

ACCREDITATION MODEL FOR THE NIGERIA CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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Abstract

Improved programme quality is the most significant gain of accreditation in higher institutions. Empirical evidences however, show that the institutional accreditation model adopted by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in accrediting Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) teacher education programmes has failed to result to the expected gain in the institutions. This paper discussed the meaning, importance of accreditation and the NCCE accreditation model. It also, identified the inherent shortcomings in the NCCE accreditation model and suggested a dual accreditation pathway comprising institutional and specialized models as a strategy to improve programmes' quality in NCE teacher training institutions.

Introduction

Accreditation started in Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) teacher education programme with the affiliation of early Colleges of Education (COE's) with university faculties/institutes of education. The linkage was necessary for some obvious reasons. Foremost, was the need to assist Advanced Teachers' Colleges, which metamorphosed to COEs to develop the academic culture, expected of the tertiary education system (Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union, COEASU, 2006), Others were to maintain acceptable standards of quality in the colleges, and to achieve comparable interpretation of NCE certificates awarded by institutions across the country (Ukoha and Ahia, 2004).

The affiliation programme was later seen to be fraught with problems. As there were so many universities, so were standards. There was no parity in standards and practices as programmes' quality varied from university to university. Universities had more confidence in products of their affiliate COE's and reflected same in admission policies (National Commission for Colleges of Education, NCCE, 2002). The need for comparable standards of quality in NCE teacher education programme resulted to the establishment of the NCCE.

The NCCE was established by Decree 3 (now Act) of 1989. Its mandate, among other things include the laying down of standards for all programmes of NCE teacher education, accreditation of certificates and academic awards, and approval of guidelines for accreditation (NCCE, 2002). Hitherto, the commission has harmonized all NCE programmes into a minimum standard and its circulation to all NCE teacher-training institutions in 1990 marked the beginning of programme accreditation in NCE teacher training institutions in Nigeria (NCCE, 1996).

Accreditation can be explained from the two available models adopted in accrediting programmes in tertiary institutions. A model is a simple description of a system, used for explaining how something works. Accreditation model in this paper is therefore, defined as the system or method adopted by accreditation agencies in carrying out accreditation exercise in tertiary institutions. The United States Office of Post Secondary Education (2006) and Sole (2006), identified two accreditation models. The models are specialized accreditation and institutional accreditation carried out by professional bodies and government agencies, respectively. Based on the former model, Rice (1987), defined accreditation as a process, whereby a professional group judges its educational programmes against a set of consensually derived norms, usually referred to as standards. On the latter model, accreditation according to NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (2003), is the formal recognition of a course by a state or territory-accrediting body, in accordance with previously stated standards. The two definitions show that, accreditation is a self-regulatory process which professional organizations or government agencies recognize educational institutions or programmes that had been found to meet or exceeded standards and criteria for educational quality. The NCCE accredits all NCE teacher education programmes in COE's and polytechnics. The commission adopts the institutional model in performing her accreditation functions. The commission appoints the accreditation committee (on adhoc basis), which assesses programmes in relation to previously defined criteria of excellence called minimum standards (NCCE, Undated). The committee submits its report to the commission, which eventually grants any three of accreditation status (full, interim or denied) to the course.

After 16 years of implementing the institutional model, the NCCE accreditation exercise seems not to be effective in terms of improving the quality of NCE teacher education programmes in Nigeria. For instance, Ukoha and Ahia (2004), discovered that accreditation in three Federal Colleges of Education did not result to improvement in teaching and learning facilities, personnel and administration of departments, which are internationally, recognized indicators of quality in teacher education programme. The same study found that, institutions do subtly pressurize the accreditation team through monetary gratification and gifts in exchange for favourable report on their programmes.

These sharp practices arise because in using the institutional model, the NCCE is both the "jury" and the "judge". Besides, the institutional model is known to over emphasize inputs over

outcomes and process (Tajudin, 2001). The highlighted shortcomings, among others, in the NCCE accreditation system necessitated this paper. The paper discussed the meaning, importance and the process of accreditation; the NCCE accreditation model, and the inherent shortcomings. As a strategy to overcome the shortcomings and improve quality, the paper suggested a dual accreditation model consisting of specialized and institutional pathways.

Meaning, Importance and the Process of Accreditation

Accreditation represents an attempt to create a quality system in tertiary institutions through the achievement and maintenance of high quality programmes in an environment conducive to teaching and learning. The quality assurance system can be instituted by a government agency or a non-governmental organization. Thus, there are two accreditation systems depending on the agency involved in the evaluation process. The evaluation system conducted by a government agency is called institutional accreditation, while that conducted by a non-governmental organization is referred to as specialized or programme accreditation.

Sole (2006) defined institutional accreditation as an acknowledgement by a government agency or office that an institution possesses specifically prescribed requirements. The National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are government agencies charged with accreditation in universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. An institutional accrediting agency evaluates the entire institution in terms of its mission and the agencies' laid down standards or criteria (Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, HLCNCA, 2003). Other standards assessed include, educational activities, governance and administration, financial stability, admissions and students personnel services. The criteria further include, students academic achievement, institutional effectiveness and relationship with constituencies inside and outside the institution. "

. . Specialized accreditation is a professional activity. The aim is to guarantee a set of quality threshold, which is meant to lead to constant improvement. The HLCNCA (2003), defined it as a voluntary process of self-evaluation as measured against published standards or criteria and certified by an independent national professional body, who qualifies as an expert in the various fields evaluated. A specialist accrediting body evaluates particular units, schools or programmes within an institution. The system is associated with national professional associations such as those for engineering, medicine, and law or with specific disciplines such as business, teacher education and psychology (HLCNCA, 2003). Such national professional associations in Nigeria and the programmes they accredit include Nigeria Medical Association (Medicine), Nigeria Bar Association (Law), Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (Accountancy), Nigeria Society of Engineers (Engineering), etc.

Succinctly, accreditation is an evaluation procedure conducted by a government institution or national professional association to determine whether a course or institution meets a previously stated minimum standards/criteria of excellence. Accreditation is linked to the existence of previously laid down minimum standards in defense of quality, efficiency, and also to guarantee performance evenness and uniformity throughout the country (Sole, 2006). Accreditation is therefore, a highly visible and tangible source of professional recognition of a course of study and the training institution. It also assures public confidence and accountability towards the accredited school.

Another significant gain of accreditation according to Akande (2002), is that it protects professionals, employers of labour, training institutions and students. To the professionals, accreditation guarantees that training institutions implement the approved course of study designed to ensure that intending professionals in training acquired the needed specialized knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for registration and practice (Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, ILTHE, 2001) Accreditation helps employers of labour to ensure that employees possess the level of skills needed for employment (Ukoha and Ahia, 2004). It gives students confidence on the quality of their certificates and relevance of their course of study. Finally, accreditation according to the National Private Schools Association Group, NPSAG (2006) establishes acceptable criteria for students' assessment and transfer; enhances learning process and promotes professional development. These gains are possible because the accreditation process is continually evolving.

The basic process of accreditation according to NPSAG (2006) and HLCNCA (2003) is summarized below:

1. The institution undertakes a self-study to examine how it meets the General Institutional Requirements (GIR's) and the criteria for accreditation. The results of the self-examination are summarized in a self-study report that forms the basis for evaluation.
2. On site visit by team of evaluators appointed by the accrediting body. The team summarizes its findings in a written team report that assesses institution's compliance to GIR and criteria. The team report is based on the self-study report and meetings with representatives of institution and team. The report is submitted to the agency's accreditation review committee (ARC).
3. The ARC makes accreditation decision based on self-study report, team report and institutional responses. The decision could be one of the following three types of judgment; accredited, accredited with reservation and non-accredited.

Accredited means full and complete compliance with the most significant requirements of the minimum criteria of quality. Accredited with reservation implies substantial compliance with major criteria, but with need for further improvement; while non-accredited means total absence of any possible (even minimum) requirements. The granting of this title and the accreditation certificate is of a temporary nature. As a rule, it must not exceed a five years validity, after which the whole procedure has to be repeated (Sole, 2006). Accreditation therefore is a continuous evaluation process.

The NCCE Accreditation Model or System

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) is a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education. The commission was specifically established to accredit NCE teacher education programmes in tertiary institutions. By implication, the commission undertakes institutional accreditation of all NCE teacher-training institutions. The NCCE accreditation system is founded on the belief that accreditation provides for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality through continuous self-evaluation, planning and improvement. To this end, the NCCE (Undated) defined programme accreditation as involving evaluation of:

- i. the quality of academic programmes .offered in colleges of education at NCE level,
- ii. the competency and number of teaching and administrative staff, and finally
- iii. the quality of course for study i.e. the curriculum that prepares students to be competent in their areas of specialization (P. I).

It is discernible from the above definition that quality improvement is the central focus of NCCE accreditation exercise. The same ideal is reflected in the commission's avowed aims of accreditation, which are to;

- (i) achieve national standard in the NCE as awarded by approved educational institution.
- (ii) maintain the minimum standards and achieve comparable interpretation of (NCE) certificates awarded by various institutions; and
- (iii) ensure that teacher education in Nigeria is of high standard and meets the needs of the Nigerian society (P. 2)

In pursuance of the above aims, the commission carries out comprehensive evaluation of an institution and its programmes. The evaluation is focused on the total NCE programme and its compliance with the minimum standards and criteria, published and determined by the NCCE. The maiden edition of the minimum standards was published in 1990, and revised in 1996 and 2002. The accreditation criteria according to NCCE (Undated) include institutional goals and objectives, curriculum, teaching staff (quality and quantity), students admission, retention and graduation. Others are standards of NCE examination, financial support, physical facilities and administration of departments. Based on these criteria, the commission executes its accreditation mandate. The mandate covers initial and continued accreditation of institutions and programmes; establishment of new colleges and departments; and granting of accreditation status (NCCE, Undated). After the initial accreditation of existing COE's in 1990, the commission re-evaluates institutions and their programmes every six years. The process of evaluation for both initial and continued accreditation is structured to determine whether an institution meets the NCCE's general institutional requirements and the criteria for accreditation. The process is illustrated in figure 1 and can be summarize as follows:

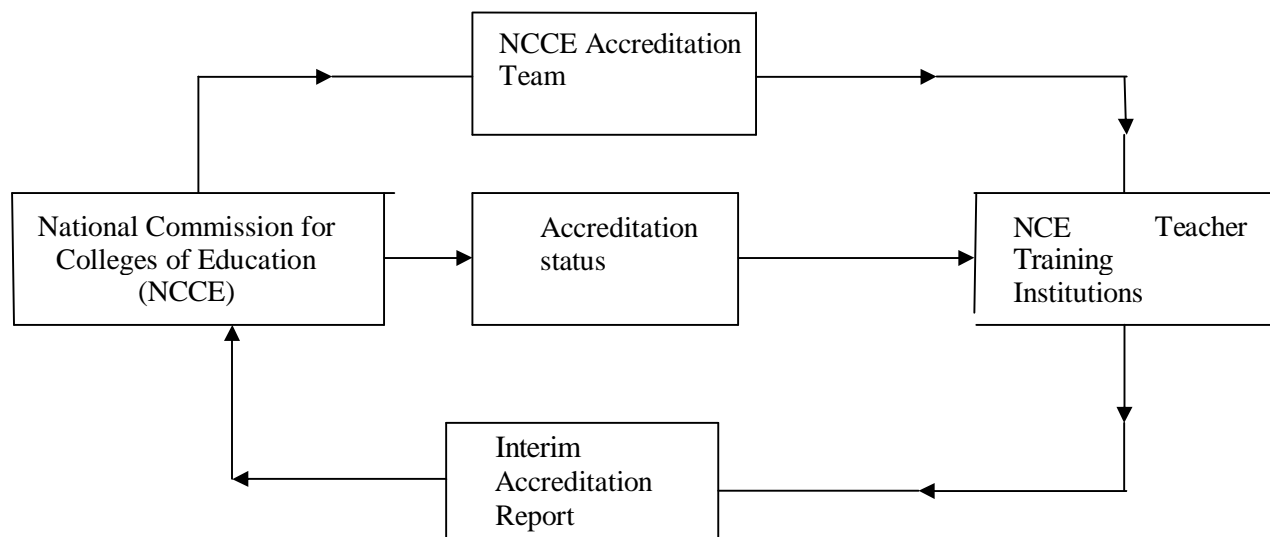


Figure 1: NCCE Institutional Accreditation Model

The process starts with:

1. The institution to be accredited completing the Accreditation Re-evaluation Form (Form NCCE/AREF) and/or the Self-Assessment Form (Form NCCE/SAF/1 and 2) for programmes granted interim accreditation during initial visitation or re-accreditation, respectively. The SAF/1 and 2 contain general information on the institution and the programme/course to be accredited. The completed forms are signed by the chief executive of the college and returned to the executive secretary of the NCCE for approval prior to accreditation visit.
2. The NCCE appointing an adhoc accreditation team. Members of the team are usually professionals in the area selected from universities, COE's and staff of the commission.
3. On site visitation (usually two working days) of the accreditation team to the institution/department to evaluate the academic programme offered in terms of curricula contents, intellectual atmosphere in the college, morale of academic staff, students' standard of work, and physical facilities provided. The team also carries out on-the-spot-assessment to authenticate the information already supplied by the institution/department on its personnel, teaching materials, library facilities and administration of departments (NCCE, Undated). The team summarizes its findings in the accreditation team report form (NCCE/ATRF). The team discusses the report with the Provost/officials of the institution who also countersigns it before forwarding copies to the executive secretary of the commission. The contents of the report include philosophy and objectives of the institution, aims and objectives of programme being accredited. Others are the observation of team members on the accreditation criteria in the self-assessment report and strong areas and shortcomings of the programme.
4. Based on the accreditation team's report and provost's report, the executive secretary through the commission's accreditation committee makes a recommendation for any three of accreditation status (denied, interim and full accreditation) on the programme. The judgment is conveyed to the college in writing and an accreditation certificate issued. Full accreditation is granted to a programme that satisfied die minimum standards. It is for a period of six years (NCCE, Undated). Interim accreditation is granted to a programme that has minor deficiencies, which according to the commission must be rectified in not more than two academic sessions. A programme that does not satisfy the minimum standard requirement is denied accreditation. Request for revisitation comes from the college (NCCE, Undated)

Shortcomings in the NCCE Accreditation System

Improved programme quality is the most significant gain of accreditation. This means that accredited NCE programme should at least satisfy the minimum quality threshold (in personnel, curriculum, facilities, funding, etc) as certified in the NCCE minimum standards and accreditation criteria. Unfortunately, these expectations seem unrealizable. The state of the COE's viz the quality of their facilities, programmes and graduates are far from being qualitative. As a justification, Olaitan, Nwachukwu, Igbo, Oyemachi and Ekong (1999), observed remarkable evidence of poor programme supervision, administration and implementation as having led to downward trend in the quality of NCE teacher education programme. This observation was after the 1999/2000 NCCE accreditation exercise. In the same vein, Ukoha and Ahia (2004) discovered that, NCCE accreditation exercise failed to result to improved laboratory, library and classroom facilities, employment of adequate number of qualified staff; institutional financed staff development programme, and adequate and regular provision of fund in three federal colleges of education studied. After the 2004/05-accreditation exercise, Ali (2006) identified four current and serious problems facing vocational and technical education including NCE (technical) education in colleges of education. The problems in their order of seriousness are irrelevant curricula contents,

insufficient infrastructural facilities available and useable for laboratory/workshop training, poor quality of entry level students and high drop-out rate in the programme. These problems have perhaps resulted to continuous decline in the quality of NCE graduates as reported by Israel (2005). Credible as the NCCE accreditation may seem to be, the above reports question the validity and appropriateness of the commission's system of accreditation. No doubt, the lapses may be inherent in the institutional model and the processes adopted by the commission.

The institutional accreditation model used by the commission is generalist in approach and inappropriate for NCE teacher education programmes- The system involves the whole institution, programmes, sites, funding, facilities and methods of instructional delivery. It gives less attention to specific professional issues. Experts (e.g. HLCNCA, 2003 and National League, for Nursing Accrediting Commission, NLNAC, 2002), agree that accreditation of individual programmes, such as those preparing students to practice a profession is different and is carried out by national professional association that apply specific standards for curriculum and course content. NCE teacher education programme prepares students to become professional teachers in different subjects areas and therefore should be accredited using the specialist model.

The position of the commission in NCE teacher education accreditation exercise is that of the "jury and the judge". The federal government funds the colleges through the commission. The commission sets the accreditation criteria and minimum standard requirements. As well, the commission sets up the accreditation committee, funds the exercise, receives accreditation team's report and grants accreditation status to institutions/programmes. The concentration of these functions in one body is too much for the exercise to be effective and valid without abuses.

Poor programme funding by government, which manifests in adequate provision of facilities in NCE teacher training colleges has tended to mar the accreditation process in the institutions. The process is grossly manipulated by both the college and commission's staff. For instance, Ukoha and Ahia (2004), noted that institutions do hire facilities and personnel to meet accreditation requirements.

This is in addition to the subtle manipulation of the accreditation team by institutional heads through materials and monetary gifts in exchange for favourable reports (Ukoha and Ahia, 2004). These manipulations result to inaccurate accreditation results.

The NCCE accreditation system is also flawed by undue political manipulation of the process. The former minister of education, Prof. Babalola Borishade in NCCE (2002) cautioned the commission against politicizing the process to ensure valid outcomes. The caution has so far remained a warning on paper. Institutional heads and even government agents (in the case of state colleges) take both orthodox and unorthodox steps to ensure accreditation of their programmes. Accreditation team members have informally reported of some team reports being guided by regional and ethnic sentiments. The political abuses have, according to Ojukwu and Ojukwu (2004), affected the expected impacts of accreditation in the colleges. This is to the extent that institutions/programmes granted full accreditation status continued to lack the basic teaching personnel, facilities and resources which are indicators of quality in teacher education programmes. Besides, there are no published cases of institutions losing accreditation status (Ukoha 2005), as recently done by the NUC. It has all been success and satisfactory story in the history of NCCE accreditation in colleges of education.

Also, the hurried manner (2 working days) in which the site accreditation team carries out its functions according to Tajudin (2001), results to inaccuracies and distortion of team's report and results. This distortion in scoring he noted arises because institutional accreditation over emphasizes inputs over outcomes and process. Such distortions are reduced in professional accreditation, he further noted. Reason: the same accreditation body registers graduates and monitor their performance in the field.

Finally, the two academic sessions required for an institution to rectify deficiencies in programmes granted interim accreditation during initial accreditation before applying for re-accreditation is too long. Within the period, the institution continues to admit, train and graduate students in the course irrespective of the deficiencies. Similarly, it is counter productive to ask the same institution to request for re-visitation. The institution may adopt delay tactics and bid for time unnecessarily while running the programme to the detriment of the students and society. The time frame for re-evaluation of a programme is the prerogative of the professional body in specialist accreditation (Sole, 2006).

Suggested Accreditation Model for NCE Teacher Education Programme

There is enough literature evidence (e.g. Ali 2006, Ukoha and Ahia 2004, and Ojukwu and Ojukwu, 2004) indicating that the NCCE's accreditation system, has, over the years, not resulted to the most publicized gain of accreditation (improved programmes quality) in NCE teacher training institutions. Rather than improving, the observable indicators of quality in teacher education programme (e.g. physical facilities, funding, laboratory/workshop equipment, teaching and support staff, library facilities, quality of students' work, etc), in the institutions are declining. Empirical evidence also show that, the trend has evidently resulted to decline in the quality of NCE graduates of COE's (Israel, 2005). The trend is not acceptable, as poor quality NCE teachers cannot meet the present and future needs of the universal basic education scheme. To reverse the trend, a dual accreditation model comprising institutional and specialized accreditation systems is suggested. The model is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

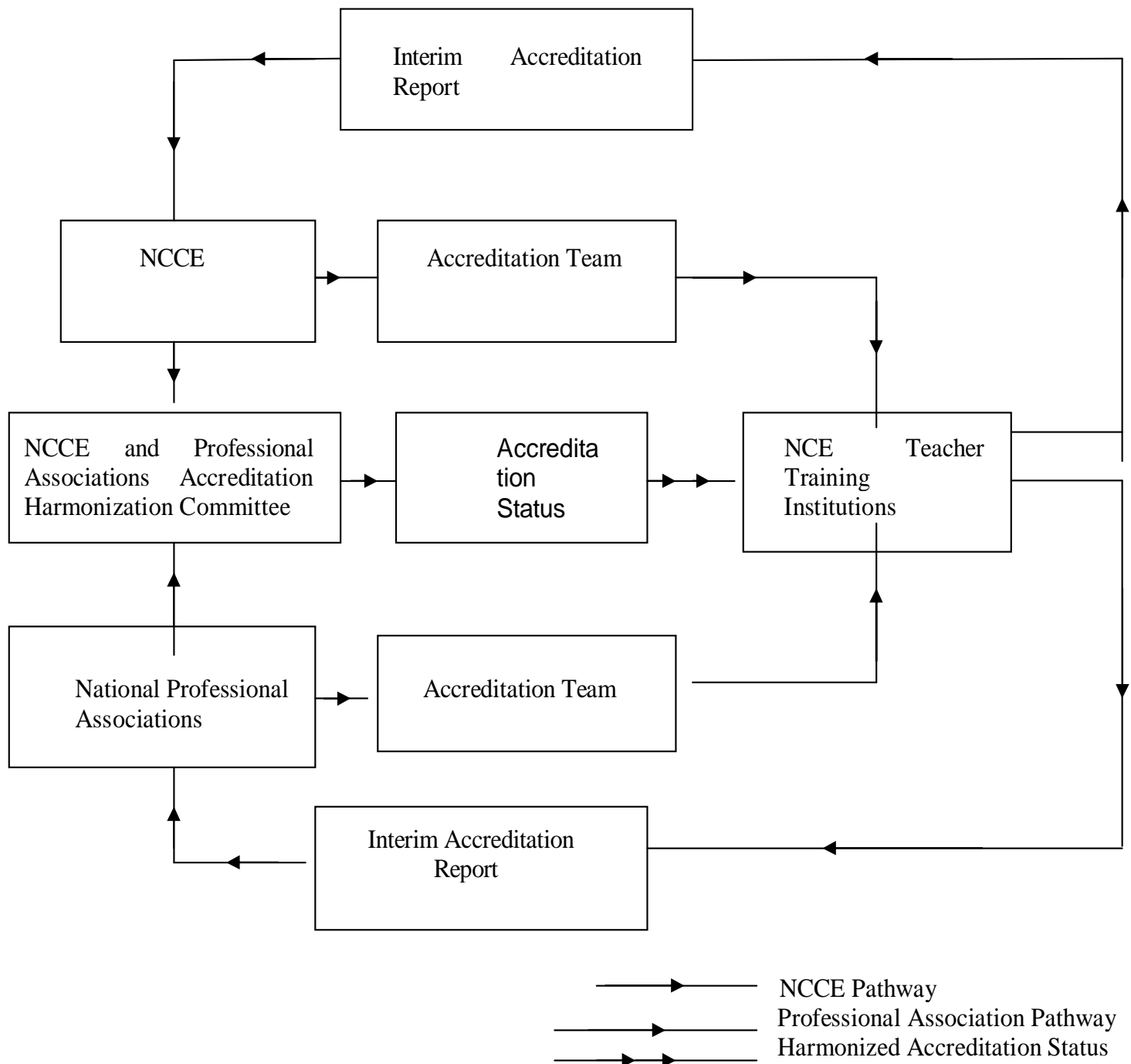


Figure 2: Suggested Dual Pathway Accreditation Model

Accreditation of NCE teacher education programmes in the proposed model is a joint exercise between the NCCE and national professional associations in teacher education. The institutional pathway remains the responsibility of the NCCE. The description of the system is already explained under the NCCE accreditation model. The specialized accreditation pathway is conducted by national professional associations in teacher education. This means that independent national associations such as the Science Teachers' Association of Nigeria (STAN), Nigerian Vocational Association (NVA), Nigerian Association of Business Educators (NABE), Social Studies Association of Nigeria (SOSAN), Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON), Curriculum Organisation of Nigeria (CON), etc will undertake both initial and continuous accreditation of courses in their respective disciplines. Each association, by implication, will develop its general institutional requirements (GIRS) and minimum standards.

The accreditation procedure starts with the institution undertaking a self-study which culminates in a self-study report forwarded to the association. The self-study helps an institution to examine how it meets the GIRS and the accreditation criteria. The completed self-study report constitutes the institution's formal application to the association for accreditation. Having paid the accreditation fee, a team of professionals appointed by the association verifies the institutions compliance to the GIRS and accreditation criteria through on site visit to the institution.

The team summarizes its findings in a team's report; offers advice and suggestions for improvement and concludes with a recommendation for accreditation decision. The team's report is submitted to the association's review committee, which reviews it and makes recommendations to the board of trustees for final accreditation decision. In the diagram, the final accreditation decision is made by a joint accreditation harmonization committee (AHC) of both the NCCE and the professional associations. The harmonization committee is necessary to avoid disparities in judgement which may arise assuming each body gives an independent decision.

The suggestion for a dual accreditation pathway is based on the tested accreditation practices of the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in universities and polytechnics, respectively. The NUC and NBTE, like the NCCE, set the minimum standards requirements and accreditation criteria for professional courses in universities and polytechnics. Yet, national professional associations (e.g. NMA, ICAN, NSE, NRN, NUJ, NBA, etc) in addition accredit professional courses in the two institutions. The system has proved credible and valid over the years as it has continued to meet the needs of both professional bodies and the commissions.

Besides, specialized accreditation is applicable to professional fields. Such fields include engineering, medicine, law and teacher education and psychology. In these fields, a professional certificates, safety and professional competence are matters of academic, professional and public concern (NLNAC, 2002). NCE teacher education programmes meet those criteria. Presently, NCE is the minimum teaching qualification accepted for professional registration by the Teachers' Registration Council (TRC). Moreso, specialized accreditation guarantees a set of quality threshold, which leads to constant improvement. Unlike institutional accreditation, in specialized accreditation, the committee appointed by the professional body to verify the existence of the requested criteria continues to cooperate with the facility in its improvement activities (Sole, 2006). This is a major advantage.

The dual accreditation pathway shall greatly minimize the abuses inherent in the institutional pathway. The validity of professional accreditation carried out by associations like the ICAN, NSE, NMA, NBA, etc in their respective disciplines has never been questionable. Specifically, there have not been reported cases of political manipulations, abuses and compromise in the process. The professional associations have remained firm and fair in their accreditation exercise. This explains why the public holds the professions in high esteem. If implemented the same is expected in NCE teacher education. Both the quality of NCE teachers and their public image are expected to improve.

Some constraints are anticipated in implementing the new accreditation model. Foremost, is the reluctance associated with implementing innovations in education. NCCE may not want to give the new system a trial as it may consider it a duplication of function. Second, is the financial involvement. Under the specialized accreditation pathway, institutions will be required to pay accreditation fee to professional bodies. This will increase the financial burden of the institutions. Another problem may be absence of formidable umbrella national professional associations in teacher education with the necessary structures for accreditation.

Recommendations

The dual-accreditation model suggested in this paper holds great potentials for a credible and result

oriented programme accreditation in NCE teacher education in Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that:

1. The Federal Ministry of Education should direct the NCCE to work out the modalities for implementing the model as part of the on-going reforms in
2. The TRC should liaise with NCE teacher training institutions and existing professional associations in education to form and register national professional associations to undertake accreditation of courses in their subject area.

Conclusion

Accreditation in NCE teacher education programme has no alternative. It is the only credible mechanism of ensuring quality and public confidence in NCE teacher training institutions, their products and certificates. Every effort should therefore be made to implement the dual accreditation model suggested, since the NCCE's institutional model has failed to result to the most significant gain of accreditation - improved programmes quality. The new model is expected to change the paradigm of accreditation management in NCE teacher education to professionalism, transparency and cooperation between the NCCE and national professional associations in teacher education for better quality and accuracy.

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