidable economy through education, professionalization of the teaching profession should not be in contest. Hence, government should make considerable effort to professionalize teaching in Nigeria. This could be achieved through constant evaluation of institutions and programmes to ensure the maintenance of standards in our colleges of education.

NCCE

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) is a body charged with drawing and enforcing minimum standards for teacher education at the sub-degree level and laying down minimum standards for all approved teacher education programmes and approve guidelines for accreditation of colleges of education and the programmes the colleges offer. In this regard, the Commission determines and unifies academic contents of National Certificate in Education (NCE) programmes and the personnel requirements for the mounting of the programmes.

The Commission is also saddled with the responsibility of determining basic minimum requirements for admission, prescribes mode of evaluating and continuous assessment of students. It is also mandated to determine the process and procedures of accreditation and re-accreditation of programmes and institutions for teacher education. The Commission is currently overseeing 146 colleges of education that award National Certificate in Education (NCE). The breakdown shows that 21 are federal institutions, 47 belongs to state government, while 55 are privately owned ((http://www.ncceonline.edu.ng/).

a.   The enabling Decree (now Act) No. 3 of January 1989 (amended decree No. 12 1993) (http://www.lawnigeria.com/Laws of the Federation/ NATIONAL-COMMISSION-FOR-COLLEGES-OF-EDUCATION-ACT.html) mandated the Commission to perform the following functions:

b.   Make recommendations on the national policy necessary for the full development of teacher education and the training of teachers.
c.   Lay down minimum standards for all programmes of teacher education and accredit their certificates and other academic awards after obtaining thereof prior approval of the Honorable Minister of Education.
d.   Approve guidelines setting out criteria for accreditation of all Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

e.   Determine the qualified teachers needs of Nigeria for the purpose of planning facilities and in particular prepare periodic master plans for the balanced and coordinated development of Colleges of Education.

f.   Inquire into and advise the Federal Government on the financial needs of the Colleges to enable them meet the objectives of producing the trained qualified teachers of the country.

g.   Receive block grants from the Federal Government and allocate them to the Colleges of Education.

h.   Act as the agency for channeling all external aids to Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

i.   Harmonise entry requirements and duration of courses at the Colleges of Education.

j.   Collate, analyse and publish relevant information relating to teacher education in Nigeria.

k.   Advise on and take measures to improve immediate and long term prospects of technical and business education teachers with respect to status and remuneration.

l.   Provide encouragement for women to enter a wide range of pre-vocational courses in technical education (http://www.ncceonline.edu.ng/functions.php)

Theoretical Basis: The Theory of Change

The theory of change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused in particular on mapping out or "filling in" what has been described as the "missing middle" between what a programme or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved (Clark and Taplin, 2012). A theory of change explains how an intervention is expected to produce its results. The theory typically starts out with a sequence of events and results (outputs, immediate outcomes, intermediate outcomes and ultimate outcomes) that are expected to occur owing to the intervention. This is commonly referred to as the "programme logic" or "logic model." However, the theory of change goes further by outlining the mechanisms of change, as well as the assumptions, risks and context that support or hinder the theory from being manifested as observed outcomes. This opens the black box of change and allows evaluators to better examine the causal link between the intervention outputs and the observed outcomes. The theory of change can be used to test — with evidence — the assumed causal chain of results with what is observed to have happened, checking each link and assumption in the process to verify the expected theory (Chen,1990).

It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then works back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and how these relate to one another causally) for the goals to occur. A theory of change is an articulation of the results an organization must achieve to be successful, and how it,

working alone or with others, will achieve them. Organizations do this either of their own volition or because funders, board members, or other parties ask them to do so.

Based on the literature on the theory of change, this framework inventories changes that take place as a result of the accreditation process and explores the impact of internal and external conditions. The features of the changes are studied in terms of their characteristics (conceptual approach and action strategies) and their issues (strategic transformation, organizational transformation and transformation of the relationship). Insofar as internal and external conditions are concerned, four factors are seen to promote change: (1) an environment that exercises external pressure and allows a project to go forward; (2) the existence of certain basic factors; (3) a realistic conceptual approach and specific implementation strategies; and (4) appropriate skills and leadership (Chen, 1994).

A Case for Integrating Technology-driven Accreditation Process
One of the key differentiators of an institution for change is its ability to integrate technology into the accreditation process and take a huge leap forward towards continuous improvement. The National Commission on Colleges of Education (NCCE) has depended so much on manual accreditation system. A manual accreditation system is heavily dependent on individuals and puts pressure on human resources to evaluate continuously and ensure compliance to standards. Murray (2005) advanced some reasons against manual accreditation. These include:

- Manual accreditation is time consuming, tedious, and frustrating.
- Faculty members have to spend so much of their time to update documents of accreditation.
- The manual accreditation process may not be accurate and contains lots of human errors, mistakes and bias. These may be difficult to rectify.
- Time consuming to find the evaluation mark.
- Complexities in calculation of marks manually.
- Process flaws cannot be identified and rectified.

On the other hand, automated and technology-driven accreditation is capable of leading the institution with innovation and emerging technologies for the welfare of the stakeholders. This would entail developing a framework of software such as Outcome Based Education Software and Accreditation Management System. It would also entail the training of teachers in colleges of education as well as members of the NCCE staff in the Academic Programme Unit in the step by step use and application of the software. It would include the employment of technology in the teaching learning process, the examination process, in the recruitment and promotion process, and virtually all aspects/components of an institution such that data, visual and otherwise, concerning these different aspects of an institution are generated and automatically stored in a macro data bank accessible by NCCE.

To ensure that a technology-based accreditation management system adopted is credible and acceptable, educators must have a strong hand in its development. Before the departments and offices adopt the automated accreditation system, institutions should fulfil the quality standards set by NCCE for continuous improvement. Colleges can then use these standards to guide implementation of curriculum, assessment, evaluation and learning resources. In general, automated accreditation system is customizable and flexible enough to accommodate diversity in instructional methods used in the department, school or college. Accreditation Outcomes Technology-enabled accreditation is easy-to-use and customize and requires minimal training

Educational institutions can easily analyse their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities through an informed review process; planning and resource allocation becomes easy; ther is improved intra and inter-institutional communication through real-time email notifications and SMS alerts. There is also the elimination of traditional spreadsheets, word documents, and legacy systems. Data is easy and quick to store, import, export, analyseand generate report from existing systems. The effectiveness and efficiency will compensate for the cost of procurement of technology and the training of human resources following.https://www.creatrixcampus.com/blog/how-get-your-college-accredited-most-effective-tactics

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